Panel 1: Ethics, Faith and Self-making

‘Revival in the land’: salvation, democratisation and scale in a Burmese church

_Alexander Edwards (LSE)_

For some members of Burma’s small evangelical Christian community, the country’s current political transition is seen as clear evidence of the power of their prayer and the work of God. New freedoms and the former opposition’s victory in recent elections are thought to herald a more general revival whereby Burma will ‘come to know Jesus’. But unlike evangelicals elsewhere who also read their national politics through a soteriological lens, these believers must work to sustain this conviction in the face of an altogether different reality: living in a country that remains, despite two centuries of missionary activity, approximately 90% Buddhist. This paper considers how this demographic fact is incorporated by these Christians into the frames through which they approach the transition and, by extension, the nation. Based on recent fieldwork with a church in Yangon, it returns to questions of centre and periphery that have animated anthropological work on Burma since Leach. In doing so, it tracks the ways in which members and ministers of this church cultivate, especially through prayer, an identification with the nation – and an emotional investment in its transition – even as they also shift between other scales that spatially, temporally, and soteriologically transcend it. I show that for these believers, notwithstanding their complex positions of religious and ethnic marginality, identification with global Christianity has not been coterminous with a turning away from the nation. On the contrary, this transnational religious identity has engendered for them a particular mode of orientation toward the nation – an orientation that has, I will argue, been thrown into sharp relief by the expectations and disappointments emergent in Burma’s transition.

Negotiating morality: everyday understandings of living a ‘good’ life in Hpa-an, Myanmar

_Justine Chambers (College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University)_

In Myanmar, major social and political transformations are disproportionately affecting the lives of its people. Influenced by the flourishing of the anthropology of morality and the pursuit of happiness and well-being, my research seeks to look ‘beyond the suffering subject’, as Joel Robbins posits, focusing instead on the ‘anthropology of the good’ and the everyday projects of how Karen people in eastern Myanmar navigate how to live a ‘good’ or ‘moral’ life. Domains of ethics and morality are deeply embedded in a complex array of norms, values, historical experiences and social institutions. In discussing the recent interest in these subjects, Sherry Ortner calls for anthropologists to position their work as being ‘in active interaction’ with ‘larger contexts’ of power and inequality rather than in opposition to those aspects of social life. This paper examines local
systems and hierarchies of morality in and around Hpa-an, Karen state, Myanmar and how these come to shape and inform local values and the boundaries around what is 'good' and moral within a Buddhist cosmological framework and social reproduction at large. Based on sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2015-16, this paper demonstrates the significant degree of moral flexibility and contingency within Karen Buddhist peoples’ lives as they navigate Hpa-an’s numerous overlapping and competing social, moral and political authorities. The paper concludes with observations about the socially-situated nature of morality and wider debates within anthropology surrounding the question of ‘ethics’ in what is an increasingly globalised and changing world.

Atheism and stigma: the melee of social division
Siân Eleri Jones (UEL)

This paper draws on anthropological perspectives on identity, belief, epistemology, morality and stigma to demonstrate how marginalised groups, vying for recognition as valued identities, can themselves become intolerant of others whilst legitimising the self. In a contemporary political climate where the populism of Brexit–Trump has led to panic driven vitriolic ‘othering’ ephemeral markers of discrimination become inculcated and a melee of stigmatising behaviours materialises. This work looks at the heterogeneous relationships of atheists and religionists as a lens through which processes of exclusion and inclusion can be understood. Atheists have historically suffered stigmatisation that exiles them to an anomalous social category. Stigma is not, however, only imposed upon atheist, they have also become perpetrators of stigma towards religionists and even towards fellow atheists. Within the hostility of prejudicial stigma firing between, and amongst, atheists and religionists, a ‘majority mixed middle’ becomes visible. Those occupying this middle majority reveal the flexibility individuals display in contextually constructing atheistic and/or religious identities. By appropriating elements of religiosity and atheism, individuals erect multifaceted identities whose plasticity facilitates stigma avoidance. Based on research undertaken in 2012, the study discussed here aims to unpack the mechanisms that sustain scrutiny of others, the ensuing stigmatic violence between groups as well as the fluidity with which people understand belonging. Doing so the nuanced means through which people make sense of self, and others, through dynamic identities are revealed. Far from the alleged binary thinking of populism, the complexity of identity and belonging visible in the ‘majority mixed middle’ exposes a valuable lesson about inclusion and the lived realities of global subjects that is critical in this turbulent political time.

The local and the global in rural Ethiopia
Sarah Howard (Goldsmiths)

In this paper I propose to look at the ways in which my research site in rural east-central Ethiopia has been and remains connected to global processes. Although in many ways it fits the archetype of a remote and unchanging African village, it has been both on the receiving end of forceful national and international currents, conflicts and ideologies, and itself played a surprisingly important role in global history through an event related to the invasion of fascist Italian forces in 1937. Linking (aspiring) colonial violence to doctrines of
development, I will explore how social action has in part been forged through encounters with the non-local. To illustrate this ethnographically, I will use focus on the life history of one man, encompassing his family history of internal and external migration; his conversion from Orthodox to Evangelical Christianity; and his aspirations as he transitioned from state employee to petty entrepreneur. Using a single person’s experience is a way to, in Joao Biehl’s words, ‘capture both the densities of localities and the rawness of uniqueness’, and how the legacy of past and present structures that affect people’s lives in concrete ways can combine with self-making practices that may be a rejection of local social norms.

Panel 2: Negotiating Difference

‘The Chinese will come and we will no longer have jobs’: Chinese influence in a changing Laos

*Phill Wilcox (Goldsmiths)*

Chinese influence in Southeast Asia is a topic of growing interest. Along the Lao-China border, Special Economic Zones provide some level of employment to Lao nationals, largely in exchange for tracts of Lao territory passing into Chinese hands. This paper extends contemporary research on this relationship by recognising that this does not stop at the border zones themselves and argues that Chinese influence, investment and involvement in Laos is now very much a matter of everyday life throughout the country and particularly in Lao cities. In turn, this has profound impacts on Lao culture and society as many Lao citizens view growing Chinese influence in their country with varying degrees of real concern. This paper demonstrates the everyday perceptions of growing Chinese influence in Luang Prabang and the strategies some Lao citizens undertake in response to this, which are marked overwhelmingly by pragmatism and varying degrees of pessimism for the future. Finally, this paper contends that the importance of this issue for Laos cannot be overstated, and that the issue of Lao-China relations may itself be the determinative issue for the continuing legitimacy of the Lao political establishment in the coming decades.

Negotiating the ‘difference’ (a case study of India): narratives of female migrant workers of Manipur and Nagaland in upscale retail sectors in Delhi

*Priyanka Dass Saharia (LSE)*

Did anthropologists who studied change and conflict merely end up expanding the structural-functional approach—rather than contradicting it? This paper, in a dialogue with Jean and John Comaroff’s ideas presented at the Max Gluckman Memorial Lecture, 1998 and attempts to provoke a corollary of a kind that doesn’t challenge the propositions but merely broadens their framework to understand a context of contemporary India. In understanding the character of the sudden transformation of a 20th century international order within the ‘postcolonial’ context of South Africa – *the Age of Futilitarianism*, as they called it, there is a collapse of earlier grand narratives of orthodox social sciences. After almost two decades, we are faced with another turn of this ‘transformation’ into, what is quickly popularised as the ‘post-truth’ world order. This paper deploys Edward Soja’s concept of ‘third space’ to understand and formulate how
‘difference’ is understood, experienced and lived in a certain social context of the metropolis of Delhi (the Capital – the ‘centre’). It is with, the same notion of ‘liminality’ that the Comaroffs call as within which ‘to outrun their original bipartisan logic’, this paper explores the new shape of a topography where female migrant workers from Manipur (Northeast India – the ‘periphery’) are experiencing but also framing their ‘ethnic differences’ into ‘marketable exotica’. Thereby they broker in the making of their political identities, within the nature of the urban space – collapsing dichotomies of ‘culture’ and ‘capitalism’ negotiating the dimension of scale between both. Thus, the ‘agency’ of these subjects is not anticipated as manifested ‘repressed desire’ but emerges, not through being pinned on ‘Utopic’ imaginings but by the very opening up of spaces (and opportunities for production) within the city which enables these becomings. Through multi-sited ethnography and discourse analysis, the tensions inherent in these multiple lines of negotiations would be understood, which on one hand is a project in progress for these women to integrate with the larger social body of the nation and on the other hand reshapes the very imagination of the social body in a modern nation state vis-à-vis a ‘postcolonial’ one.

The global and virtual refugee: ‘global cosmopolitanism’ among refugees in the UK

Nicole I.J. Hoellerer (Brunel)

Since 2010, about 400 Bhutanese refugees living in refugee camps in Nepal have been resettled to the UK with the organized Gateway Protection Programme. The paper is based on 14 months qualitative, ethnographic research (in line with a PhD course) with Bhutanese refugees in Manchester (UK), and sheds light on how refugees-as-agents negotiate and perform a social and cultural identity by a ‘transculturalisation of cultural translation’, in which they actively pick-and-choose from various local, national and transnational cultures and identities, ‘translating’ and mingling cultures, identities and practices acquired in Bhutan, Nepal and the Global North. Often, their notions of a global identity are acquired and performed on the borderless virtual stage of the internet. Refugees live in what Bhabha called a ‘global cosmopolitanism’, locating the self in a ‘world of plural cultures and peoples’. Contrary to assumptions of some social theorists, who argued that migrants suffer from an ‘identity crisis’, Bhutanese refugees occupy what Hall 2010 refers to as a ‘third space’, bridging cultural and social boundaries in a multicultural, urban space, and begin to perceive themselves as global, as well as virtual citizens. This is not, however, a linear progression from one bounded, localized culture to another, but a complex interplay of multiple, global identities and cultures, which change over time. Bhutanese refugees in Manchester conceive their social and cultural identity not as a single root that is bound to a specific location, culture or nation, but as a ‘root moving toward and encountering other roots’, demonstrating that refugees’ ideas of locality, emplacement, belonging and situatedness are truly globalized, and are driven and re-enforced through interactions with their diaspora, the multi-cultural community in the UK, and the borderless space online.

Diasporic brokers: expertise and the mediation of local knowledge

Alex Kirby-Reynolds (Goldsmiths)
Drawing on my work as a consultant for a humanitarian organisation based in Britain, this paper offers a discussion on brokerage in the formation of global networks, connecting developed and underdeveloped nations. The organisation attempts to collect and disseminate humanitarian knowledge in the assumption that this will improve various actors’ abilities to cope with shocks. Knowledge, in this formulation, is bifurcated into the global and the local, with the former being a body of abstracted discourse belonging to partnered INGOs, and the latter being the situated practices of people embedded in the local contexts of humanitarian crises. This physical and conceptual separation between global and local requires experts who are able to mediate and reconnect these collective bodies of knowledge. In this paper I focus on one such expert and a case study *cum* conceptual exploration that he was commissioned to do by the organisation. This study was on the topic of Sub-Saharan African indigenous knowledge and its sharing throughout the wider humanitarian sector. This expert positioned himself to the humanitarian organisation as a broker between global and local knowledges based on his status as a university academic and, crucially, because of his position as part of the East African diaspora, heading an ‘Indigenous Knowledge Centre’ in the region. While this social capital enabled him to obtain greater potentiality as a broker, it was insufficient in allowing him to maintain this position. Various constraints left him unable to perform this role satisfactorily and he resorted to plagiarism in an attempt to conceal this. I argue that this story reminds us that sympathetic attempts to bring marginalised people into some vision of the global are underpinned by a complex reality of mediation, expertise and ownership. This reality simultaneously produces distance between the two, running against the intentions of the actors involved.

**Panel 3: Bodies and Biopolitics**

‘More than’ ethical: the context of organ pledging in Kerala  
*Abin Thomas (India Institute, KCL)*

The contemporary drive for awareness in organ donation practices across Kerala, a southern Indian state, tries to change the cultural, social and economic narratives of organ donation and transplantation. The leaders of the public campaigns assume that the people in the state *need better awareness*. Their speeches supporting organ donation became ethical narratives about how one can become human by taking part in organ pledging. As part of my fieldwork, I stayed in a village from the central part of Kerala, where 2000 individuals had pledged their organs. According to the Limca Book of Records, this village is the first organ donation literate village in the country. The ethnography insights from the village challenged the assumption of the organ pledging campaigns. Instead, the villagers articulated their consent to be biologically available along with biological, ethical, economic and political conditions. These conditions speak to multiple concerns of a failing developmental state and its healthcare institutions. On the one hand, this context marks a highly ethical discourse about being human. On the other hand, it engages with new forms of biopolitical demands from the category of ‘potential organ donor’s village.’ By analysing these conversations, I will show how the responses from the villagers problematize organ donation campaigns in the state.
Constructing sisterhood: local response to global corporate culture
Elena Fejdiova
In this paper I explore the dialectics of relationships between small local collectives of women in Slovakia focused on bonding and cooperation by optimising attractiveness and the global corporate ideology of the direct sales cosmetic company aimed at individualism, achievement and competition. Through shared ritualized consumption of cosmetics researched women developed relationships of cooperation as a levelling counter-culture to the hierarchies and corporate competitive ideology of the cosmetic company. On one hand, the corporate institutional structures provided by the cosmetic company preceded and facilitated the emergence of the collective rituals centred on shared manipulation of cosmetics. Nevertheless, the company’s ideology and marketing method subverted the female personal networks for business purposes. On the other hand, in their collective cosmetic rituals women reversed and opposed this ideology and the company’s competitive dynamics that focused on maximising profits and competition between women through beauty. On the contrary, researched women favoured the group levelling ritual processes. These rituals of subversion were characterized by refuting the business ethos and by creating space for cooperation of participating women through beautification practices within their alliances. Women regularly displayed to each other their cooperative intentions in a clear and reliable way through a series of costly behaviours. The emergent relationships of closeness and bonding were understood by the researched women as ties of sisterhood. In my presentation I first discuss the collective ritual practices of shared manipulation of cosmetics and of displaying signals of commitment to the group. Then I show how in these rituals women created amongst themselves close bonding relationships that they constructed as kinship ties of fictitious sisterhood. Finally, I show how the women empowered through collective rituals reversed and opposed the competitive corporate culture of the cosmetic company.

O Tal do Ao Vivo: Funk (The live one: funk): Funk music via live streaming in times of police occupation in a favela in Rio de Janeiro
Charlotte Livingstone (Goldsmiths)
Under the state logic of the ‘war on drugs’ many favelas in Rio de Janeiro are under military occupation by Pacifying Police Units (UPP), who engage in armed conflict for territorial power with local drug traders. Residents describe the situation of unpredictable lethal violence as ‘this war which is not ours’. Baile funks, a defining feature of Rio de Janeiro’s cultural landscape, are outlawed in UPP occupied favelas. The population who produces this music and associated cultural trends – predominantly black favela youth – fights against this criminalisation. During fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Complexo do Alemão, a favela complex in the North Zone of Rio, I collaborated with the independent media collective, Coletivo Papo Reto, who publicly denounce state violence, particularly abuses by the UPP, and demand accountability. Their ever evolving and fluid methodology relies on mobilizing affect and action through the use of mobile phones and social media. They have gained international recognition for their defence of human rights in the favela through the use of video as evidence. What has gained less attention is their critique of the cultural
aspects of this genocide of the Afro Brazilian favela population. In this paper, I look at how young funk producers and media activists in Complexo do Alemão directly and indirectly denounce state violence in the favela. *O Tal do ao Vivo* is a private funk performance on a rooftop (*laje*) which is shared with networked publics via live streaming. On the surface this seems to be an experiment in the narration of self through social media, and an opportunity to share their music with a wider, even global audience. Yet it is also a home-grown solution to the restrictions on favela culture, leisure and movement imposed by the UPP, and a criticism of the state’s violation of these rights.

**Panel 4: Arts and Representation**

**Citizens of photography: a rhetorical weapon of collective action in Cambodia**

*Sokphea Young (UCL)*

We are living in the age of photography. It moulds the ways in which we see and visualise past and present social, economic and political phenomena. Recently, photography has been employed by those citizens who access to mediums of photographs – known as citizens of photography – to articulate and represent their grievances and demands. Such forms of articulation and leverage have been long discussed by scholars of collective action of social movement studies. However, the discussion between photography and social movements in the extant literature remains limited. Drawing on a case of socio-environmental movements in Cambodia, this paper contributes to the understanding of the two fields. It interrogates how visual representations, as a form of expression and leverage, define outcomes of the collective action of disgruntled citizens. The paper argues that the ubiquity of visual devices and digital social media eases grassroots citizens to aesthetically exert their influence on the targets, political institutions, to address their demands. In the visual age, the article suggests that citizens of photography should be embraced in the influencing strategies of social movements; and, transcending its aesthetics, photography itself should explore its interdisciplinary impacts as shown in this study.

**War trophy images, global media flows and Tamil Dalit identities**

*Jill Reese (UCL)*

In March 2013, hundreds of posters depicting the image of a young boy’s bullet ridden body were pasted along the streets of Madurai, Tamilnadu. The photograph was one of a series of images taken on a mobile phone of twelve-year-old Balachandran, son of LTTE leader Prabhakaran, before and after he was killed by Sri Lankan forces while in their captivity. Channel 4 broadcast the images in a series of documentaries about human rights violations in the final months of the civil war in 2009. They were then disseminated via various news media in Tamilnadu, often without reference to the Channel 4 series. Tamil political parties commissioned posters with Balachandran’s image in a call for a UNHRC investigation into what they claimed were atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan military against Sri Lankan Tamils. This paper will discuss the global media flows that help to produce and reify local Madurai Tamil identities by demonstrating that for those in the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (Liberation Panther Party, VCK), a Dalit political party, the ‘war trophy’ photographs are visible evidence of the mutual, corporeal suffering of violence and oppression
that links Dalit communities in Tamilnadu with Sri Lankan Tamils.

The modernist aesthetics of Radcliffe-Brown: art and The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes (1931)
Isak Niehaus (Brunel)
In this paper, I suggest that modern art served as a major inspiration for Radcliffe-Brown’s structuralism in anthropology. This suggestion is counter-intuitive given that critics frequently contrast Radcliffe-Brown’s attempts to study social life by methods similar as those in the natural sciences, with more humanist, artistically-orientated, approaches. However, I argue that during the early twentieth century, no insurmountable gulf existed between sciences and arts. Drawing on archival sources, I show that in addition to elaborating new anthropological theories, Radcliffe-Brown was a vocal proponent of modernism in the arts. As President of the Five Arts Club in Sydney during the 1920s, he suggested that art should be in concert with the ‘scientific spirit’ of the time. He opposed photographic realism, sentimentalism, vagueness, and the over-elaboration of detail; and advocated abstraction based on a definite method of composition, hard lines, and definite forms. This aesthetic orientation is also apparent in his rejection of Daisy Bates’ romantic and sentimentalist accounts of Australian Aborigines, and in the composition of his seminal work, The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes (1931). The study follows the principles of minimalism and abstraction, which guided modern art, and seeks to elucidate structural forms underlying social interaction. My paper explores anthropological writings in the context of modernism as global trend in art and social sciences.

Panel 5: Work, Labour and Livelihoods

Scaling the ‘gospel of credit’: on vigilance, affective labour and the topographies of microfinance in the Gusii highlands, Kenya
Teodor Zidaru (LSE)
At once spurred by the wide-spread take up of mobile money transfer services and renewed by the current emphasis on financial inclusion in policymaking, microfinance in Kenya is still in the ascendant. Financiers the industry over are proselytizing what will herein be unpacked as a ‘gospel of credit’, with microcredit as a financially feasible and morally legitimate means toward a bountiful life. In the Gusii highlands, this scalar project encounters deep mistrust and ambivalence. For many, however, it is also a necessary interaction in that not only borrowers but also their friends and kin depend on the lump sums that formal savings-credit arrangements endow. In the process, both financiers and borrowers resort to affective labour in order to mediate savings-credit arrangements, negotiate debt repayment regimes and achieve a sense of trust, transparency and cooperation. Rather than simply pitching financiers against the poor, as alien subjects proffering microfinance on terms anathema to borrowers’ enmeshment in local social relations, this paper interrogates how the gospel of credit is preached, by whom, to what ends and how it is received. Why, for example, would loan officers publically refer to the American pastors whose money they are issuing as credit? And why would local politicians want to be
actively involved in the mediation of microfinance? Similarly, why would borrowers speak of how important it is to maintain a great deal of vigilance in these interactions, particularly against the explosive potentials of ‘black stomachs’? By attending to microfinance’s variegated topographies of scale – as mutually reinforcing connections between distinct scalable quantities and qualities – this paper undermines common-sense understandings of microfinance. Rather than just being a frontier vector of centripetal accumulation, violence and hierarchy, I argue that scaling projects such as microfinance can equally undermine and even flatten established hierarchies.

‘If we shut down, you all shut down!’ Memories of struggles, labour activism and hierarchies of power in Terni (Central Italy)

Matteo Saltalippi (Goldsmiths)

Focusing on individuality and associativism in labour activism, the paper aims to show how the labour unrest rituals, concerning coercion and solidarity among the Terni steelworkers, relies and challenges present struggle practices built on memories of a glorious past, evaluating the strike as a trait of the working-class as a subaltern culture. This paper looks at the steelworkers’ political agency during AST (Terni, Italy) ThyssenKrupp’s industrial dispute concerning 550 redundancies, and questions the role and outcomes of the strike action in shaping the steelworkers’ economic future. The bottom-race in wages and working conditions as a consequence of productive capital hypermobility provides the global landscape to analyse the local, associational, and structural workers’ power relations within the company town context. Outside the gate in the factory forecourt, the workers overstepped the boundary of the protected production sphere, and streamed into the public space engaging in an economic and political struggle. The pivotal role of local unionists is that of matching power, and power struggle, with the need for visibility on national media, hence adapting their approach to new socio-economic circumstances: nevertheless, they rely on strike ‘maps’ that elicit tensions and comparisons, generating gaps between diverse subcontractors and steelworkers’ groups. The consequences arise spontaneously: workers’ group claiming different strike approaches, in open contrast with the unionised activities to achieve the dispute settlement and negotiate the company town’s future. The paper aims to frame theoretically the role of both unionised and non-unionised activism in authoring the protest; the workers’ request and coercion of solidarity ‘for the whole company-town’s good’; and the description of blame and responsibility attributed to the structures and hierarchies of power following local and international trajectories, reinforcing the locally perceived idea of a Germanic-centric Europe side with ThyssenKrupp.

Assembling fish, salt and loss: translating climate change for export promotion in coastal Bangladesh

Camelia Dewan (Birkbeck)

This paper introduces Lonanodi village, a saline village in Bangladesh’s coastal zone to explore the social and environmental costs of living in a saltwater environment. It highlights the history of how Lonanodi came to be a barren, saline desert through the capitalist relations developed under the 1980s ‘Blue
Revolution’, where customary rights to wild fisheries were replaced by
privatised wetlands for export-oriented profits. I then explore the impact of tiger
prawn cultivation on the labour market and how it is a significant contributor to
outmigration, and argue that the label ‘climate change refugee’ simplifies
politicized processes of migration. The politicised nature of shrimp cultivation
and the coalition of forces involved is the focus of the next section that discusses
why there is a ‘translation’ of climate change as the sole, or inevitable, cause of
salinity in the coastal zone, despite grass roots movements demonstrating the
reversibility of salinity. I conclude that salinity is as much man-made as it is
seasonal, and that the highly unequal land use practice of brackish aquaculture
has an extremely negative impact on local livelihoods. Although tiger prawn
cultivation in Lonanodi was introduced long before ‘climate change’ became a
development priority, the current assertion that Bangladesh must expand
brackish aquaculture as a form of ‘climate change adaptation’ obscures the
highly contested expansion of shrimp cultivation in Bangladesh and its negative
impact on the poor who are unable to benefit from these capitalist assemblages.

‘Roaming in order to live’: friendship in a north-east Namibian town
Megan Laws (LSE)
Tsumkwe is a rural town in north-eastern Namibia, located at the centre of a
large protected area which was formerly a ‘Bushman’ homeland under the
apartheid-regime. At the time of independence, its inhabitants, the famous !Kung
who now call themselves Ju’hoansi, were given de facto rights to manage and
utilise the resources within. Despite these benefits, the story of the Ju’hoansi is
one of increasing marginalisation from any means of subsistence, and increasing
dependency on wealthy visitors, cash grants, and food aid. These forms of
dependency, however, are infrequent and unreliable, and so in order to survive
people rely primarily on acts of care through friendship. This raises the question:
What kinds of friendships are those enjoyed by ‘marginal people’? Carrier has
emphasised that a relationship ‘constrained’ is something very different from
what we call ‘friendship’. And yet among Ju’hoan former ‘foragers’ living in the rural north-east Namibian town of Tsumkwe, particular kinds of friendships
have flourished in the context of increasing constraints of poverty. These are
friendships based upon what is locally referred to as the ‘zula’ economy: a
practice that involves roaming or wandering about in search for opportunities
for patronage. The form these acts of patronage take have long been set aside by
anthropologists as a discrete, if not prototypical, form of sharing. While these
acts of sharing, based upon demand, have often been regarded as the hallmark of
so-called ‘egalitarian societies’, the form they take today are in many ways
distinct from those described in the past. This paper addresses the question of
whether, and in what sense, new conditions of marginality and inequality have
transformed patterns of demand sharing – introducing categories of ‘kin’ and
‘non-kin’, and ‘private’ and ‘public’ – thereby leading to the emergence of a new
emic concept of friendship.

Panel 6: The Politics of Belonging

‘No culture of our own’: ethnic politics and caste in Nepal
Ivan Deschenaux (LSE)

‘We, the Bishwokarma, have no culture of our own.’ This suggestion, which my host and adoptive father in Nepal regularly made, is surprising. The Bishwokarma, the largest Dalit group in Nepal, certainly engage in many practices that, on the face of it, should count as ‘cultural’. Many of these practices are not exclusive to the Bishwokarma, yet some are. In particular, blacksmithing is so strongly associated with the Bishwokarma that they are sometimes euphemistically referred to as ‘those who do metalwork’.

Why, then, had my adoptive father developed a desire for a ‘culture of his own’? What is it about blacksmithing, or any of the other activities he and his relatives engage in, that doesn’t fit the bill? To answer these questions, one must consider phenomena extending far beyond the boundaries of the remote village in which my adoptive father and his family lived. With the end of the Hindu monarchy, a tremendous rise in ethnic and identity politics took place in Nepal, fuelled in part by global discourses of indigeneity. As a result, specific notions of ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’ spread in Nepal, centred on non-Nepali languages and non-Hindu religions. Scholars have argued that this phenomenon has been experienced positively by members of hitherto oppressed groups. While this may be true in some cases, it is not necessarily so for the Bishwokarma, whose plight has historically been based on caste rather than ethnicity, and who have therefore been left behind by the turn to ethnicity. The Bishwokarma share a language and religion with high-caste Hindus, but none of the latter’s privileges. They are now no better off with regards to caste, but additionally, are becoming envious of cultural markers which they simply cannot claim to have.

Trans-nationalization of social movements in Argentina and Latin America

Jose Ignacio Gonzalez-Acosta (Goldsmiths)

In recent years we have observed an international tendency of governments and State-based institutions to lose their ability to generate citizen participation. Increasingly there appears to be a rejection of politics as a specialized activity for professionals occupying elective positions. At the same time, in social contexts such as Buenos Aires, Argentina, where the Federacion Universitaria de Buenos Aires (FUBA) student organization operates, social movements appear to be a constructive vector for new systems of community-making and learning. Articulating a process of a radical pluralist democracy that spans across national borders.

As a parting category to understand these movements, I suggest to think through them as an ecology of aesthetic communities and emergences. Using Rancière’s definition of aesthetic acts, which reconfigure the distribution of the sensible; configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and include novel forms of political subjectivity. Considering them to be forms of organization embedded within a larger genealogy of protest in Argentina and Latin America, that have today generated newness in their forms of practice and performance. Giving value to spontaneity and imagination.

To exemplify this analysis, I provide two examples of social movement trans-nationalization. One is the ‘Ni Una Menos’ campaign, an initiative against gender violence which originated in Argentina in 2015, and has since been replicated in several countries throughout Latin America and beyond. The other is the
movement demanding justice for victims of forced disappearances. Exemplified with the case of the 43 Mexican students of Ayotzinapa in 2014, which the student movement in Buenos Aires adopted as its own. I propose trans-nationalization of this cause in relation to the larger political history of Argentina, and the importance of a local recognition of human rights and collective memory relating to political violence. Highlighting the interplay of ‘local’ and ‘global’ narratives.

Through an exploration of both examples, I aim to consider the possibilities that social movements such as these may imply. In a scenario in which ‘globalized’ problems may also elicit trans-national efforts of resistance.

Microaggressions and the social relations of not belonging: lowrider car culture in New Mexico, USA

Jo Sedillo (Goldsmiths)

Lowriders are evidence of the creation of a simultaneously local and extra-local ethnopolitical identity. Having a purpose that was traditionally built upon much more than the specialty mechanics and automobiles that are glamorized today, the lowrider is a social medium. It is a way of conduct, a platform for communication, and an attitude with a particular aesthetic. The digital lifestyle we live in today has caused an increased allure and participation of lowrider culture globally. This affects perceptions of authenticity and local definitions of what it means to ‘be’ lowrider. Such transformations have lead to an oversimplified image of the lowrider that is centered around bicycles and cars, and a ‘cholo culture’ that resembles gang life mirrored after American films, pop-culture, and clothing. As a result, this occurrence raises questions about how such appropriations affect concepts of aesthetics, hegemonic views of gender, cultural membership, ethnicity, and identity. While the overarching aim of my research is to explore the interplay of ideas like mimicry and resistance, or the idea of future heritage (such as aspiration and the issue of dignity), its goal is to also question more broadly: how do individuals construct and negotiate identity, how does this inform feelings of belonging, and how does material culture influence definitions of group membership. For this presentation, I specifically question how does one’s cultural pride and performance of ethnicity simultaneously foster notions of inclusion, while exclude individuals at the same time? Using narrative and audio-visual material, I attempt to dissect those insider-outsider discourses that are unique to the lowrider culture of my home. Although lowriding has origins and a rich history of trying to combat inequality, paradoxically it at times also reproduces the same injustices it claims to be against.

Aliens among us: Arizonan perspectives on a post- Trump social reality

Susannah Crockford (LSE)

Two kinds of ‘alien’ occupy the central ethnographic frame for this paper: undocumented migrants and people who self-identify as coming from another planet. Drawing on data from my fieldwork in Sedona, Arizona, during 2012-2014 and recent interviews with informants, this paper examines how ‘aliens’ in Arizona have responded to the changing political and social environment after
the election of Donald Trump as President. The increased surveillance, detention, and deportation of undocumented migrants under Trump is well documented in the media; this increase is especially acute in Arizona where anti-immigration politicians, such as Sheriff Joe Arpaio, have been enforcing for many years local forms of the policies that the Trump administration is currently implementing nationwide. Undocumented migrants are therefore particularly precarious in Arizona. In this paper, I recount the story of one undocumented migrant that I knew during my fieldwork in Sedona and has recently returned to Arizona from California since the election. I examine how she frames her precarious political position in the specific locality of Arizona and how she has been navigating the changing social reality of post-Trump America. Her story is then juxtaposed with that of a ‘starseed’, someone who self-identifies as coming from another planet, in this case, the Pleiades system. I examine how his beliefs situate him as a ‘galactic’ citizen, beyond national and even planetary boundaries, and how this operates as a political statement against the current social conditions in the USA. This allows for a comparative analysis of the ‘alien’ in Arizona; both the alien as other and self as alien. What does it mean to be an ‘alien’ in post-Trump America? How are the changing social and political conditions reframed in terms of personal beliefs about the local, the global, and the galactic?

**Panel 7: Locality**

Drawing across the Green Line: using visual art to understand cultural exchange between divided Palestinian locales

*Helen Underhill (SOAS)*

The relation between Palestinian cultural production and resistance practices has been widely debated in anthropology. Increasing attention has been paid to theorising the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, particularly in terms of proposed academic and cultural boycotts of Israel. However, existing studies have not adequately addressed the ways in which Palestinian citizens of Israel establish ‘Palestinian-ness’ in relation to other Palestinian locales. My paper addresses the production of contemporary visual art by Palestinian citizens of Israel, using ethnographic research conducted alongside artists in Haifa. It focuses on moments of conflict, when ideals of purity in cultural activism meet lived experiences of ambivalence, contingency and willingness to compromise in order to promote Palestinian narratives within Israel. These artists negotiate their ‘Palestinian-ness’ not only with Israeli audiences, but with a Palestinian art scene constellated across cultural organisations, galleries and funding bodies based in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. I focus on dialogue and exchange between Ramallah and Haifa, a study which would also be relevant to Palestinian communities across the Middle East and internationally. I analyse the misgivings of these artists about BDS, in order to show how they engage in negotiations with the self, with the state/s within which they operate, and with a notional Palestine (and hence other Palestinians in distant locations), as well as with what I represent as a researcher. Employing critical reflection on the politics of conducting this research, I analyse where people draw their individual lines in this contested location. I argue that the politics of visual art making and display reveal important aspects of what it means to be Palestinian
in Israel, and, crucially, how this identity is established in relation to a network of Palestinian locations.

Identity politics, queer and safe space in the Athenian lgbt community

*Diana Manesi (Goldsmiths)*

In this paper I will explore identity politics in Greece, providing the historical and cultural background and reflecting upon the terms queer, feminism and identity and their meanings within the Greek political domain; thus I will look upon collective forms of identification within Greek lgbtq activism, particularly on issues of westernization when it comes to becoming queer as well as queer’s affiliations with Greek anarchism. The issue of safe space and battles around identity and representation became a focal point of my field site. What I came to notice is that theory becomes an ‘elsewhere’ and Berlin is constructed as a fantasy island that has to offer many and diverse queer narratives (art, social spaces, festivals) that make life ‘here’ more tolerable and promissory. They both represent a mode of being that is then not quite here but nonetheless indispensable to a queer act of imagining transformation. However, the social, political, material world in which the Greek queer community exists has not changed as radically; in 2015 the Cohabitation Contract for same-sex couples was voted in the Greek parliament after three years of constant appeals by same-sex couples to the European Court of Justice while two years later the District Court of Athens denies AMOQA’s (Athenian Museum of Queer Arts) request for setting up an association on suspicion that AMOQA aims at spreading homosexuality and that the proposed association has hidden ‘commercial’ purposes. In such an heterosexist society the thinkability of a space, safe and less hostile, is a ‘reality’ set against a concretely-experienced ‘fiction’, no amount of intellectual recognition on bodies and fragmented identities can remove trans women, gay men and lesbians from their everyday experience of a world that reasserts notions about gender and sexuality as fixed and authentic individual identities. I will draw upon particular conflicts that arose throughout my fieldwork which reveal a disjuncture, evident in queer politics, between an articulated commitment to promoting an understanding of sexuality that challenges the idea of static, monolithic, bounded categories (queer as a western set of ideas) and the political practices of creating safe space which inescapably fall upon binary conceptions of sexuality and power.

Playing across scales: football and the ambiguous practice of locality

*Michele Serafini (SOAS)*

Rooting its genealogy in the long history of Gurkha soldiery, football has become the most popular form of entertainment in the Lamjung district of Western Nepal. Played on local pitches and watched on global screens, the game allows different scales – both imaginary and material – to become real on the ground of daily life. In this paper, I will explore football as a globally recognizable practice allowing for a playful articulation of the local. Departing from a commonsensical view of football as just another instance of relentless globalization, while at the same time anchoring the game within the skewed political economy of its administration, I will show how people literally play across scales in order to strategically push forward their own plans. On the one hand, compliance to internationally defined football universals (from rules to aesthetics to pitch
sizes) becomes a tool for contextual articulations of authority. In Lamjung, this means rearranging places and people according to a hierarchy of professionalism, as well as opening up spaces for the development of future political careers and speculative investments. On the other hand, many youths find in football a channel for unruly self-assertion. Constrained between an unrewarding education system and the spectre of migration, youths will be seen navigating through the game for creating a sense of presence. There, localities are categorized through the global. Here, they are defiantly enjoyed despite it.

The field: an attempt at co-construction of local commons in New Cross
Toby Austin Locke (Goldsmiths)
The Field began in 2014 as an experiment in creating a self-organised neighbourhood resource. At a time when public space is increasingly under threat, when community centres and public services are withdrawing rapidly in the wake of the UK’s Conservative party led austerity programs, and when public life is increasingly subject to processes of commercialisation and privatisation, The Field is an attempt to create a different kind of social space. This social space seeks to affirm the right to the city beyond the limits of the traditionally corresponding dichotomies of state/market and public/private. The project was initiated to experiment with the idea of the commons, and following from the explorations of local activist group the New Cross Commoners. The Field explores what commoning means in practice, beyond the pages of theoretical monographs and outside of the walls of the academy. Based in New Cross, London—an area characterised by divisions between Goldsmiths College, and the communities of local residents—The Field also represents an attempt to take the notion of the commons out of the university and into the local area, creating contexts for self-organisation and collective action that cross cuts otherwise relatively separate communities.