

THE BULLSHIT HIT JOB: DAVID GRAEBER AND THE HAU “COUP”

Analytical summary of 93 pages of email correspondence between David Graeber, Ilana Gershon, Sarah Green, one postdoc and one graduate student, in addition to messages from Marshall Sahlins, Marilyn Strathern, Sean Dowdy and members of the anthropology departments of SOAS and Stanford, from November 11 to December 25, 2017, regarding Giovanni da Col and HAU.

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MEMORANDUM

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Page references “(p.1)”, “(p. 93)” are to the PDF of the compiled email threads provided by an unnamed donor. To consult this PDF (“[GRAEBER COUP EMAILS 93 pages](#)”) click on this Google Drive [link](#). The comments left by “narrator” on the PDF are from the donor. My email is enrique.martino@gmail.com #haumemo.

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1. The Three Gs (Graeber, Gershon and Green)

Imagine one of the most famous scholars in the world directly contacts a small group of precarious and unemployed junior scholars and offers them the editorship and “collective” ownership of a successful academic journal in exchange for taking part in an elaborate conspiracy involving the symbolic and reputational assassination of the editor. In June 2018, a public scandal erupted on social media through the hashtag “#hautalk” concerning the journal *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* and its editor-in-chief, Giovanni da Col. But the origin of this scandal went back eight months, when an extraordinary plot was hatched by a handful of notable anthropologists and their followers to carefully orchestrate it. David Graeber, an LSE professor and former editor-at-large of HAU (2012-2017), inaugurated this plot in November 2017 in a group email with the subject heading “Coup d’état” (p. 1), which led to a lengthy correspondence among the participants, which comprise the 93-page PDF document [attached](#). A former participant of this “coup” sent me a copy of the correspondence after listening to Justin Murphy’s interview with me, “[HAU did this happen? With Digital Editor Enrique Martino](#)”. The present memorandum is a summary analysis of and excerpts from these “Graeber coup emails”. If you are unfamiliar with the history of HAU and #hautalk, 2011-2018, I recommend first reading the section “brief account” on pages 7 to 11.

According to Graeber, it was crucial to find a way to force the “removal of Gio, by whatever means necessary” (p. 58). The core of active participants included Sarah Green, a professor at the University of Helsinki, former chair of HAU’s External Advisory Board (2013-2017) and current president of the European Association of Social Anthropology (EASA); Ilana Gershon, a professor at Indiana University and former HAU associate editor (2016-2017), Sean Dowdy, a psychotherapist and assistant professor at the University of Chicago and former HAU managing editor (2014-2016), and three junior former members of HAU’s editorial team who were actively recruited and instructed by the tenured faculty. I have kept the latter anonymous (“x”, “xx”, “xxx”), according to the wishes of the unnamed donor.

The emails surrounding the self-described coup against HAU and its editor reveal the genesis of the rumours that would eventually form the basis for the three main allegations against Giovanni da Col: physical assault of HAU staff; sexual harassment of female staff; and the embezzlement of HAU funds. These allegations – all of them subsequently found to be without any substance – were enumerated or insinuated in the statements made public in June 2018: David Graeber’s June 11 “[HAU Apology](#)”; two anonymous open letters, “[Former HAU Staff 7](#)” and “[haustaffletter.wordpress](#)” published June 13 and 14, respectively; the June 18 petition (“[Public Statement on HAU](#)”) by Ilana Gershon, David Graeber, Sarah Green and Keir Martin; and Colleen Flaherty’s article “[A Journal Implodes](#)”, published in *Inside Higher Education*. The accusations were taken at face value, reproduced and circulated in some of the discipline’s most influential institutions and outlets, including an editorial note by Deborah Thomas for the *American Anthropologist*, entitled “[Leadership and Accountability](#)”.

The email threads show a coordinated and increasingly desperate effort by the group to remove Giovanni da Col from the position of editor-in-chief of HAU, starting with Graeber’s expression of an “intense desire to kill him” (p. 1), a personal wish that soon morphed into a moral assertion, “this person should be killed” (p. 4). In a [blog](#) comment, Graeber claimed that “around November 20” 2017 he was “contacted by former HAU workers” about “allegations of bullying” by Giovanni da Col. The veracity of this is questionable, however, since Graeber actively [contacted](#) “xx” in early November via a twitter direct message and offered to “help” him by sharing “the story” of da Col’s “bullying/gaslighting” and then proceeded to put a tremendous effort into the “plan to gather a group of people to do something about it” (p.10). Graeber rhetorically asked this small fraction of

previous HAU collaborators he managed to recruit for the “coup”: “Am I really powerful? Well I guess we’re about to find out!” (p. 13). “I’m about to unleash the hounds of hell”, “I feel like I’m in a comic book” (pp. 71, 45). Graeber led this group to believe that he himself had “started” HAU and that Giovanni da Col was merely an expedient “operator” (pp. 11, 9). Graeber may have convinced himself that he was the main “founder” of the “intellectual project” of HAU (p. 81), by lending his name and fame to HAU’s founding [manifesto](#) of December 2011, largely [written](#) by Giovanni da Col, and then believing he had a right, above any existing legal structure or governing process, to taketh away what he had bequeathed.

Graeber’s “HAU Apology” can be traced through this new email evidence as the public culmination of carefully manipulated mischaracterizations. For example, the notion that Graeber’s “name and status appear to have been used [by da Col] to intimidate and threaten” staff is rooted in a message by “xx” (male) who tells Graeber that “I really only engaged with HAU because your name was attached to it”, since “your name, does carry weight with many of us junior radical anthros” (p. 21). Graeber then ends up saying in another email (note the gender swap) “one of them told me she’d said to herself ‘if David Graeber was involved, how bad could it be?’” (p. 84). He also condensed and transformed characters in the saga, for instance, when he drew on “a story that reached me - admittedly third hand” about a “Norwegian woman” who was a prospective HAU “author” but who was later portrayed as “staff” (pp. 1, 9). An [incident](#) in 2014 when da Col had a tussle with an acquaintance over the use of an apartment - a personal issue entirely unrelated to HAU - was transformed through the elixir of the coup plot into an accusation that da Col physically attacked a HAU staff member in its office - an office that never existed outside cyberspace. At other times, Graeber simply invented incidents about da Col from scratch, claiming that “he’s been abusing a lot of people, were incidents of violence again”, that he heard of “new reports of violence”, and that da Col was getting “away with physically attacking people” (pp. 1, 10). Graeber widely circulated a [list](#) of what he considered serious allegations in late 2017 which included the accusation that da Col offered to pay Dowdy “in the form of sexual services (not performed by himself)”. Graeber imagines that da Col was “terrorising young female academics into providing sexual services for underlings in lieu of payment” and then suggested in private that da Col could have also been using his “sister” for this, to which Sahlins added: “I don’t think he has a sister. Must be his mother” (p. 4). This obscene exchange is considerably viler than what Graeber cites as da Col’s “weird sexist shit”, such as the apparent joke when offering a “woman for the room” in the “jocular terms” of exaggerated hospitality to a guest speaker at a HAU event (pp. 9, 14).

In Graeber’s first programmatic 1500-word email to the self-proclaimed coup group, in whose eyes Graeber was a renowned public figure who represented their intellectual and political ideals, he pronounced his injunction “to kill the bastard” (p. 9). The motive of at least two active participants, who produced various open letters and lists of allegations at Graeber’s request, were likely marked by his strident language and his implicit offer of a new personal relationship with him if they complied with his plot. These two participants assured Graeber and Gershon that they were keen to publicly drag da Col’s “name” through the “mud” (p. 30). They offered to state in writing (although anonymously) that da Col’s “behavior was totally abusive and violent—no matter the geographic distance” (p. 20), with the effect that “Gio is going to be in a pretty awful position. ‘Good’ awful, of course, from our point of view” (p. 47). Confident of their cronyistic ability to bypass a transparent call by HAU’s directors for new editors to apply, Graeber and Gershon offered members of the group the editorship in exchange for their participation, telling them “you could run it”, “you with [x] if she’s as cool as she seems”, “in place ready to replace Gio as editor/director of HAU if we oust him”, “we’d have to hire 2-3 people to do what Gio’s now doing” (pp. 1, 3, 14). For “initiating our attack” (pp. 50, 73) against da Col, Graeber also suggested that he

knew “ace hackers” who could access HAU’s bank accounts, and that he had a “spy friend” who could honey-trap Giovanni da Col in order to generate a sexual harassment scandal: “She’d have just worn a wire, allowed him to try to pick her up, and got enough out of him in half an hour to probably have him jailed” (p. 18).

The correspondence also includes messages from Marshall Sahlins (University of Chicago) and Marilyn Strathern (University of Cambridge), possibly the two most famous living anthropologists, as well as various members of the anthropology departments of SOAS and Stanford. The senior participants of the coup and the driving forces behind it hailed from the top echelons of academic anthropology. The emails discussed below show them engaged in what they accused Giovanni da Col of doing, namely deploying academic power to ruin someone’s life and career. Whether their charges against Giovanni da Col were based in fact did not seem to be decisive. As Graeber summarized the strategy, “people will assume he [da Col] was up to shady things and rumours will circulate, even though they might not be entirely accurate rumours” (p. 66). Gershon was instrumental in drafting the petitions and reaching out to anthropology blogs (pp. 48, 95) in preparation for a public campaign that she predicted would destroy not just da Col but HAU as a whole: “HAU will go under quietly because people [will] stop reviewing for HAU and stop submitting articles, we use our community's passive aggressive instincts to do Gio/HAU in” - an outcome Gershon described as “VERY satisfying” (p. 65).

2. “Plan A” and “Plan B”; or, the Private and Public Options for a Coup

The group around Graeber, Gershon and Green initially produced two plans (“Plan A” and “Plan B”) to remove Giovanni da Col from office by confronting him or his superiors with a “a list of depredations” (p. 10). In a short space of time, the strategy shifted from offering da Col a “quiet” exit - “if he agrees to step aside then he will able to save face” (p. 57) - to a “coup” via public shaming. “Plan A” oscillated between a direct letter to da Col or to the members of HAU’s External Advisory Board (EAB) or to the director of the University of Chicago Press asking for da Col’s resignation. This letter would be a “shot across the bows” (p. 28) sent in Strathern’s name, with Graeber and Chris Gregory as co-signatories. Graeber still considered himself to be the acting editor-at-large of HAU in late 2017, even though his mandate had expired in May of that year. According to HAU’s 2013 [Constitution](#), the role of the editor-at-large included being the contact person for grievances and controversies reported by the editorial team and bringing them to the External Advisory Board (EAB). The “coup” group, including an associate editor (Gershon) and a member of the Editorial Board (Strathern), did not want to pursue their claims through institutional channels or HAU governing organs, eventually discarding altogether the notion of contacting the EAB (20 members), Editorial Board (106 members), or HAU-NET members (37 supporting institutions). It is unclear how someone like Marilyn Strathern could have considered these broad oversight groups to be compromised. Strathern dropped off halfway through the “Plan A” plot; as Graeber says, “unfortunately Dame Marilyn has gone wobbly on us” after she noted that the management was being radically restructured and that a “new treasurer” was already in place (p. 59), implying that the coup was no longer necessary. Other members of the EAB and the Editorial Board were contacted by Graeber individually to add their “big names” as weight, for example: “Sarah Green - well, obviously”; “Holly High - I’m in contact with her now”; “Lauren Leve - ex-girlfriend now trying to convince me to be cautious”; “Michael Scott - colleague, dislikes me, coward, will come along if others are” (p. 46).

Plan A ended up as a letter sent on December 20, 2017, to Giovanni da Col by David Graeber, coordinated with Gershon and Sahlins (pp. 83-86), in which Graeber demanded possession of HAU under threat of public scandal, warning that “proceeding this way will prevent the inevitable

explosions about to occur”. After claiming to have evidence of da Col’s violence and sexual harassment, he said, “at this particular historical juncture some of these scandals will be particularly difficult to brush aside” (p. 85). Da Col promptly forwarded this email to Carole McGranahan, Chair of the EAB and Professor at University of Colorado-Boulder, and invited the EAB to conduct an investigation into the allegations. The Executive Council, made up of 8 of the 20 members composing the EAB (Carlos Fausto, Jane Guyer, Michael Lambek, Rena Lederman, Carole McGranahan [Interim Chair], Michael Puett, and Andrew Shryock), issued its findings in early 2018 and [concluded](#) that Graeber’s allegations were not credible. When the EAB chair contacted Graeber to request evidence of the broader criminal allegations, Graeber refused to turn over any. Instead, he threatened the chair (as well as other HAU members), who were referred to in the emails as “a dud”, “completely unreliable”, and “Gio’s toadie” – “I warned her [McGranahan] before I left” (pp. 9, 48, 90).

“Plan B” was to publish two open letters, one signed by senior members of the group and the other signed anonymously by three or four editors and graduate students who had previously worked with da Col and were no longer part of HAU. “Plan B” was not put into action until June 2018, half a year after the Executive Council had already hired a treasurer and decided to pay out forfeited honoraria and implemented the plan approved by the EAB in May 2017 to address known management problems. For details on “Plan B” and HAU’s restructuring, see the “brief account” of the labour relations and the creation of HAU and #hautalk section below.

3. Lawyers and Sexual Harassment Fabrications

One of the main [allegations circulated](#) by David Graeber was that Giovanni da Col was employing “threats of professional destruction or legal harassment” against staff. Yet the correspondence reveals that the group actively consulted with lawyers (pp. 32, 34, 50) about the potential allegations. Marshall Sahlins’ lawyer stated that their best chance for pressuring the University of Chicago Press to remove da Col from the editorship lay in a “personal misconduct (sexual harassment)” (p. 24) story. Evidence for this was flimsy; it was simply asserted as “Sexual harassment of female HAU staff” (p. 25) in the list of allegations circulated by Graeber. This stemmed from a claim made by one of Graeber’s followers, “x”, who had left HAU in 2013 and who was possibly also promised the co-editorship by Graeber (p. 3). Although “x” had never met da Col in person, she said that “his behaviour toward me bordered on sexual harassment at times” (p. 5), referring to a Facebook chat in 2013 where they discussed their exercise routines, hiking and potential “fieldwork” amongst Crossfit fitness groups (p. 5). In the coup email exchanges, Graeber replied that that was “not ‘bordering on’ sexual harassment it pretty much fits to textbook definition far as I’m concerned” (p. 13). There is no other mention of sexual harassment in the emails. After seeing and circulating the lawyer’s note (p. 24) in mid-November, Graeber attempted to pursue the angle of lodging accusations “at this particular historical juncture” by contacting “xxx”, a female editor, on November 29, 2017 with [an email](#) soliciting testimony, expressing that the most desirable finding would be a “super-clear case of sexual harassment. Let’s see what we can do to back you up”. She immediately replies “Ah, I see. I of course am very aware that Giovanni is very tricky to pin down when it comes to illegal dealings” but does not mention anything in this regard, and instead produces this [letter](#) and tells Graeber “you’re welcome to give it to the lawyer or pass it around as you see fit”. In sum, the group undertook all possible legal action against da Col, but they failed.

4. The Open Letters: A Multiplication of Personhood

There is strong indication that both the “HAU Staff 7” and the “haustaffletter.wordpress” open letters were not composed, as claimed, by the 7 plus 4 staff members who appear as signatories but were instead primarily compiled by 3 or 4 persons. Other people may have signed to show support

and achieve “anonymity”, since “x” said there was “strength in numbers” (p. 39), but they did not add any further allegations. The formulations suggested by “x” in the emails (pp. 5-7) and her draft document, “Allegations of misconduct against GdC to date (24/11/2017)” (p. 25) do not differ significantly from the first open letter that was published seven months later. One person [Dowdy], rather than four, seems to have single-handedly produced the second open letter at “haustaffletter.wordpress”, based on a document entitled “HAUStafferReport”, which was posted to [twitter](#) by Graeber and likely produced in 2018 by someone who had resigned from HAU in 2016. Green relays to Graeber her knowledge about Dowdy and what she referred to [elsewhere](#) as a “disagreement” over honoraria payment, an issue that arose during her “time as chair [of the EAB] that had not been resolved”. However, during Green’s tenure as Chair of the EAB (2013-2017), no EAB meeting was ever called to discuss any staff complaints or address any grievance.

Some members of the group may have co-signed both letters to further inflate numbers. Both letters used the misleading term “HAU staff” for anonymous co-signatories, that could include everyone from a pool of well over a hundred people who were in any way collaborating with HAU at some point in the past, such as Associate Editors, designers and copyeditors who liaised primarily with the managing editor and were offered UK freelance rates, and editorial and social media volunteers (many without any honoraria whatsoever, others with one of around US\$1000 a year).

5. The role of Sarah Green and figures at SOAS and Stanford

Towards the beginning of an email thread, Graeber said that he was “already in touch with Sarah Green and she’s good to go” (p. 13). Green surreptitiously provided Graeber and the group with HAU’s internal documents to “make it easier formally to remove him” and to prepare the path for their “coup” (pp. 5, 10, 34). Graeber says repeatedly he doesn’t “know the details of what the formal structures are (I’m terrible, terrible at admin, this is one of my life problems.) Let me check with SG” (p. 10). Green did not disclose the plot to the EAB, the adjudicating body of HAU, and was thus not only bypassing the EAB but also violating her responsibilities and the trust placed in her when she was appointed the EAB chair.

In 4 years of her work as Chair of the EAB, the record shows that it held only a single “meeting,” conducted over email and via a survey. In a [report](#) she submitted to the EAB, dated June 2015, she wrote, “Over the summer, a revised constitution will be prepared, which will include revisions in the structure” of the “collective” project and address the known fact that “the vast majority of the work is done for free”. However, there is no record that she ever convened another meeting to prepare or revise such a document, including her proposal to establish “an explicit code of conduct”. Formally, her term ended in May 2016, but she pre-emptively extended her own chairship for an additional year, without any election or permission from the rest of the EAB. Green also did not bring to the EAB for adjudication, the January 2016 [letter](#) of complaint from several professors at Stanford – but passed it on to the subsequent chair for her to deal with it, and subsequently also to someone who leaked it in February 2019.

In her [final report](#) to the EAB in May 2017, Green says she had “envisaged” a “plan to restructure HAU [that] did not proceed as planned”. The reason, she said, was that Gershon, who volunteered to become the interim co-editor of HAU for four months in late 2016 while da Col was on sabbatical, was also “planning to take some role in carrying out that task” of administrative restructuring involving executive control. It seems this internal attempt to “restructure” HAU failed because they both had “misunderstandings with Giovanni”. Gershon then wrote an email to da Col saying she considered it “an open secret” that Dowdy was treated “badly” and that she did not want da Col to “be our boss”, “a boss who has generously given us editorial decision-making powers

for a certain amount of time.” After sending this final report, Green summoned a meeting of the EAB – sans da Col – to propose another attempt at an internal restructuring. When some members of the EAB asked for the editor-in-chief to be present, she discontinued her participation.

When Green stopped presiding over the EAB in May 2017, she sent a direct letter to Graeber and the other editors of HAU describing da Col as someone with a “problem with anger management, with gender politics, and with an extraordinarily overblown sense of his own importance”. She said that she herself could not raise these issues in a “public” forum. This may have given Graeber the idea that he could use his large public platform to this effect. Graeber said this was the “period” when he started “working closely with her” (p. 10). What bothered Green about da Col came down to the “implication of him being the boss that is [what is] offensive to me” (p. 60).

There are hints that the widely circulated petition of June 18, 2018, called the “Public Statement on HAU”, was primarily formulated by Green and Gershon back in 2017, judging by the continuous and almost signature use of certain clichés, such as “open secret”, “mechanisms of accountability”, “establishment of democratic and accountable systems”, “join us in finding a framework”, found in both the petition and their emails (pp. 17, 26, 88). Considering that this petition ended up collecting 616 signatories, they represented a large pool of potential new coup members who could have been called on to vote in the authors of the petition as new directors under the guise of democratic participation.

Green is currently president of EASA, which announced in its August 2019 newsletter that it would undertake a “moral” inquiry into the “[HAU affair 2011-2017](#)”. An [addendum](#) from November 2019 by EASA’s former president stated unequivocally that the decision to open up this “enquiry / inquiry / review (all three terms were used in the letter)” was decided by the new executive, Sarah Green. It seems evident that Green is now using EASA executive power and cloaking it in technocratic sloganeering to pursue her own particular obsession: four internal and external attempts to permanently remove Giovanni da Col; in August 2016 in league with Gershon; in May 2017 through the EAB; in November 2017 as part of David Graeber’s “coup” (“bounce him”, “like we tried last time” p. 1); and in June 2018 with the petition that under the threat of mass resignation sought to open The Society for Ethnographic Theory to individual membership recruited through the petition. Once all these plans failed, and once they realized they could not occupy HAU’s leadership, the only option the Three Gs looked forward to was the destroying of HAU altogether.

The emails reveal that various members of the anthropology departments of SOAS (p. 33) and Stanford (pp. 14, 47) had prior knowledge of the coup plot. Some even asked Graeber for the list of allegations against da Col in order to forward it to other people. This laid the foundation for the Gershon cliché later promoted on social media and EASA-linked blogs that “abuse” at HAU was an “open secret”. After someone at Stanford asked Graeber for permission to forward his summary of accusations to the Wenner-Gren Foundation, which da Col had approached for funding, Graeber got the idea of contacting other funders, saying, “What would be ideal would be to have Wenner-Grenn and others in our camp, say, ‘we’d love to give money to HAU but only if it’s a proper collective with an independent treasury etc.’. Let me see if I can talk to her” (p. 47). They also sent messages to the members of professional selection committees for visiting lectureship positions in the UK where da Col was being considered as a candidate (p. 16), some of whom reassured Graeber that da Col will not “get the post” (p. 34). These covert actions clearly constitute efforts to tamper with hiring and funding procedures. In contrast, neither Graeber’s coup group or others have produced any evidence that former HAU “staff” had their opportunities or career damaged or derailed by da Col, which was another of the allegations levelled against da Col.

Brief account of the labour relations and the creation of HAU and #HAUtalk, 2011-2018

HAU was conceived in February 2011, based on an idea by Giovanni da Col. At some point in his 30s he dropped out of his Cambridge doctoral programme in order to pursue this unusually successful publishing venture that hoped to revitalize the discipline by drawing on the long history of anthropology and merging it with contemporary ethnographic research and theory. The project had a long-term vision; in the eyes of many HAU readers and supporters, the very existence of the discipline of anthropology was at stake. The first issue of HAU was released in December 2011 on a website, with no institutional or grant support from particular universities or associations.

By 2017, HAU became the most cited anthropology journal in Europe and the second most cited journal in social and cultural anthropology, publishing about 1,500 pages a year, more than any other anthropology journal. HAU also launched an open-access book publishing project with affordable paperbacks (38 titles in the catalogue) printed and distributed by University of Chicago Press. Its books and articles were featured in the mainstream press (NYT, WSJ, NYRB, Times Literary Supplement, etc.) and include contributions by some of the very foremost contemporary thinkers (Piketty, Butler, Agamben, Ginzburg, etc.). In 2017, the HAU website had almost one million views and a quarter of a million article downloads.

Until 2017, over the course of six years, much of the indispensable editorial work was performed by dozens of anthropology undergraduate and graduate students who volunteered and entered and exited at will into the 100% remote and virtual editorial space of constant paperwork and correspondence. The early phase of the project had relied on the editorial team's efforts and personal investments as "[honorary collaborators](#)" (on a yearly honoraria, or as unpaid voluntary collaborators or as freelance paid collaborators). The Editor-in-Chief would read all submitted papers, select peer reviewers and read their reviews, make final decisions on acceptance and rejection, as well as independently select books for the symposia and reprints and the like. An editorial intern or assistant, for example, would have to correspond with authors and reviewers and compile the review forms. Associate editors, almost two dozen mainly younger scholars, would provide many of the peer reviews for special issues (for instance, I was an AE in 2016-2017 during my first postdoc in Göttingen). A freelance copyeditor would proofread and format author manuscripts, which were then sent to a professional typesetter in Delhi. Members of the social media team would take weekly turns in promoting HAU publications. HAU never had an office and most of its volunteers and freelancers had never met da Col in person. The core team of graduate students and junior scholars went through a large turnover (most didn't stay for more than a year and left in order to enrol in or finish their PhDs), while da Col was the long-running sole Editor-in Chief since 2012. In the first year Justin Shaffner was also Co-Editor-in-Chief, and Michael Lambek (August 2016 to June 2017) and Amira Mittermaier (August 2016 to December 2016) took on the position of Interim Editors to fill in for da Col while he was on an editorial sabbatical. In May 2017, da Col presented a proposal to the EAB for the deal that would see the University of Chicago Press publish HAU Journal in exchange for absorbing costs and fairly remunerating those involved in its production. The 20 EAB members voted 18 in favor, with two abstentions.

Until 2017, most of the team had been effectively donating their time, even though some of those performing core tasks had the right to claim an annual honorarium, which, as such, was never intended to cover the cost of even basic living expenses. Most "staff" came in or out with doctoral scholarships and postdoctoral stipends and fellowships, some of which were found via connections with scholars associated with HAU. But even the managing editor, who had many responsibilities,

such as collecting annual membership dues from individual university departments and libraries (HAU-NET) to ensure a modicum of honoraria could be paid out at the end of the year, was not paid a salary but worked as a freelancer paid by the hour. This was not white-collar work, nor market-rate wage labour, nor a part-time student job. So what was it?

A very broke anthropology project. Giovanni da Col himself had lived off a string of fellowships and savings from his previous professional work in the NGO sector in Tibet. Funding for HAU events, which led to special issues, was almost exclusively raised from various applications to foundations. The funding from HAU-NET members became enough to cover some of the costs of the open-access HAU Books series, such as the services of a managing editor, but not others, like book stalls, graphic design, or permissions for translations and the like. Marketing and distribution of HAU Books were supported by the University of Chicago Press starting in 2015. Da Col, following a recommendation of the EAB in 2015, sought to expand support from HAU-NET members and grants awarded to authors that might include publishing support. Authors from certain wealthy institutions were also asked to inquire if their university library had funds designed to support open-access journals through Author Processing Charge (APCs).

The treasurer of HAU who had full access to all of HAU's finances in late 2017 publicly [declared](#) that da Col did not claim his honoraria in 2016 and 2017 and that he waited for the transition to University of Chicago Press to make sure "all debts" had been first paid. The issue of the outstanding claims to honoraria by former staff who left before the end of their agreed-upon term (which, by the terms of the agreement, meant they would give up their honorarium) were redressed by the Executive Council of the EAB, which was in charge of overseeing the transition of HAU Journal to Chicago and decided to pay honoraria on a prorated basis to six individuals in late 2017 and early 2018 for the time they had spent working with HAU.

In his final [editorial note](#) in early 2019, da Col acknowledged that it was a profound "mistake" that "too much work was expected by honorary staff who offered to help for a modest annual honorarium". In his own words, his "cajoling, moral pressure, and draconian insistence on agreements and societal regulations" had involved holding out parts of the honoraria of those who left halfway through the year or before projects were completed, thus violating the terms of their agreements and the 2013 constitution. Being denied the honoraria they wanted and deserved despite breaking their agreements led to some unhappy results amongst a handful of people as HAU grew, especially once Graeber and his followers started promoting their own fantasies that Giovanni da Col was "basically embezzling funds and living it up on HAU money" (p. 14).

Da Col contends that his general micro-management or particular moments of virtual outbursts did not constitute workplace "abuse" in any meaningful sense of the term. Telling someone to leave the editorial team if they were not at ease, or imploring someone to stay until the completion of their responsibilities is a type of "contractual" practice that was used during the early days of HAU when it lacked a shared governance structure or clearly-defined bureaucratic responsibilities, similar to small start-up ventures with a CEO. The early HAU was also modelled on the firm in the sense that only the EAB had "the power to remove an editor who repeatedly violates the constitution or is guilty of malpractice . . . or any other act that seriously and permanently harms the reputation of the Society" (VII.1 [HAU 2013 Constitution](#)). This is why the Three Gs (Graeber, Green and Gershon) strategically recruited a handful of former HAU staff to make growing lists of alleged "malpractices" and, when they didn't find what they were looking for, decided to usurp the EAB and move towards a campaign of reputational attack that would retroactively legitimate the "removal" of da Col.

Claire Lehmann published her story [“How David Graeber Cancelled a Colleague”](#) on 9 September 2019, which she researched through public tweets, documents and comments following the open letters by Graeber and the anonymous “HAU 7”. When she contacted Graeber for a statement, he said that after “a year of behind-the-scenes efforts”, he “finally wrote a public statement”, his “HAU Apology”, on June 11, 2018, which kick-started the social media pile-on and coalesced under the #hautalk hashtag that was created and promoted by the social media team of the journal *Cultural Anthropology* and the circle of academic friends of “xx”.

The Graeber group’s list of allegations were closely [examined](#) by a group of 17 professors (members of the Executive Council of the EAB and the new Board of Trustees formed in January 2018) who concluded that “given the thoroughness with which we were able to review the available evidence of the allegations, I am confident in sharing with you that the bulk of the allegations are not only unfounded, but appear to be purposefully malicious gossip” driven by a “small group of scholars who are actively working to smear the name of HAU and its Editor-in-Chief”. In addition, in January 2018, the Executive Council of the EAB had made a direct call to past and present HAU staff to submit grievances and discussed the issues with them by phone and email, and which were considered [resolved](#) by all the contacted parties. The Three Gs were aware that once “Gio” was “paying people” in late 2017 he “undercut one of our most effective critiques of his behavior. Of course, moving the journal to Chicago [starting December 2017] also means that the people who work on HAU behind the scenes will now be getting paid regularly. So one of our biggest issues will be taken care of”. This is why Gershon insisted that the public “accusations” of “Plan B” would have to be ones which da Col cannot “deny (or say it was just a misunderstanding and now everything has been cleared up)”, with labels that linger and stick when left unspecified such as sexual “harassment” and “abuse” (p .64).

Gershon heavily promoted Plan B, writing, “Let me be clear - we will have to release accusations no matter which plan we choose. It is just a matter of timing” (p. 64). The timing of the “HAU Apology” and the six-month delay between the late 2017 turn to “Plan B” of the “coup” and the June 2018 creation of #hautalk only makes sense in relation to the escalating dispute between da Col and Graeber and Sahlins, on the other, regarding the latter’s book *On Kings* published by HAU. Sahlins, citing the low Amazon sales rank of the book, felt that the book had received too “little publicity”, and throughout the first half of 2018 he deployed his lawyers again to try to bring it to another publisher - long after the book had been published with an open-access Creative Commons license (CC-BY). Sahlins and Graeber made “repeated attempts to terminate the book contract with HAU”, but these finally “fell through”, according to a Sahlins [Facebook](#) post on June 11, 2018. Eight hours later, his former student Graeber pulled the trigger on his hastily drafted “HAU Apology”, which was a simple blend of parts of his first long email to the coup group (pp. 9-11) and his direct message to da Col on December 20, 2017 (pp. 83-86). Soon after the “HAU Apology”, Sahlins wrote an email to the entire HAU Editorial Board demanding that the “solution to HAU” was to have it “completely divorced from the old HAU”, rename it “Two Crows”, and have “the enterprise turned over to staff (former and present) and their recruits.” Taylor Genovese was also [explicit](#), calling on those who “suffered as a precariat under a tyrannical EIC” to “expropriate it to be run democratically”. In her [tweet](#) to the professors and “PhD students who populate #hautalk” Lehmann notes that “having a dispute with someone over honoraria does not mean that you’re allowed to invent sexual harassment allegations against them.”

It is untenable for anyone to claim that any of the quasi-volunteers depended for their livelihoods on their association with an internet-based non-profit open-access publication or that it was a primary cause of their economic precarity in an academic system held up by grants, teaching jobs

or other employment. It is also specious and invalid to claim that da Col had the capacity to negatively affect the careers of the people who were keen on denouncing and ruining him. The power to select candidates or influence hiring starts and ends with committees of professors, doctoral supervisors and leaders of institutions with open positions. The image of Giovanni da Col as some sort of “[ultra-powerful](#)” “grad student”, as most recently tweeted by Graeber in February 2020, the last of hundreds of perplexing tweets about HAU, was a retroactive but necessary artifice of #hautalk. Da Col was an editor of a niche theory journal that was far from the institutional centre of the discipline, such as the AAA (American Anthropological Association). Nor did he have an established or secure academic affiliation. The coup group had closely studied HAU’s constitution (pp. 34, 41) and was fully aware that the EAB was the organ of “[adjudication](#)”, that it could intervene in cases of misconduct and that there were formal routes to try to remove an editor. Nevertheless, the Three Gs [used](#) social media and a [special](#) EASA conference meeting to spread ideas they knew to be false, for example, that HAU had no internal mechanism for addressing grievances or that it was impossible to fire “the autocratic editor for life”. Graeber and the coup group managed to turn #hautalk into a cult of lament built around non-existent “[survivors](#)” of “abuse”, to attract a crowd whose cornerstone of identity is that of being persecuted, used or ignored by the powers-that-be of the academic system. The Three Gs therefore had to imagine “GDC” as some sort of locus of “power” in order to justify their “attack” and prevent any negative feelings and reactions that might arise from the scapegoating that ensued – the #hautalk bandwagon of bad faith artists who think “empathy” consists of spreading damaging lies about a situation they have no knowledge of or connection to, solely to get likes on twitter or promote their profile and blogs.

In the immediate aftermath of the June 2018 scandal, post-#hautalk, Giovanni da Col lost his research position at the SOAS Centre of Ethnographic Theory, which simply shut down the website and removed his pigeonhole for snail mail, the only physical existence of HAU, without contacting him beforehand or asking for his version of the situation. The Head of Department of Anthropology stated that da Col would be suspended until they could conduct their own investigation into the matter, something they never did. Much of HAU’s old and new leadership, such as the Board of Trustees and the already dissolved EAB, resigned or responded to the call for his resignation. The founding 2013 HAU constitution, which had been co-signed by Sarah Green, Chair of the EAB at the time, was valid until the [The Society for Ethnographic Theory](#) became a new non-profit company limited by guarantee in January 2018. The new SET was governed collectively by a board of trustees, composed of Magnus Course, Carlos Fausto, Caterina Guenzi, Niloofar Haeri, Michael Puett, Joel Robbins, Carlo Severi [Chair], Anne-Christine Taylor, Angela Zito, and Giovanni da Col.

In late June 2018, da Col was “[suspended](#)” from his positions as Editor-in-Chief and as a Trustee. The only thing left to him was the intellectual property of HAU. He therefore entered negotiations with the few remaining members of HAU’s executive structure, which was replenished with new trustees (later called Directors) in the autumn of 2018 (Kriti Kapila [Chair], John Borneman, Niloofar Haeri, and Anne-Christine Taylor). Giovanni da Col tendered his resignation as editor-in-chief, effective December 15, 2018. The new Board of Directors also introduced new Bylaws to further develop a clear, transparent document to build a better system for collecting and resolving grievances for current HAU staff. They [reiterated](#) their “apology if erstwhile working conditions at HAU have caused damage to former members”.

Da Col had already been relieved of his managerial role in January 2018 when the new Board of Trustees formed to divide up the executive tasks (legal, contracts, hiring and staff issues, HR, diversity, fundraising, website management, events, partnership, etc.). There was finally a clear

separation between the executive and the editorial domains, and HAU Journal and HAU Books became separate divisions. Da Col was instructed to dedicate all his time to the editorial work of the journal (along with two new deputy editors, Deborah Durham and Michael Lempert) and the books series (along with Sasha Newell, Julie Archambault and Niloofar Haeri). By early 2018, the editors at HAU Journal were only working with a managing editor at the University of Chicago Press and its production and marketing departments. HAU editors at both the journal and books division also worked with freelancers (designers, copy editors, assistants, IT, etc.), whom HAU could afford to pay more respectable rates. The Society for Ethnographic Theory no longer used interns or volunteers. It is relevant that no individual working with or for HAU since 2018 has filed a complaint about working conditions, even after #hautalk.

The fact that Graeber went ahead with “Plan B” and published his “HAU Apology” in June 2018 suggests that he did so not to protect “Hau staff” from da Col but to circumvent the already completed reorganization of HAU so he could fulfil his wish “to kill the bastard” - “once he’s out of HAU, he’s toast” (p. 66).

It should be noted that David Graeber, a popular figure among grad students and younger anthropologists, with over 100,000 twitter followers, considered da Col to be “still a graduate student” (p. 86). He also believed that da Col was “still in uncertain mental health” (p. 43), and thought of him as “bonkers”, “depressed and crazy” (p. 9). Graeber mentions that, given the enormous workload and stress of the HAU editorial position, he had “a record in writing of [da Col] saying ‘I had a breakdown, I can’t handle this, help me!’” (p. 47). Gershon emphasized these angles in the letter she wrote to the University of Chicago Press director, saying that da Col had a history of “nervous breakdowns” (p. 43) and demanding “for Gio to step down because no anthropological journal of HAU’s importance” should be led by a “graduate student” who “still hasn’t defended his Phd” (p. 64). But in the coup group, Gershon strategically insisted that, for their planned public letters, “labeling Gio mentally unwell might not be received well by the Anthro community at large” (p. 38), since presumably they did not want to cultivate the image of tenured faculty relentlessly pursuing an overworked and possibly mentally ill PhD student.

Da Col’s mental health and standing in the discipline and his ability to edit or publish or find a professional job has been shattered, since almost everyone reacted by cutting ties with him. Most of the anthropologists whose careers he had helped stopped communicating with him; many of the “elders” whose renown he spent years reviving suddenly didn’t know him and couldn’t help him. All of his upcoming invited talks, keynote and workshops at the Universities of Oxford, Zurich, and UC Davis were cancelled within two weeks of Graeber’s “HAU Apology”. In the summer of 2018, da Col was planning to move to Paris to occupy HAU’s first-ever physical office space at the *Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme* (FMSH), which was also supposed to provide space for visiting doctoral and postdoctoral researchers and link up with a network of new Centres of Ethnographic Theory in the global south. The FMSH quietly removed his name from their website without contacting him.

Why did everything fall apart? How did these asymmetric consequences come about? Is anyone feeling better? Is anthropology any better now? Have we all been participants *and* observers? In an as-yet-unpublished “long version” of this memorandum, unapologetically Thucydidean and provisionally titled *Skandalon: The Formation of an Anthropological Party*, I expand on the personal networks and the social and mythical dimensions of both HAU and #hautalk within the ongoing crisis of the university and, as Graeber reminds us, within the structure of “this particular historical juncture”.

Addendum: The “Graeber coup” emails, Jesse Singal and The Chronicle of Higher Education

The science journalist Jesse Singal has had access to the “Graeber coup emails” since October 2019. On the basis of these emails, Singal got his pitch for an article accepted by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in December 2019 (publication date currently unknown), which shows both Singal and the CHE editors considered this new evidence to be of public interest. This view is further supported by the fact that Graeber’s “HAU Apology” was preceded by the specific threat of a social media scandal made in an email sent to da Col on December 20, 2017 (pp. 83-86, also leaked [here](#) in 2019) which on twitter was also referred to as the “blackmail email”. Graeber summarizes it as: “I warn him [da Col] of impending catastrophe and basically say everybody hates him” (p. 80).

Also undeniable is that the conspirators contacted a broad range of potential “allies” among notable anthropologists, and reached out to funding intuitions (The Wenner-Gren Foundation, etc.) and anthropology departments in the whole world (at Stanford, at SOAS, at Edinburgh, etc.) with their [lists](#) of allegations since late 2017. Gershon herself confirms that she spread the “open secret” at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) meeting in Washington DC in December 2017, where she set up one-to-one sessions with HAU affiliated people to propagate rumours and negotiate conditions of their support for the planned “coup”, for example: “Debbora now knows much more about what is going on, and was shocked to hear it”; “Golub may support this if HAU is no longer open access. We may need to make a fuss about open access to get some of the people on board” (p. 48). As Graeber also confirmed in his November 29, 2017, email to “xxx”: “we’re going to bring people over to our side, compile testimonies, etc, over the AAA and then hope we can move soon after that.” Without his involvement, there may still have been conflicts or individual complaints at HAU, however, there would not have been anything near to the crowds that descended on HAU and da Col in June 2018.

Extracts from the “Graeber coup” email threads

A. Subject: Re: coup d'état [November 12, 2017]

Graeber: subject of email: “*coup d'etat*” (p. 1)

Graeber: “*I’m still fuming about a story that reached me - admittedly third hand - about how he’d threatened some young Norwegian woman’s career if she didn’t get some paper in on time or did some shitwork or something, along the lines of ‘I know David Graeber, I can destroy your career like that...’ Since then I’ve had an intense desire to kill him.*” (p. 1)

Graeber: “*[what] if a new collective team which actually included you was in power?; ‘he’s been abusing a lot of people, were incidents of violence again. Several people who work for the journal have been talking about removing him’; ‘Either bounce him or like we tried last time, [or] put him in a position where he doesn’t deal with subordinates’*” (p. 1)

B. Subject: Re: the Trento strangler strikes again [November 15 to 18, 2017]

Graeber: “*weirdest discovery of the day: Gio apparently told [Dowdy] he couldn’t afford to pay him the \$12k he owed but could provide at least some it in the form of sexual services (not performed by himself); ‘does he have a sister?; Marshall replied: ‘I don’t think he has a sister. Must be his mother.’; ‘the alternative is too infuriating to even consider: basically, that he was pressuring or terrorising young female academics into providing sexual services for underlings in lieu of payment. this person should be killed’*” (p. 4)

Graeber: “*had a chat with Ilana Gershon, she suggested that we should have someone in place ready to replace Gio as editor/director of HAU if we oust him.*” “*should the position happen to fall open and should an adequate salary be acquired.... Would you consider it?;’*” (p. 4)

C. Subject: Re: HAU abuse [November 11 to 17, 2017]

x: “*A bit about my experience of this guy: I worked for HAU for just over two years and found Gio to be an aggressive, manipulative bully. I also found him to be grossly sexist and his behavior toward me bordered on sexual harassment at times. He managed to work in completely inappropriate sexual innuendo into our correspondence to the point where he’d say things like he wished he could do ‘physical exercise fieldwork’ with me*” (p. 5)

x: “*He would regularly attempt to bully and manipulate staff by playing them off against each other, for example, attempting to humiliate one person in front of another or threatening to take work off one to give to the other*” (pp. 5-6)

x: “*He would ask for understanding re: the amount of stress he’s under, give a speech about ‘radical sacrifice’ and ‘the spirit of HAU’ etc. and then, in my case at least, remind me of his latest vague promise to fund my way to a conference/workshop or his most recent effort to ‘look for money’ to pay me some kind of honorarium*” (p. 6)

x: “*I was fed up and took the opportunity to resign*” (p. 6)

x: “*staff have no way of knowing where HAU’s funds are going or how much there even is in the HAU account each year. Does Gio draw a salary from HAU funds? What does he pay himself? Does he also pay for his own travel expenses out of HAU funds? Does he use HAU funds as he likes while preaching to his overworked staff about ‘radical sacrifice’?; ‘may be relevant to us now as it may ultimately contribute to Gio’s downfall.’*” (p. 6)

Graeber: “*I just wanted to kill the bastard. You might have noticed that I haven’t published in HAU for some years now, and I basically dropped Gio as a friend; we used to correspond a lot, even*

hang out (he wanted me to be the godfather of his daughter) but after that.... I mean it was a rumour, I never even got the name of who he threatened, but it was sufficiently in keeping with other patterns and reports of behaviour I knew it had to be true.” (p. 9)

Graeber: *“when I saw [xx] mention on twitter he’d had a bad academic abuse experience, I contacted him”; “there was an plan to gather a group of people to do something about it” (p. 10)*

Graeber: *“What really scared me this time around were the new reports of violence. I’d naively figured after the strangling incident, and his getting temporarily kicked out as editor as a result, he would know he at least couldn’t get away with physically attacking people any more! Apparently I was wrong.” No further reference or detail. (p. 10)*

Graeber: *“Perhaps we can get together a small core group that can compile some kind of archive, a list of depreddations: what each member of staff has had to endure, incidents of violence, incidents of harassment and bullying, etc. We should also as [?] says identify key allies, but differentiate between ones we can bring on board right away, and those who we’ll eventually have to swing to our side (e.g., [?] We’ll need to think about how a non-abusive HAU could be funded and organised. I can contact Marshall” (p. 10)*

Graeber: *“I’m already in touch with Sarah Green and she’s good to go, willing to be added to the cc list” (p. 13)*

Graeber: *“that’s not ‘bordering on’ sexual harassment it pretty much fits to textbook definition far as I’m concerned” (p. 13).*

Graeber: *“Am I really powerful? Well I guess we’re about to find out!” (p. 13).*

Graeber: *“I just consulted with Ilana Gershon, and she’s totally down with helping us as in any way she can...Ilana would be happy to be on the cc list.” (p. 14)*

Graeber: *“people at Stanford are also trying to compile a similar list of outrages, to get rid of Gio but keep HAU” (p. 14)*

Graeber: *“I was talking to a friend who was at a recent Cambridge HAU event and Gio was doing things like ordering multiple bottles of expensive single-malt scotch delivered in the middle of the night, and offering to hire sex-workers for additional services (latter was a joke, but he seriously made such offers to some people I won’t name [...]) Very large sums are being squirrelled away somewhere” (p. 14)*

Graeber: *“we’d have to hire 2-3 people to do what Gio’s now doing, how are we going to pay them all? Well, actually, the money’s quite possibly there.” (p. 14)*

xx: *“Perhaps those that oppose him silently would be more willing to stick their neck out once we have solid, written accounts of all his past behaviour.”; “if his history of misconduct and abuse is made public at some point in the future by some anonymous group of troublemakers, perhaps they will reassess his position even if he does get the job.” (p. 16) This is connected to the killing injunction.*

x: *“any clear evidence of financial mismanagement/misconduct will boost our case against him greatly. I think it could be crucial tbh - and David your contacts will definitely come in handy at this point.” (p. 17)*

Graeber: *“I will talk to Sarah [Green]” (p. 17)*

xx: *“It sounds like she has a great deal of info that will help build a case against him” (p. 17)*

Graeber: *“yes - here’s her final report that she circulated on resigning” (p. 17)*

Graeber: “*Ilana told me she already contacted [?] on her own initiative, but that this will require diplomacy, as response was very guarded, i.e., ‘I don’t want to do this in a way which hurts Gio’ sort of things - so I agreed with Ilana to arrange some sort of three-way chat.*” (p. 17) This seems either to be an email to [xxx] or [xxxxx], the former has been leaked [here](#).

xx: “*I’m still waiting to hear back from [Dowdy] (who resigned because of Gio’s behaviour). I’m hoping he’ll be willing to write up his experience for us. I gather he will want to do so anonymously though*” (p. 17)

Graeber: “*my friend the Bengali princess who used to be a spy; she’d have just worn a wire, allowed him to try to pick her up, and got enough out of him in half an hour to probably have him jailed.*” (p. 18)

Graeber: “*I also know a good number of ace hackers who could contribute their skills if later we need to investigate the money issues*” (p. 18)

Graeber: “*I’d have to play nice with Gio while plotting his undoing*”

Graeber: “*the Stanford info has been passed to Sarah Green.*” (p. 18)

xx: “*Gio’s behavior was totally abusive and violent—no matter the geographic distance. No one should have to endure that kind of patriarchal, misogynist horse shit. [] The callousness that he takes to prey on everyone, including yourself [David Graeber], is disgusting. Like I said before, I really only engaged with HAU because your name was attached to it [...] it sounds like you [David Graeber] are as equally a victim in this nightmare.*” (p. 21) [lol]

D. Subject: Re: well my spy friend is out of contact so there's always the direct approach [November 17 to 19, 2017]

Graeber: “*Did I mention Marshall reports one HAU employee owed several thousand dollars says Gio said he couldn’t pay him in money but offered to pay at least part in the form of the services of a professional sex worker:?”* (p. 23)

Graeber: “*start by each writing up a shirt [sic] anonymous version of our own experiences*” (p. 23)

Graeber: “*Sarah will be putting me in touch with [Sean].*” (p. 23)

E. Subject: Fwd: Gio [November 25 to 25, 2017]

Sahlins to Graeber: “*Well. I guess there are other things.*” (p. 24) After their attempt to find legally actionable case against GdC fail. Forwards note from Marshal Sahlins hired lawyer.

Graeber to Sahlins: “*step 2 then would be to get all the big names on the masthead to either pull out or threaten to. Has anyone talked to Marilyn [Strathern]:?”* (p. 25)

Graeber to Sahlins: “*This is what one of the former HAU employees working on the problem has so far compiled*”:

Document prepared by the group: “*Allegations of misconduct against GdC to date (24/11/2017)*”; “*1. Personal misconduct 1a: Bullying, intimidation and abuse of HAU staff. 1b: Sexual harassment of female HAU staff. 1c: Physical assault [etc.]*” (p. 25)

Contains statements from Sarah Green and a list of rumours and other fabrications such as “*3c: Misappropriation of HAU funds —Use of HAU funds for personal benefit. —Additional, credible reports of misuse of HAU funds can be cited, e.g. late night lavish parties etc. 4. Other. 4a: the sex-work stuff.*” (p. 26)

Graeber: “*How the hell do we get GdC out?*” (p. 27)

F. Subject: Dame Marilyn comes through, Attachments: Gio– draft.doc [December 9, 2017]

Graeber: “*So I had a little chat with the estimable Marilyn Strathern, who is seriously concerned as you might imagine with the allegations [...] she provided a ‘shot across the bows’ to be sent in her name, with me as co-signatory [...] She would like to move quickly.*” (p. 28)

G. Subject: Re: Working doc of allegations [November 25 to December 9, 2017]

x: “*I really feel for [xxx] and am so thankful she took the time to put this together. It is a very well written, damning summary of current goings-on at HAU.*” “*This document is going to be very helpful for writing up the statements/open letters*” (p. 30).

This document is likely this one leaked [here](#) in February 2019;

x: “*I think even institutions like the AAA should eventually be briefed regarding his misconduct, because his name should be officially mud once this is all over. He is a crook and an exploitative bully and nothing more.*” (p. 30)

Gershon: “*I too am livid*” (p. 30)

Graeber: “*Gio is now threatening legal action against [xxx] for complaining about the APCs.*” (p. 31)

xx: “*he uses the legal angle to bully subordinates as part of his controlling toolkit.*” (p. 31)

x: “*Perhaps we should get a legal mind to look over the final version of these statements just to cover ourselves in case Gio goes the legal route?*” (p. 32)

x: “*I have attached a draft working doc for the open letter/statement for everyone to take a look at. This one is written as a ‘patrons’ statement. I will just tinker a bit with the wording for the ‘former and current HAU staff’ statement. Basically they will be the same but from different PoV.*” (p. 32)

x: “*we hit him with the open-letters*” (p. 32)

Graeber: “*Good point I guess we have to leap into action*” (p. 32)

Graeber: “*I talked to [?] who confirms he never gave Gio a proper home base at SOAS [...] their contract expires in 6 months and won’t be renewed. I asked, if Gio were gone, and HAU made a proper collective, might he consider a real relationship, office, etc.? He said certainly, it was only Gio he was objecting to.*” (p. 33)

Graeber: “*I also talked to someone at [Edinburgh] and she said there’s nothing to worry about, people know he’s a sexist pig and there’s no danger he’ll get the post.*” (p. 34)

Graeber: “*It’s a big undertaking could we line up enough accounts before the HAU transfer? [...] I’d emphasize that Gio has repeatedly claimed that he 1. had a nervous breakdown in 2014 and is by his own admission still in uncertain mental health, 2. keeps saying he would love others to step up and take his place in most of his current functions [...] Say we need to step in for everyone’s sake including his own.*” (p. 38)

Gershon: “*the nervous breakdown was never mentioned to me. I really worry that labeling Gio mentally unwell might not be received well by the Anthro community at large, since it will turn into an argument over whether he really is unwell or not.*” (p. 38)

Graeber: *“I’m cc’ing in Ilana as I think everyone previously agreed. Me communicating with her separately feels undemocratic”* (p. 39)

x: *“The problem with compiling material re: Gio’s misconduct towards former staff is that it’s basically only myself and [xx] who have agreed to write an account of our experiences”* (p. 39)

x: *“we work towards releasing two statements: 1. A statement on behalf of former and current staff, listing credible complaints against Gio, urging him to step aside and/or encouraging individuals and institutions to withhold their support for HAU until he does so, and; 2. A statement on behalf of key patrons such as yourself David, Marshall and Marilyn, making it clear that you are aware of his behaviour and you believe the complaints against him listed in the statement released by the Former HAU Staff Collective [...] or we could just release them publicly and go from there.”* (p. 39)

x: *“the aim is for Gio to step aside and/or for key institutions to withdraw their support until he does so. I could compile a list of all the institutions involved in HAU-net and we could approach them to withdraw their support until he stands down too if need be.”* (p. 39)

x: *“We would be able to get more former and current staff to ‘sign’ a statement of the above (1.) kind attesting to his misconduct than would be willing to write a full account of their experience. There’s the protection of anonymity and safety/strength in numbers.”* (p. 39)

Graeber: *“I think there’s almost no chance Gio will not dig his heels in so Plan B is definitely required”* (p. 42) Plan B was the publication of the statement/petition and the open letters.

Graeber: *“[Giovanni da Col] will devote himself full time, 24/7, to plotting and scheming to regain full power and unless we have people who are willing to devote at least as much time and energy to fighting him, each step of the way, he will reassert himself.”* *“I am [sic] pretty skeptical of any approach that does not have him removed from all levers of power, and can’t see him agreeing to that voluntarily [...] we have the means to instantly oust him”* (p. 44)

Graeber: *“my old nemesis. I feel like I’m in a comic book”* (p. 45)

Graeber: *“I think Sarah is talking to Marilyn and she might not be as difficult to get on board as we think [...] Let’s first see what Marilyn really thinks and not assume she’s necessarily an entirely weak link”* (p. 45)

Gershon: *“I completely agree – Plan B is really going to be necessary. He is going to fight as hard as he can to keep HAU because, let’s face it, he doesn’t have anything else. But this diplomatic statement may be the way to get Marilyn on board.”* (p. 45)

Graeber: *“I was thinking of others I might contact: If we are looking for mass resignations, members of the editorial board include [...] Sarah Green - well, obviously [...] Holly High - I’m in contact with her now [...] Michael Puett - old friend [...] Michael Scott - colleague, dislikes me, coward, will come along if others are [etc.]”* (p. 46)

x: *“I personally don’t feel comfortable making reference to his mental health because, as Ilana says, we may very well get bogged down in a debate about whether he is or is not mentally unwell and that is definitely not the hill we want to die on.”* (p. 47)

Graeber: *“I only said it because I thought I had a record in writing of him saying ‘I had a breakdown, I can’t handle this, help me!’”* (p. 47)

Graeber: *“[?] at Stanford contacted me and asked if she could send the note I sent to her summarising Gio’s behaviour to [?] at Wenner-Grenn, who Gio has approached. What would be ideal would be to have Wenner-Grenn and others in our camp, say, ‘we’d love to give money to HAU but*

only if it's a proper collecIve with an independent treasury etc.'. Let me see if I can talk to her." (p. 47)

x: *"if he agrees to step aside then he will able to save face. If he doesn't then we release the statements as open letters to the Anthropology community and his reputation will take a tumble"; "Gio is going to be in a pretty awful position. 'Good' awful, of course, from our point of view."* (p. 47)

x: *"I could draft up the two statements example docs that we could workshop"* (p. 47)

Graeber: *"Could you? I'd be mightily appreciative!"* (p. 47)

Gershon: *"the question for me is which statement do you think will get most people to sign on board [...] We may need to make a fuss about open access to get some of the people on board [...] Perhaps also Niko Besnier – but I think for Niko we would have to be clear about all that Gio has done to abuse people. My sense from talking to people is that Carole McGranahan is completely unreliable."* (p. 48)

H. Subject: Re: pre-emptive strike; Fwd: HAU: Interim Chair's letter to the EAB; Attachments: DRAFT OPEN LETTER TO GDC - PATRONS - 1.docx [December 10 to 12, 2017]

xx: *"I think we need to begin to attack [...] we really need to start to move toward consensus on how to begin our attempt at ousting him. [x] has an excellent draft of a collective letter that we should try and get finalized soon. I think her mention of running it past a legal entity is a good one, but we may be fine if it is just going to go to the Board/Advisory Committee first? Or did we want to move straight to public?"* (p. 50)

Graeber: *"Gio launches pre-emptive strike. Our response?"* (p. 50)

Graeber forwards emails from Giovanni da Col to the External Advisory Board from the 9th of December 2017 and from Carole McGranahan to the EAB from the 25th of August 2017. These emails were not directly sent to Graeber, meaning someone in the EAB was forwarding Graeber all correspondence (the candidate is the person he mentions being "in contact with her" on p. 46). It shows however that the group should have known that HAU was already being restructured starting in the summer of 2017 and the contract with Chicago was already complete: Carole McGranahan email said: *"Key for the EAB is determining the restructuring of HAU-SET. We will do this by writing a new Constitution with the Editor-in-Chief, with clear parameters for the following: a. governance, both structure and procedures [;] b. finances (treasurer and accountant) [;] c. roles of EIC and EB (and other existing boards and committees), including decision-making powers, responsibilities, and term lengths [;] d. procedures for disputes, grievances, and sanctions [...] What I would like to propose is the dissolution of the External Advisory Board. In its place, we wish to create an Executive Board (EB) or a similar board that could liaise more directly with the Editorial office. [...] We will aim to circulate a draft Constitution to the EAB by October 15 [2017]. We request input from all the current EAB members; the task at hand is to find practical solutions to the current challenges that our wonderful project has been facing."* (pp. 51-56)

x: *"At some stage we will have to address his claims re: turning over a new leaf but I think we should make our initial move as soon as possible. We all know that Gio will not sign away his power [...] He has to go."* (p. 57)

Graeber: *"I agree strongly that the removal of Gio, by whatever means necessary, should be our primary concern."* (p. 58)

xx: *"I haven't accepted the money he and Carole are offering me is because it seems to me to be hush money. I don't want to hurt our cause by accepting it [...] P.S. as I write this, I got an email that Gio has wire transferred me [?] that he calculated as owing me. So it seems that if you don't accept the money, in true Gio fashion, he will force it into your pocket like some kind of*

Goodfellas villain." (p. 58) In this context xx, forwards another private email from Carole McGranahan: "At the AAAs last weekend I got to meet the new treasurer of HAU and she had a good report on the finances. [...] Giovanni would like to pay you pro rata outside of the terms of the honorary period. He always told me that you did excellent work on behalf of HAU [...] The transfer has already been made." (p. 63)

Graeber: "unfortunately Dame Marilyn has gone wobbly on us here was her reply".

Gershon: "I can back channel a bit with Marilyn [...] this is the obvious move from my perspective to make with her wobbliness. Argh!" (pp. 58-59)

Strathern: "there is to be a new treasurer etc etc— and just too many new people around for him to get away with it. I think this takes the heat off. Or rather, since he has had wind of disquiet is there any value in pressing ahead with our complaint?" [...] I think it would be useful for your dossier of documents and the specific allegations you were accumulating to be kept: a bit later on it may be helpful to check with Carole that specific individuals were properly treated." (p. 59) [email forwarded to the group by Graeber]

Green: "Ah, the plot thickens. Reading between the lines, what I think is happening is that Chicago has ordered Giovanni to implement the recommendations in my report before they will take over"; "restructure the management of the organization" (p. 60)

Green: "Gio said he 'fired' [?] How can you fire a volunteer? [...] It's the implication of him being the boss that is offensive" (p. 60) [email forwarded to the group by Graeber]

I. Subject: Re: HAU follow-up [December 10 to 20, 2017]

Gershon: "if Gio starts paying people what he owes them, then he will undercut one of our most effective critiques of his behavior. Of course, moving the journal to Chicago also means that the people who work on HAU behind the scenes will now be getting paid regularly. So one of our biggest issues will be taken care of." (p. 64)

Gershon: "Let me be clear – we will have to release accusations no matter which plan we choose. It is just a matter of timing. [...] a letter condemning all that he has done waiting to be publicly circulated [...] No accusations at the outset that Gio can deny (or say it was just a misunderstanding and now everything has been cleared up)". (p. 64)

Gershon: "Plan B: Release a list of all the ways Gio has behaved badly and call for his resignation" (p. 65)

Gershon: "pros – VERY satisfying [:] clear and not very confusing action" (p. 65)

Gershon: "HAU will go under quietly because people stop reviewing for HAU and stop submitting articles, we use our community's passive aggressive instincts to do Gio/HAU in." (p. 65)

Gershon: "cons: - Gio can claim it is all a misunderstanding, slander, can start lawsuits, and move us into he-said, she-said debates [:] -more likely people will have to step forward and claim that Gio wronged them publicly [:] -Gio can claim to have fixed all the problems, and HAU and Gio move forward (p. 65)

Graeber: "I am pretty sure it will be impossible at this stage to get Marilyn and Marshall to sign on to Plan B". Plan B is the public shaming route. (p. 66)

Graeber: "I think Plan A, the nice version, might be unsatisfying, but let's be honest - Gio's fame is a bubble, and when the bubble bursts, people will assume he was up to shady things and rumours will circulate, even though they might not be entirely accurate rumours" (p. 66)

Graeber: “once he’s out of HAU, he’s toast. So one scenario would be to keep the Plan B statement to circulate privately, and otherwise let nature do it’s work. These are just thoughts - I’d be willing to be persuaded that a more aggressive approach is better” (p. 66)

Graeber: “Agreed to move quickly. Marshall told Gio he should resign yesterday, I confirmed, and Gio claimed he’d like to but is not allowed by the terms of the Chicago deal. In other words he’s really feeling the pressure.” (p. 67)

Graeber: “All the hostility to HAU is his doing an no one else’s. He has to own it.” (p. 67)

Gershon: “what does it mean when we say we want transparency and oversight. But I don’t really care that strongly, it is just how I would write this. [...] I am guessing we have around a month and half after the transition to Chicago before it looks odd that we are doing this. And better to do it before the transition if possible.” (p. 67) Gershon seems to not know that the contract with University of Chicago Press was signed in the summer of 2017 as they are rushing to execute the coup, thinking that if they move before the end of December, they could destroy the deal.

Graeber: “Anyway talked to [?] for some time, she’s on side. Carole M. on the other hand sent out a pro- Gio circular thusly if people haven’t seen it: I don’t actually get these emails interestingly enough, but my friend forwards them” (p. 69) Graeber implicates another member of the EAB, a likely candidate is Andrej Grubačić, his close “friend”, one-time co-author, fellow academic “anarchist” and also reputed to be a “difficult” man-child or so I hear.

Graeber: “Might directly intervene with Gio tomorrow” (p. 70)

Gershon: “Do we need to have a letter ready to go if your direct intervention doesn’t go well?” (p. 70)

x: “Not sure what you are referring to re: direct intervention but please let us know if there is anything we can do to help/support.” (p. 70)

Graeber: “I’m about to unleash the hounds of hell by sending a letter to Gio, cc’d to Marshall, expanding on Marshall’s suggestion he step down as CEO”. (p. 71)

Gershon: “I think you did a great job. I have a few editing suggestions” (p. 71)

x: “[xx] could you draft a new Plan A letter? and I’ll fix up the previous [Plan B] letter I drafted in case we need that too?” (p. 72)

xx: “So perhaps I am more traumatized than I thought because I found myself getting incredibly angry while trying to write this [...] I kept having to walk away from the computer because my blood pressure was skyrocketing. As such, please consider this a rough draft. I welcome (and almost require) some editing and contributions” (p. 72)

Gershon: “The full version of David’s letter is very hard hitting, around paragraph 3 I would be completely devastated to get such a letter. So probably Gio will be affected too [...] I think David needs to circulate the letter to Marilyn and Marshall” (p. 73)

Graeber: “Ilana, do you think I should do so beforehand? I think they might council me to hold back.” (p. 73)

xx: “This looks fantastic, David. Let us know how it goes or if you need any other support from us prior to initiating our attack. [...] Alea iacta est, y’all” (p. 73)

Sahlins and Graeber: “Marshall has already proposed an abbreviated version of what I’m suggesting - he told Gio ‘You should let someone else take over HAU as CEO: you can be the otiose EXecutive Publisher.’” (p. 74)

Graeber: “*Marilyn also would like to see the back of him but I’m not sure I want to trouble her with the details. When I said that I expected HAU workers to write a letter calling for his resignation and that if they did I would be honour-bound to be in solidarity, and sign on, but feared being alone, she replied:*”

Strathern: “OK! First thing is if there is a way I can back up your move of solidarity, I will definitely do so (so you wont be alone) and publicly if need be. If you write a separate letter, for instance, it might be one I could sign too. (But I am too far out from the day to day concerns of the journal to be legitimately part of the HAU workers’ call for resignation: most of what I hear is second or third hand).” (p. 74) [email forwarded to the group by Graeber]

Gershon: “*I am imagining that this will be a public petition, not a private letter*” (p. 75)

Gershon: “*What do you guys want – is this a letter by HAU workers or is this a more general one? I am now email-confused.*” (p. 76)

Graeber: “*the personal one basically says there are ‘half a dozen different scandals’ about to hit and doesn’t say from who. I warn him of impending catastrophe and basically say everybody hates him*” (p. 80)

x: “*I wonder if we should send a similar letter to just the Advisory Board? That way this warning is not yet public but can be a warning to those involved [...] we will probably have to advance in our plans unless the Board can urge him to step down to avoid public scandal.*” (p. 81)

[xxxxxx] to Graeber: “*There is no one who can just step in and keep things running, because no one has all the info and access to accounts etc. Because other than getting Gio out asap, there is simply no plan whatsoever. That’s the reason I keep asking what we’re going to do after sending around the heavy-hitting letters, because I don’t think anyone has thought about that in any detail [...] The minimum of responsibility to take would be to have a concrete, executable plan, someone who can step in and take over, not ‘probably’ and ‘I think’, but “definitely”. [...] this whole affair is like one of those nightmares where you watch a car crash unfold in slow motion without being able to stop it, and frankly, you’re the one driving.*” (pp. 82-83)

Graeber to Giovanni da Col, 20/12/2019: “*If HAU is to survive you need to step down as editor immediately [...] There are half a dozen different scandals about to break. [...] Your internal governance of HAU would likely be outright criminal if HAU itself did not have such a grey-area legal status. And this isn’t even mentioning the stories of interpersonal violence or threats of violence, sexual harassment, and darker things I won’t even mention - but I can assure you, other people will. At this particular historical juncture some of these scandals will be particularly difficult to brush aside, belittle or ignore. [...] Proceeding this way will prevent the inevitable explosions about to occur. As a friend, I urge you to take this course. HAU can still be salvaged. So can your career. But neither are likely to survive unless you take the course of action I am recommending. David*” (pp. 83-86). Also posted on hauleaks [here](#). David Graeber claimed on twitter this was a personal message of advice, but it was a carefully crafted letter with input by the group, and Marshall Sahlins cc’d.

Gershon: “*I would suggest that we send the Plan A letter to everyone involved with HAU – the Advisory Board, the editorial boards, HAUnet, and ask people to sign before submitting it to the press director. Before doing this, I would ask Marilyn and Marshall to see whether they are willing to sign – and if they want to change the language. After that, I think we start collecting signatures.*” (p. 88)

Gershon: “*And if we got strong pushback, we make the letter into a public petition and ask people to sign*” (p. 88). Sahlins signed the open letter [here](#), Strathern did not.

x: “*David, your (+Marshall’s) email to Gio was really powerful and buoyed my spirits.[...] Here’s hoping Gio’s dominoes start to fall now things are in motion.*” (p. 90).

xx: *“That cowardly little shit. I guess that answers your question regarding whether HAU is Gio. Seems it is and it seems that Carole doesn't care that it is—she's been Gio's toadie for months now. I warned her before I left in my last email [...] We should then get that to Chicago's Press Director ASAP in case we need be move to the more public phase. I'm absolutely livid.”* (p. 90)

J. Subject: Re: letter re: our experience at HAU; Attachment: LETTER RE- GDC - EX-WORKERS - 1.docx [December 23 to 24, 2017]

x: *“This letter looks great. I will add some of my experiences in. This letter might be good to send to [?] and see if they want to add in their anonymized experiences [...] Ilana or David, would you want to reach out to any of them with this letter?”* (p. 91)

xx: *“Gio is cunning and vicious and I have no doubt he will try and destroy my career and discredit my character if he finds out that I've been organising against him. BUT, I definitely want to provide David with backing right now and preferably asap, SO I have amended an old draft letter and was thinking that we could release this anonymously together if you agree?”* (p. 91)

x: *“Hi Ilana [...] Thanks for all your work/help on this.”* (p. 92)