

Newsletter of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex



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## New Grant

**Rebecca Prentice** has received a grant from the International Development Challenge Fund (IDCF) for a new research project, 'Raising Labour Standards in Bangladesh's Global Garment Industry: What Role for Compensation Rights?' The grant will fund research in Bangladesh with survivors of the 2013 collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory building to learn about experiences of receiving compensation for occupational injury and death, in collaboration with Mahmudul Sumon at Jahangirnagar University.



Photos courtesy of the Tazreen Claims Administration

## Researching 'diversity' at the OHCHR



Last December, the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore, commissioned an



Julie and the Palais Wilson (main office of the OHCHR)

ethnographic study of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The task was assigned to a small team: **Julie Billaud**,

Agathe Mora (LSE & Graduate Institute in Geneva) and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (University of Helsinki).

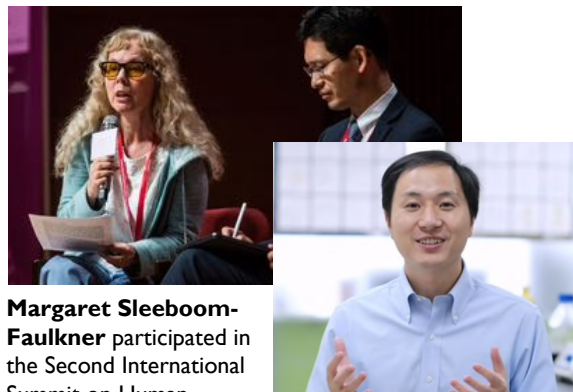
The aim of this project is to give the OHCHR a fresh window onto its inner working, with a specific focus on barriers to, and enablers of, greater diversity in the workplace. The objective is to develop a holistic view of formal and informal dimensions of the Office's organisational culture, including its more structural levels (rules, procedures, formal and informal hierarchies, decisions making processes) as well as its collective levels (shared values, world view, routines, behaviours, codes and attitudes). The scope of inquiry includes the Office's: i) patterns of social relations, ii) systems of meaning, iii) ethics, values and normative behaviour, and iv) power, politics, and control. The team will use the whole toolkit of ethnographic methods.

More specifically, the research uses practices of knowledge production as an entry point to the study of diversity. It seeks to explore how knowledge travels within the Organisation, how documents get written, the various kinds of expertise mobilised in the process, how texts are circulated and disseminated, how people understand them, talk about them, use them to do various things — sometimes unexpected ones.

The research is an "action learning process" that will deliver advice and recommendations much earlier than only at its conclusion and that will close with a report to the High Commissioner. The methodology draws inspiration from Action Research whereby key partners within the Office take part in the project and engage in the identification and overcoming of barriers. It will consist of regular 'reflexive sessions' with key research partners identified within the Office organized in parallel to on-going fieldwork activities. The idea is to create the conditions under which researchers and human rights practitioners risk interpretations together in a manner that disrupts their habitual analytic modes in order to access in situ the emergence of ideas. The research team will capitalize on partners' own sceptical or self-critical moves so as to find a 'collaborative' mode of analysis with expert subjects who are not researchers, but stand as counterparts in the research process.

In addition to experimenting with research methods, the research is also an opportunity for the team to gain deeper insights into the everyday workings of the UN, the organization charged with realizing what historian of human rights Samuel Moyn has coined 'The Last Utopia' of the 21st century (2010), i.e a world where all human rights will be realized everywhere.

## Genome Editing Conference



**Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner** participated in the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing in November 2018 at the University of Hong Kong.

Genome editing, in particular germline interventions, can affect the genome of generations to come. A surprise announcement at the Summit was that Dr He Jiankui from China had succeeded in editing the germline of embryos: he had altered the DNA of twin girls to prevent the contraction of HIV.

Margaret, who for over a decade has conducted anthropological research on biotechnology and society in Asia and the West, spoke on the first day of the Summit. She pointed out the implications of germline editing, not just for finding cures for intractable conditions, but also for the role of design in human reproduction, the kind of people valued in society, our notion of humanity, and the inadvertent introduction of new disease.

Margaret spoke with a report writer on the first day, who already knew that the organizing committee planned to lift the ban it had previously supported. Despite the shock of Dr He's announcement, the general mood among genome scientists is to regulate the research so that scientists can move forward 'safely'. As in practice this means that laboratories all over the world will be trying to compete in this field, there is much concern. Anthropologist urgently need to get involved in discussions on how biotechnology affects society – it is shaping the life choices of ourselves and others.

### A Letter from Helsinki...



In September 2018 I arrived in Helsinki, an elegant yet quirky Baltic seaport city modeled architecturally on St Petersburg, to begin my appointment as the Jane and Aatos Erkko Visiting Professor in Studies on Contemporary Society, a

position awarded by invitation for one academic year.

Alongside some 50 Fellows I began participating in the shared life of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, a research unit of the University of Helsinki devoted to the social sciences and humanities. The Collegium's motto is 'Freedom to Think'. This is cultivated through a programme that combines support for individual research and writing with plentiful occasions for sociability and exchange, including a Tuesday Fellows' seminar, Wednesday afternoon yoga and pilates, Thursday afternoon coffee (we take turns providing pastries) plus regular pub outings and frequent conferences, workshops, lunches, dinners, and parties. A spacious and beautiful Common Room, its east wall lined with windows looking out onto the National Library, serves as our communal space—the Helsinki equivalent of our Dhaba!

During my Collegium year, I am writing a book, currently called 'Minority or Nation? Competing Justice Projects at the League of Nations'. Using claims and petitions for Macedonia as my case study, I am examining how the international mechanism set up to ensure protection of minorities and their rights after the First World War became a site where several visions for the future of the 'New Europe' clashed. On the one hand, the victorious Allies wanted to consolidate the new territorial status quo; they charged the newly created League of Nations to guarantee the peace through ensuring the proper implementation of the

minorities treaties that had been imposed on some states. This involved introducing 'minority' as a legal-political category newly endowed with protections and rights, and promoting minority citizenship. Conversely, a variety of civic and revolutionary organisations, supported by internationalists and social reformers, used the petition process to claim rights and protections but also to resist the project of minoritisation and to continue an unfinished struggle for nationhood.

Apart from writing the book, my other major obligations have involved delivering an inaugural lecture last November to the university community, and organizing a conference in May.

As an American living since 1983 between the UK, Switzerland and Greece, I have long felt rather European. But spending time in this Nordic corner of Europe has offered me fresh perspectives on everything from language and Brexit to the political conundrums in Europe's imperial borderlands. Finns and Russians are particularly numerous at the Collegium, but colleagues also hail from Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Costa Rica, the UK and US. When in late November I gave my inaugural Erkko Lecture, the Collegium's director who had been chairing me, a Finnish political scientist who works on Finnish-Russian relations, commented that Macedonia sounded a lot like Karelia: a territory desired by two (or more) new nation-states,



Commission investigating Bulgarian village, border dispute in the 1930s

whose borders and language are contested, a place as mythic as it is real. Karelia and Macedonia: good to think together. And almost as stimulating as the quick dip during my Saturday saunas in the hole chipped out from the iced-over Baltic sea.

Jane Cowan, 26th Jan

### Student Fieldtrip



As part of his 3rd Year Module **The Anthropology of Food** module **Peter Luetchford** organized a field trip to Borough Market, London. **Yuvinka Ribera & Ed Flaxman** write:

"As planned the previous week, we split into small groups, with research topics, questions, and ethical considerations in mind. Each group investigated different issues: discourses and social values relating to food and prices, sensory experiences, material cultures and commodity fetishism. However, strategies to investigate these topics varied. Some students decided to interact with traders directly, some enjoyed the trip to the market as an embodied experience, while others just observed and took notes. We meandered through the market, flowing with the crowd, caught up in the tide of smells and waves of traditional images. It was like stepping back in time, with no digital images, all price tags hand-written, and every container handcrafted with love and care. On the one hand, the market was beautiful, aesthetically warming, and it looked authentic! There were corked bottles and label-less jars; it was refreshing not to have brands and advertising crowding our vision. Words such as organic, food origin, exotic food, and the label for Great Taste Awards stood out. Displays evoked nature, with wooden walls and utensils, images of traditional life, and a sense of nostalgia for the 'good old days', before the rise of mass consumerism and supermarket shopping took hold. Overall, the tastes, the smells, and the imagery of the market were wholesome and warm: a sensorial overload.

However, it could be argued, the market is a form of advertising,

promoting and profiting from an 'authentic', 'alternative' form of consumption. We noted that commercial food stores (as they seemed!), where the overall experience was just like supermarkets, outnumbered 'traditional' stalls. Towards the back of one stall, Ed spotted a disposable plastic bottle. It read 'Sainsbury's Sparkling Water', a familiar sight. Most of the customers were tourists, taking pictures, trying new flavours, and shopping. Prices were high compared to those found at supermarkets. Even though some prices are justified by production processes and quality, I could not help thinking: "Who at the end of the day can afford to shop here on a regular basis?" I noticed one stall advertising cakes with "No Cane Sugar", while another, next to it, sold raw cane sugar from Colombia. This made me reflect on relationships within the market. Was there a sense of community and common struggle amongst traders? How were workers treated and how did they relate to traders and stall owners?

The following week we shared our thoughts and experiences, and discussed the visit with reference to anthropological literature. It was a grand day out, but we could not help but think the market is a performance for tourists. There is a front stage; the 'authentic' shopping experience which is merely a fabrication of people's imaginations and nostalgia. This front stage performance contrasts with a back stage 'reality', where digital card readers, computer screens and plastic bottles lurk.

Thanks to Yuvinka Ribera and Edward Flaxman who also provided the photos on this page and the front cover.





## Other News

### Foundation Years Conference



The Foundation Faculty, led by **Wendy Ashall** have successfully bid to host the 2019 Foundation Years Network Annual Conference.

The two-day event in July will encourage critical engagement with the deficit model and its pernicious tendency to unwittingly underpin Foundation teaching practice and rear its head in students' self-perceptions, as well as its diffusion among the widening participation, student transitions and teaching and learning literatures.

The conference invites practitioner contributions which critically examine the deficit model and its effects upon educators and learners and/or which offer strategies for a more inclusive pedagogy, across the disciplines, when working with very diverse groups of FY students.

More information on the Foundation Year Network at <https://foundationyear.ac.uk>

### A Visit from the Afghan Ambassador

S. Tayeb Jawad, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the UK and Northern Ireland, spoke to students and staff at the Sussex Asia Centre in the School of Global Studies on 26th November 2018. The Ambassador's presentation - entitled 'The Prospect for Peace and Pluralism in Afghanistan' - addressed the aims and goals of peace talks currently underway and involving the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban.



Ambassador Said T. Jawad and Magnus Marsden

## Publications

**Magnus Marsden & Vera Skvirskaja** (University of Copenhagen) jointly edited an Open Access Special Issue of the journal *History & Anthropology* entitled **Merchant identities, trading nodes, and globalization**.

Contributions focus on the nature of transregional Asian interactions taking place in the field of commerce through an examination of the experiences, activities, and histories of commodity traders whose life trajectories criss-cross Asia. The articles share a common geographic point of reference: Yiwu – an officially designated 'international trade city' located in China's eastern Zhejiang province.

[www.tandfonline.com/toc/ghan20/current](http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ghan20/current)

## Ethics

Together with Peter Pels (University of Leiden) and Hansjörg Dilger (Free University of Berlin), **Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner** has worked on the 'Guidelines for data management and scientific integrity in ethnography', published by Ethnography: <https://tinyurl.com/yau7pm9q>

The guidelines emphasise the responsibility that ethnographers have to protect the research materials that they gather with their research partners (interlocutors) in the field. A summary has been adopted by the European Anthropology Society for Anthropology as the Statement on Data Management and Ethnographic Integrity: <https://easoonline.org/downloads/support/EASA%20statement%20on%20data%20governance.pdf>

In addition, Bob Simpson (Durham University) and Margaret have launched the website for the navigation of ethnographic fieldwork (EthNav), which can be visited at the website of the Association for Social Anthropology: <https://www.theasa.org/ethics/ethnav.html>

## Viva Successes

**Gemma Houldey** passed her viva for her thesis: "The Vulnerable Humanitarian: Discourses of Stress and Meaning-Making among Aid Workers in Kenya." The thesis investigates the everyday challenges of aid work, and how these experiences are shaped by particular narratives of aid practice. Drawing on findings from one year of ethnographic research in Nairobi and Turkana in Kenya, the thesis considers the ways in which the emotional upheavals of national and international staff working for aid and development agencies are determined by the particularities of the sector; including its organisational culture, its moral and humanitarian agenda and its securitised spaces and structures.

The thesis is an important contribution to current debates concerning power and agency in the aid sector, and highlights how gender, race, nationality and other interlocking factors such as religion and marital status all have implications for how aid workers approach their lives and livelihoods and how they are treated in the workplace. By highlighting the experiences of national staff it disrupts dominant narratives concerning the problems of aid practice, and proposes new and diverse approaches to understanding and addressing wellbeing in the sector.

Gemma has already published a number of online articles about her work:

<https://tinyurl.com/y8vhr3mb>

<https://tinyurl.com/y7tvqqxg>

Follow her blog 'Life in Crisis':

[www.gemmahouldey.com](http://www.gemmahouldey.com)

**Layla Zaglul Ruiz's** PhD research was on Fairtrade bananas in Costa Rica.

She writes:

No other commodity symbolises exploitation in Latin America like the banana. The banana industry in Costa Rica has been characterised by free trade policies, labour exploitation, vertical integration and environmental neglect. In recent years the Fairtrade movement has claimed to offer an alternative, 'fairer' model of banana production in the region.

By exploring the specific case of Costa Rican bananas - an industry that provides a perfect example of what the Fairtrade movement claims to be opposed to - my doctoral research demonstrates that Fairtrade fails to challenge the structural inequalities contained within the banana industry.

My research centred on an ethnographic study of two farms – one Fairtrade certified and one conventional farm – located in the South Pacific region of Costa Rica. For a period of twelve months, between September 2015 and August 2016, I worked in both farms as a regular packing plant employee.

My work explores how exploitation works in these farms and exposes how a series of factors contribute to the reproduction of inequality and exploitative relationships, including gender, patriarchy, national identity and religious ideology. The thesis is also an explanation of why there is a lack of resistance from the workers. More importantly, my study explains why rather than resistance there is compliance. Finally, it addresses the question of whether or not being Fairtrade certified makes a difference to the exploitation, inequality and compliance or lack of resistance among banana workers.



Layla with Packing Workers



Gemma on field research with a Somali aid worker in Nairobi

## Notes from the Field: Kabul's Sikh and Hindu Communities - Magnus Marsden



With the assistance of the Gurdwara Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall, London, I visited in September 2018 the central Sikh Gurdwara in Kabul's Shor Bazaar neighbourhood. Given that my long-standing research interests concern the history and contemporary dynamics of Afghan trading networks, I have for long been interested in seeing at first hand the collective life of Kabul's Sikh and Hindu communities – members of these communities have been historically significant actors in Afghanistan's economy over the course of many centuries.

During my time in Kabul I interacted with Sikh men and women from a variety of ages and backgrounds, including influential community leaders, shopkeepers who run small businesses in the neighbourhood and in Kabul's central wholesale market (mandawi), religious education instructors, and women and children who are currently based in one or other of the gurdwaras located in this part of the city.

While Sikhs were once a pillar of the Afghan merchant community, today most successful Sikh merchants have left the

country and conduct business abroad. I was told that there were currently only about six hundred Sikh and Hindu families in Afghanistan. Many families have moved to Kabul from other cities in the country such as Herat, Jalalabad and Qandahar that were once important centres of community life but have become increasingly insecure as a result of the Taliban insurgency and the activities of ISIS (Khorasan).

A number of serious security incidents have indeed directly affected the lives of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan and community morale more generally. A Sikh candidate for the parliamentary elections had been killed along with 14 other members of the community and their Muslim driver during the course of a visit to Jalalabad which they had made with the aim of meeting the President of Afghanistan, Dr Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. More recently, a Sikh shopkeeper in Herat had been shot, resulting in him being transferred to India for medical treatment.

It was not only public threats to community safety and security that the Sikhs with whom I spoke raised as pressing concerns. A further key concern of my Sikhs interlocutors in Kabul was the security and well-being of their families. The temple complexes are currently being used as refuges for families in economic difficulty, as well as for those who regard their safety as being palpably at risk. In the central Gurdwara, for example, as many as 37 families were living in small rooms inside the complex. I was also taken to another gurdwara located in the nearby Hindu Guzar area of the city. There, I was introduced to a further 8 Sikh families who were living in cramped conditions, mostly taking the form of a single room in which a curtain was used to divide the living and sleeping from cooking areas. The men of these households ran basic shops selling local medicine in the nearby market (which

I also visited).

The education of Sikh and Hindu children is a pressing concern. On several occasions during the course of the day, it was remarked to me that Sikh children and youth had found it difficult to avail themselves of formal education in Afghanistan in recent decades. As a result, members of community told me that they increasingly sought to educate their young within the confines of their own community spaces. I was shown a room in the Gurdwara in which a class of around 15 children was being instructed by a teacher from the community.

Having returned to the UK, I was invited by the Gurdwara Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar to address its congregation in Southall in November on the occasion of the inauguration of their new building an offices. I spent a fascinating day in the Gurdawara, giving a speech in Farsi to the congregation and speaking in Farsi to many members of the community. I was who told of the nature of their lives in Afghanistan before the onset of war in the late 1970s, and of their experiences in the countries (especially India, Uzbekistan, Russia and Ukraine) in which they had been based before eventually coming to the UK. I'm now in discussions with the community about creating an oral archive. It is hoped that younger generations in the community who have mostly never visited Afghanistan and are unable to speak Pashto or Farsi (Afghanistan's main languages) might benefit in the future from having access to first-hand material about the historical background and contributions of Afghanistan's Sikhs.



### Sussex Anthropology: Who We Are

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