NO GO WORLD

How fear is redrawing our maps and infecting our politics

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Following his captivating first book *Illegality, Inc.* (2014), Ruben Andersson's new publication *No Go World* does not stray away from his interest in migration control. It broadens the initial focus by looking at circuits of fear that have contributed to producing a global map marked by inaccessible "danger" zones where "threats" – migrants, terrorists, insurgents – have to be intervened upon and contained. It explores the red patches of world maps on travellers' advices sections of western governments, and it looks at the margins of "our" maps and the trend of attributing degrees of risk to particular areas of the globe. Andersson argues that there is a performative power to danger mapping. In producing these maps, the "cartographers of doom" (p. 61) – as he calls them – participate in the exercise of power that is defining the boundaries between the "lands of civilization" and what lies beyond.

The book is divided into two sections, separated by an interlude. The first section examines distance creation and its effects, while the second section introduces the reader to the different "monsters" (p. 254) that populate the margins of the map. *No Go World* is a truly multi-sited ethnography that makes use of a range of diverse methods (interviews, observations, document analysis) and sources (military reports, explorer and journalistic accounts, maps). A significant amount of attention is devoted to the Sahel zone – remote and economically 'unimportant', but that has become central "to our new world disorder" (p. 3). The author maps interventions – from peace keeping operations to border reform and military stabilization missions – across dimensions (air, ground, water, virtual space) and contexts (in Mali but also in Libya and Somalia). A central question guides the reader through these rough and diverse terrains: What is the function of the Map?

The first section opens with a case study on Mali (chapters 1 and 2). In 2012, a military coup put an end to Amadou Toumani Touré's presidency. Separatist groups in the north declared an independent state and jihadist groups were also on the rise. Andersson focuses on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) which has been deployed as an answer to stabilize the country. He describes it as "a peace-keeping mission with no peace to keep, hostage to elusive dangers lurking on the horizon" (p. 33). As the north frontline has become both inaccessible and increasingly perceived as menacing, the mission's western administrators are kept in a five-star hotel in Bamako, reduced to "remote programming" including flash visits, phone calls and skype conference with the few local staff and partners (p. 37). The backdrop to this contemporary

situation of disarray is formed by the descriptive snippets of Andersson's first visit to the country in 2001, as a budding anthropologist. Through his narrations of banal encounters, tea-drinking and taxi-riding, he conveys to the reader the sense that these were distinctly different times, when poverty and a destination being off the beaten track did not inevitably rhyme with danger.

In chapter 3, "The Tyranny of Distance", as well as in the interlude he fleshes out what he calls the "vertical politics of intervention" (p. 105). These refer to the increasing control of unwanted populations or dangerous places from above as ground interventions become more dangerous and contentious. Darting to yet another African context of conflict, he takes the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) as a case in point. He describes officials' contrasting awareness of the death count on the ground according to their position in the strange constellation of EU funding for the mission, Ugandan, Burundian, Kenyan and Ethiopian soldiers on the ground, UN equipment and U. S. training and intelligence. The Swedish Eurocrat from the European External Action Service (EEAS), Borg, blinks blankly back at his interviewer when questioned about the high fatality count. In contrast, Colonel Minyori, a Kenyan colonel in charge of the soldiers his country had contributed to the mission, is blunt when asked about the politics of death distribution in this "peace" mission in Somalia: "We are willing to pay. We pay with blood, you pay us the cash" (p. 108), he says. Andersson concludes that "the boots on the ground were African, the funds in the pot were European, the support chain was run by the UN, the drones in the sky were American" (p. 109). This vignette provides a useful springboard to outline a key argument that runs through the book: these interventions designed to contain and stabilize "danger" contribute to the securitization of the relationship between the rich and the poor on a global scale.

The second part of the book is devoted to the depiction of "creatures" populating these map margins. Andersson outlines monsters, snake merchants, wolves and other reptilian spectres. The "Wolves at our Door" chapter takes the idiom of the infected border (which has been examined elsewhere, see: Harper and Raman 2008, Markel and Stern 2002) to reflect upon the construction of enemies and threats. Through examples ranging from Ellis Island, to current Mexican-American borderlands, and Libya, the author argues that risk-based bordering and fear politics draw on metaphors and logics of epidemiology and infection to portray "unwanted migrants" themselves as contagious. The snake merchant acts as a character to explore the business behind the production and circulation of fear. Fear, he says, serves a useful function for those who gain from continued violence. It is a vicious and lucrative circle: danger motivates investments in everything from sanitization projects to migrant sensitization campaigns (p. 204).

No Go World is a gripping book, which sometimes feels more like a novel than an academic publication. Its story-telling style, as well as the breadth of the author's approach contribute to the book's wide audience appeal. Nonetheless, both these features also have a more critical side to them. The (at-times) dramatic and almost journalistic narrative form Ruben Andersson chooses is not without risk. It often flirts with some of anthropology's disciplinary boundaries which anthropologists themselves are not always so comfortable negotiating. Anthropology has advocated for ethnographies that go beyond description and provide analyses which can account for systemic forces that shape the particular. However, by avoiding

delving into one "system-problem" more deeply, unpicking its regularities and irregularities and outlining more specifically its dynamics, Andersson produces the effect of a sort of "unveiling": The system of danger and fear production he describes ends up looking like a kind of armoured and impenetrable machine. Not producing a more fine-grained ethnographic analysis risks weakening anthropology's currency and what makes the discipline's engaged positions so convincing. In other words, the books lacks a more thorough engagement with contemporary debates around what it means and how to conduct fieldwork with elites (for a good example, see: Gilbert 2015 and 2018). Therefore, it risks reinforcing post-critical stances that advocate retreating out of grand categories of analysis such as exploitation, empire and class to more non-normative stances (Gilbert 2018).

However, this book also makes valuable and innovative contributions to anthropology. Firstly, *No Go World* tackles the question of conducting research in difficult to access places, with (powerful) people who often do not want to talk. Andersson's book proves that it is important not to leave them out of our studies, even if exploring the places in which they work and the secrecy involved in their professional worlds might come with analytical limitations. The book is also timely in its form. With its image-filled and colourful use of idioms, Andersson "maps the political power of narration, through the narrative form itself" (p. 262). His critique of global asymmetrical power dynamics and of the post-colonial politics of the production of modern-day danger-zones, inscribes him *de facto* on the side of an engaged anthropology. The combination of this engaged position with the narrative form puts his project squarely in line with what some commentators (see Monbiot 2017) have called for in a 'post-truth' era: not shying away from emotional politics, but rather understanding that the story is important, as is the way in which you tell it.

References

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