

**I QUADERNI DI
INTO THE BLACK BOX**

**GENDERING LOGISTICS.
FEMINIST APPROACHES
FOR THE ANALYSIS OF
SUPPLY-CHAIN
CAPITALISM**

**EDITED BY BENVIGNÙ, CUPPINI,
FRAPPORTI, GAMBINO, MILESI,
PEANO, PIRONE**

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA**

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Edited by

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Evelina Gambino, Floriano Milesi, Irene Peano,
Maurilio Pirone

Department of the Arts

University of Bologna

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Department of Arts
Director Giacomo Manzoli
University of Bologna
Via Barberia 4
40123 Bologna

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INTRODUCTION: READING LOGISTICAL OPERATIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF GENDER

Evelina GAMBINO, Irene PEANO, INTO THE BLACK BOX

Planetary corridors, supply chains, global value chains, hubs, circulation struggles, just-in-time... A logistical lexicon and imaginary are now shaping the very ways in which we think about contemporary capitalism. In the last decade the awareness of the strategic importance of logistics for capital's reproduction has increased, from the viewpoint of both the managerial techniques of governance and of critical theory and social movements. Logistics is then emerging as a crucial systemic logic, as a set of necessary infrastructures, operations and assemblages of labour force for the reproduction of capital, and as a site of contestation and struggles.

This collection of essays seeks to intervene in the lively discussions about logistical capitalism within and beyond academia, by unearthing the multiple ways in which gender underwrites global circulation. The essays gathered here build on a wide array of feminist and post-colonial works from a range of disciplines, adding to the already existing wealth of analyses that discuss the complex imbrications of processes of gendering and racialization within projects of accumulation on a global scale and across different temporalities. Crucially, we contend that addressing these issues through an explicitly logistical gaze does not amount merely to a reformulation of the insights of these important bodies of work, but rather it is the result of the political urgency to name and counteract the specific mechanisms through

which contemporary capitalism shapes our lives and extracts from them.

This e-book thus provides a range of interventions which, however diverse, all place gender at the core of a critical analysis of global flows and mechanisms of extraction. Across these chapters readers will find interrogations of the role of pre-existing taxonomies of gender, often in their articulations to those of race, in sustaining and compounding logistical circulation, as well as examples of the ways in which these are reworked – or even created anew – by the imperative of connectivity. We contend that it is by observing these complex and at times awkward intersections that we can start sketching an opposition to the violence enshrined in the pursuit of seamless flows.

The impressive span of logistics as a series of operations and as a conceptual lens affords novel ways to analyse the multiplicity of phenomena that is enlisted in the reproduction of capitalist worlds and trace connections with spaces once too distant to seem linked. If, as Deborah Cowen has argued, contemporary global capitalism is characterized by a recasting of the relation between making and moving (2014:104), it is also true that these new geometries do not just happen in an “elsewhere” of circulation: they are constitutive of the very fabric of our existences; they intersect with and underwrite the “fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (Katz 2001:711).

The week-long blockage of the Suez Canal by a giant container ship, which paralysed maritime traffic in March 2021, is just the latest and one of the most visible examples of such imbrication: the fear of shortages caused by the clogging of such a vital artery of global trade rippled across the globe as corporations, governments and consumers alike lamented the prospected lack of commodities of all kinds, from medical and food supplies to

sex toys. Besides consumption patterns, and in relation to them, as the essays in this collection show the logistical organisation of supply chains has also shaped labour organisation, contributed to further naturalise imaginaries of competition and reproduction, colonised desire, sexuality and relations, making use of and elaborating on gender as a subjectifying force. If logistics quite literally supplies our lives down to an intimate and bodily level, the opposite is also true: our most intimate, bodily efforts are enlisted to sustain the gigantic networks of global trade. Feminist and post-colonial scholars across disciplines have shown how the circulation of capital, commodities and labour is sustained by a host of relations, exchanges and practices traditionally deemed outside the bounds of productive labour (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Hochschild 2012; Bhattacharya 2018). These relational, material practices constitute the basis of social reproduction, functioning as substrates to logistical circulation and allowing its connections to look smooth (Appel 2019:2). As Cindy Katz has argued in calling for analyses that are able to ground what she terms “vagabond capitalism” into the processes that allow it to thrive, “focusing on social reproduction allows us to address questions of the making, maintenance, and exploitation of a fluidly differentiated labor force, the productions (and destructions) of nature, and the means to create alternative geographies of opposition to globalized capitalism” (Katz 2001: 710).

In the first essay of this volume, Irene Peano follows these lines by suggesting that “a gendered study of logistics may take into consideration, first, the role of supply-chain management in shaping (formal and informal, re/productive, waged and unwaged) workers’ subjectivities, movements and relations, including patterns of household organisation, kinship and

intimacy [...] To overlook such crucial forces would also mean to foreclose the possibility of imagining concrete, viable opposition against them.” (Peano, this volume).

In different ways, all the interventions that follow respond to Peano’s call to shed light on these crucial forces. In particular, most of the studies collected here pause on the making and unmaking of masculinities, showing these processes to be pivotal to the reproduction of logistical timescapes across different settings. As we are shown, crises of masculinity go hand in hand with the changes to labour organisation and the attempted suppression of avenues of struggle at the hands of ever more agile supply chains. As a consequence of these intertwined processes, explored by Kampouri and Rivoal in their texts, we see how virility, docility and respectability are recast through the prism of logistical labour. In parallel to these processes, at the other end of the class hierarchy, as Chua and Gambino show, logistical rationalities as much as libidinal attachments come into existence as the embodied performances of the top managers in charge of governing logistical flows. Exploring the equation between certain kinds of dominant masculinity and the power to calculate future risks crucially exposes the embodied nature of the ostensibly immaterial world of financial calculation. From docks (Kampouri, Rivoal) to boardrooms (Alimahomed-Wilson, Chua), to the private vehicles of logistics-loving Prime Ministers (Gambino), the texts come to terms with the many ways in which what it means to be a [real] man is predicated on the shifting patterns of labour, knowledge and expertise that travel along logistical flows, both existing and imagined.

Too often the behaviour of men is left unchallenged by the naturalising operations of the patriarchy. By rendering the

familiar strange, a focus on the plurality of processes that converge in the (un)making of masculinity opens up productive avenues to talk about gender as a field of relations that is captured, valued and replicated by capital to ensure unpaid reproductive work and the naturalization of extractive hierarchies more broadly, towards its own reproduction and expansion. To this it must be added that, as Jake Alimahomed-Wilson discusses in his contribution, the sphere of circulation is also a place where race is produced, historically as in the present (see also Zeiderman 2020). The works collected here, therefore, as Evelina Gambino, following Boyer, suggests, may constitute a step in the direction of “confront[ing] and reform[ing] of the transcendence-seeking “hypersubjects” (usually but not exclusively white, straight, northern males) that gifted the world the Anthropocene as part of their centuries-long project of remaking the planet for their own convenience and luxury” (Boyer 2018: 239).

“Any politics that effectively counters capitalism’s global imperative must confront the shifts in social reproduction that have accompanied and enabled it” (Katz 2001:710). (Re)productive processes across supply chains feed off the intersections which define workers’ – and indeed managers’ – subjectivities inside and outside the workplace, creating new productive figurations (Ong 1987; Roediger and Roediger 1999; Rofel 1999). What appears necessary in the face of the complexity of relations and repetitions enlisted to sustain logistical operation is thus, as Anna Tsing has argued, the elaboration of a “polyglot language of class formation” that those who seek to counteract extractive processes across logistical networks need to articulate (Tsing 2009:175). It is possible to recall some examples in which struggles in the domain of circulation and struggles in the domain of reproduction appear inextricably intertwined - think of the

ZAD in France, the No TAV in Val di Susa, the No DAPL movement in Standing Rock or the Tar Sands struggle in Canada. In these contexts, encampments became forms of struggle in themselves, care work presented itself as a barricade and the barricade as care work. If we follow Kristin Ross' suggestion (2015), these forms of struggle represent today's embryonic expression of a "Commune form" in which the dimension of needs and desires moves "beyond the measures of capital - beyond wages and price, everything has moved into the sphere of reproduction" (Clover 2020:129).

In "hitting the ground" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019), logistical operations go through different processes of "domestication" (Smith, Rochovská and Stenning 2010). Subjectifying mechanisms that rely on gendering and racialization are pivotal to this domestication: not a mere surplus to the functioning of logistical flows, as the articles collected in this volume show, they permeate the variegated spaces that compose and are engulfed by the pursuit of seamless circulation - from the household to the warehouse and, indeed, the boardrooms where new routes are negotiated. Aiming to detect and sharpen our focus on these processes, this collection assembles situated knowledges on global logistics, that speak from the standpoint of specific bodies, relations, affects and places, naming them as integral to the (re)production of global flows.

In the concluding piece of this volume Emilia Weber speaks of one of these struggles and of the horizon that, albeit temporarily, it materialises. "We watch the ship Aurora, named after the Roman goddess who flies across the sky announcing dawn, ferry people in the Baltic, 12 miles off the coast of Poland". On the ship, feminist sailors provide free and safe abortions to

women who are affected by Ireland's oppressive laws. They do so by using the conventions that regulate seafaring to their own advantage, strategically crossing into international waters. These temporary spaces of maritime gender solidarity, as Weber suggests, resonate with Linebaugh and Rediker's account of 17th- and 18th-century pirates who practiced an "insurgent hydrarchy [...] creating spaces on ships where they governed themselves as limited democracies using the pirate code which included dividing their loot equally, distributing justice and maintaining a multiracial social order, in so doing directly challenging the development of capitalism and international trade" (Weber, this volume).

In her afterword, Deborah Cowen draws on a range of recent decolonial, indigenous and feminist studies to trace some lines of continuity between still budding reflections on the need to gender logistics as a field of inquiry and more established critical engagements with the related domains of mobility, infrastructure, social reproduction in relation to global supply chains. If today's logistics exists *in the wake* of the past processes of gender and race subjectivation that have constituted global trade (Cowen 2014; Zeiderman 2020; cf. Sharpe 2016), one of the propositions advanced by this volume is also that logistical struggles exist in the wake of the space-times of insurgent reproduction that have sabotaged capitalist forms of value production in our recent and not-so-recent history.

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GENDERING LOGISTICS: SUBJECTIVITIES, BIOPOLITICS AND EXTRACTION IN SUPPLY CHAINS

Irene PEANO

In the domain of critical logistical studies, now a burgeoning field, the analysis of gender relations is largely neglected, being a rare occurrence in scholarly as much as in political, activist and militant reflections. One explanation for this might lie in the fact that logistics, as some analysts contend, is (still) a male-dominated industry – and this in more ways than one. From the warehouse shop floor, the longshore and the ship deck (Alimahomed Wilson 2011, 2016, this volume; Bonacich and Wilson 2008; Kampouri, this volume; Rivoal, this volume) to corporate boardrooms (Alimahomed Wilson, this volume; Chua 2019) and the imaginaries spun by advertising campaigns (Cowen 2014), synchronizing the flows of commodities, but also of people, along global supply chains appears to be largely a man's job. Whilst in and of itself this should not rule out a gender analysis (quite to the contrary), it may be the case that, alas, academically and politically gender is here implicitly equated with women and the feminine - despite four decades of arguments against this sort of essentialist reductionism, which distorts what feminists have conceived from the very start as an intrinsically *relational* concept describing a specific dimension of power. At the same time, as this brief essay aims to show, the very assumption of logistics' masculine character can and should be put to the test for what it blinds us to.

But let us begin with men, who are too often let off the hook through the neutralizing operations of patriarchy. The work of Jake Alimahomed-Wilson certainly stands out as one of the most systematic attempts at considering the gendered (and racialised) dimension in logistics labour relations, with special reference to the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles (among the largest maritime hubs worldwide). Whilst his descriptions of hegemonic masculinities and their evolution among waterfront workers may resonate with those pertaining to other industrial sectors, Alimahomed-Wilson's analysis of the 'crisis of masculinity' that invested longshoremen in Southern California (2011, 2016 chapter 6) arguably points to the ways in which the so-called 'logistics revolution' (Allen 1997), and particularly the process of containerisation, had a specific impact on gender relations. Alimahomed-Wilson deals both with processes of homosocial, all-male heterosexual subjectivation and with the discrimination that women faced (and still face) when entering an industry that was previously the exclusive purview of men. He highlights how the containerised mechanisation of the shipping industry disembodies and de-socialises labour, thus depriving workers of one of the constituent elements of their old-time, masculine working-class identification as physically strong. As a consequence, on the one hand male workers have tended to project their virility upon machinery, whose operation they have claimed as an exclusively male prerogative, and, on the other, they have also offloaded their frustrations upon women, who started to enter the profession in the late 1970s as a result of struggles as much as of changing labour patterns. Thus, this case study not only reinforces the analysis of broader trends, most notably the shifts in workers' subjectivation under the blows of neoliberal restructuring (and the concomitant 'feminisation' of work, on which Rivoal and Kampouri also reflect in this volume).

It also allows us to identify the specific role played by logistical technologies in this process.

Other works (Allison et al. 2018; Bonacich and Wilson 2008) have also explored the patterns of discrimination that invest the women - particularly those who are also racialised – employed in logistical operations in southern California. Differential treatment encompasses several dimensions: from access, wages, and steadiness of work to institutionalised and day-to-day sexism and racism. Tasks where the rates of female labour are growing, if still lower than those of male employees, are especially those involving packaging and distribution, where gender stereotypes about docility and physical aptness to perform specific assignments abound.

But (hetero)sexist and racist ideologies have been shown to permeate the logistics industry's self-narrations at other levels too. In her seminal *The deadly life of logistics*, Deborah Cowen analyses UPS couriers' company advertising campaign, in partnership with National Geographic's series on *Great Migrations*. Here, the dichotomous tropes of feminine consumption and male labour (both deeply racialised and segmented) are employed alongside the naturalisation of reproductive heterosexuality as «a violent competition for species survival», which, in Cowen's words, coincides with «a necropolitical racial project» (2014:207-210) that has mobility at its core. The imperative to make commodities flow smoothly is equated to a supposedly biological drive towards movement as the basis of life preservation. Similarly, in her interviews with corporate logistics managers Charmaine Chua stumbled into the military and sexual metaphors these male professionals use to characterise the strategies of enlargement inherent to the shipping

industry. She describes her interlocutors as «white men, in ties, discussing [...] very big ships – in very deep harbours» (2019:146). Indeed, the grafting of fantasies of masculine prowess onto logistical projects displays long genealogies, as old as the construction of the global, imperial infrastructure that made them possible. In 1833, Henri de Saint-Simon's disciple Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin (the self-appointed 'father' of a church he himself had founded), in an epistolary poem provided a rather telling description of his idea of unifying the Occident (typically characterised as 'male') with a feminised Orient by digging across the isthmi of Suez and Panama:

We will thus place one foot on the Nile,
The other on Jerusalem,
Our left hand will cover Rome
And still rest on Paris.
Suez
Is the centre of our working life,
There we will commit the act
That the world is waiting for
To confess that we are
Male.
(Cited in Hubert, 2013:26)

Indeed, as Chua puts it:

juvenile sexual metaphors do more than reveal the performative masculinities embedded in corporate culture. These allusions to phallic imagery and sexual domination are linked to speculative desires about the continued wellbeing of the capitalist future, marking the extra-economic logics inherent in logistical fascination with infrastructural monstrosity and scale. (2019:147)

For both Cowen and Chua, at stake in the heterosexist discourse of logistics' ideology is more than male domination. Rather, the latter is seen as one of the articulations of a mode of power which relies on the reproduction of certain forms of life at the expense of others (cf. also Gambino, this volume). Just as ensuring the smooth circulation of commodities is presented by advertising as a life-and-death matter, a natural reproductive need, in corporate managers' discourse expansion is deemed necessary for the reproduction of a system which relies on libidinal as much as on calculative operations. Desire, «simultaneously intimate and infrastructural», is indeed a crucial component of such necro-, bio- and geopolitical strife (Cowen 2014:223). Sexuality thus figures as «calibrated to, installed within, and productive of infrastructures of political and economic life» (Ibid. 224). For Cowen, therefore, «cultivating alternatives to logistics space demands not only imagining economy differently but building different economies of (human) natures» (Ibid.).

Yet, the infrastructural role of sexuality and desire in logistics' necropolitical underbelly, wherein martial dispositions blend into civilian trade operations (the central thesis in Cowen's book), remains for the most part uncharted and hence difficult to overcome or transform. On the other hand, the gendered and sexualised dimension of military operations, and its history, has been the subject of several studies and militant feminist reflections, which represent a promising starting point for this type of inquiry. Among them, the work of Cynthia Enloe (1988, 2000) appears particularly enlightening of the multiple ways in which military logistics has relied on the sexual, affective, reproductive labour characteristically reserved for women.

Women are being used by militaries to solve their nagging problems of “manpower” availability, quality, health, morale, and readiness. Exposing the character and operations of the military as an institution can be done not by concentrating on the usual topic - male soldiers - but by focusing on those women most subject to military exploitation: military prostitutes, military wives, military nurses, women soldiers, women defence industry workers, and "civilianized" defence workers. (Enloe 2000:44)

From ‘camp followers’ (women servicing the reproductive needs of armies by cooking, provisioning, nursing, washing laundry and supplying sexual-affective services, who in Europe and its colonies tagged along armies at least since Roman times and until the early modern period) and prostitutes catering to soldiers (or being forced to do so) to ‘military wives’ and nurses, the role of sexuality and social reproduction to keep war infrastructures alive appears foundational and worthy of fresh insight through the logistical looking glass. Whether or not we consider it exhaustive, the military genealogy of logistics that stretches back to late-18th-century army reforms is nothing other than the genealogy of technologies devised to fulfil the reproductive needs of troops, which later got transposed into the organisation of trade supply. The efficient provisioning and feeding of armies that characterised such military ‘logistical turn’ went hand-in-hand with the ever more formal incorporation of women into the military, most notably as nurses and auxiliary personnel, who substituted the more marginal and despised (because somewhat autonomous and thus feared) camp followers (Enloe 2000:199-206).

More generally, the logistical organisation of supply chains crucially relies on gendered and sexualised forms of extraction. Not only does exploitation operate through the gendered and racialised faultlines underpinning workplace organisation and the supply industry's imaginaries, to which I referred above. Hidden surpluses are also extracted from workers' households, where feminised re/productive labour is provided in unwaged form. Simultaneously, paid (but devalued) re/productive work of the sexual, affective, and care varieties – from cleaning and cooking to prostitution –, again the prerogative of feminised subjects, is equally necessary for the smooth logistical operations of capital (see Dunaway et al. 2014). From this perspective, and in relation to the workings of supply chains, the divides between productive and reproductive, waged and unwaged, formal and informal labour must once again be challenged and rethought, as much as the 'logistical-turn' scholarship has done with the distinction between production and circulation, considering all these as gendering and gendered mechanisms.

Arlie Hochschild (2000) famously defined «global care chains» as those social ties that result from inequalities in re/productive demands (where however sexual needs and desires are glaringly absent) and in the capacity to afford them, that in turn engender the flow of care workers across borders. In my own work (Peano 2017, 2019) I have sought to directly relate the operations of commodity chains, with specific reference to the Italian agribusiness sector, to those of reproductive labour, and particularly of sex work. The logistical reorganisation of agro-industrial production along retail-controlled, global supply chains unfolded simultaneously with increasing reliance on migrant labour and its containment through zoning mechanisms, themselves achieved by logistical operations. In this context, an

archipelago of labour and asylum seekers' reception camps, slums and other more or less formalised, controlled or tolerated workers' settlements has progressively expanded. Here, the externalisation of labour's reproductive costs was made possible, among other means, also thanks to the supply of cheap services by migrant (especially Nigerian) women for the large army of single, West-African, casual male workers.

These women's migration trajectories, systematically marked by indebtedness, violence and heavy exploitation, have aptly been dubbed «pipelines» by the Nigerian press (cf. Carrisi 2011), sketching a vivid portrait of their ingrained, infrastructural character. Indeed, the labour they provide is embedded in what Ara Wilson (2016) analysed in terms of «the infrastructure of intimacy», that enables a range of activities and relations. Furthermore, since it took root in 1980s' Italy, the sexual labour provided by Nigerian women has been tied, on the one hand, to the flow of different commodities along global supply chains, through complex intersections and paths: not only those of the crude oil extracted, among others, by the multinational company, ENI – founded and still partially owned by the Italian state –, but also of the toxic waste, arms and drugs smuggled across borders in several directions - sometimes along with, other times in exchange for, the migration of women themselves (Peano 2011). Logistics' extrastatecraft (Easterling 2014) thus exerts its grip on a range of flows, including that of migrant sex labour.

On the other hand, apart from servicing the needs of male migrants in Italian agro-industrial enclaves, the bulk of these women's soliciting takes place along important logistical routes and within their hubs, at the peripheries of cities, in industrial

areas and at busy junctions and road segments - if in diminishing numbers, due to criminalising policies that increasingly drove sex work indoors – catering, among others, to lorry drivers. Indeed, the mostly male workforce on which a large part of the organization of global supply chains often depends is made up by significant numbers of lone, alienated, migrant or highly mobile men – drivers and sailors above all -, who (just as in the case of soldiers discussed above) are socialized as consumers of sexual services, thus engendering a market in which supply is as often provided by racialised, migrant women (socialized as care and sex providers). The organization of supply-chain labour and its technologies thus have very concrete subjectifying effects on workers' affective and sexual lives, impinging upon their libidos and desires, and hence also on the lives of those (be they wives, girlfriends, casual partners, sex workers or others) with whom they relate on those terms. As some male workers employed in warehouses located in the hinterland of Modena (northern Italy) revealed during their interviews with sociologist Dario Fontana (pers. comm.), the voice-control system imparting tasks through headsets had such pervasive impact on their psychic-emotional lives that they often dreamed of a personified, female incarnation of the voice itself, with whom they indulged in sexual fantasies. Indeed, in Fontana's words, the feminine headset voice displayed a markedly more mellow, pleasant tone if compared to standard, more mechanical and metallic artificial voices. This might reflect a deliberate choice on the part of the company that elaborates such technologies, and on those employing them, dictated by the need to produce, by affective means, docile subjects among a largely male workforce who is assumed to fit the heterosexual standard. Again, considering these dynamics means exposing the hidden connections between logistics, extraction, subjection and desire.

To sum up, a gendered study of logistics may take into consideration, first, the role of supply-chain management in shaping (formal and informal, re/productive, waged and unwaged) workers' subjectivities, movements and relations, including patterns of household organisation, kinship, intimacy and desire. At the same time, sexuality and desire, themselves innervated by gendering forces, must be reckoned with for their infrastructural role within (as well as against) the simultaneously symbolic and material, logistical operations of capital. To overlook such crucial forces would also mean to foreclose the possibility of imagining concrete, viable opposition against them.

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RACIALIZED MASCULINITIES AND GLOBAL LOGISTICS LABOR

Jake ALIMAHOMED-WILSON

The global capitalist supply chain is controlled by white hegemonic masculinity¹. Affluent, corporate-elite, straight white men are structurally positioned as the managers and overseers of a vast global logistics labor force comprised primarily of working-class men of color. Throughout the logistics-driven global economy, logistics workers remain highly segregated by both gender and race. Starting from the point of extraction to production and distribution, and onward to the point of consumption, the modern global capitalist world system is organized by the production of gendered-racial difference. According to Cedric Robinson's (2000) theory of racial capitalism, "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology". As a material force, Robinson maintains, "it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism". In conjunction with racial capitalism, the production of social difference, and the devaluation of labor is also gendered; combined, gender and race are defining aspects of global capitalism and key features undergirding the global logistics industry. In this system, gender and race are mutually constitutive (Collins 1990) forces structuring the composition of workforces and the labor

¹ This article draws on some of my previous publications, including Alimahomed-Wilson, J. 2016; 2019; 2011; Bonacich, E., Alimahomed, S. and Wilson, J. B. 2008.

exploitation processes. In light of this, this concept paper attempts to very briefly synthesize the critical study of logistics with theories of racial capitalism (Robinson 2000; Pulido 2017) and sociological theories of masculinities (Acker 2019; Connell 2000) in order to highlight some of the intersecting ways that masculinities, race, power, and domination operate and structure logistics labor (Robinson 2000:39; Pulido 2017; Acker 2013; Connell 2000).

A DISPOSABLE GLOBAL LOGISTICS WORKFORCE: PROFIT, EXTRACTION, AND SURPLUS VALUE

The devaluation of (racialized) marginalized masculinities (Connell 2000), and subsequent extraction of differential value and profit by elite white men, is a core feature of global logistics. Hegemonic masculinity, personified by elite white corporate men like Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, also dominate the business-driven field, or “science” of supply chain management (Cowen 2014). In contrast, a disposable, global male-dominated blue-collar logistics workforce of primarily of dispossessed men of color, many of whom are migrants, is the driving labor force behind the global logistics industry. Pulido (2017) describes how “nonwhite devaluation” is produced and a source of value extraction via racialized labour systems. Thus, the production of differential value (i.e. the devaluation of gendered-racialized² labour) becomes “critical in the accumulation of surplus – both profits and power” (Ibidem). In relation to the global logistics industry, the exploited labor of racialized masculinities is a key source of

² While global logistics remains a male-dominated workforce, women of color are a fast-growing labor force, particularly in warehousing and last mile logistics operations.

extraction and generator of surplus value, making the system profitable for the world's largest transnational corporate retailers such as Amazon and Walmart. The production of gendered and racial difference in logistics also reinforces a global labor hierarchy by "naturalizing" a gendered-racialized ordering of workers between different racial groups of men. In this system, men of color remain concentrated in the most labor-intensive, precarious, dangerous, low wage, and surveillance-driven jobs in logistics; in contrast elite, white corporate men manage and control both workers and the movement of goods (i.e. the circulation of capital).

Not only are capitalist markets imbued with a masculine ethos, but masculinities also shape the workplaces (Acker 2013), exploitation processes, occupational identities, and organizational structures of both corporations and unions. Working-class men's bodies are shaped along racial and class lines and are symbolic of perceived social power and worth and are directly related to labor practices and work (Connell 2005). Occupational and class-based identities are formed along both gendered and racial lines. The workplace, particularly in male-dominated jobs such as longshore work (Alimahomed-Wilson 2011) is a key site where masculine power, racism, status, and domination are produced and reproduced (Rivoal 2020). For decades, the Southern Californian waterfront was quite literally a (white) "man's world" – for decades, working class white men controlled the waterfront. Women of all races, along with men of color (especially Black men), were excluded or marginalized by white-male longshore workers on the waterfront (Alimahomed-Wilson 2016). Today, about 90% of the dockworkers working in the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles are still men, but the majority of these men are now men of color.

RACIALIZED MASCULINITIES AND THE GENDERED-RACIALIZED SUPPLY CHAIN

The expansion of global logistics was made possible by the large-scale appropriation of a global gendered-racialized labor regime of low paid, dispossessed marginalized masculinities. These male-dominated workforces are populated by racially subordinated masculinities and structurally positioned by capital as “cheap,” disposable workforces undeserving of a “family wage”³. Marginalized masculinities, embodied by poor and working-class men of color, many of whom are from the Global South, have become the primary exploited workforces in global logistics. Marginalized masculinities are subordinated in the global gender hierarchy and manifest “in exploited or oppressed [racialized] groups such as ethnic minorities, which may share many features with hegemonic masculinity but are socially deauthorized” (Alimahomed-Wilson 2016:31).

Racialized masculinities dominate the blue-collar workforces in global logistics in nearly every sector, from the global shipping industry, to warehousing, longshoring and port labor, trucking, and last mile logistics delivery operations. Therefore, the exploitation of racialized masculinities are an essential component of both global capitalism and logistics.

MEN OF COLOR AND AMAZON’S GLOBAL LOGISTICS EMPIRE

Today, Amazon is now widely considered one of the world’s largest logistics corporations (Moody 2020). Amazon’s agenda-setting logistics and supply chain management practices are

³ Historically, the gendered “family wage” was usually only extended to white working-class men and white families.

transforming global commerce including the ways consumer goods are transported and consumed around the world (Alimahomed-Wilson and Reese 2020). Amazon's global logistics empire serves as a significant site to explore the intersections of racial capitalism and hegemonic masculinity. The executives at Amazon are disproportionately elite white men. These affluent white men reap the benefits of a corporate structure that enriches a small group of elite men. They are the architects of Amazon's global supply chain, the overseers of workers, the managers of the supply chain, and innovators of Amazon's anti-worker technologies of surveillance and control in warehousing and last mile logistics operations. Amazon's top executives typify hegemonic masculinity in contrast to its blue-collar workforce which primarily depends on the low paid exploited labor of racialized masculinities. At Amazon, Black and Latinx workers comprise 24.5 percent and 17 percent respectively of the total workforce (Clement 2020). While men are the majority (55%) of Amazon's blue-collar workforce, women (45%) are quickly becoming a major segment of Amazon's blue-collar labor force (Greene 2015). In particular, women of color are overrepresented at Amazon's warehouses. Women of color are the most underrepresented in Amazon's elite executive ranks. In contrast, Amazon's warehouses are increasingly staffed by Latinx women, Somali Muslim women in Minnesota, and Black women throughout the United States. Of note, women of color are also leading much of the resistance of Amazon's warehouse workers, including wildcat strikes and walk outs over poor working conditions⁴.

⁴ While this paper concentrates mostly on men of color's labor positions in logistics, is very important to study race, gender, and class and women of color's increasing labor participation in working-class logistics jobs, including warehouse work is an important site of study. For example, Somali Immigrant

What makes Amazon distinct from other big tech corporations is its massive logistics infrastructure, and its large blue-collar workforce of thousands of workers in warehouses, including fulfilment centres, sorting centres, and delivery centres. In the United States – home to Amazon’s largest workforce – the majority of these workers are men of color. In contrast, Amazon’s management and elite executives remain disproportionately white men. In fact, over 60 percent of Amazon’s management is white; and 73 percent of all managers are men. Hegemonic masculinity is a defining feature of Amazon’s corporate structure. According to Amazon’s “Diversity Report, 2015,” of Amazon’s top 115 executives, only one executive was Black (Amazon Staff 2018). In contrast, over 85 percent of Black workers employed by Amazon work in blue-collar jobs that are the most back-breaking, and labor-intensive within warehousing operations (Greene 2015). The vast majority of Amazon’s contingent and subcontracted delivery drivers in Southern California are also men of color (Alimahomed-Wilson 2020). Latinx men in particular are overrepresented in Southern California’s network of subcontracted Amazon Delivery Service Provider (DSP), package delivery drivers. Los Angeles’ last mile delivery drivers are low paid and precarious. These workers endure a relentless pace of work and are under constant surveillance.

Differential value extraction is institutionalized via Amazon’s “extreme high-churn model” (Tung and Berkowitz 2020) which operates vis-à-vis the racialized surveillance of labor (for more on racialized surveillance in logistics see Alimahomed-Wilson and Potiker 2017) The high-churn model forces warehouse workers to work at an unsustainable pace in order to satisfy Amazon’s productivity goals. Men of color’s racialized bodies are shaped

women in Minnesota, have been labor leaders in organizing Amazon’s workforce (Gurley 2019; Bruder 2019).

and impacted by this physically demanding blue-collar work. Gendered-racialized ideologies about working class men of color's bodies associate these workers as "naturally fit" for the hard labor of warehousing. Working-class men's bodies are therefore literally shaped on the job (Alimahomed-Wilson 2011). Amazon has developed a "proprietary productivity metric" which sets productivity targets while simultaneously monitoring workers' movements. The surveillance-driven productivity metric ensures workers "push their bodies to the brink to avoid automatic termination for missing quotas" (Tung and Berkowitz 2020). The high-churn model disproportionately impacts men of color, and a growing number of working class women of color working at Amazon's warehouse facilities, leading to high turnover rates and increased exposure to dangerous working conditions (Reese 2020). The devaluation of racialized masculine labor is an integral component behind Amazon's supply chain management strategy.

RACIALIZED MASCULINITIES AND THE GLOBAL LOGISTICS SUPPLY CHAIN

Beyond Amazon, the global supply chain also reveals deep patterns of gendered-racialized labor segregation and exploitation. The devaluation of men of color's labor and subsequent extraction of differential value and profit is a foundation of the global logistics infrastructure. About 99% of the world's 1.6 million seafarers who work at sea on container vessels are men. However, the vast majority of this nearly all male-workforce is now mostly structurally vulnerable workers (racialized masculinities) from the Global South. Men of color, primarily from the Philippines, China, Indonesia, and India

provide the majority of labor power that makes low cost global shipping possible. McKay's (2007) research on Filipino seafarers – who represent about 25 percent of the total workforce – demonstrates how “the combination of a segmented labor market analysis with a theory of multiple masculinities helps us begin to make sense of the contradictory character of Filipino seafarer masculinity” (2007:630). Gender and race work shape the artificial naturalization of low wages, poor working conditions, justifying a lower standard of living for working class racialized masculinities.

Latinx men, including a large number of immigrants, are the primary blue-collar labor force in Southern California's massive logistics industry. About 90% of the Los Angeles harbor area's 16,000 port truckers – or “troqueros” as they are more commonly referred to – are men of color from Central America, primarily from El Salvador (Bonacich, Alimahomed and Wilson 2008). These workers face very low paid and working conditions that resemble “sweatshops on wheels.” The deterioration of working conditions in the port drayage sector has been further amplified by the misclassified employment statuses of these drivers, which has also further undermined collective action efforts and fuelled a race to the bottom (Kaoosji 2018).

Over the past few decades, both capital and supply chains have become more concentrated (Moody 2020). The key nodes in logistics systems today are mostly located on the outskirts of major urban metropolitan areas and depend on large concentrations of labor, most of it low-paid (Moody 2017). Therefore, the logistics-driven transformation of Southern California's Inland Empire region was not solely an outcome of the region's transportation infrastructure, nor just its large consumer market, but also flourished due to the area's significant gendered-racialized workforce. According to Kim Moody, “these

[new warehouse] clusters are based around large metropolitan areas and all draw on what you might call the ‘reserve army of labor’ – mostly workers of color who came into these warehouses in the last ten to fifteen years” (Browne 2018). Juan De Lara (2018) notes that global commodity chains transformed Southern California just as Latinxs and immigrants were turning California into a majority non-white state thereby linking the expansion of global logistics to racial capitalism.

Over 80% of all warehouse workers working in the Inland Empire region are Latinx; of which, 70% of whom are men (Allison, J.E., Herrera, J.S., Struna, J. and Reese, E. 2018). Approximately, nearly one-third of these warehouse workers are Latinx women, who on average are the lowest paid of any group of warehouse workers. In fact, Latinx women earn approximately US \$4,000 less than their Latinx male counterparts (De Lara 2013). As Bonacich, Alimahomed and Wilson (2008:342) note, “Racialized labor systems are gendered, creating a complex intersection of race-class-gender divisions among workers. All women face a gendered division of labor, but women of color face especially onerous pay and poor working conditions”. Finally, Allison, Herrera, Struna, and Reese’s (2018) study of earnings inequality among Inland Southern California’s warehouse workers found that Latinx immigrant women are disproportionately employed in the low-wage packing warehousing jobs. They describe this intersectional exploitation process as a “matrix of exploitation,” whereby gender, race and citizenship status significantly impact the annual incomes of warehouse workers.

FUTURE RESEARCH ON GENDER, RACE, AND LOGISTICS

Critical logistics continues to emerge as a field that has the potential to more fully interrogate the centrality of gender and

race in shaping the organization and exploitation processes of logistics labor (Benvenuti and Rivoal 2020; Rivoal forthcoming). The production of gendered-racial difference reinforces a hierarchy in the corporate global supply chain and naturalizes a gendered-racialized division of labor. This taken-for-granted expropriation of surplus value generated by a disposable global labor regime of mostly racialized masculinities makes the circulation of goods profitable for the world's largest corporations. New avenues of research should consider the growing workforce of women of color in logistics work. The gendered racial division of labor across the global supply chain must therefore be understood as an outcome of a central organizing logic of gendered-racial capitalism.

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DOCKWORKER MASCULINITIES

Eleni KAMPOURI

Labour struggles in the Piraeus Port Authority (OLP) are dominated by tactics of controlling the limit between normal hours and overtime as well as occupying and bringing the port to a standstill. The division of labour along gender lines is a direct product of the composition of labour subjectivities that emerged in the docks in the long hours of paid overtime and striking. It may seem that dock work is stereotypically normalised as masculine only because in the past it required strong hands, but most of all it is the ability to work without having family or domestic care responsibilities that determine the gendered division of labour in the Port.

The story of the emergence of these subjectivities is a story of masculine bodies that come together to fight, to endure, to win. These bodies are almost entirely masculine and Greek. There are very few women amongst them aside from those workers who usually occupy marginal administrative positions. And there are no migrants, except for the cleaners employed in the container terminals by sub-contractors of OLP and the Piraeus Container Terminal (PCT) who undertake particular ‘feminised’, undervalued and underpaid forms of work. Some women from the administration have managed to enter and become active in the labour unions, though typically they perform hybrid and niche roles.

Because feminine and migrant bodies don’t appear as an integral part of labour, the history of the dockworkers’ movement is commonly told as a linear thread of events emblematic of the

victories of Greek men against the Greek state or of Greek Dockworker Unions against Greek governments. This narrative begins with the 1929 dockworkers strike in Piraeus, when violent clashes between the dockworkers and the cavalry took place resulting in several deaths, but also in better salaries, control of working hours and paid overtime. The story spans throughout the next decades with more struggles, more strikes and violent confrontations, but also increasingly peaceful labour union negotiations and tactical alliances with leading political parties that end up with the unions achieving a stable, secure relationship with the state and dockworkers enjoying well-paid, public sector jobs with greater security and improved labour rights.

Small incidents break this linearity, bringing silences and marginalisation to the forefront. In the 2000s, a limited number of female workers were hired by OLP to work in the container section of the port. These workers were selected through a public recruitment procedure that gave bonuses to the long-term unemployed and to parents of more than four children, most of whom were women. Initially, these female bodies were chosen because they already performed the conventional gender roles assigned to them as mothers and wives. Gradually, however, they had to be assigned to other specialisations, mostly to work as security and administrative personnel, where special skills are required (knowledge of legislative procedures, practical and organisational skills).

Although they had to start from the beginning, to learn anew and retrain in order to familiarise themselves with complicated terminology and frequent changes in the legal framework, some of these female workers willingly left the container terminal because they believed that this would give them more flexibility to combine work with care. This movement also meant that they lost the possibility to add to their fixed income the additional

overtime that they would otherwise get in the long hours on the docks. Time is the most important variable when it comes to gender hierarchies in the port. Female bodies end up doing subsidiary tasks mostly in the passenger section of the port not only because they are seen as weak, but mostly because they lack (or are considered to lack) the indefinite time to commit to tasks. Neither containerisation nor digitisation could radically alter or re-articulate this condition.

DISRUPTION: MASCULINITIES IN CRISIS

The 2009 strike that began on the 1st of October disrupted the linear story of labour struggles in the Piraeus port. On that day marking the beginning of the 35-year concession of part of the Piraeus container terminal to Cosco subsidiary, PCT – signed during the previous year – dockworkers gathered once again to halt the mobilities of machines, things and people in the port, as they had done so many times in the past. The port was once again brought into a complete standstill. While thousands of containers were trapped, others were forced to be redirected to other ports causing conflicts between the OLP unions, logistics companies, track companies and local businessmen.

The unions declared that the concession was ‘an outright sell-out of public property’ and feared that the new container terminal operators would bring large-scale layoffs and the influx of cheap Chinese workers and goods. The strike, however, only succeeded in delaying the operationalisation of Cosco plans and signed the start of a one-month period of negotiations between the government and the PCT management. Union hopes that the newly elected Greek government in November 2009 would freeze the implementation of the concession were proven empty.

Media images of the strikers taken during that period portray almost exclusively male dockworkers carrying flags and banners that demand Chinese capital to leave the Port. Visual remnants of this period can still be found in the port as graffiti, posters hanging in the OLP buildings and as archival material in union blogs and websites. The 'Chinese go Home' graffiti still welcomes visitors at the entrance of the OLP Pier I as a reminder of the Greek dockworkers' resistance to Chinese capitalism. The Cosco concession signifies a complete collapse of the relation between gender, capital and nation.

Yet there is also a process of self-mocking taking place: feminised and racialised images are posted on the walls as ironic commentaries of the broken relation of gender, capital and nation. One of them portrays a Chinese client who is trying to 'buy' a prostitute. She makes the following statement 'Ok sir, I am a whore, and I don't sell myself. I just rent myself. If you wish to buy something, the port is on sale'. The relationship between feminised (prostitution) masculinised labour (dock work) is reversed as the port enters a process of privatisation. Privatisation is here linked to the threat of the feminisation of labour that is anchored to fears of a loss of sovereignty. Unlike prostitution, the Cosco concession constitutes a 'sale' rather than a 'rent'. The concession establishes above all a threat of a territorial invasion, the construction of a 'territory within a territory'.

The threat of disorder in the regime of gender, capital and nation is also apparent in another self-mocking joke found on the walls of OLP. When an old man is being asked by a friend why he is in a hurry, he replies: 'I am going to take the Pakistani citizenship to save the 25 euro entrance fee that the Minister of Health imposed in hospitals'.

The threat of feminisation and racialisation brings the story of dock worker masculinities to a dead-end. While existing

employees in the OLP container terminal are able to retain their civil servant status and some of the labour rights that they had won during the past decades, PCT has no obligation under the concession to do the same for its own new recruits. Moreover, centrally imposed austerity measures have practically stopped the recruitment procedures of new dock workers in OLP, as is the case in the entire public sector in Greece, while older generations of dock workers were given incentives to resign. In effect for an undetermined period of time, OLP is in a position where it cannot recruit new dock workers because of the memorandum stipulations for the shrinking of the Greek public sector.

The implication of this dead-end is that PCT through its contracting and subcontracting companies is the only possible employer of new labour in the port. Newly recruited dockworkers will have to accept work without any of the benefits that were previously attached to dock labour. Although some – particularly the older OLP workers – retain part of their labour rights, most dock workers seem to have no choice but to renegotiate their labour relations on an individual basis without any of the former rights that they may have previously enjoyed.

In the context of the economic crisis, masculine bodies tend to become more fragile than in the past. They are exposed to forms of vulnerability that were previously reserved for feminised and racialised subjects in precarious sectors of the economy, such as those of the cleaners or the sex workers. Regimes of gender, class and nation that previously privileged and idealised unionised masculine bodies are now rendering them more prone to victimisation.

TOWARDS A DOCILE CYBORG

The threat of ‘Chinafication’ is often presented not only as the effect of the Cosco concession but also as the imminent condition of the Greek economy. The term refers to the globalisation of labour that often assumes a global precarious ‘unit’ who is genderless, without race and devoid of agency. Unable to refer back to a history of collective labour struggles, this unit pushes all labour to an impasse as it drags wages down and deprives all workers from hard-won labour rights. Being genderless, this unit can spend unlimited hours working. Emptied of race, this unit can perform any kind of unskilled work, without any labour rights – including fixed contracts, hours or paid overtime. In other words, the unit of Chinafication appears to be a timeless and universal subject of capitalist development.

Rather than instituting Chinafied labour, however, the concession seems to have brought to the port only a few Chinese executives and high-level officials commanding the PCT hierarchy. Labour in the docks continues to be predominantly Greek and male on both sides of the container terminal and migrant workers remain marginalised and invisible. What prevails, instead, is a sharp generational division between older and younger males that separates the OLP and PCT composition of labour. Although the line separating different generations of male dock workers seems difficult to cross, the borders of gender and race seem impossible to transgress.

Instead of challenging the gendered division of labour, the Cosco concession has reconfigured it in an unexpected way. PCT is increasingly able to recruit younger and more precarious bodies; bodies that become docile under the threat of continuous unemployment. Since it was mainly male dominated sectors (like the construction and ship building industries) that have been hit harder by the crisis, the numbers of available male (especially

young) precarious labour become vast providing Cosco with far more skilled male bodies than the Chinafication thesis assumes. New PCT recruits are neither genderless nor raceless: they are mostly young, robust, healthy, educated, masculine and Greek.

There is evidence to suggest that this new breed of dock workers is not usually recruited from the surrounding areas, such as Perama, where a large pool of unemployed, working class and poor men who used to work in the ship building industry are concentrated. New PCT dockworkers seem to be selected from different locales for their skills and ability to perform tasks in a digitised labour environment. Rather than physical strength, what seems to determine their employability is the capacity to spend unlimited time at work, completely free from care responsibilities. Another marker of employability is their ability to follow the protocols and procedures of PCT, while refraining from collective and communal labour struggles. The coming together of bodies that produced dock work subjectivities in the port becomes impossible. Rather than Chinafied units, the subjectivities that may emerge from these processes may be said to resemble ‘docile cyborgs’, that is masculine bodies able to transform themselves through their machinic extensions into a labour force devoid of collective labour experiences, rights, demands and even desires.

WORKING-CLASS MASCULINITIES IN THE LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

Haude RIVOAL

There is a specific interest behind looking at working-class masculinities in the logistics sector. Not only because logistics is particularly relevant to this topic due to it being a male-dominated industry (Alimahomed-Wilson 2011), but also because working-class masculinities are often linked to normative, homogeneous and essentialist discourses about workers. So far, sociology and history have mostly focused on virilist practices of workers, often understood as 1. a defensive strategy (Molinier 1997) or 2. as the search for an ideal of masculinity and self-esteem forged from the “missing” financial, economic and cultural resources of popular classes (Beasley 2008). In France, the recent debates on the transformations of masculinity have mainly focused on off-the-job practices, like sports (Oualhaci 2014), youth (Coquard 2018) or domestic work. This leaves the study of working-class masculinities to the stigmata of manhood and strength, but also to a masculinity of excess and physical exertion, as well as the idea of conservative and reactionary behaviours (especially towards women or politics).

However, many gender studies today show that there are almost as many forms of masculinities as there are men (that is why we use the plural when talking about masculinities) and especially that all masculinities are not synonymous of manhood. This was one of the main findings of my recently defended PhD, which aimed to demonstrate that some logistics workers develop a “respectable” popular style of masculinity. In other words, a

masculinity more in “conformity” with the norms of middle classes, in the same way Beverly Skeggs demonstrated with women (Skeggs 1997). The “legitimacy” resulting from the incarnation of this masculinity, allows these men to distinguish themselves from the most precarious fringe of the working class. It also allows them to distinguish themselves from marginalized masculinities or to distinguish themselves from women.

It seems important to remember here that masculinity and femininity are related. We can’t understand “masculinity” without its relations to equality, but mostly of domination or hierarchy with femininity (Connell 1995). For example, if some men accept to work in very difficult conditions, it is partly because doing a “man’s job” can be valued, that is to say, a job that a woman can’t do. But we cannot consider this kind of working-class masculinity as something immutable. In this article, we will try to understand the plurality of working-class masculinities as well as the hierarchy between them.

BECOMING “RESPECTABLE”

We can distinguish three criteria to understand what constitutes a “respectable” or legitimate “popular masculinity” (which could also be associated with “complicit masculinity” if we use the categories defined by Raewyn Connell): 1. seniority and organizational capital (in other words, the legitimacy or the professional authority you get through your work); 2. a more inclusive (less dialectical) relationship with women; 3. distancing oneself from hypermasculine stereotypes (the exaggeration of male stereotypical behaviour, such as an emphasis on physical strength, excessive behaviours, etc.).

1. Workers’ jobs in logistics are precarious jobs, which require few qualifications, other than physical endurance under

very demanding conditions (repeatability of gestures, refrigerated environment, staggered hours, etc.). The desire for greater respectability and for becoming permanently involved in employment, requires some men to renew the codes of masculinity in order to establish a professional legitimacy (to be recognized as a professional who is not only able to engage his body in the work but also to master trades skills). As these workers are morally and emotionally more involved in their jobs, they are more likely to consider their work as a springboard for social mobility that will allow them to change job (become a driver for example) or “get into the offices”.

2. A “respectable” popular masculinity also expresses itself in a more inclusive relationship with women. The idea that women have no place in warehouses is not usually what you hear during workers’ interviews. I have never met a man openly hostile to women working in warehouses, especially because all workers I’ve met come from a two incomes household or are in a single-parent family. This means that few workers doubt that two wages are better than one. But this relationship to the sexual division of tasks has not only rhetorical effect. This relation to women’s work can also be applied to the daily lives of workers, especially to non-working practices.

For example, Michel, one of the truck drivers I met, was investing a lot of time and money in training his daughter for the beauty contest that took place in his village. His wife could not leave the office before 9 in the evening. So, it was Michel who took his daughter to meetings to prepare for the contest or “to go shopping” when she needed accessories (like flower crowns, glitter, etc.). Also, he regularly meets up with the mothers from his village to discuss the terms of the contest. At work, when Michel was talking about this contest, he was far from being mocked by his colleagues. Instead, he lets others see that he is a

“good father”, invested in family life. This confers him and allows him to gain respect both from his colleagues, as well as from management, who see that he is a reliable man from this unprecedented responsibility. This is one of the reasons why the management gave him the responsibility of a new truck, offered by the head offices of the company.

But we can also suppose that if Michel subjects himself to this kind of transgression of sex roles, it is because his daughter embodies the stereotypes of hyperfemininity through her actions, which reassures everyone about the place of men and women in society. It is not uncommon to note that a diffuse misogyny can coexist with a much more respectful view of women, sometimes even with the same person. Louis, for example, one of the workers I met, did not hesitate to point out that his job was “too hard for women” and to hold a speech about equality when I explained the topic of my study to him. Egalitarian discourses do not necessarily call into question sexist practices. Nevertheless, it reveals that a certain number of men (especially young men) insist on gendered stereotypes at work less than others (especially elder ones).

3. Another factor of a “respectable” working-class masculinity expresses itself by distancing oneself from stereotypes associated with hypermasculinity. This control of an excessive manhood can be understood in light of the feminization of the workforce (especially with the feminization of middle and top management). It can also be understood in light of general evolutions in the model of hegemonic masculinity and the diversity of professional skills that are required in companies today.

Today, as Stéphane Beaux and Michel Pialoux point out (2002), you don’t need to act “like a man” to be a good professional, you must have dynamism, enthusiasm, “the sense of

initiative, the taste for responsibilities, a certain sense of dialogue, etc.” [1]. The definition of strength has changed in comparison to a more traditional masculinity, where physical endurance was like a “moral property” (Schwartz 1990). The acquisition of this capacity involves a new relationship with the body, less into demonstrations of strength. It allows 1. to prevent health risks, to manage wear and to preserve a “body capital” largely undermined by pathogenic jobs but which also allows 2. to acquire a new social status, that of “old” (meaning holding on over the long term – which could be as little as a few months) and therefore eventually to consider professional developments in this industry.

PLURALITY AND HIERARCHY OF WORKING-CLASS MASCULINITIES

It is not uncommon today to see warehouses in which virilist behaviours can be repressed by the management or by workers’ collectives themselves. I was able to benefit from it, being the only woman working in some warehouses, not necessarily in a protective or paternalistic position but also to remind a colleague of his professionalism. The world of work is not only the place where one learns “how to be a man” but a world where you learn to control your masculinity. Thus, we note that some forms of rejection of stereotyped masculinities, often associated with the lower fringes of the working-class. It is also linked to a desire for an upward mobility, obtained by the force of the wrist, as well as the discovery of practices of the middle-class that benefit from education and from the sharing of domestic tasks. For employees, some of whom are at the margins of the labor market and whose fear is to reconvene precariousness, investment in employment is the guarantee to stay away from the most vulnerable fringes of

the working classes. It can be considered that this respectability is a way to distinguishing oneself from the most precarious versions of oneself (in other words, from the one that is part of virilist practices, in a role of “bully”) as well as ensuring a place in the gender hierarchy (in other words, distinguishing itself from women).

This respectable masculinity that could be described as “hybrid” makes it possible to understand the articulation of a dominated position and the different resources available to them to find margins of autonomy and valorization. It also allows us to understand that there is a hierarchy between complicit masculinities and marginalized masculinities. Being a man is not enough to be dominant, you have to be it “right”. The incarnation of this “respectable” masculinity rests on an elective self-understanding that a “working-class aristocracy” is carried by values of professional and moral excellence. This “working-class aristocracy” arises in comparison with less stable workers, often young and racialized, appreciated by the management for their malleability and endurance but who carry a certain number of stigmata (which appears in a number of interviews with the middle management): brutality, indiscipline, indocility, lack of autonomy, lifestyle of excesses, etc.

However, this study shows that even though some men embody a legitimate or respectable working-class masculinity, most of workers find it difficult to give up a position of domination that commits them to maintain certain gender and/or class stigmata. This brings us to the final point in explaining how masculinity issues fit in with a productive organization to lock up workers in a certain identity of gender and/or class, but also to keep women and some men in marginalized positions.

MASCULINITY ISSUES AND THE LOGISTICS INDUSTRY

It seems important to explain the context of the survey more precisely at this stage. Transport and logistics providers are evolving in a highly competitive market. This competitiveness is accentuated by an ideal of a just-in-time flow of goods, which means, the flow of goods without interruption. This ideal of just-in-time has consequences on the organization of work and on workers. It implies: an intensification of the flow, computerization of management methods, a fragmentation of working collectives, etc.

In order to respond to the constraints of the flow, managers and head offices, despite some health prevention practices, always strongly value speed and “banging in”. This valorization is concretely translated by obtaining productivity bonuses (schematically, the faster you go, the more parcels you make, the more money you earn). It aims to increase the productivity by mobilizing workers by the promise of a supplementary salary, which can be relatively important (for incomes that hardly exceed the minimum wage). The middle management is well aware that the objective characteristics of workers’ occupations in warehouses leave little room for other types of behaviour than those involving some forms of brutality, especially in commitment to the body. As proof, managers allow some expressions of virilism in the warehouse both marginally and punctually (it is precisely spending behaviours or certain forms of physical or verbal brutality – raising ones tone, insulting each other abruptly, etc.) In this sense, we can say that masculinity, the way it is built, does not depend only on individual resources, but it is largely shaped by work itself.

We always imagine the dominant (both from a gender and class point of view) as a homogeneous group, focusing on the effects of their actions (in this case on the side-lining of women),

forgetting that they are themselves caught in a web of injunctions where they unceasingly are forced to prove their value. This value passes by perpetuating performances of a manly ethos to answer the productive injunctions, which sometimes lead to an increase in backlash against women (Alimahomed-Wilson 2011) and often locked workers into a certain identity of gender and class.

It goes without saying that a job as a worker in a frozen warehouse where the temperature is below -25° is a repulsive job, carried out by the most precarious fringe of the working-class, mostly racialized and/or unskilled, and that it is often linked to the urgency and the need for a salary (Benvegnù and Gaborieau 2018). However, the recruitment of this workforce is not exempt from some a selection that focuses on physical criteria. The body in this case is a variable in the recruitment of the workforce. If Leon, a former team leader of a warehouse prefers workers from Mali, it is “because they are beefier than the French” and he continues “we love them big arms”. The black body and more generally the dominated body can be at the same time valued, admired aesthetically (“they had arms like that”) but also reduced to its most pugilistic use (“they don’t think. You say “load”. Boom, boom, they’ve loaded it”). It allows us to understand how the organizational processes of human resources works through which they prefer to recruit a certain type of man (young men, strong and/or who will easily integrate into a collective male workforce and share their sociability) rather than women who might disturb it. This partly explains the stagnation (see a decrease) of the female workforce in some warehouses over the past decade as well as the maintenance of the coherence of this masculine organizational culture.

To conclude, this survey shows that the transformations of work did not solve the question of the feminization of jobs but moved the analysis of hierarchies between employees within the

class of men itself (especially within the working-class where we can distinguish between several forms of masculinities). This survey also shows that the workers' masculinities and the values associated with them are not constructed in a system of opposition to a hegemonic order. Physical strength and manhood emulation remain necessary to respond to productive rates, even though some men are various registers of masculinity, sometimes contradictory "between cadence and caution" in the words of Nicolas Jounin. That leads us to take a closer look at the variety of masculinities, shaped by work itself but also by the labor market and its needs.

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This article has been written up using the results of my PhD, which I defended last year (Rivoal 2018). I studied the links between capitalism and masculinities thought logistics. My work was based on an ethnographic survey into a big company, Transfrilog, the European leader in refrigerated logistics. I worked in this company for three years and I was in charge of professional equality between men and women. Also, I worked in warehouses where I was hired, undercover, as a worker, for several months.

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Big dick energy at the end of the world. Technopolitics for a global hustle

Evelina GAMBINO

In a recent film by Ermalo Magradze (2017), a Georgian filmmaker famous for his trash-movies depicting the country's life, we see two men sat in a car. One of them is Georgia's new Prime Minister and, looking demoralised, he is complaining to his interlocutor:

“We are stuck Mr Kakha, investors are very difficult to attract” – says the PM

“Why? We have such a great business environment!” – responds Kakha in an incredulous tone.

Suddenly their conversation is interrupted by a phone call: it's a minister from the Chinese government!

“Oh – the PM sighs – why does this guy always call me at inappropriate times? You know what they are calling about Kakha? They are calling about the New Silk Road”.

The PM asks the driver to stop the car and swiftly arranges for simultaneous translation on the other side of the phone as he greets the Chinese emissary: “what are you calling about? The corridor connecting China and Europe? Off course! Off course we will support this project! This project is not just profitable for you Mr, it is very profitable for us! Off course!”.

The PM speaks slowly articulating each word and looking vacuously straight ahead, thus accentuating the uncanniness of this familiar chat between the Georgian PM and the unnamed Chinese government official.

As the Prime Minister hangs up, his mood has changed: “we are going to the Belt and Road conference!” he tells his companion.



A drowned pig floating on the shores of Anaklia, photo by the author

Over twenty years have passed since feminist geographer Gibson-Graham invited us to “make global capitalism lose its erection” (1996:146). To do so, she argued “we [must] reject the naturalization of power and violence that is conferred upon the Multi National Corporation (MNC) by the globalization script” (ibidem). Staring from my own experience observing the workings of a MNC committed to the construction of a large scale transit infrastructure in the Republic of Georgia, in this short article I try to respond to Gibson-Graham’s invitation by

denuding the script of logistical globalisation of its aura and exposing the limp hustle at its core.

Throughout my fieldwork around the construction of the deep sea port of Anaklia, set to become the most important, and desired, logistical hub in the country and a potential node of the Chinese-led BRI, what I have observed has been the assembling not just of a material infrastructure, but of an oozing and powerful aura accompanying the members of the consortium in charge of building the port and legitimising their actions, as technical experts, socially responsible entrepreneurs and, even, as aspiring politicians.

The 19th century French word, “logistique”, used under Napoleon to describe the art of sustaining warring troops derives from the Geek term “logistikos” indicating mathematical reasoning, rationality and calculation (Cowen 2014:27). In her study of global trade routes, Deborah Cowen has exposed the imbrication of war and trade that this etymology and the subsequent history of logistics expansion demonstrates. Here, rather, I want to reflect upon the other side of this etymological imbrication, focusing on the aspect of “calculation”, and on a specific politics of technological rationality that has constituted the backbone of expanding logistical networks across the world, alongside and instrumental to the practices of warfare, extraction and to the conquest of lands and people. It is exactly that rationality that I call into question, exposing it as a concerted hustle sustained by a calculative consensus and guilty of engendering what we call “the anthropocene” and the processes of decay and destruction that are accelerating the end of the world as we know it (Boyer 2018:240; Hecht 2018).

This intervention is just a sketch, but it intends to be a contribution to the strategy inspired by Gibson-Graham’s seminal work and outlined by the feminist collective behind the GENS

manifesto “to reveal the messy processes that enable capitalism to appear totalizing and coherent” (Bear et al. 2015), exposing its vulnerabilities and precarious composition as a means to displace its dominance.

RATIONAL MEN

October 2018, it’s a warm morning in the site of my fieldwork, the future deep-sea port of Anaklia, and me and a group of architecture students from a London university are busy putting on high-viz gilets and helmets to enter the building site. A greenfield project, the port and logistical hub is set to rise at the border with the *de facto* state of Abkhazia, a site of multiple conflicts and currently still a contested territory. The corporation in charge of developing the port is Anaklia Development Consortium (ADC) led by the largest commercial bank in Georgia, TBC Bank and including an US firm Conti International. ADC’s deputy CEO is waiting for us on the balcony of the company’s office; unlike ours, his protective gear is custom made, with his name written on the different pieces. Today, this top manager is about to lead us into the territory. Before the tour we receive an explanation of health and safety measures as well as the state-of-the-art procedures implemented on site. The deputy CEO concludes: “That’s a lot of money, that’s a lot of effort and a lot of additional hours! But we do not shy away from it! Because that’s not what our company is about – we are about building a sustainable future and Anaklia Deep Sea Port is necessary to build a sustainable future for Georgia”.

We follow the deputy onto the balcony of the office from which we can observe the whole port territory, stretching from Anaklia village up to the edge of the site where a previous attempt to turn the small coastal town into a logistics hub failed after the

demise of Georgia's former President Mikhail Saakashvili, the project's initiator. A gigantic dredger is stationed in the sea. It's the Athena One provided by the Dutch company Van Oord, one of the largest marine contractor companies in the world, responsible for, among others, the construction of Dubai's Palm Island and the second Suez Canal – a fact that we are told at every occasion, by different members of the port management staff. Our host speaks loudly, his English is fluent and his Georgian accent has an American cadence. Every aspect of his behaviour, from his abrupt manners to his speech, seems to declare that he is a man who chooses facts over words, a man that can be trusted. In his account “seamlessness” is often conjured.

Like the epithets of Homeric verse, attached to different characters to remind the reader of their characteristics and place them within the cosmology of the narration, the Deputy CEO attaches “efficiency”, “time-saving”, “economic rationality” to all of the consortium's actions. He explains to us the current state of the port's construction, illustrating the different phases and the choice of contractors employed to perform them. In a rhythmic litany he utters the sentence: “That's time, that's economics!” to qualify the company's choices, underlining how behind every decision a specific set of calculations has been made in order to streamline the construction process. Pronouncing these magic words, in turn, he places himself as a rational actor within the broader narrative of Anaklia's development. Ultimately, he declares, once the port is built, “logistics in Georgia will become faster, cheaper and more efficient for everyone, from the local winemaker from Kakheti⁵ to large shipping companies. Everything will be accessible and streamlined [...] the Sky is the limit!”.

⁵ Region in South-East Georgia famous for its wineries

Mirtskhulava's posture is not unique, rather it's the personification of the transnational script "of a rational knowledge-based economy at the heart of the new financial hegemony" (McDowell 2011:198). At the centre of such hegemony are the masculine subjectivities of the "bright young men whose mathematical skills were part of the development of the complex and innovatory new tools that allowed them to model markets, develop swaps as an instrument and predict risks" (ibidem). Georgia's former minister of the Economy, Kakha Bendukidze, a man, widely considered to be the architect of the country's post-Soviet neoliberalisation, had called upon a new type of man to populate the nation he was in charge to transform. In an interview from 2010, the former Minister sarcastically stated:

"I'm told that in Georgia it's shameful for men to use a calculator. Weapons are good, cigarettes are ok, but a calculator is shameful. Shallowness is acceptable, while depth is not... Guys! Let's take a calculator, it's useful, we can count something" (Bendukidze 2010).

Short of showing us a calculator, the deputy CEO is fully channelling this rational masculinity. What he depicted to us is a "clean, cerebral world" (McDowell 2011:199) where men - like him - operate to calculate risk and ensure profit. In his manly, confident presence Mirtskhulava sought to be the embodiment of the port's future profitability (Chua, this volume).

Throughout my fieldwork in and around Anaklia, I observed a new and highly technical language enter the shared vocabulary not just of those involved in the project but of the many people who engaged with it in different ways. The language of logistics is made of measuring units unknown to the lay observer, such as the TEU – the measure of container's capacity – references to faraway places and processes, such as the one implied by the

name “post-Panamax” – used to describe a type of vessels so big that it did not fit into the original locks of the Panama Canal – and shared fetishes, like the widespread appreciation for the simple object that is the shipping container. This language that is usually encountered in tedious technical publications or in the control room of a logistics facility, came to be featured in Facebook posts and press releases from the company but also magazines, government speeches, popular films and the many formal and informal conversations I entertained in an around the developing port. Yet, Mirtskhulava’s speech is also filled with grandiose statements, references to things that cannot be calculated: “sky is the limit!”, he declares depicting the future fortunes of humble winemakers from Kakheti. As Lancaster notes, these very hyperboles serve to sustain the rationality of the market, placing its handlers as a class of «priests of the financial industry» in possession of a higher knowledge (Lancaster 2010:13). The “new technical clothes” that the Anaklia Port project draped on the efforts to covert the small coastal location on a worldly hub, are thus more than a description of the port’s components and function, they are a constructed mix of fact, fiction and performance bundled together to bring into being the very reality to which they refer, sustaining the claims of the consortium’s members in virtue of their inscrutable display of calculability (Mitchell 2002:80; Barry 2013:24; Harvey and Knox 2015:87-89; Tsing:1999).

LOGISTICS AND BIG DICK ENERGY

The term “Big Dick Energy” (BDE) first appeared on twitter in 2018 and quickly become part of popular culture. According to its author it “refer[s] to guys who aren’t that great but for whatever reason you still find attractive”. The urban dictionary

states: “the energy speaks for itself. The big dick tells its own story [...] it’s confidence without cockiness” (Grant 2018). BDE is a “condensation of power, sexuality, desire and masculinity” (McDowell 1997:179); however it is different from the appellative “big swinging dick” attributed to successful traders in the City of London described by feminist geographer Linda McDowell in her ethnography of trade floors (ibidem:119). Not the brash showing off of overinflated sexual powers and different from the chauvinist innuendos described by Charmaine Chua as powering the race of shipping companies to “always have the biggest [ship]. [I]n a race to have the most impressive monster” (Chua 2018:146; this volume). Big Dick Energy is a much more subtle assertion of gendered prowess.

Let’s be clear, the technocrats and managers I have encountered *do not have* Big Dick Energy, they are conjuring it. Handling the measures, horizons and language of logistical expansion confers these otherwise desperate hustlers the quiet confidence and ease with oneself that comes from knowing you master an infallible tool. This tool is logistics.

Across the countries, like Georgia, who are bidding to become part of the Chinese-led BRI, “logistics” has become a container for all things desirable. Its promise of economic development predicated on infrastructural connectivity, as I have commented elsewhere, has offered a new framework for old geopolitical ambitions and development strategies alike (Gambino 2018; 2019). While actually existing logistics in the South Caucasus largely travels on so called informal or semi-formal networks (Fellings 2019; Polese et al. 2018) and the futuristic hubs set to populate the BRI are largely not yet built, the aura of logistical connectivity is more than ever tangible and embodied by its proponents. Similarly to the PM in Ermalo’s film acquiring a new vitality at the mention of the corridor connecting China and

Europe or the deputy CEO with his custom made high-viz, across unfinished infrastructural landscapes, the masters of logistics can be seen jostling for a piece of profitable future, conjuring the powerful aura of their not-yet-tangible global connections to legitimise their otherwise unconvincing hustle.

VAGABOND CAPITALISM. TECHNOPOLITICS FOR A GLOBAL HUSTLE

The power to command cargo mobilities exudes an aura that turns the most daring propositions, such as the idea that building a deep-sea port on a wetland bordering with a contested war-zone might be a path to sustainable development, into an accurate estimate. Logistics' big dick energy turns an agglomeration of blotched processes, chance, environmental disaster and cover-ups into the coherent narrative of connectivity.

A feminist analysis of logistics starts from the unmaking of the specific technopolitics on which it rests, stripping it of its aura to expose the hustle at its core. Rather than an expert-lead logistics revolution, what we have been witnessing are the operations of what Cindy Katz calls "vagabond capitalism". "The phrase vagabond capitalism puts the vagrancy and dereliction where it belongs—on capitalism, that unsettled, dissolute, irresponsible stalker of the world" (Katz 2001:709). Seeing logistics expansion as vagabond capitalism, in turn, allows us to see expertise as a masquerade fuelled by the (dis)embodied and class-and-race-dependent big dick energy of the ever-knowing "economic man" (Mcdowell 1997:183; Zaloom 2006). Rather than a sequence of smooth flows, vagabond capitalism advances through friction and the constant hustle of its proponents. As Thieme reminds us in her article on the hustle economy, "to hustle has generally, since the

1960s, been associated with an underworld of morally and legally dubious practices” (Thieme, 2018:10). While Thieme, taking as a starting point the post-colonial lives of Nairobi’s street-dwelling youths, aptly defines what she calls “the hustle economy” as the affirmative political practice of marginalised youth across disparate geographies, I urge, in this context, an opposite move: namely to turn the lens of the hustle upwards, exposing the embodied economic performance and the dirty work of those at the top. Calling out the hustle, in turns, works as a performative practice of rendering precarious the grip that logistical capital has on the varied operations that compose it (cf. Mezzadra and Neilson 2019).

Far from being all-knowing, quietly confident disembodied subjects, the implementers of logistics are hustlers, swindlers, con-artists. Their approximation made into confidence thanks to the big dick energy exuded by the promise of seamless cargo mobilities.

LIMP LOGISTICS

On the 9th of January 2020, the Georgian government announced the dissolution of its contract with the consortium in charge of implementing the Anaklia port project. This decision, coming after a year of public negotiations, is due to the inability of the company to attract enough investment capital to develop the project. The hustle, this time, has failed. The territory that me and the students observed with the deputy CEO, is now an abandoned expanse of dark soil, carried by the winds into the houses of the inhabitants of the village. This failure, however, should not cast the Anaklia project as an exception within a sea of smooth logistical operations; on the contrary, the frictions that lead to its demise are the same as those that operate across the

seemingly immense space being connected through transit corridors, hubs and gateways (Tsing 2000; 2004).

Similarly to Charmaine Chua's brilliant observation of the childish chauvinism powering the monstrous speculations of the shipping industry (Chua 2018, this volume) and to Deborah Cowen's powerful analysis of the Ratzelian environmental determinism underlying logistics' promise of connectivity (Cowen 2014:29, 219) and, following what Irene Peano reminds us in her timely contribution (Peano, this volume): observing the gendered performativity of logistical rationality is a political endeavour. "A confront[ing] and reform[ing] of the transcendence-seeking *hypersubjects* (usually but not exclusively white, straight, northern males) that gifted the world the Anthropocene as part of their centuries-long project of remaking the planet for their own convenience and luxury" (Boyer 2018:239). Their quiet confidence rests on centuries of destruction, their big dick energy is driving our ecosystems to their end.

To go back to Gibson-Graham's original invitation: how might we get globalization to lose its erection?

Through a careful work of inquiry and decoding of the technopolitics informing logistical expansion, through exposing the uncertainties it seeks to silence and supporting the lifeworlds from which it extracts its vitality "[We] might remember that an erection is fragile and quite temporal and that [capital's] testicles are certainly no stronger than [our] knees" (Marcus 1992:396 in Gibson-Graham 1996:126).

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UNENDURABLE MONSTROSITIES: MEGASHIPS AND THE MASCULINITY OF SPECULATIVE MEGAPROJECTS¹

Charmaine CHUA

Since the 2010s, the world's largest shipping companies have been locked in a battle for the title of 'World's Largest Ship.' First in 2013 came Maersk with their Triple-E ships, with a maximum capacity of 18,000 TEU - ships longer than the empire state building on its side. Complacently, Maersk purchased the web domain, worldslargestship.com – only to find less than a year later that it had been taken over by the CSCL Globe, a 19, 100 TEU behemoth launched by China Shipping Container Lines in 2014. Then came the MSC Oscar at 19, 224 TEU, which held the title until Maersk answered back, with new 20, 000 TEU ships. Finally in 2016, OOCL ordered six 21, 000 TEU ships – and that, for now, is where things stand, with the OOCL Hong Kong claiming the title of the first ship to cross the 21,000 TEU Mark when it was delivered in 2017.

If the monstrous ambition of these shipping companies seems like a sort of masculinist game – a Tower-of-Babel-esque quest for mastery over the ocean – you would not be off the mark. But something else is also at stake: the unmitigated expansion of logistical infrastructure produces an unfolding series of political economic crises when they fix themselves in physical landscapes, turning logistical fantasies of seamless global flow into logistical

¹ This essay is a revision of a talk originally given at the Sonic Acts festival, Amsterdam, Feb 2017.

nightmares.

Here's one of those nightmares: On August 30, 2016, without most people noticing, an unprecedented global crisis occurred at sea and out of sight. The expansion of ship sizes brought so much container capacity onto the market without accompanying trade growth that ships began to suffer the weight of over-speculation. Under the weight of a \$5.4 billion debt, South Korea's largest shipping company – and seventh largest in the world – Hanjin, filed for bankruptcy. With its assets frozen, 85 ships across Asia, Europe and North America found themselves stranded or placed under arrest, as creditors rushed to seize what assets they could salvage and ports refused to allow Hanjin ships to dock because of uncertainty about who would pay their bills.

This left more than 80 massive container ships, half a million cargo containers and \$14.5 billion worth of goods – from Samsung electronics to furniture and food – stranded at sea. As retailers struggled to get their merchandise off these ships, 3000 crew members across the world were stranded at sea, asked to ration their food, water, and fuel amidst diminishing supplies. In some ports, sailors were denied the basic right to walk on land for months – direct victims of a wider supply chain crisis.

If the hurried expansion of mega ships sounds even intuitively like an unsustainable practice, it is my aim to show why and how that has become so, and in turn, to interrogate the links between logistical expansion, speculations about the future of growth, and the effects of infrastructural expansion on human disposability.

The question I seek to ask is not primarily a causal one, such as 'why does the shipping industry seem to be shooting itself in the foot by building bigger and bigger ships?' Rather, we might pose a question more attentive to the forms of violence such

projects entail: What are the spatial, social, and political effects of the monstrous scale of infrastructural expansion? And what does the scale of these projects tell us about capital's imperative to expand value accumulation through the construction of a global logistics space?

As corporations over-invest in the expansion of their shipping fleet carrying capacities, another form of infrastructural expansion is also demanded in the adaptation of port infrastructures, which are often funded by federal and municipal taxes. This means that while the ownership of the means of circulation are privatized, the risks of over-investment are socialized, and come to be borne by society at large in contested and uneven ways. Rather than follow the neoclassic economic logic that megaship expansions are built on the logic of economies of scale, I private infrastructure expansion cannot be explained in isolation from broader shifts in the way the logistics economy is organized, and in the way the state participates in facilitating the circulation, production, and consumption of commercial capital.

As such, this essay proposes the following argument: Both state and corporate projects to expand the scale of logistics infrastructure are materialized bets on the durability of capital accumulation. As the state-capital nexus seeks to build this durable future, facilitating the expanded reproduction of capital through the growth of global logistics space, these infrastructures become burdens on the public that spatially fix concrete spaces of transit through contested and uneven processes of rescaling and dispossession. The expansion of logistical infrastructure must be understood not only in terms of the physical system of circulation it enables, but also in terms of the irrational rationalities that these obsessions with monstrous expansion entail.

By interrogating the massive expansion of megaships in terms of both its financial and spatial logics, material systems of global supply can be understood not only as durable infrastructure - public works that stimulate local and global economic growth - but as unendurable monstrosities that express the violence of global circulation through a shared vision of a capitalist future, affirming the continued desire for corporate expansion to hypermasculinist investments in size and the “bigness” of global transportation infrastructure.

“IT’S AN ARMS RACE”: NEOCLASSICAL LOGICS OF MONSTROUS EXPANSION

At first blush, neoclassical economic rationales for the megaship boom seem to make sense: Since the international standardization of the shipping container, ships have sought to increase in size to capture economies of scale. As seen in Figure 1 above, ship sizes have gradually expanded since the first trans-oceanic voyage of *Encounter Bay* in 1968. While the largest shipping liners have experimented with increasing their carrying capacities for decades, it was not until the global financial crisis in 2008 that megaships were produced in high numbers. At the height of the financial crisis, freight rates (the slot costs per container transported) plummeted along with global trade volumes (Morris 2015). Shipbuilding orders were cancelled in droves, leaving half-built ships stranded in yards all over South Korea and China. When orders finally picked up again in 2010 and 2011, companies knew that they had to cut costs. Pushed along by weak freight rates and rising fuel costs, many shipping lines concluded that the most cost-effective solution was megaships, which, by expanding the number of containers transported per vessel, could lower the costs of transporting each

container by leveraging economies of scale. The larger shipping companies who could afford these costly investments began to place orders in bulk.² Maersk first set the trend with 20 18,000 TEU Triple-E class ships, ordered in 2011. Two years later, other shipping companies followed suit, suitably convinced of the competitive advantage of these behemoths.

Building bigger vessels allows ship owners to capture economies of scale in fuel and crew costs, allowing them to lower the unit costs per container and restore profitability through cost-saving measures. If a single mega-vessel can now carry what it used to take 3 ships to transport, fuel costs can be cut by as much as 50%, and crew sizes might be reduced by almost half. These cost-cutting measures have been crucial for the profit maximizing strategies of larger container lines such as Maersk: since their super-post-panamax ships have launched, their freight costs have gone down from \$3108 per TEU in 2011, to \$2630 today (Drewry Maritime Research 2014). In micro-economic terms, these cost-saving measures allow larger corporations to capture the market share of global container capacity. For individual carriers, then, the rationale for ordering bigger, more technologically advanced and fuel-efficient ships is based on competitive dynamics at the firm level: the bigger the ships and the larger the proportion of the fleet comprised of them, the greater the ability to edge out competitors by lowering slot costs. In accordance with such calculations, the scramble to order megaships has escalated since 2011. Ninety-seven ships capable of carrying between 18,000 and 20,000 20-foot-equivalent container units are scheduled to be

² For example, Hyundai Heavy Industries reports that since 2010, it has built 82 ships of more than 10,000 TEU but has received orders for only five ships in the 5,000 TEU range (Morris 2015).

delivered to various companies by mid-2019, crowding an already-large global fleet of megaships with more orders of even larger container vessels.

At an industry-wide level, these calculations quickly begin to meet with wider problems. In the last few years, companies have supplied so many vessels that hundreds of behemoth ships have come into service at the same time, making it difficult for carriers to match demand with burgeoning supply. Since the 2008 financial crisis, trade volumes have not recovered sufficiently, and returns on capital have remained low, resulting in many empty ships traveling across the ocean while filled with far less than their projected maximum loads, resulting in what the industry terms ‘overcapacity’ (Maritime Executive Staff 2015). Overcapacity poses a supply-side challenge for the shipping industry: with ships traveling only half-filled on their designated routes, the fuel and slot cost savings these large ships were designed for are largely cancelled out, forcing companies to drive down their freight rates. In September 2015, freight rates dropped 59% to an all-time low of an average \$313 per twenty-foot container. Even with this price competition, shipowners have failed to fill their megaships with the number of containers that would justify their projected economies of scale. In 2015, Maersk, the largest shipping company in the world, reported a \$600 million shortfall in their full-year profit forecast, nearing a 50% fall in profits from 2014.

Considered in terms of the wider industry, the megaship arms race begins to meet its internal contradictions in its inability to meet its own projected outcomes. According to some analysts, low freight demand, overcapacity problems, and the consequent tightening of profit margins led to the top four carriers sustaining a cumulative loss of \$3.5 billion in 2017 (Milne 2018). Trade

volumes have risen at such a slow pace that they have not justified the high expenditure on megaships. In fact, overcapacity has only exacerbated the problem of slow growth. Multiple maritime analysts have argued that trade volumes must rise before the container line market continues to be flooded with monstrous ships. With overcapacity projected to hit 8-10% by 2018, the highest since the financial crisis in 2008, analyst forecasts for balancing trade volumes have generally been cautious.

In the ideal outcome that these container lines picture, ships would be fully loaded and constantly circulating the ocean. Yet, in the current climate, many ships are idled, and kept out of service at anchor for a month and beyond because there is not enough volume to put the ships in service- and bear the crew, fuel, and docking costs which that requires. In November 2015, the reported laid-up cellular capacity was almost past the million-TEU watershed: 263 container ships were reported idled, totaling 934,700 TEU and representing 4.7% of the total global fleet. Idling megaships evidences how serious the situation of oversupply has become. Carriers typically endeavor to keep their largest ships and therefore most expensive assets active; an idling megaship suggests that desperate situations have called for desperate measures.

Carriers thus face a dilemma: without using the newest and largest ships to lower operational costs, they risk losing business; but by investing in a state-of-the-art fleet, they exacerbate supply glut and poor freight earnings, and are now struggling to stay afloat. As one shipping analyst confided in an interview, "Flooding the market with additional capacity is counterintuitive, and I believe all shipping lines know that. Unfortunately, it has become a case of 'you are damned if you don't, you are damned if you do'. Everyone is trying to play catch up" (Bill Hatch, personal

interview, 2015). At the firm-level, shipping liners thus respond to an industry-wide problem of overcapacity with a technocratic response based on the self-interests of particular stakeholders, rather than probe into cascading social, material and political effects they bring to bear on the totality of global capitalist relations.

SPECULATIVE DESIRES: MONSTER SHIPS AS DURABLE FUTURES

The process by which capitalists, as a class, invest in logics of unmitigated expansion with little consideration of broader structural impacts begs investigation. Shipping experts frequently rely on rhetorics of assurance to indicate their simultaneous faith in and uncertainty about the continued future of capital accumulation. In an industry where fine-tuned cost calculations champion rationalistic, economistic thinking, I often found in interviews with shipping executives that extra- or even non-economic desires often played key roles in decision making.

For instance, in a 2015 interview with Maersk network designer Nils Madsen, I pressed the question of how ordering megaships relied on projections that they would be filled at 100% capacity. “How do you know that your Triple-E ships will eventually be filled if the global economy is bad and trade volumes haven’t been going up?”

Madsen responded: “Well, you don’t know. You hope. There’s a bit of hope in it. Of course, we try to read the economic numbers, and well, the world economy seems to be growing, *no matter what happens*. If it grows 2%, then in principle, you need to grow your fleet by 4% to grow the company. So, we keep building bigger ships” (Nils Madsen, personal interview, 2015).

Madsen made no admission that the mad rush to build megaships could be the precise cause and exacerbation of a shipping crisis. Rather, he proudly owned the fact that Maersk has continuously set the precedent for larger ships in the industry:

M: What you're going to see is if we order triple Es, soon everybody orders triple Es.

C: Right. COSCO copied, UAC copied.

M: And, when they do that, then we have to respond.

C: By ordering more...

N: More, or bigger.

In October 2015, Maersk CEO Nils Anderson publicly reaffirmed this logic of competition: “We don’t want other companies to leapfrog us and to be more aggressive on investments, so we are going to defend our market-leading position” (Ellyatt 2015). Such logics of defense against ‘leapfrogging’ suggest that the shipping logistics industry, like many others, frequently justifies its infrastructural investments in terms of firm-level decisions to defend against industry competition. Projections of megaship growth are often made on the basis of maintaining market share, and on the assumption that trade volumes will continue to grow. In this way, a core component of the logic of megaship expansion is a speculative bet on the future of capital accumulation. That infrastructural expansion is often premised on speculative growth is not in itself surprising. However, talk of big ships frequently augmented with military and sexual metaphors. “It’s an arms race,” several

shipping industry professionals have told me. Nils Madsen went on:

“Don’t get me wrong, it’s an arms race. But also, and maybe this sounds stupid, there is also pride in having the biggest one.”

And then with a wink he said:

“I mean, we are men after all, right? We like to have the biggest one, always. That’s how it works!”

Carol Cohn has traced in the context of military defense intellectuals that discourses of nuclear strategy frequently employ ‘technostrategic’ language that is characterized by “extraordinary abstraction and removal” from military realities and peppered with sexual subtext, or as she puts it, “white men in ties discussing missile size” (Cohn 1987, 692). The same might be said of shipping professionals – white men, in ties, discussing not missiles – but very big ships – in very deep harbors. Leaning across the table at a cafe conspiratorially, Madsen explained Maersk’s superiority in this way:

“We’ll always have the biggest. We are in a race to have the most impressive monster. But of course the minute you announce that you are making a new megaship order, you start a war. You are saying [sticking his tongue out and making a taunting noise]

‘I have the biggest now! Yay! Show me yours! Come and get me! So you start a war all over again’³.

These juvenile sexual metaphors do more than reveal the performative masculinities embedded in corporate culture. While such masculinist positioning undoubtedly operates as a structuring axis of everyday corporate life, the casual rhetoric of masculinist competition, when linked to the physical expansion of megaships, evince the links between global markets, hypermasculine performance, and expansionist desire. Allusions to phallic imagery and sexual domination are linked to speculative investments in the continued well-being of the capitalist future, marking the extra-economic logics inherent in logistical fascination with infrastructural monstrosity and scale.

The language of monsters captures the tension in which decisions that appear at the outset to be rational, ordered and calculative run up against chance, fortune and mystery. As David McNally notes in his book on the centrality of the monstrous as a strategic-theoretical metaphor for global capitalism, “the idea that something monstrous is at work in the operations of global capitalism is never far from the surface today” (McNally 2010:9). The etymology of the monster derives from the Latin *monere* (to warn). Amongst other things, McNally argues, “monsters are warnings - not only of what may happen but also of what is already *happening*” (ibid). Gordon and Gordon similarly note that fear and uncertainty accompany monster metaphors because they are often employed in the face of disaster. Monsters “are harbingers of things we do not want to face, of catastrophes”

³ Madsen, pers interview

(McNally 2009:10).

Shortly after the 2008 financial crisis, journalist Matt Taibbi famously characterized Goldman Sachs as “a great vampire squid, wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money” (Taibbi 2010). The idea that something monstrous is at work in the operations of global capitalism is thus never far from the surface today.

We might thus understand the megaship as a monster that expresses both fascination with the grandiose, and fear in the speculative future that is to come. The simultaneous allure and fear of monster capital becomes evident in even a cursory survey of the shipping industry’s reaction to megaships. Shipping professionals who exhibit a fascination with perpetual expansions of megaship scales express a contemporary social imaginary in which monstrous ships simultaneously strike a mixture of fear and fascination between that which is knowable, and that which is not, or as McNally puts it, “the role of human creation in the process of economics in particular and science more generally, and the anxiety induced by the impossibility of exorcising the unknown - economic or otherwise” (McNally 2009:10).

Marx himself intuited this gothic character of capitalism through the use of the monstrous as a metaphor. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx explains: “capital posits the permanence of value (to a certain degree) by incarnating itself in fleeting commodities and taking on their form, but at the same time changing them just as constantly; alternates between its eternal form in money and its passing form in commodities; ... But capital obtains this ability only by constantly sucking in living labor as its soul, vampire-like” (1973:646). As Jack Halberstam

notes, Marx here describes the economic system in which we live, capitalism, as gothic “in its ability to transfer matter into commodity, commodity into value and value into capitalism” (Halberstam 2013:103).

Thus, while vampiric, blood sucking capital accumulation may be the primary desire at work in the shipping industry’s megaship frenzy, logics of market competition often stumble over the edge of the rational, relying on categories of hope, risk, and speculation to justify often seemingly self-contradictory and irresponsible forms of economic decision-making.

Drawing from these insights that monstrosity is always linked to processes of surplus value creation, the building of monstrous ships represents a form of speculative infrastructural building that exhibits a desire for not only market share, but mastery and control the entire architecture of global capitalism. The ‘arms race’ of megaships becomes monstrous precisely at the point where it crosses the threshold of economic exaggeration, becoming insensible to measured assessments of calculable growth on which neoclassical economic logics are built.

These instances of monstrosity reveal the ruse at the heart of infrastructural expansion: rather than being technical systems for the collective provisioning of basic necessities and needs for human societies – as infrastructure’s terminological predecessor ‘public works’ suggests – logistical infrastructures today are more about monumental projections of the durability of capitalism’s future. Yet, corporate and state investments in logistical infrastructure have equally become spectacles of failure and market collapse — evinced vividly in the 2016 bankruptcy of Hanjin shipping and widespread shipping industry worries about overcapacity. These moments of failure gesture towards a market

environment where the *anticipatory* nature of exercises of market capture and nation building becomes a good unto itself. As Nicole Grove suggests, efforts to “disrupt” markets through these anticipatory gestures make acts of speculation themselves “the markers of ‘success’ rather than any means to an end (Grove forthcoming).”

The masculinist attachment of anticipatory futures to logistical infrastructure are thus evidence of more than periodic market consolidation or the failures of national fiscal regimes to keep logistical firms afloat. As Timothy Mitchell argues, “they also reflect a contemporary world in which financial infrastructures allow the accumulation of capital to bypass the work of building durable or productive structures for collective life” (Mitchell 2014:437). As capital has been drawn into large infrastructures, it flows into projects that weaken rather than enhance the possibilities for future collective life: into pipelines for oil exports, skyscraper condominiums, privatized airports, and fracking fields. In addition, these fixed, immobile, and large-scale infrastructures, increasingly massive in size as they seek to service larger volumes of containers coming into the port, extend the fixed infrastructure of distribution - and the associated pollution, noise, and spatial expansion entailed in their construction - unevenly across the city, effectively shifting the costs, and socializing the risks onto society (Li 2009).

The durability that transport infrastructure promises thus reflects a corresponding speculative fragility. Here, we might follow Timothy Mitchell in thinking through the “durable yet fragile” nature of infrastructure. For Mitchell, modern infrastructure gave birth to corporate power by containing the promise of income flows that the long-lived fixed capital of equipment and technical systems seemed to guarantee:

“Finance capital expanded into a future built upon the new life span of infrastructures, charging its flimsy paper work of financial promises with the durability of the iron, steel, copper, lead and concrete through which it now lived. Capital bulked itself up through the scale and longevity of the material grids of modern collective life, and then traded the expectation of this future income by selling speculative shares in the present” (2014:438).

This is another way of stating Marx’s insight that, counter to a Schumpeterian celebration of creative destruction where successive innovations shape the various epochs of modernity, the fixed capital invested in infrastructure and heavy machinery is bound to meet with contradictions as the falling rate of profit outpaces the ability for that sunk capital to return the surplus value invested in it.

What Mitchell’s insight emphasizes in addition to Marx, however, is that the apparent longevity of infrastructure is sold as a promise on future gain. Its durability is not only a liability - that is, the fact that capital is tied up in particular objects and pinned down in place is not only a *problem* of fixed capital which the capitalist must overcome - it also expresses an implicit faith in the continued renewal of capital’s future. In this way, understanding infrastructural expansion as “a promise of material durability in an otherwise ‘flimsy’ paper world” connects the relations between material fixed capital and financial speculation (Mitchell 2014).

To emphasize the relation between the seemingly immaterial world of financialization and the material durability of the worlds we build, traced in terms of very particular modes of engineering, construction, and planning imprinted across space, is to interrogate the relationship between future and present. As

Mitchell illustrates, durability means that the value of the enterprise “doesn’t rest in the steel or concrete that is built, but value rests in the revenue stream that is discounted to reflect uncertainty and sold in the present in the form of stocks or bonds in many other forms” (Mitchell 2014). Durable infrastructures are not (or not always) as Adam Smith and urban planners might suggest, public works that stimulate local economic development. Rather, they are concrete materialities that perform qualities of durability, out of which is created a financial bet on the future that is reflected in the present through qualities of speculation and uncertainty.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this essay that monstrous acts of infrastructural expansion are never simply premised on market rationalities. If the monumental increases in the scale of hypermodern logistics systems are efforts to renew capital accumulation through extending the power of supply chains over the world, these claims on a capitalist future are wedded to affective dreams and desires, in which certain investments in masculinist conceptions of growth circulate through corporate culture and through global projects of logistical expansion. This link between masculinist projections of power and corporate expansionist efforts connects the ideas, values, and affects that drive infrastructural projects to the material investments themselves.

Importantly, however, material infrastructures are not resolutely unchangeable systems. Lauren Berlant has written that infrastructure is not *identical* to system or structure, as we currently see them, but that infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. Infrastructure is in her

words, “the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure” (2016, 393). If the current life-worlds of monstrous infrastructure are the vampire squids that suck the life from us through prisons, pipelines, mega-ships and terraformed dispossession, it is ever the more urgent that we refuse to normalize the durability of monstrous capital- and ask instead how we might organize durable, collective infrastructures that link us – not to capital’s mendacities, but to alternative possibilities for world-sustaining relations. Or – as organizers of the blockade of the Port of Oakland in 2011 put it: It is to Block their world – in order to unleash our own.

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VESSELS

Emilia WEBER

I first heard about the Dutch pro-choice organisation *Women on the Waves* watching Diana Whitten's documentary *Vessel* in 2014. This was during my feminist awakening when I began the naïve but necessary rite of passage which connected the dots between the feminist literature I was reading and the world around me. It was the year I read Federici and co-organised a Ladyfest with a group of friends who I learnt, and continue to learn, a lot from. I remember watching the film and then emailing a list of people encouraging them to do the same – I must have liked it a lot, because I distinctly recall taking a gamble with who I shared it with, cc-ing people outside my circle of closest friends, risking silent judgement on my taste.

As of 2017, 42% of people of reproductive age live in countries with restrictive abortion laws (Singh et al. 2018). In 2003 the World Health Organisation estimated that every 8 minutes someone in the world dies of complications arising from an unsafe abortion (World Health Organization 2007). In 1999, Rebecca Gomperts, a doctor on a Greenpeace ship, asked a friend to design a mobile gynaecological clinic, which she and a team then strapped onto a Dutch-registered boat and, at the invitation of local pro-choice activists, sailed to countries where abortion is criminalised, or at least very difficult to access. In port, the organisation *Women on the Waves* offers legal and medical workshops. They also pick up people who are seeking an abortion and sail them into international waters, in most cases 12 miles from the shore. On the way out to sea they offer sonograms and reproductive counselling, and, once outside of the nation's

territorial waters, a doctor on board will provide a non-surgical abortion.



A portable clinic aboard the Borndiep, 2004 (Women on the Waves)

We watch the ship Aurora, named after the Roman goddess who flies across the sky announcing dawn, ferry people in the Baltic, 12 miles off the coast of Poland. Once there, a rocking camera films someone's hands as they read out the ship's coordinates. Off-camera a voice says, "We are in international waters, and if you want to end the pregnancy, I have a pill for you".

*

Reproduction is spatial; it is a part of state-making processes. And because pregnancy and family formation underpin political territory it is therefore overseen by the state. As political

geographers point out, babies and reproductive bodies are wound up in geopolitical projects, whether to manage the size of a labour force, or in the name of xenophobic protection against demographic change (Calkin 2019). Abortion, then, is also spatial. Respective states control where and when abortions can be carried out: in many cases only in a clinic and with a doctor's permission. In others, abortions are illegal but, if you travel abroad to receive one, you won't be criminalised on return. Elsewhere they are completely prohibited.

Women on the Waves' strategy of resistance is spatial too: they take advantage of the legal pluralities of ocean space to reveal the state's limits and, within a legal loophole, create a temporary autonomous space where abortions can take place. Although Gomperts initially intended the mobile clinic to be a long-term option for delivering abortions, the demand is too high to be practically met in this manner, so the project functions in part as an awareness-raising media campaign about restrictive abortion laws and the consequences of illegal abortion. But the action is not only symbolic. Although a lot is written about the often-important role imagination has to play in prefiguring different worlds and alternative futures, I like the way this action materially creates the world it wants to offer, producing the conditions it desires, even if the space eventually vanishes.

*

When I find myself knowingly adoring someone, I think of Patricia Arquette in the final scene of *True Romance* driving against the sunset, repeating: "You're so cool, you're so cool, you're so cool", accompanied by Hans Zimmer swell. That's the sort of feeling Rebecca Gomperts provokes in me. There's something of the pirate in her, in the lineage of Sayyida al-Hurra,

Anne Bonny: she defies expectations, rails against injustice, smokes and drinks on her ship, performs abortions in the face of patriarchal violence. My own crush on her reminds me of the attention garnered by Pia Klemp and Carola Rackete, both ship captains who were arrested for picking up migrants in the Mediterranean Sea. I don't think their, or Gomperts', sacrifices or achievements should be diminished, but the way I place "the rescuer" centre stage doesn't feel quite right.



Mary Read and Anne Bonny in *A General History of the Pirates*, 1724 (Newberry Library)

Instead it might be useful to think more about how pirate communities actually lived. As Linebaugh and Rediker document in *The Many Headed Hydra*, 17th and 18th century pirates were often societal outlaws, people for whom the system didn't work, those desperate for employment, on the run from the law, runaway slaves, sex workers, deserters from war (Linebaugh and Rediker 2012). Together these radicals practiced "insurgent hydrarchy", creating spaces on ships where they governed themselves as limited democracies using the pirate code which included dividing their loot equally, distributing justice and maintaining a multiracial social order, in so doing directly challenging the development of capitalism and international trade.

I re-watch *Vessel* and it strikes me that the ship space is not only created by the architectural attributes of the ship and the clinic itself, or exclusively by Gomperts' vision, but by the people on it (Lefebvre 1991). There's a scene in the documentary in which anti-abortion groups onshore state that they plan to release photos and names of those accessing the ship. In response, a large group of local activists all wearing dark glasses and head coverings congregate on the jetty and board the ship together making it deliberately unclear who is a volunteer and who is seeking help. The beauty isn't in the one swashbuckling visionary who comes to the rescue of those seeking abortion, but the anonymous community who care for each other and in doing so create a space of solidarity at sea. Like the pirates, in this system repressive masters are overthrown, a black flag is raised, a new way of being together is forged.

In the 17th and 18th centuries rebellions and riots often took place in harbours and ports when sailors retaliated against their employers. For the past year I have been interviewing people who took part in the Liverpool Dockers' lockout. In 1995 the dockworkers refused to cross a picket line which included their sons and nephews sacked by a sub-contractor to the main company at the port. As punishment for refusing to cross the picket they found themselves sacked and their jobs advertised the next day. They subsequently entered a dispute with their employers that lasted until 1998.

One of the most spectacular actions associated with the dispute involved an international strike in solidarity with the Liverpool dockworkers: on 20 January 1997 dockers in 27 countries and 105 ports illegally stopped work. Ports along the entire west coast of America came to a halt, alongside 40,000 dockworkers in Japan, Sydney and all the ports in South Africa which closed "in solidarity with the Liverpool dockers who stood by us during the years of apartheid". We are led to believe that commodities circulate in a smooth, frictionless way but this is a fantasy. Capitalism involves people, and connectivity is in constant tension with the possibility of disruption. I love the image of ships filled with cargo circling the world's oceans, unable to dock, a clear demonstration of how important the worker's labour is. A strike, a withdrawal of labour, might be thought of as a ceasing, a termination, an abortion of work but this withholding is generative, it produces new ways of relating and thinking and being together.

*

Rebecca Gomperts is interviewed by press in Ireland, a journalist asks her if she has ever had an abortion. She's pissed

that the journalist is bringing biography into it: “You know, I don’t think that’s an appropriate question because there are 45 million abortions taking place each year, there is no medical intervention that has been done more than abortion.” The journalist then attempts to justify their question, mumbling something about personal experience before Gomperts halts them: “No, don’t try, it is too easy. I mean, are you going to ask someone working for Amnesty International whether they’ve been tortured? Come on, that’s not the issue. The issue is do women really have basic human rights to be able to decide what is happening with their own bodies?”.

Later, the Portuguese minister of defence forbids the Women on Waves ship to enter Portuguese national waters claiming it poses a severe risk to national security. Two Portuguese warships equipped with three cannons and two torpedo launchers are sent to monitor the Women on Waves boat as it bobs in international waters. With no way to bring people on board, Gomperts goes on a Portuguese live TV chat show where she displays a packet of medicine bought from a local pharmacy that contains Misoprostol and describes the safest way to buy and take it, despite abortion being illegal in Portugal at the time. Visibly annoyed at the conservative commentator she has been paired with, she tells the audience that she has previously had an abortion, that she is pregnant now, that she is happy she has the choice to continue her pregnancy, and happy that she had the choice to end one when needed.

Backstage we see the host of the TV show chatting to Gomperts. The host congratulates Gomperts and shares that she has a child. “It’s so nice, it’s very nice”, Gomperts replies, smiling, “...if it’s *wanted*, it’s delicious”.

*

There's a Northumbrian folk song that I listened to a lot last year while pregnant, "When the Boat Comes In". The Nic Jones version "Dance to Your Daddy" is beautiful, but I prefer the older lyrics. I watch a lo-fi video on YouTube of folk singer Bob Fox performing it in which he describes it as a "dandlin" song, traditionally sung by grandparents when they're dandlin (bouncing) their grandchild on their knee.

Thou shalt have a fishy
on a little dishy
thou shalt have a fishy
when the boat comes in.

I never really disentangled whether I identified the "fishy" in the song as the foetus that I would eventually meet, or if I was moved by the idea of feeding and nurturing the foetus through pregnancy and into their life. I think the sentiments coexist, mixed with the anxiety that I wasn't reaching the weekly tallies of oily fish portions the state recommended for the wellbeing of the unborn.

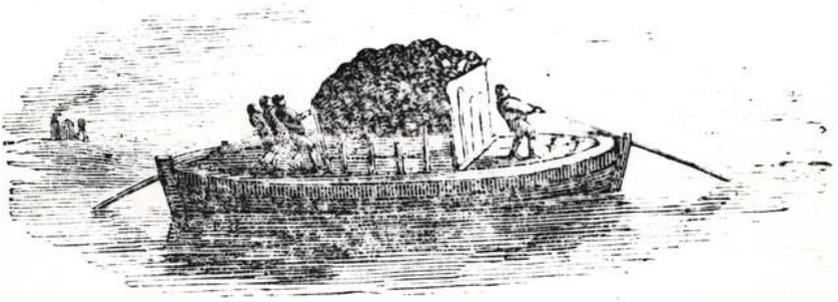
And well may the keel row
That brings the bairns their bread.

When that pregnancy ended prematurely at three months in a visceral traumatic mess, in the days and weeks that followed I was met with a vacuum of explanation – the state that had been temporarily interested in my wellbeing swiftly dropped me. I searched doctors' eyes for withheld explanations as they shrugged their shoulders telling me it was one of those things, one in three. I spent evenings scrolling threads on chat rooms, the

comments sections under articles, searching the modern-day communal spaces where folk knowledge is stored and passed on, trying to understand. In the absence of medical reasoning my mind would provide its own cruel explanation: I'd rowed this keel pretty badly, failing spectacularly to nurture my produce in any way compatible with life. In the 18th century shipwrecks were referred to as miscarriages (Lambert-Beatty 2008). I was a bad boat, a bad house.

I often find myself caught out singing the wrong words to "When the Boat Comes In", the fish change verse-to-verse: fishy turns to haddock, turns to mackerel, to bloater, to salmon. Bob Fox explains that the song is a metaphor for people in the North East badly exploited by their bosses, always hoping for their fortunes one day to change: waiting for the fishing fleet to come in, they hope that instead of the usual herring they'll get something better.

"Well may the keel row" refers to a song about the keel men of Tyne and Wear, a group of workers in the 1600s who rowed the Tyne keels —large awkward boats that transported coal from the banks of the shallow rivers to waiting collier ships. Steering cargo around sandbanks and wrecks in the water, and unloading it by hand into ships as both boats rose and fell in the lethal tidal swells at the mouth of the river, required unique skill and local knowledge. The Hostmen of Newcastle upon Tyne, businessmen who controlled the export of coal from the river Tyne, began to overload the boats with more and more coal prompting the keel men to go on a series of strikes. Some historians claim the keel men had one of the earliest trade unions.



A keel boat on the Tyne (Newcastle Libraries)

As children, when one of our pets died my brothers and I would decorate their home with their favourite snacks, flowers and tea lights and carry them down to the Thames near the flat we lived in in Brentford and set them afloat, to Valhalla, littering the river with hamster cages and fish bowls. There was a thrill to watching the lights bounce off into the dark shiny river before we lost sight of them. In the weeks following the miscarriage I would dream that I had inadvertently sat on and squashed small creatures: kittens, hamsters.

*

HMS Maidstone, anchored in Belfast Lough in 1971-1972 was used as a prison ship during Operation Demetrius, an operation

that involved the British Army arresting and interning 342 people suspected of being involved in the IRA en masse, many of whom it transpired had no links with the organisation at all. In 1972 seven IRA internees escaped the prison ship by swimming to shore. In preparation they managed to sow dissent between the two sets of warders on the ship, encouraging those from Northern Ireland to be less diligent as their colleagues from England were being paid £40 more than them. Worried that there were barbed wired entanglements underwater alongside the ship they began to feed a seal and watched where it was able to swim freely alongside the boat, and they spent hours learning the movement of the currents by observing how the rubbish was carried in the lough. On the night of escape they smeared their bodies with boot polish and butter and descended into the water, managing to swim to shore, drive a local bus parked in the port into the centre of Belfast, and from there travel to Dublin where they held a press conference.

Although abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland last year, on 1 April 2020 the regional health ministry missed a deadline to begin providing abortion just as the Covid pandemic hit. The only publicly funded abortion clinics open to people from Northern Ireland, are in Manchester and Liverpool, but during lockdown no direct flights were available.

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new work considering what it means to occupy somewhere—or something—temporarily.



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AFTERWORD

Deborah COWEN

This collection offers an invaluable intervention in prioritizing feminist engagements with logistics. It assembles contributions that address gender and supply chains in creative and compelling ways. Some address the gendered and racialized organization of work within supply chains in specific geographic contexts, while others emphasize the articulation of nationalism and masculinity with investments in logistics infrastructures. Contributors explore how masculinities are cultivated, defended and transformed in such a way that they attach workers to modes of domination and exploitation. Elsewhere, authors interrogate the role of masculinist discourse and heteropatriarchal metaphors of sexual domination in advancing logistical megaprojects and wider capitalist futures. A final and distinct contribution offers a fascinating engagement with the logistics of maritime jurisdiction as strategically navigated by feminist organizers towards a project of reproductive freedom, in what Weber terms, ‘insurgent hydrarchy’.

The multiple lines of flight opened up through the text in fact exceed the masculinist paradigms, relations and traditions that indeed dominate the mainstream work of and work on logistics. Patriarchal ways of inhabiting, knowing and engineering the world permeate the field outside of the academy as firmly as within. And yet, I want to insist that feminist and gender analysis of logistics is already vitally important to the critical interrogation of the field, and further, that there are extraordinary interdisciplinary feminist resources for undertaking this work. In place of the emphasis on lack, we might instead note that key

contributors to the emerging field of critical logistics are largely feminist scholars, organizers and artists - queer and trans, of colour, anti-imperial and Indigenous. This is particularly striking in a field that is concerned with global political economy and transnational circulation, which, as several contributors point out, is dominated by hypermasculine performance. Feminist work in multiple disciplines and fields has also been engaging profoundly logistical sites, relations and struggles for decades. Work engaging imperial circulations, social reproduction, militarized labour including sex trade work, and commodity chains, perhaps especially in Global South, Black and Indigenous feminisms, may not always already be framed as logistical inquiry, but I would suggest that this may itself be part of what a feminist engagement with logistics needs to question and transform.

Understanding the gendered organization of work and labour in logistics industries is a vital and Herculean task, yet there is also room for even more capacious questions. Critical scholars see the power of contemporary logistics far beyond the commercial port or the Amazon distribution centre; it inhabits media, carceral, extractive, urban, AI and education systems, and it has emerged through genealogies of imperial circulation, unfree labour, military discipline, and settler genocide. Logistics has jurisdiction over physical infrastructures and circulatory industries, but also mediates perception and subjection. How might our questions deepen if we were also to ask about the gendering of logistics beyond its formal labour forces? How might we think about the logistification of social reproduction as a critical and fundamentally gendered operation? What about the gendered colonial violence of logistics industries for those that stand in its path? And can we also consider the power of logistics in re/producing binary gender logics? Perhaps most crucially, we might also ask about the creative ways in which logistics is not

only a system of gendered violence but also the terrain for struggles over and through gender. Below, I briefly suggest three established and fertile lines of inquiry (of the myriad possibilities) that point towards this capacious terrain.

GENDERING LOGISTICS AS ‘LIFEWORK’

Feminist scholars of labour, commodity chains and social reproduction have long been engaging topics at the heart of logistics. Beverley Mullings’ (2021) recent and powerful intervention in these debates provides fertile ground for an expansive approach to gendering logistics. Writing outside any narrowly drawn borders of critical logistics, Mullings nevertheless makes a vital contribution to its gendering. Mullings insists that a feminist engagement with contemporary forms of precarity and automation demand a “revitalized” approach to the study of labour geographies, one that, “goes beyond the traditional emphasis on waged workers, on formal employment, and on the global North.” She offers the concept of ‘lifework’ to hold our thinking across boundaries and insists that this is, “a call to recognize the blurred boundaries between reproductive and productive work; the imperative of approaches that recognize the racial character of capitalism, and the agency embedded in community efforts to resist the dehumanizing logic of neo-liberal capitalism.” For Mullings, understanding labour’s precarity in a context of contemporary automation, or what we might call the widespread logistification of labour, requires learning from the lifework of those who have been made to survive conditions that have some connection to these for centuries. At a time of widespread dispossession and the expansion of unfreedom and unfree labour, Mullings argues that there is “much to be learnt about the ways that people in the most precarious of

circumstances sustain themselves outside of formal categories of paid labour.” Mullings is clear that the stakes are precisely “to draw attention to the geographies that have made it possible for racialized people in the Caribbean to shape even the most hostile economic landscapes in ways that sustain their capacity to reproduce themselves.”

When we follow her arguments to the grounded sites of contemporary Caribbean survivance, we are privy to even more immediate insights on renewed ways of gendering logistics. The Caribbean is not only a key geography in the genesis of modern logistics through the brutal violence of transatlantic slavery, but partly because of this, it remains a key site for investigating what we might call a feminist logistics from below. Mullings points to a range of forms of insurgent reproduction that Caribbean women practice to both survive and shape their lifeworlds. This includes the local transformations of spaces in Jamaica, but key here are also diasporic practices of transnational maritime goods movement. Indeed, as women struggled to assemble livelihoods in the neoliberalizing Caribbean states of the 1970s and 80s, many traveled to Canada as domestic workers with restricted rights and freedoms. To support children and other ‘transnational kin’ that they had to leave behind, the women developed practices and strategies, that one scholar termed ‘love in a barrel’ (Crawford 2003). The barrel became a symbol of these spatial strategies, while it is also a profoundly logistical practice that has materially underpinned diasporic Caribbean women’s efforts to sustain loved ones across borders. Trotz (2011) encourages a reading of the barrel as feminist logistics from below when she describes the Caribbean women in Toronto who keep an open barrel in their living rooms to be gradually filled for shipping to Guyana. She explains that the majority of its contents are not actually acquired

locally, but on complex bus junkets to New York organized by these women. Trotz explains how once the barrel is full, it is sealed and shipped to the Caribbean, “with the company that comes to collect it bringing an empty one to take its place.” Crawford (2003) notes that “The barrel is symbolic for Caribbean people in showing how families, mothers in particular, support their children and households in the Caribbean through the remitting of money, consumer goods, and provisions.” Mullings insists that looking to Caribbean women’s lifework can anchor a project of “recognizing the value of activities driven by motives such as care and solidarity, rather than solely profits.” And indeed, a feminist logistics from below rooted in the life of Black Caribbean women which centres care rather than accumulation is surely a feminist engagement with logistics to embrace.

GENDERING IMPERIAL LOGISTICS

Another vital body of feminist scholarship and organizing that offers insights immediately relevant to the project of gendering logistics lies in the work of Indigenous and anti-colonial feminism. While the task of gendering logistics is often taken to mean applying some form of feminist analysis to the formal logistics sector itself, there is another approach on offer that foregrounds the imperial violence of its logics and infrastructures. This is particularly crucial in contemporary struggles over circulatory and extractive infrastructures across many settler colonial states, where intrusions into Indigenous peoples’ lands are provoking powerful resistance and refusal (LaDuke 2020). Here we see an important emphasis on the gendered impacts of logistics industries on the lives of Indigenous communities, with distinct forms of sexual violence perpetrated against Indigenous women and girls. An emerging literature addresses what has long been a critical issue for Indigenous women and communities on

the ground – the ways in which construction projects for oil and gas pipelines or extraction, and other logistical infrastructures bring sexual and colonial violence to communities. ‘Man camps’ – the workcamps that house large groups of male workers are built along the infrastructural corridors of extractive geographies and often bring with them terror and violence associated with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Manuel). Indigenous feminists have also long spoken to the wider gendered ecological violence associated with logistical infrastructures, focusing on their toxicity and the particular impacts they have on reproductive health and water systems (Daigle, Todd).

Not only are these logistical infrastructures associated with gendered forms of violence and ecological harm, we can also see gendered forms of resistance and refusal in land and water protectors’ creative political actions. Dakota scholar Kim Tallbear (2019) has noted the leadership of women and gender non-conforming folks in Indigenous resurgence, and has theorized the relations of care and that fuel its feminism. Women, trans, non-binary and Two Spirit people have been particularly prominent in water protection (cite), while their leadership in the eminently counter-logistical project of blockades is widely known (cite). We might additionally look to the work of Indigenous women and non-binary people in conceptualizing, building and protecting alternative ‘critical infrastructures’, and often as they do the work of contesting colonial logistics. Tlingit land defender and anthropologist Anne Spice has been actively involved in frontline and scholarly work on this precise project. Spice (2016) conceptualizes oil and gas pipelines as ‘invasive infrastructures’ and looks to Indigenous women who work to protect and sustain the ‘critical infrastructures’ of Indigenous medicines and food systems, for example. In a call for more

attention to logistical infrastructure in social movement work, Winona Laduke and I (2020) have termed this kind of feminist assemblage of systems to sustain decolonial life, ‘alimentary infrastructure’.

TRANS/GENDERING LOGISTICS

Already breathing within the field of critical logistics is a focus on the gendered politics of reproduction and the ways in which hegemonic articulations of supply chain capitalism mobilize forms of biological determinism and binary gender that inhere systems’ survival within reproductive heteronormativity. In the imperial genealogies of the field that so many ‘critical logisticians’ trace is also an emphasis on the ways in which the emergence of logistics as a civilian field that increasingly organizes everyday life has particular implications for the very gendered domain of social reproduction. Indeed, tracing the military and corporate encroachment of logistics into everyday life and specifically the practices and relations of provisioning and sustaining, are at once questions of the gendered organization of lifework. A range of explicit questions regarding the gendered dimensions of the militarization and corporatization of social reproduction through the rise of logistics remain to be posed, yet vital provocations have been extended, and If we think again with Mullings on this question, we would have to start by asking about whose lives have long been organized by others’ logistical systems. In other words, within the field of critical logistics questions are being opened up about the very genesis and reproduction of logistical power as a (binary) gendered project of (masculine) imperial power.

This line of inquiry also has the potential to articulate in vibrant and generative ways with other bodies of established and

emerging work on gender, sexuality and circulation. Specifically, themes of movement, mobilities and migration have been fundamental to queer and trans scholarship for some time, addressing questions of travel and tourism (Puar 2002), seafaring and maritime labour (Fajardo 2011), and oceanic geographies of transit and transport (Tinsley 2018). The term ‘queer logistics’ is already popping up in the literature (cite), while the term ‘trans’ has itself been opened to scrutiny with regards the multiple valences of the prefix in notions of movement between or across in the worlds of trans-port and trans-gender. Creative questioning of the multiplicity and materiality of ‘trans’ motion is already underway in some corners with generative reflections on themes of crossing, passing and the movement through different states, spaces and social categories of belonging and becoming. Filmmaker-scholars John Greyson and Chase Joynt elaborated on these provocative questions of gender-in-motion in an interview we conducted for *Society and Space*. Reflecting on – *Murder in Passing* – the path breaking work produced for and screened on Toronto’s subway system, Greyson (director) and Joynt (lead performer) offered invaluable insight on the connections between trans(gender), trans(portation) and trans(it). Joynt questions how we imagine “rights and privileges to map onto bodies? Transgender bodies are transitory, theorized as always moving in space between one point and another. What does it mean to question the transitory nature of the (transitioning) body when the points of departure keep shifting, and the ‘settling ground’ of the destination remains to be seen?”.

These three brief sketches aim to contribute to this vital project of gendering logistics, encouraging an approach within that engages and honours the rich intersectoral and interdisciplinary work of feminist scholars, artists and organizers. These are modes

of circulation and connection that a feminist logistics must embrace.

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AUTHORS' PRESENTATION

JAKE ALIMAHOMED-WILSON

Professor of Sociology at California State University, Long Beach. He is the author of *Solidarity Forever? Race, Gender, and Unionism in the Ports of Southern California* (Lexington Books, 2016), and the editor of *Choke Points* (Pluto, 2018).

CHARMAINE CHUA

Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research and teaching interests are in technologies of globalization, global political economy, infrastructure studies, empire and imperialism, and ocean studies.

DEBORAH COWEN

Professor at the University of Toronto and a Fellow of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. Her work explores how the spaces and infrastructures of everyday life are assembled, reproduced, contested, and transformed. She focusses on questions of circulation and settler colonialism, attending to the co-production of race and space, sexuality and social ordering, and the intimate life of war in ostensibly civilian spaces.

EVELINA GAMBINO

Evelina Gambino is a Ph.D student in the Geography Department at UCL. Her work focuses on large infrastructural projects in the Republic of Georgia.

ELENI KAMPOURI

Postdoctoral Research Fellow at University of Hertfordshire.

IRENE PEANO

Irene Peano holds a PhD in Social Anthropology, obtained from the University of Cambridge, and is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Lisbon, where she works in an ERC-funded project titled “The colour of labour: the racialised lives of migrants” (PI Cristiana Bastos). Throughout her academic career, she has worked on the issue of migrant-labour exploitation and on forms of resistance against it, with a specific focus on sex and farm work, and on their intersections.

HAUDE RIVOAL

Postdoctoral researcher in sociology at Paris 8 University.

EMILIA WEBER

Writer, researcher and sometimes performance maker based in London where she is undertaking doctoral work at UCL.

