

Alina Utrata

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RESEARCH STATEMENT

My research examines technology corporations beyond the traditional political/economic divide, theorizing how and when corporations may enact a kind of political power outside the control of the state. By taking a longer approach to corporations in global history, my dissertation “Silicon Valley and the State: Towards a Political Theory of Technology Corporations” looks at how corporate and state power have interacted in areas which have historically been considered state functions. I examine how companies have come to control technological regimes—from cloud computing to digital payment systems—and what type of power this confers both over individual citizens and against the state. In addition to my doctoral work, I have published work comparing Silicon Valley’s outer space colonization projects to the histories of colonizing corporations such as company-states like the British or Dutch East India Companies. I have also conducted archival research and co-authored a chapter on the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. My future research intends to bring these strands together by comparing contemporary debates over digital sovereignty with debates on economic sovereignty during decolonization and the nationalization crises of corporations and critical infrastructure in the twentieth century.

EDUCATION

University of Cambridge, Darwin College, PhD Candidate in Politics and International Studies, (10/2020 - present).

- Dissertation Title: “Silicon Valley and the State: Towards a Political Theory of Technology Corporations.”
- Funding: Gates-Cambridge Scholarship
- Supervisor: Professor J.C. Sharman

Queen’s University Belfast, M.A., Conflict Transformation & Social Justice with distinction, (9/2017 - 12/2018).

- Dissertation: “The Job We Knew: Perceptions of Royal Ulster Constabulary Officers on the Police Role in Northern Ireland.”
- Funding: Marshall Scholarship
- Supervisor: Professor Kieran McEvoy

Stanford University, B.A., History with a Minor in Human Rights and Honors in Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, (9/2013 - 6/2017). 3.8 GPA

- Thesis: “Stories Courts Tell: The Impact of the International Criminal Tribunal on Bosnia and Herzegovina.”
- Supervisor: Professor Norman Naimark

PUBLICATIONS

Academic Articles

“Engineering Territory: Space and Colonies in Silicon Valley”. Forthcoming at *American Political Science Review*.

With Abbas Milani. “Their Man in Abadan: The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and Dylan Thomas in Iran.” Chapter in *Ebrahim Golestan’s Encounter with Dylan Thomas*. Mage Publishers. 2022.

“Thinking About Truth in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.” *Stanford International Policy Review*. July 2017.

Public-Facing Articles

“Lost in Space: Tech Billionaire’s Plans for Space Colonization.” *Boston Review*. July 2021. <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/lost-in-space/>

“Amazon Web Services, Cloud Computing and Corporate Control.” *The Darwinian*. July 2022. <https://darwin-college-cambridge.shorthandstories.com/amazon-web-services-cloud-computing-and-corporate-control/index.html>

“Company Rules: Martian Colonies and Silicon Valley’s Corporations in Space.” *Political Economy Research Centre Blog*. December 2022. https://www.perc.org.uk/project_posts/company-rules-martian-colonies-and-silicon-valleys-corporations-in-space/

“Seeing Like a Social Media Site.” Power-Switch Blog at the Cambridge Minderoo Centre, December 2020. <https://powerswitchorg.wordpress.com/2020/12/02/seeing-like-a-social-media-site/>

“The political arguments against digital monopolies in the House Judiciary Report.” Power-Switch Blog at the Cambridge Minderoo Centre, November 2020. <https://powerswitchorg.wordpress.com/2020/11/16/the-political-arguments-against-digital-monopolies-in-the-house-judiciary-report/>

“Should You Have the Right to a Facebook Account?” Power-Switch Blog at the Cambridge Minderoo Centre, November 2020. <https://powerswitchorg.wordpress.com/2020/11/16/should-you-have-a-right-to-a-facebook-account/>

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Undergraduate Supervisor, University of Cambridge, (2021 to present).

- Supervisor for papers POL 1: The Modern State and Its Alternatives and HP3: Theory and Practice in History and Politics, Technology Section
- Co-supervisor for undergraduate dissertation “Period Tracking Apps: Corporate Digital Surveillance and Reproductive Justice”

Part-Time Teaching Assistant, Stanford University, (2018 to 2019).

- Teaching assistant for courses HUMRTS 101: Gateway to Human Rights, HUMRTS 103: Transitional Justice, Human Rights, and International Criminal Tribunals and HUMRTS 114: Human Rights Practice and Challenges in Southeast Asia
- Prepared and marked weekly quizzes on course material, organized and conducted discussions, provided feedback and support to students researching and writing essays

SCHOLARSHIPS, FELLOWSHIPS & AWARDS

Gates-Cambridge Scholarship, (2020).

- One of eighty students selected for funding from the Gates-Cambridge Trust to pursue graduate study at Cambridge University

Marshall Scholarship, (2017).

- One of forty scholars across the US selected for scholarship funded by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office to study at a British university

Recipient of the Stanford Hume Humanities Honors Fellowship, (2017) [\$1,500 received].

- One of eight students at Stanford University selected for the Hume Humanities Honors fellowship, a cohort of those in humanities disciplines writing honors theses.

Recipient of the Hoover Institution's Silas Palmer Research Fellowship, (2016) [\$2,500 received].

- Fellowship and grant to conduct independent research project on Stanford University's involvement in California's forced sterilization program in the late 20th century in the Hoover Institution Archives.

Recipient of the Stanford Human Rights Center Fellowship, (June - August 2016) [\$6,000 received].

- Fellowship to take up placement to observe and report on cases in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia against former Khmer Rouge officials accused of mass atrocities. Based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Recipient of the Center for Russian, Eastern European & Eurasian Studies Research Grant, (2015) [\$2,000 received].

- Travel grant to conduct interviews with officials at Yugoslav Tribunal and victims groups in Srebrenica, Bosnia; Sarajevo, Bosnia; and The Hague, The Netherlands.

Recipient of the Stanford Global Studies Fellowship. (June - August 2015) [\$6,000 received].

- Fellowship to take up placement at the Balkan Institute for Conflict Resolution, Responsibility and Reconciliation to assist with social psychology research on intergroup reconciliation in Bosnia. Based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Recipient of the Armenian Genocide Centennial Commemoration Conference Travel Grant, (April 2015) [\$2,000 received].

- Travel grant to Istanbul, Turkey for the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and academic conference “The Armenian Genocide: Concepts and Comparative Perspectives” hosted at Boğaziçi University.

RESEARCH POSITIONS

Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies at Stanford, (2018 to 2020).

- Conducted archival research on the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Iran during the early 20th century at the Public Record Office in Kew and the British Library Archives
- Conducted secondary and archival research on a variety of projects relating to Iran

Center for Human Rights and International Justice at Stanford, (2018 to 2020).

- Conducted research on a variety of projects regarding international human rights law
- Designed educational teaching tools and supported development of academic minor

BrexitNI Law Clinic, (2018).

- Assisted with research projects and reports regarding Brexit’s impact on the Northern Irish peace process

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE AND SEMINAR ORGANIZATION

Co-Convener of the Data and Its Materialities Workshop at the Cambridge Centre for Digital Humanities, (July 2023).

- Co-convener of a one day workshop for scholars working on data and infrastructure

Convener of the Move Slow and Proof-Read: Working Papers in Critical Tech Series (February to May 2022).

- Organized and convened 15 weekly virtual meetings of over 50 early career researchers across the US, UK and Europe in critical tech to provide feedback and workshop works in progress

Graduate Student Representative, Cambridge Politics and International Studies Department, (2022).

- Responsible for organizing various social events as well as convening the formal “Meet the Department” Series, and Graduate Student Seminar Series and the End-of-Year Research Symposium

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Are Corporations Spatial Entities?” DAAD Workshop on Digital Sovereignty, (September 2023).

““Cloud First, Land Last”: Silicon Valley and Its Natural Metaphors,” Cambridge Graduate Workshop in Political Thought, (June 2023).

“The Territorialization of Cyberspace,” Academy for Territorial Development in the Leibniz Association Workshop, (July 2023).

“Amazon and The Invention of Cloud Computing,” Global Corporations and International Law Workshop at the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law at Cambridge University, (December 2022).

“Towards a Political Theory of Cloud Computing Corporations,” Workshops in Political Theory at the University of Manchester, (September 2022).

“Space Colonies, Seasteading and Cyberspace: Colonial Understandings of Space and Territory in Silicon Valley”, Political Studies Association Conference at the University of York, (April 2022).

“Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk’s Space Colonies: Engineering New Space in Silicon Valley”, University of St Andrews Graduate International Political Theory Conference, (September 2021)

INVITED TALKS

“Are Big Tech The New Colonialists?” Panelist at the Cambridge Festival of Ideas, (March 2023).

“Silicon Valley and the State: Corporations Beyond the Political/Economic Divide,” Talk for the Cambridge Society for Economic Pluralism, (October 2022).

“Amazon and the (Much Longer) History of Corporate Rule”, Talk for Wolfson College Press Fellows, (May 2023 & April 2022).

“Custodians of the Cloud,” Darwin College Humanities and Social Sciences Lunchtime Seminar, (May 2022).

“Podcasting in Academia,” Guest Speaker at The Stanford Daily Summer Workshop, (August 2022).

“Para-Academia and Big Tech,” Guest Talk at the University of Leiden, Department of Media, (May 2022).

“Human Rights in the Digital Space,” Guest on the Declarations Podcast, (March 2021).

“Why You Shouldn’t Work in Silicon Valley After Graduating,” Talk at St Mary’s University, (April 2021).

“Don’t Be Evil: Big Tech and the New Corporate State,” Marshall Scholarship Alumni Presentation Series, (March 2021).

DEPARTMENTAL AND SEMINAR PAPERS

“Locked Out of Your Account: States, Corporations & Identity Verification,” Cambridge Department of Politics & International Studies Research Symposium, (May 2023).

“Ledgers vs. Tokens: Identity and the Technology of Money,” Cambridge POLIS Department Political Theory Works in Progress Seminar, (March 2023).

“Apple Pay, Blockchain and Cash: Corporations, States and the Battle for Money,” Cambridge POLIS Department International Relations and Comparative Politics Works in Progress Seminar, (April 2023).

“Jeff Bezos and Elon Musks’s (Corporate) Celestial Settlements and the History of the British East India Company,” Cambridge POLIS Department Move Slow & Proof-Read: Working Papers in Critical Tech, (March 2022).

“The Political Theory and History of Corporations and their States,” Cambridge POLIS Department Agora Seminar Series, (June 2021).

“Silicon Valley and the State,” Gates Annual Weekend of Research at the University of Cambridge, (May 2021).

MEDIA & PRODUCTION

Creator, Host and Producer of The Anti-Dystopians Podcast and Newsletter, (2020 to present).

- Host and producer of a podcast which interviews guest researchers and activists to host academic discussions of critical technology with over 20,000 downloads
- *Selected episodes:* A History of Libertarian Exit; Data Colonialism and Its Discontents; Astrotopia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race; Nationalize Gmail!; Should Facebook Be a Public Utility?; The Feminine Meme: Gender at Hack-a-Thons; Data Flows: Period Tracking Apps and Surveillance Capitalism; The First AI: Are Corporations Robots?; Platform Socialism; Financial Imperialism on the Blockchain; The Eye of the Tiger: Wildlife Surveillance in Indian Tiger Reserves; The Return of (Amazon) Ring

Producer of The Rights Pod: The Stanford Human Rights Center Podcast, (2019).

- Creator of the “Rights Pod”, the Center for Human Rights at Stanford’s podcast series now produced and hosted by current Stanford Human Rights students

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

United States Department of State, Intern. Washington, D.C. (March to June 2016).