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## FREEDOM AFTER NEOLIBERALISM

# Cosmopolitan Risk, Neoliberal Un-Freedom: Transparency and Responsibility in John LeCarré's *The Constant Gardener*

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At the heart of both Kantian cosmopolitanism and liberal capitalism is the belief that they offer the best option for freedom from parochial curtailments of safety and liberty. On the one hand, a cosmopolitan federation of states provides the best option for freeing Europe (and, thus, the argument claims, the globe) from the violence that follows national affiliations and sovereignty. On the other hand, *laissez-faire* economics best ensures individual autonomy and freedom. While one focuses on the universal and the other on the individual, both understand freedom as best emerging from the disappearance of the nation-state. But, alongside both notions of freedom, cosmopolitanism and liberal capitalism both displace risk, by either attempting to eliminate it altogether in global geopolitical harmony or limiting it to an expression of personal decision-making and enterprise. As a result, the risks that accompany the expansion and operation of contemporary global capital tend to have no way to be expressed outside of historically familiar and paternalist colonial language of civilization and personal responsibility. This paper examines how John Le Carré's *The Constant Gardener* provides a way to think about globalized risk and responsibility outside of the limitations of cosmopolitan and capitalist discourses by making visible the differential costs both cosmopolitanism and capitalism impose on bodies and places. I argue that the novel uses explicitly cosmopolitan rhetoric of global ethical and political responsibility to critique the self-centered entrepreneurial rationalism of contemporary neoliberalism and its implications for thinking about risk in a transnational context.

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The first words spoken by his future wife to Justin Quayle, the protagonist of John Le Carré's 2001 novel *The Constant Gardener*, ask him to define 'when a state is not a state' (2001: 143). Quayle, at Cambridge as a representative of the Foreign Office to give a talk on 'Law and Administered Society'—a talk that has been written by someone else who could not attend at the last minute—is flummoxed by this question. He finally offers the following:

[T]hese days, very roughly, the qualifications for being a *civilized state* amount to—electoral suffrage, ah—protection of life and property—um, justice, health and education for all, at least to a certain level—then the maintenance of sound administrative infrastructure—and roads, transport, drains, et cetera—and—what else is there?—ah yes, the equitable collection of taxes. If a state fails to deliver on at least a quorum of the above—then one *has* to say that the contract between state and citizen begins to look pretty *shaky*. (Le Carré, 2001: 145, emphasis in original)

Justin's stuttering description of the role of the state parallels David Harvey's articulation of the role of the state under neoliberalism:

The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. But beyond these the state should not venture. (Harvey, 2007: 2)

Justin's desire for 'justice, health and education for all, at least to a certain level,' despite its qualifications and vagueness, signals an incipient cosmopolitanism not present in Harvey's description. Justin's equivocations—here and elsewhere in the passage—illustrate, on the one hand, that he might harbor more re-distributive

cosmopolitan views than one might expect of a mid-level diplomat and, on the other hand, the ease with which cosmopolitan platitudes are co-opted in service of neoliberal expansion (paralleling the similar co-optation of cosmopolitanism by colonial projects) (Brennan, 1997; Calhoun, 2002; Cheah, 2006)). The substantive difference between Harvey's and Justin's descriptions remains, however, the forthright acknowledgement of market forces. But as Justin's future wife, Tessa, makes clear in a rejoinder about the responsibility to intervene in failed states, international trade cannot be understood outside of market forces: 'You *negotiate* with other countries, don't you? You cut *deals* with them. You legitimize them through *trading* partnerships. Are you telling us that there's one ethical standard for *your* country and another for the rest' (Le Carré, 2001: 146, emphasis in original)? Her reply reveals that discussions of successful and failed states rest on market decisions in ways that Justin does not want to acknowledge with his ongoing investment in imperial diplomacy between 'civilized' states.

These tensions between the neoliberal state, responsibility, and, as the novel unfolds, risk undertaken in restitution of colonial and neocolonial wrongs, are the engine of Le Carré's critique. Tessa deliberately courts risk once she and Justin arrive in Nairobi, escalating the scale of these risks further after she delivers a stillborn child. As understood by both Tessa and the novel, risk is the hinge between the neoliberal status quo (which understands market gains as the only measure of freedom and value) and the demands of responsibility (framed as deliberately cosmopolitan in its scope in the novel). Put differently, and to use the novel's medical rhetoric: if cosmopolitan ideals of shared humanity work to diagnose the ills of globalized neoliberal realpolitik, then risk is imagined as, if not the cure, then as palliative care—and care that is deliberately cosmopolitan in its application.

Cosmopolitan values have long been understood as those most likely to inspire the production of a more secure global public sphere. For Immanuel Kant, for instance, one of the three articles of his vision of global peace is the right to free, cosmopolitan mobility which derives from shared, human inhabitation of limited global space; the right to present oneself to societies different from that of one's birth is one that

'belongs to all mankind in virtue of our common right of possession on the surface of the earth on which, as it is a globe, we cannot be infinitely scattered, and must in the end reconcile ourselves to existence side by side' (Kant, 1903; 138). Cosmopolitan individual mobility—and subsequent hospitality—offers, for Kant, a scaled-down model of the relationship between states, working together for global security: 'In this way far distant territories may enter into peaceful relations with one another. These relations may at last come under the public control of law, and thus the human race may be brought nearer the realisation of a cosmopolitan constitution' (Kant, 1903; 139). For Kant, a cosmopolitan constitution is one that is resolutely liberal and republican: made up of autonomous subjects and nation-states, working together to create and preserve a secure and lasting global peace. The liberal cosmopolitan values he espouses leads to particular practices designed around them, all of which work to make the globe peaceful and safer.

Emerging in response to Kantian philosophy, modern iterations of cosmopolitanism have, at their root, a similar preoccupation with linking cosmopolitan values with the practices necessary for a globally secure life. In its post-World War Two iteration, cosmopolitan theory has thus interrogated the relationship between the subject, the nation-state, and a broader vision of global safety and security. Much of this work indicates a debt to Hannah Arendt, one of the preeminent philosophers of post-World War Two mobility and its link to human rights, particularly her notion of the changing operation of 'the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity' (Arendt, 1968: 298). Moreover, scholars of 'vernacular cosmopolitanisms,' to use Homi Bhabha's phrase, have been particularly interested in refugees and other forms of coerced and forced migration, emphasizing cosmopolitan mobility's connection to dangerous and precarious forms of life (Bhabha, 1996; Mignolo, 2000; Werbner, 2008). This strand of cosmopolitan theory, heavily influenced by the work of postcolonial writers and scholars, has typically been skeptical of forms of cosmopolitanism understood as both too easily amenable to global capital and too quick to dismiss the contemporary relevance of the nation-state (Gilroy, 2005; Rao, 2010; Robbins, 2012). Indeed, cosmopolitanism

has often been characterized, in vernacular cosmopolitanism, as a negative force that seeks to obscure and exnominate the hierarchies and power imbalances endemic to the global expansion of neoliberalism. Cosmopolitanism has, thus, been uneasily complicit with imperialism—a practice visible in Justin's semi-cosmopolitan defence of the neoliberal and imperial state quoted at the beginning of this article. Yet, as Derrida's (2002) consideration of cosmopolitan hospitality demonstrates, cosmopolitanism offers a compelling paradigm for offering forms of self-consciously global refuge that explicitly engage with the questions of precarity and responsibility central to this article. In other words, if the neoliberal externalization of risk has often couched itself in cosmopolitan terms (for instance, universal access to entrepreneurial self-sufficiency), we might also find cosmopolitan values and practices useful to interrupt this same externalization of risk.

Indeed, over the last 50 years or so, the rise and expansion of neoliberal financialization has seen particularly economic risks as the route to the biggest possible gain for the biggest possible cross-section of global society. The cosmopolitan risks described in *The Constant Gardener* act as a link between these two conversations. The novel thus imagines a globality that brings together the discursive operation of neoliberal financialization with aspirations for a universal, cosmopolitan humanity. If neoliberal freedom entails that 'you are free insofar as you assume the *way of life* (consumption, work, public spending, taxes, etc.) compatible with reimbursement' (Lazzarato, 2012: 31, emphasis in original), then the cosmopolitan risks at play in this novel, which do not presume reimbursement (and, indeed, lead to Tessa's and Justin's violent deaths) are a rejection of this modality of freedom in favor of a recognition of ethical indebtedness. As Justin observes of Tessa, 'she was born rich but that never impressed her. She had no interest in money. She needed far less of it than the aspiring classes. But she knew she had no excuse for being indifferent to what she saw and heard. *She knew she owed*' (Le Carré, 2001: 155, emphasis added). *The Constant Gardener* illustrates that this recognition of debt provides a pathway to risky cosmopolitan acts that neither replicate the privatizing logic of neoliberalism nor conform to lingering colonial hierarchies.

As illustrated in *The Constant Gardener*, thinking about cosmopolitan risk is not to break altogether from the practices and values of either neoliberalism or colonialism; it is, instead, to turn these discourses in on themselves. Describing the change in capitalism's tone, following the 2008 crisis, Maurizio Lazzarato observes that 'the dedication, subjective motivation and *the work on the self* preached by management since the 1980s have become an injunction to *take upon oneself* the costs and risks of the economic and financial disaster. The population must take charge of everything business and the Welfare State 'externalize' onto society, debt first of all' (Lazzarato, 2012: 9, emphasis in original). Similarly, Miranda Joseph notes that 'the combination of privatization and personal responsabilization with "the financialization of daily life"... requires us all to manage our own lives through financial accounting practices' (Joseph, 2014: xi). Paul Langley demonstrates that 'neo-liberal government... stimulates, promotes, and shapes subjects who, self-consciously and responsibly, further their own security and freedom through the market in general and via calculative investment in the risks of the financial markets in particular' (Langley, 2008: 55). As these critics make clear, the nexus of risk and responsibility is one way in which neoliberal 'regime[s] of capital accumulation and [regimes] of biopolitical governmentality' intertwine at the scale of the individual subject (M Joseph, 2014: xi; cf. LiPuma and Lee, 2004; Joseph, 2013; Brown 2015).<sup>1</sup>

The model of cosmopolitan risk proposed in *The Constant Gardener* follows from these patterns of behavior demanded of the subject under contemporary neoliberal modalities, but also self-consciously attends to the way the subject operates within a web of global connections and practices. Yet, where neoliberalism posits ever more stringent financial responsabilization (at the level of the individual, at least) as the pathway to freedom, *The Constant Gardener* uses this demand to foreground ethical forms of responsabilization. It thus defamiliarizes neoliberal values and practices—transparency and responsabilization especially—to emphasize another form of global connection and success. *The Constant Gardener* asks its readers to reexamine the components of neoliberal risk taking and management: the transparent information

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<sup>1</sup> LiPuma and Lee particularly emphasize the global operation of risk under neoliberalism.

necessary for taking rational risks and the personal responsibility to accept the consequences of these risks. These components are both shown to obfuscate the operation of corporate and state power, and the global extension of these forms of power. Cosmopolitan risk offers a lens through which to re-focus these practices and values that already circulate widely, but in such a way as to posit social justice as the organizing principle. While the seemingly monolithic and inescapable nature of neoliberalism might lend itself to a feeling of the impossibility of critique, let alone action, what this novel illustrates are the forms of critique and mediation already present in the practices and expectations that suffuse contemporary life. Indeed, neoliberalism might here provide the very vocabulary and structures that allow for a more equitable model for the distribution of risk, wealth, or resources.<sup>2</sup> This may not be the kind of revolutionary overhaul that might seem theoretically more appealing to leftists and other critics, but it does provide a contingent opportunity from which to build new global solidarities and alignments.

### **Transparent Information and Calculating Risks**

One of the technologies of risk management that administers the relationship between individual and population, the exception and the norm, is the emphasis on predictive calculations that Ian Hacking tracks over the last 150 years. In tracing the social rise of chance at the expense of determinism, he observes that, through the concomitant rise of the norm, 'we use variation from the normal today in order to relieve a sense of responsibility' (Hacking, 1990: 168). Similarly, he notes that 'by covering opinion with a veneer of objectivity, we replace judgment by computation' (Hacking, 1990: 4). Miranda Joseph observes that the processes of statistical accounting central to contemporary risk management do not just manage populations, but 'they also operate at an ideological level, inviting subjects to recognize themselves as members of those populations, to 'become statistics' through their own practices' (Joseph, 2014: 94). Joseph notes, via Kathleen Woodward, that 'we experience and

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<sup>2</sup> I follow, here, from James Ferguson's *Give a Man a Fish* (2015) and Aihwa Ong's *Neoliberalism as Exception* (2006) where they argue that a monolithic and blanket critique of neoliberalism works to obscure its more ambivalent operations, particularly in the Global South.



respond to risk' by 'a one-two punch' of the 'interpellat[ion] and implicat[ion]... of number and narrative' (Joseph, 2014: 94). While the protagonists of *The Constant Gardener* grapple most directly with information passed on via narrative (rather than statistic), this 'interpellation and implication' dyad is replicated both in the mode of ideological control Joseph points to and as a means of defamiliarizing this same project by imagining it as a pathway for resistance. Woodward theorizes that the contemporary 'society of the statistic' produces a particular feeling: 'statistical stress or statistical boredom, which is related to it, can be understood as constituting a particular structure of feeling, one that discloses the society of the statistic in which we live today—a mediatized, marketized, and medicalized culture in which the notion of being at risk has assumed dominant proportions' (Woodward, 2009: 212).

This emphasis on prediction aligns with and relies upon broader neoliberal aspirations towards full transparency. As Clare Birchall notes, 'as a proactive implementation at moments of crisis or moral failure, a visible response to public disquiet, transparency has attractive, palliative qualities for politicians and CEOs who want to be seen *doing* rather than *reflecting*' (Birchall, 2013: 77, emphasis in original). Yet the ideological formation of transparency moves beyond governmental and corporate spheres to 'position citizens as individually culpable for the data that transparency exposes' (Birchall, 2013: 83). While this might begin to suggest a democratic loosening of the reins of power, 'this new requirement of citizen vigilance transfers responsibility (to catch wrongdoing) onto the citizen' (Birchall, 2013: 83). As Wendy Brown observes, the practices of neoliberal governmentality 'substitute ever-evolving new management techniques for top-down rule in state, firm, and subject alike. Centralized authority, law, policing, rules, and quotas are replaced by networked, team-based, practice-oriented techniques emphasizing incentivization, guidelines, and benchmarks' (Brown, 2015: 34). Given this managing 'requirement' for vigilance, it is not surprising that popular cultural forms are teeming with amateur detectives who reveal the lingering opacity surrounding both the state and the corporation. This same sense of the need for vigilance makes itself visible in *The Constant Gardener*, organized as it is around characters who stumble upon

scenarios where transparency is revealed to be anything but. If 'economic pressures encourage the trend towards greater transparency [as] investors want to invest their scarce resources in countries where they have credible information about risks and rewards [and where they can] predict what the investment climate will look like in the future and ascertain that the government upholds its commitments' (Lord, 2006: 9), this entrepreneurial logic of risk, reward, and global investment is turned on its head in Le Carré's novel.

Transparency does not here name a practice for searching out sites for capital investment, but, instead, locations for ethical action and contingent communities. Moreover, *The Constant Gardener* reveals the way that transparent knowledge *already* circulates among those who possess social and economic power. Rather than acting as a tool for democratic expansion, this knowledge provides both the currency for in-group social advancement and a site for the re-entrenchment of imperial control. If neoliberal claims of transparency seem to 'deliver raw material, "original" data and information free from human distortion and the attendant risks of re-presentation' (Birchall, 2013: 80), *The Constant Gardener* consistently reminds us that this raw material and data is neither as initially opaque as it is alleged to be nor as 'free from human distortion.' In other words, it reminds us that actions become risky for our protagonists when they are required to excavate information deliberately buried by corporate and governmental power structures and thus to interrupt the smooth operation of power in response to already-knowable information. The novel illustrates, then, how the calculative information needed to take risky actions is situated at the intersection of knowing and not-knowing, seeing and not-seeing, transparency and opacity. This ambivalence undercuts the pervasive and bulldozing logic of neoliberal transparency by demonstrating its uneven operation. Despite popular claims that global subjects require *further* transparency in order to act, the forms of cosmopolitan risk depicted in these novels highlight that risk is a matter of will, not knowledge; that in fact narratives of 'further examination' are often alibis for inaction in the face of incontrovertible suffering. Le Carré emphasizes the way this alibi follows imperial logics and personal ethical failings.

Concerns about transparency and its effects are central to *The Constant Gardener*, which follows Justin's attempts to solve the murder of Tessa. He uncovers the collusion of the British and Kenyan governments, and the pharmaceutical corporation ThreeBees, in the circulation of a tuberculosis drug (Dypraxa) with obscured negative side effects—information Tessa knew and threatened to make public, leading to her death. And in following the global path of the information Tessa discovered between, among other places, Kenya, Germany, the UK, Canada, and Italy, Justin too ends up murdered. The anxieties of transparency are thus made most visible in *The Constant Gardener* around the various investigations into Tessa's murder. When asked about what instigated Tessa's crusade, by the London police officers in Nairobi assigned to scrutinize her death, Justin replies that 'she wanted to pull back from too much freedom' (Le Carré, 2001: 154). He goes on to explain that this desire for less freedom was catalyzed by the complacency and caginess of the British Foreign Office and the network of public-private power of which they are but one node:

'So what changed [Tessa's mind about having too much freedom]?' Lesley asked.

'We did,' Justin retorted with fervor. He meant the other *we*. We her survivors. We the guilty ones. 'With our complacency,' he said, lowering his voice... 'We who are paid to see what's going on, and prefer not to. We who walk past life with our eyes down.' (Le Carré, 2001: 154–55, emphasis in original)

He goes on to note that 'in my profession, studied ignorance is an art form ... it was hard for me, from then on, to walk down Stanley Street without ... the other image in my mind' (Le Carré, 2001: 157). Justin's reflections both before and after Tessa's death illustrates the way concerns about transparency circulate around the particular knowledge and practices disavowed by the diplomatic corps. This model of 'studied ignorance' suggests that knowledge is already transparent and available but beside the point: diplomats are 'paid to see what's going on,' but 'prefer not to.' We can hear the echo of Melville's *Bartleby* (Melville, 2016) and his rejection of the demands of capitalist busy-ness in the diplomats' preference 'not to,' but, rather than a critique

of capital's demands, here this is a disinterest in the messy reality and consequences of capital. Tessa, in Justin's summation, 'distinguished between pain observed and pain shared. Pain observed is journalistic pain. It's diplomatic pain. It's television pain, over as soon as you switch off your beastly set. Those who watch suffering and do nothing about it, in her book, were little better than those who inflicted it. They were the bad Samaritans.' (Le Carré, 2001: 159)

While this has clear application to thinking about risk and responsibility, it also raises questions about the operation and purpose of neoliberal transparency. In other words, does the transparent visibility of the suffering of others lead to cosmopolitan risk? Tessa and ultimately, Justin claim that transparency around suffering without concomitant action is ultimately a gesture of bad faith. Transparency, like empathy, after all, can also be 'switched off' like a television in the face of claims of national or market security. It does not, then, demand response, but simply provides for the accumulation of information. Cosmopolitan risk, instead, puts this information to work by centering cosmopolitanism around practices rather than identities or feelings. Tessa and Justin become cosmopolitan when they start acting, not just when they begin to empathize with other global subjects.

Yet Tessa and Justin are not un-invested in transparency; it is indeed Justin's repetition of Tessa's search for transparency that animates the entire novel. *The Constant Gardener*, then, suggests the inescapability of calls for transparency as a kind of justice: transparency appears to bring wrongdoing to light, making justice and reparations possible. Yet as this narrative unfolds we see its limits: it might lead to actions that work to invert the entrepreneurial demands of neoliberal risk in ways that recognize a cosmopolitan shared humanity, but, in *The Constant Gardener*, these risks ultimately maintain the individualism of neoliberal subjectivity, just without the attendant investment in financial accumulation. Justin's quest to gather knowledge against and about the effects of Dypraxa and ThreeBees is primarily a quest to recover the information already collected by Tessa and Arnold, suggesting a multi-level search for transparency (he wants to make visible both corporate malfeasance and the knowledge Tessa and Arnold had about it). He shifts from his passive blindness as

a member of the British diplomatic corps to being an active seeker of truth and taker of risks. Yet even this can be read as a melancholic gesture to resist the loss of Tessa. Justin must—almost compulsively—retrace Tessa's steps and actions; he reanimates her through repetition. Indeed, while his actions are framed, to some degree, as an attempt to find and bring to justice her murderers, he ultimately loses this specific interest, becoming a martyr at the site of her death (in part, this is in response to the varied levels of guilt held by many people: Tessa is murdered by many, not just those who physically kill her). Justin's compulsion to repeat thus ultimately occludes any deaths that are not Tessa's. His need to make Tessa live by making the knowledge she acquired transparent is increasingly posited as a reflection of an epic love story in a way that situates Justin's actions within a neoliberal frame of romance as self-realization.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this move on the novel's part to contain Justin's actions within a familiar narrative of romantic love downplays not only the cosmopolitan development he undergoes, but it, in some sense, ironically gives credence to the narrative surrounding Justin developed by the British Foreign Office: that, in his grief, he loses his grip on reality. His actions are those of a grief-stricken widower, not those of a man who belatedly realizes his own complicity in global oppressions and violence.

More significantly, this way of reading the novel does further discursive violence to the dead Africans who populate it, particularly Wanza and Arnold (Tessa's friends and co-conspirators). These deaths become incidental—no matter either the violence with which they are committed, or their role in a larger pattern of globally unmourned, unnoticed African deaths.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Ghita, a friend of Tessa's and contract

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<sup>3</sup> This is particularly emphasized in the film adaptation with its tagline 'Love. At any Cost.'

<sup>4</sup> Following Judith Butler, the question of which bodies are recognized as grievable is tied to a simultaneous recognition of our own bodily vulnerability, emerging out of risks with cosmopolitan reach:

We have all lost in recent decades from AIDS, but there are other losses that afflict us, from illness and from global conflict; and there is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization. This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies. (Butler, 2004: 20)

Yet, as she goes on to ask, 'at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable' (Butler, 2004: 38)?

employee at the British Consulate, is the one who most visibly reacts to the brutality of Arnold's death, when the facts are revealed to her and Justin—suggesting that it is outside, in some sense, of Justin's interests. Moreover, the brutality of Arnold's death is connected explicitly and repeatedly to his homosexuality, suggesting that his death emerges out of a pre-modern Kenyan homophobia; in contrast, Tessa's murder is represented as the responsibility of a resolutely contemporary and transnational corporate criminality. The novel generally resists all too familiar depictions of Africans as less civilized than Europeans and North Americans,<sup>5</sup> depicting the predatory capitalism of ThreeBees and the 'Moi's Boys' as being both the result of lingering colonial inequalities and the 'natural' effects of unregulated neoliberal economic globalization. Arnold's death, and the justification of it, therefore, strikes a jarring note. In the shift to globe-trotting romance, these deaths become nearly invisible as the narrative can only focus on Justin's need to recover the lost love object.

Transparency, here the reporting of facts necessary for making the decisions that make both risk and ethics possible, is insufficient as a route to any meaningful sense of shared collective life and responsibility. The transparent knowledge that neoliberalism claims as a sufficient response to moments of failure, even disaster, is shown in this novel as merely revealing information that is already available. Cosmopolitan commitments to a global humanity become possible, instead, as Justin shifts from simply making information transparent (pain observed) to becoming enmeshed and self-consciously invested in concerns about responsibility (pain shared).

### **Responsibility and the After-Effects of Risk**

If transparency as it operates both under neoliberal orthodoxy and in *The Constant Gardener* produces ambiguous effects, it nonetheless remains imaginatively central and necessary as a tool of neoliberal risk-management. In order for risks to appear as reasonable and productive, risk takers must have access to transparent knowledge in

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<sup>5</sup> The film does not entirely resist this narrative of civilizational hierarchies. The Sudanese that attack Lorbeer's refugee camp at the end of the film are depicted as almost pre-historical invaders. This scene does not appear in the novel.

order to act (though this calls into question how risky these neoliberal risks actually are). Transparency, then, is understood to help us make decisions about taking risks; but what about after these risks have been taken? Risk begets personal responsibility in most formulations of it: the individual takes the risk, based on their examination of available information, and bears the responsibility, good or bad. The process, from start to finish, is streamlined to what is essentially its lowest common denominator: the individual. But as the particular systems at the heart of *The Constant Gardener* highlight, limiting risks to the individual alone is a fantasy perpetrated by the power formations at play, by individuals who imagine themselves as solipsistically central, and by parochial elisions of risk's global component.

Le Carré shifts away from the narrowly individualist focus of entrepreneurial risk, with its emphasis on risk as a pathway to accumulation, to focus on an ethics of cosmopolitically responsible pursuit. The conceptualization of this pursuit deliberately resists either the imperative of health central to biopower or 'being a risk taker and/or risk manager [as] a central component of entrepreneurial subjectivity' (Joseph, 2014: 95).<sup>6</sup> Instead, risky acts are imagined here as the only responsible way to account for one's already existing position as a global subject; responsibility is understood as a scenario where 'all security actors [understood by Le Carré as all humans] bear a responsibility to consider the global impact of their decisions' (Burke, 2013: 14). These are deliberately cosmopolitan notions of responsibility. Neoliberal freedom is a further expansion of liberal autonomy, envisioning 'a society, [where] freedom has nothing to say about what an individual does with his freedom; it is not an all-embracing ethic. Indeed, a major aim of the liberal is to leave the ethical problem for the individual to wrestle with' (Friedman, 2002: 12). *The Constant Gardener* transforms this vision of freedom disinterested in collective ethics to highlight the subject's inescapable role as a responsible member of global humanity through characters' ability to access transparent knowledge and their awareness that said knowledge requires response.

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<sup>6</sup> On health and biopower see Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy* (2009) and Nikolas Rose's *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007).

Understanding this awareness of the cosmopolitan scope of risk and the necessity for thinking responsibility beyond the individual and the nation marks one way of considering particularly contemporary risks and attending to the transition from welfare state risk management to neoliberalism to some potential mutation beyond. As Anthony Giddens traces this transition, he notes that:

The welfare state... developed as a security state, a way of protecting against risk, where collective rather than private insurance was necessary. Like early forms of private insurance, it was built on the presumption of external risk. External risk can be fairly well calculated – one can draw up actuarial tables and decide on that basis how to insure people. Sickness, disablement, unemployment were treated by the welfare state as ‘accidents of fate’, against which insurance should be collectively provided. (Giddens, 1999: 4)

He goes on to observe that ‘the crisis of the welfare state is not purely fiscal, it is a crisis of risk management in a society dominated by a new type of risk’ (Giddens, 1999: 7). Without Giddens naming it as such, this crisis also reflects neoliberal shifts away from the collective to the individual: ‘when people have a more active orientation to their lives, they also have to have a more active orientation to risk management, so it is not surprising that those who can afford it tend to opt out of existing welfare systems’ (Giddens, 1999: 7). Giddens’ narrative, with its internalized neoliberal assumptions (the activity of enterprise vs. the passivity of welfare, for instance), is one that, elsewhere, highlights the particular global element of changing relationships with risk: the rise of ‘manufactured risks,’ ‘risk situations which we have very little historical experience of confronting [and which are] directly influenced by... intensifying globalisation’ (Giddens, 2003: 26). For Giddens, ‘living in a global age means coping with a diversity of new situations of risk’ (Giddens, 2003: 35).

This new ‘global age’ is brought to the forefront in Ulrich Beck’s term, ‘world risk society’ (1992), and its description of risks (such as nuclear war and climate change) that cannot be accounted for by either national or strictly individualistic accounts of risk, both in terms of causality and responsibility. For Beck, the risks that particularly



characterize 'second modernity' (a period more or less coterminous with the rise and entrenchment of neoliberalism) are cosmopolitan: they demand global thinking for understanding creation, reach, and response. His evocation of cosmopolitanism points to his understanding that it is a necessary response to global realities: 'as recognition of the risks springing from global interdependencies increase, so too do the compulsion, the opportunity, but also resistance ... to arriving at cosmopolitan solutions' (Beck, 2006: 22). The cosmopolitan responsibilities of contemporary risk-management, therefore, are posed by Beck (and implicitly by Giddens) as the only possible responses to threats and dangers that exist transnationally. Yet, as Beck notes repeatedly, the cosmopolitan possibilities of risk are ambiguous, just as liable to reinforce territoriality as promote openness. Beck's distinction between 'cosmopolitanism' and 'really existing cosmopolitanization' may be useful here: 'cosmopolitanism is a conscious and voluntary choice, and often that of an elite. The concept 'cosmopolitanization' is designed to draw attention to the fact that the becoming cosmopolitan of reality is also, and even primarily, a function of coerced choices or a side effect of unconscious decisions' (Beck, 2006: 19). He goes on to clarify that:

'Cosmopolitanization' in this sense means latent cosmopolitanism, *unconscious* cosmopolitanism, *passive* cosmopolitanism which shapes reality as side effects of global trade or global threats such as climate change, terrorism or financial crises. My life, my body, my 'individual existence' become part of another world, of foreign cultures, religions, histories and global interdependencies, without my realizing or expressly wishing it. (Beck, 2006: 19, emphasis in original)

This notion of 'actually existing cosmopolitanization' suggests the inescapability of cosmopolitan connections (for Beck, primarily centered on risk) but also the inadequacy of typical notions of nation-state sovereignty and personal responsibility. It is easy to see, however, the overlap between this mode of cosmopolitanization and neoliberal divestment from the state. Beck's call for 'global communities—at least *ad*

*hoc* ones for the historical moment' (Beck, 1996: 20, emphasis in original)—has the potential to overlap with the NGO-ization of global politics and humanitarianism, as much as it creates real political alternatives to the statist system and its corporate analogues. How, then, to understand an awareness of cosmopolitan risks and responsibilities that do not just further minimize the role of the state? Indeed, Justin's early definition of failed states inadvertently highlights the centrality of the state's responsibility to its citizens—but emphasizes infrastructural operation and maintenance (echoing Chicago School understandings of the state as umpire in the game, not a player<sup>7</sup>). Justin's emphasis on infrastructure in contrast to Tessa's ethical imperative is shown to be hollow in the face of state sponsorship of violence at home and abroad. Thus *The Constant Gardener* asks, directly and indirectly, how, once one is aware of the scope of particular threats and dangers exposed in the transparent expansion of knowledge, might one understand personal risk and responsibility? And, more importantly, how might one act?

Common and persistent in *The Constant Gardener* are Justin's assertions about decision-making and its consequences; he claims either that he did not know the details or depth of the violence surrounding him or, if he did know, that he was unsure of the most effective way to act. Justin exists in a space characterized by stark oppositions between knowing and not-knowing, acting and not-acting, framed by the language of safety and protection. Justin's desire for safety and protection—from physical and mental/emotional threats—seems, on one hand, eminently reasonable; on the other hand, the comparisons set up in the text between him and other characters who are forced to act in risky ways reveal this desire as not only impossible, but reliant upon privileges he does not wish to acknowledge fully and responsibilities he seeks to deny.

The first chapters of *The Constant Gardener*, told from the perspective of Sandy Woodrow, Justin's immediate superior in the British High Commission in Nairobi, crystallize this dynamic that runs throughout the novel, opposing those who research

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<sup>7</sup> Both Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (2007) and Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* (2002), foundational theorizations of neoliberalism, make versions of this claim.

and those who take risks. This contrast maps itself through the binary between those who see the world as they want to (in a romanticized, idealized fashion), and those who know it as it transparently is (here, cynical and hard-bitten). Research and reflection is thus, paradoxically, set up by Sandy as irrational; or, at least, not as rational as risk-taking, which is posed as without reflexivity. In Sandy's world-view, men of action are emblems of masculine rationality; indeed, his first description of Justin highlights the latter's emotional and nurturing qualities, traditionally coded as feminine: 'on the windowsill at Justin's left stood a line of potted plants that he was nurturing' (Le Carré, 2001: 19). Sandy notices these plants in Justin's office; meanwhile Justin studies the graphs he has posted on the walls of his office.<sup>8</sup> These graphs, 'titled RELATIVE INFRASTRUCTURES 2005–2010 and purported, so far as [Sandy] could make out from where he stood, to predict the future prosperity of African nations' (Le Carré, 2001: 19), and their predictive calculations (the novel was published in 2001, so these are calculations that look significantly into the future of the novel's time), are discursively linked by Sandy with Justin's nurturing of 'jasmine and balsam' (Le Carré, 2001: 19). Per Sandy's descriptions, the predictive and calculative research Justin does is no different in terms of efficacy than his interest in ornamental gardening; it makes things look better but has no larger purpose than the aesthetic. Sandy's perspective on the situation is inflected by both his own infatuation with Justin's murdered wife and his own self-importance, but it is not inaccurate. Justin's preoccupation with predictive research has indeed led to his removal from the world outside his office; this is made clear in the metaphorical work done by the plants he tends, for instance, as they are not native to Nairobi, suggesting a nostalgic investment in English gentility rather than an engagement with his actual time and location. While being interrogated by the British Foreign

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<sup>8</sup> These distinctions, as made by Sandy, are, on some level, ironized by his monstrous self-satisfaction and sense of self-promotion. His underestimation of both Tessa and Justin reveals him as remarkably short-sighted and an ultimately unreliable narrator, suggesting, eventually, the way neoliberal orthodoxies are not as transparent as imagined as they obscure behaviour that rejects economic self-interest. Nonetheless, as readers, we do not fully know this yet in these first chapters. And while Woodrow's assessment of Justin is shown to be inaccurate, his descriptions of Coleridge, the High Commissioner, and Tim Donohue, the spy, retain a good deal of validity throughout.

Office on his return to England, Justin is asked '*how*, in reality, [he] remained *totally* ignorant of [Tessa's] *activities*—her inquiries—her... meddling... [was he] really saying she told [him] nothing, *showed* [him] nothing, *shared* nothing' (Le Carré, 2001: 203, emphasis in original). While the interrogator finds 'that awfully hard to believe,' Justin asserts that 'it's what happens when you put your head in the sand' (Le Carré, 2001: 203). Given Justin's investment in the research he does for the embassy, it is difficult to categorize him as fully ignorant of the world; yet, when it comes to actionable information, his head is indeed in the sand. Research and rationality, action and irrationality, therefore, do not align in quite the ways their definitions would typically suggest. Nor, given the horrific violence of Tessa's death, is rational action a path to freedom understood as personal bodily autonomy.

These tensions continue throughout the novel, particularly in Sandy's descriptions of his fellow embassy officials, Coleridge and Donohue, which emphasize their relative disinclination to act on information. Coleridge, for instance, is 'a hollowed, hyperintelligent man, an eternal student of something [yet] had somehow remained stranded on the brink of manhood' (Le Carré, 2001: 25)—reiterating the claim that research prohibits achieving the heights of masculine risk-taking. Donohue, similarly, 'looked even sicker than usual... sunken, colorless cheeks. Nests of crumbling skin below the drooping yellowed eyes. The straggling mustache clawed downward in comic despair' (Le Carré, 2001: 8–9). Both men are characterized as hollowed-out, occupying peripheral masculinities, either through the appearance of youth or extreme age. On hearing of Tessa's murder, Donohue responds with 'probing stares' (Le Carré, 2001: 17), while Coleridge is in tears (Le Carré, 2001: 25). Both Coleridge and Donohue, therefore, are understood as gatherers of information—but in such a way that reflects their own emasculated decrepitude. Coleridge, in his reliance on colonial-era notions of English civility and good governance, attempts to address Tessa's death through gentility and the appropriate (though unofficial) bureaucratic channels. Yet, despite all of Coleridge's looking into things, he effects no change. Indeed, at the end of the novel, he disappears 'into the catacombs of official Whitehall [of which] little was said, but much implied' (Le Carré, 2001: 538). Donohue, who collects information in the service of the British intelligence service

and, implicitly, props up corporate and corrupt regimes, is a spectral figure who acts as a haunting reminder of the uses to which knowledge might be put as he is left beholden to his corporate overseers. Throughout these early pages of the novel, action which wants to follow the recognizable bureaucratic pathways to success and transparency reflects a childish and emasculated belief in rules and routines that can only reinforce the status quo for already existing ideological formations.

Actions that do not replicate bureaucratic success but, instead, produce an awareness of their global impact become visible when Justin attempts to figure out the causes of Tessa's death and disrupt the complacency of the corporate-neo-colonial complex. The ultimate implication of the novel is that action, framed as the necessary and responsible response to global circumstances, can only follow from research, which has been framed by Sandy as irrational because it does not follow the route to personal advancement. Yet these are actions that do not lead to the advancement of the autonomous neoliberal entrepreneur, driven ever forward in search of accumulation (per Friedman's definition of freedom), for this information is shown to be risky *and* costly. On one hand, those who are aware of the collusion between transnational pharmaceutical companies and Kenyan dictatorships, with the support of the British and other governments—and acknowledge the ethical issues surrounding it—end up demoted, at best, and murdered, at worst. And, on the other hand, Justin is required to spend his fortune travelling around the globe to securely acquire the information lost with Tessa's death. While we might hear echoes of the old adage, 'you have to spend money to make money,' there is no attempt by Justin—or Tessa—to transform this expense into something economically or even socially profitable to themselves (neither gain any social capital from their actions, and, in fact, lose much of what they have). Yet the gathering of information is very much secondary to the sense of urgency and necessity that specific actions must be taken; that to understand one's allegiance and responsibility to humanity as a whole, rather than along narrowly configured national or class lines, requires acts, not just intangible knowledge or feelings.

Like Justin's movement from the hermetic reality of diplomatic life, risky cosmopolitanism requires of its privileged subjects a rejection of the neoliberal freedom to endlessly accumulate alongside other similarly accumulating subjects.

Rather, it demands what might look like the ‘un-freedom’ found in putting one’s safety—and, thus, potential for future accumulation—at risk for those who disproportionately bear the costs of contemporary life. Cosmopolitan risk and its corollary, neoliberal un-freedom, then, offers a tentative and contingent response to Butler’s provocative series of questions in *Precarious Life*:

If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? Could the experience of a dislocation of First World safety not condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally?... This can be a point of departure [from which we might] critically evaluate and oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more grievable than others. (Butler, 2004: 30)

By rejecting neoliberal modes of personal freedom as the organizing principle of social life, we might begin to imagine other ways of establishing global communal life in the face of the violence and risks with which it is marked.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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