

# The Treasure chest

## Counter-cartography of Agrilogistic Violence



Found Ola/Unilever Schatkist, Nikki Vieler, Photo, 2017<sup>(c1)</sup>

On the 4th of May 2017 a polymer object was found on the beach of Scheveningen. This object was an OLA Schatkist Ice Cream container. This object was highly likely to be bought from one of the local Ice cream parlours which sell Unilever/OLA Schatkist Ice Creams. What follows is a speculative counter-cartography<sup>(b2)</sup> of the life course of this polymer object through the design, source of materials, manufacture, distribution and use within Agrilogistics (Agricultural Logistics)<sup>(b1)</sup> in Planet Earth's ecology. I will visualise and take note of the intersections of violence, law, politics and aesthetics of this life course.



An extended visual localization of the found polymer object, Nikki Vieler, Various Media, 2017

## Use & Distribution

The polymer treasure chest was found on Scheveningen beach after its content had been consumed and the container disposed of by an unidentified user. I then tried to take a Forensic approach<sup>(b2)</sup> to the polymer object and its affiliated system (Agrilogistics)<sup>(b1)</sup>, by analysing the object, the object's affiliated media and speculated the path it took from raw resource to found object (I also include relevant background historical information to these developments). In particular I was and am interested in making the Agrilogistic<sup>(b1)</sup> violence of this object more visible, by developing an analysis which connects the violence that is at and outside the threshold of direct visual detectability.



Visualisation of an ice cream parlour in the vicinity of Scheveningen beach, Nikki Vieler, Photographs, 2017

The polymer object is a product, designed and manufactured for mass consumption. Scheveningen beach lies in the Netherlands, whose current and previous coalition government has a VVD party majority supplemented by members of D66, Christenunie and CDA political parties<sup>(a1,2)</sup>. The VVD party and the coalition government support private enterprise and liberal economics, whose policies allow this product to be sold at Scheveningen beach<sup>(a3,4)</sup>. The user had bought the treasure chest at one of the local Ice cream parlours which sold the OLA/Unilever Ice cream.

The ice cream had been distributed through Unilever's affiliated network of distribution centres in the Netherlands, with this case being the Bidfood storage facility in Schiedam<sup>(a5)</sup>. The transportation costs of the ice cream container are paid for by Unilever, who in return adds this on to the price of the commodity which is sold on the beaches of Scheveningen.

While Unilever produces the goods in Germany, a significant segment of the company is based in the Netherlands. The financial headquarters is located in Rotterdam. Unilever has been in the Netherlands since the 1930's and its founding companies have maintained a foothold in the Netherlands for a significantly longer time<sup>(a6)</sup>. It's organisation of tax payments is therefore old and complex.

The Netherlands allows minimisation of corporate tax, which makes it highly attractive for corporations to locate financial holding companies in the country<sup>(a7,8,9)</sup>. The exemption is for foreign branches and participation through capital gains, dividends and profit participation loan interest derived from a qualifying subsidiary. This policy is maintained by the current government<sup>(a9)</sup>. The history of Dutch taxation and tax avoidance in the Netherlands predates the tenure of Mark Rutte as prime minister and the current coalition government and has a longer and more complex history<sup>(a9)</sup>.

Companies in the Netherlands pay tax mainly on profits. However, companies can reduce their tax by creating and stating very low profits, or move the profits to another holding in a country which has very little tax on profit. Therefore most of the Dutch tax can be avoided<sup>(a7,8)</sup>.



Comparison of the contemporary design of the Treasure chest with an older version, Nikki Vieler, Photograph, 2017

### Aesthetics & Design

The aesthetics of the treasure chest have been modified over decades of design, production and consumption. However they have fundamentally remained the same and deliver a simple message. The treasure chest is a symbol of wealth and adventure. These themes are central to the politics of neoliberalism and corporatism, which has swept over the world since the turn of the previous century<sup>(a10,11,12)</sup>.

The colour blue is a colour that symbolises water & the sea and also is often a symbolic colour of neoliberal economic policies. It remains a main colour in the logo of the VVD party in the Netherlands<sup>(a3)</sup> and is the main colour of the conservative party in the United Kingdom (a party which strongly harbours neoliberal policies)<sup>(a12, )</sup>. Therefore the blue polymer treasure chest ice cream container is suitably sold next to a beach, as its colour indicates the sea and the neoliberal economic policies which have swept over the planet earth onto the beaches of many countries<sup>(a10,11,12)</sup>.





Comparison of the contemporary design of the Treasure chest with an older version, Nikki Vieler, Photograph, 2017

There is not much to be found and said about the design of the object itself. It is a reasonably elementary object designed to be injection moulded at great speed, efficiency and little cost. The design has changed over the years in order to reduce costs and to increase production speeds. A set of design approaches which fit within neoliberal policies of market oriented thought<sup>(a11,12)</sup>. After all, reduction of costs open the product to a larger market, as the price can be lowered.

## Manufacture

The treasure chest container was distributed from the Unilever/Langnese plant in Heppenheim<sup>(a14)</sup>. The Heppenheim production facility takes the Treasure chest Ice cream container and fills it with its ice cream, cardboard inner lining and gift. The facility then wraps the object in a polymer wrapping, freezes it and sends it to its destined distribution centre in the Netherlands, which in this case is Schiedam<sup>(a5)</sup>.



Merkel at Eu summit, Unknown author, Photograph, 2012, <sup>(a15)</sup>

Germany's head of government (Angela Merkel) <sup>(a16)</sup>, has enforced open trading policies within Europe and the European Union which allow the production and consumption of goods to flow between countries<sup>(a17)</sup>. This allows the propylene produced by a chemical plant in Saudi Arabia to be shipped to the Lyondell-Basell plant in Wesseling<sup>(a18,19)</sup>, which in turn is converted into polypropylene. The shipping of the propylene to the Wesseling plant occurs through the port of Rotterdam. In doing so, the shipment is charged import duties and VAT which is paid by the Dutch Lyondell-Basell affiliate<sup>(a7,8,9)</sup>.



Wesseling chemicals plant, Germany, Unknown Author, Photograph, 2017

The polypropylene object was made from polypropylene granules which were injected into a mould in the Unilever/Langnese facility in Germany with the help of Coveris. Lyondell-Basell & Coveris operate together with Unilever to set up and produce the OLA/Langnese Treasure Chest Ice Cream containers in Germany in Heppenheim and Wesseling<sup>(a14,18,20)</sup>.

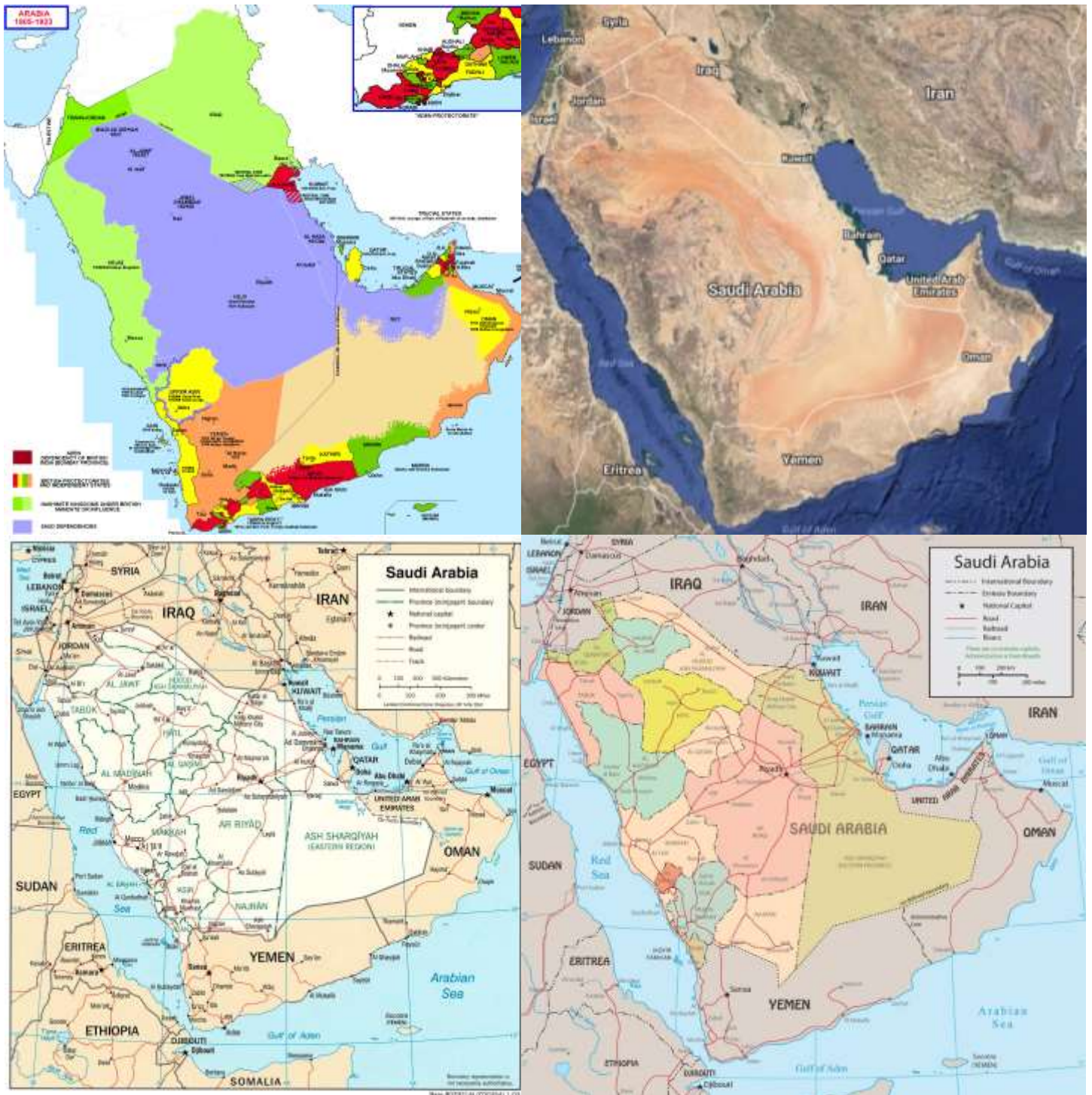




Qatif oil production facility, Ghawar oil field, Unknown author, Photograph, Unknown date

The polypropylene granules were manufactured by converting propylene into polypropylene. Propylene was acquired from the production of oil and gas. The hydrocarbon fluids were likely produced from the Ghawar oil field<sup>(a21)</sup>. The oil was then processed at the Al-Jubail chemical processing plant in Saudi Arabia<sup>(a22)</sup>, where Lyondell-Basell and Tasnee petrochemical cooperatively own and manage the plant<sup>(a22)</sup>. During the production, Lyondell-Basell and Tasnee pay corporate tax to the Saudi government<sup>(a23)</sup>.





Four maps of Saudi Arabia, (map predating the Saudi Arabian State, Saudi Arabia as seen from google maps, A political map of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabian states), Nikki Vieler, Various Media, 2017 [\(a28\)](#)

## A short Political History of Saudi Arabia

The history of Saudi Arabia is complex yet I will cover it so as to provide the Treasure chest's context of the longué duree [\(b2\)](#). The nation is fairly young and was established after World War I [\(a23\)](#). While the borders were set by the British government and Saudi Royal Family, it was at great expense of the local economy and dynamics [\(a26\)](#). King Ibn Il Saud had asked the British government to keep the borders of the nation open and flexible so that the nomadic peoples of the Saudi peninsula could travel and live freely. The British denied this and created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with its very rigid and linear borders [\(a26\)](#). A decision which still has consequences today as Saudi Arabia is a significant influence in the Middle East [\(a26,27\)](#).

The Saudi Arabian government has also used its wealth from the hydrocarbon industry to increase the general quality of life in Saudi Arabia [\(a28,29\)](#). Huge investments in infrastructure, education and medical facilities have been made over decades. Saudi Arabia is currently one of the largest importers of weapons from Western countries such as the USA and the UK [\(a30\)](#).





Child in Mother's arms, Unknown author, Al-jazeera Photograph, 2017<sup>(a31)</sup>

### Contemporary Agrilogistic Violence relatable to the Treasure Chest

The taxes which the Saudi government puts on its exports (VAT) and corporate tax, indirectly fund the Saudi military who are under the command of the Saudi Royal family. Saudi Arabia and its military are currently leading the military intervention in Yemen under the command of the Saudi crown prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud <sup>(a32)</sup>. This military intervention is accused of the bombing of strategic infrastructure and blocking the supply of basic food supplies to the Yemeni people <sup>(a31,33,34)</sup>. This has created a considerable famine in Yemen, which has led to deaths, malnutrition, developmental problems amongst children and further indirect Agrilogistic violence <sup>(a,31,33,34,b2)</sup>. Thus the Saudi's use Agrilogistics <sup>(b2)</sup> to supply polymer objects and ice cream throughout the world and by means of financial exchange to enforce a barely legally detectable violent campaign against the Yemeni people <sup>(b1,c2)</sup>.

The ingredients of the Ice cream enclosed in this polymer object originate from the United States of America, Spain, Ghana, India and the Philippines. Each of these ingredients and countries has its own stories and history of Agrilogistic <sup>(b1)</sup> violence to tell <sup>(a35)</sup>, as do the Netherlands and Germany <sup>(a35)</sup>.







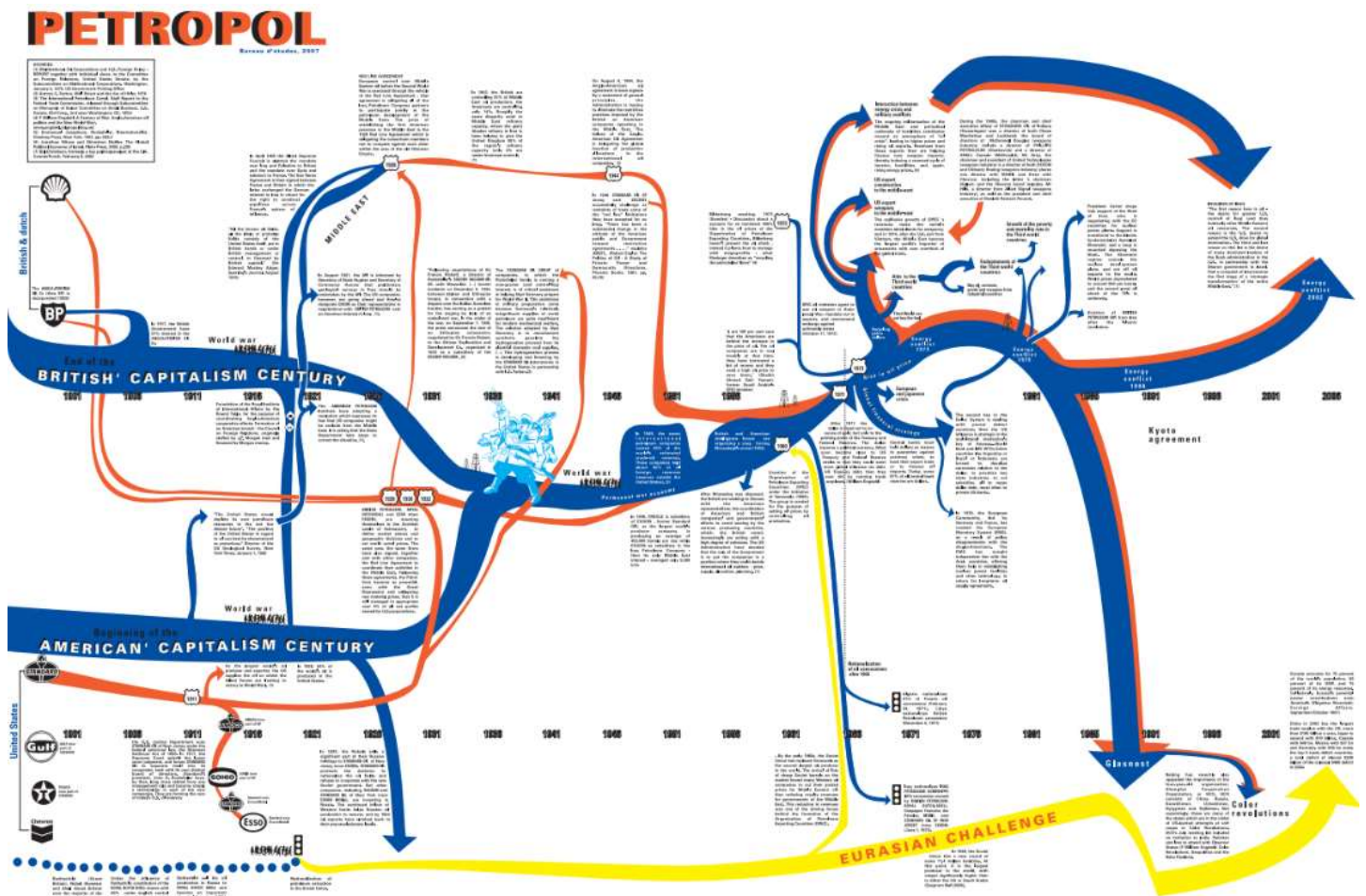
Depiction interior Tonychocolonely chocolate bar wrapper, Nikki Vieler, Photograph, 2017

A physically small example of counter-cartographic work which I could make is the Tony’s Chocolonely chocolate wrapper depicted above. It’s an example of how I can engage with consumers and their consumption patterns by creating a chronography<sup>(a38,39)</sup> of the product’s development.

I would have to develop a larger and more complex map to map out the entire system which creates such an object. Therefore I should also look at larger and more complex examples. While this is a very good example of a consumer related map, the educational value of the Agrilogistical system<sup>(b1)</sup> behind it could be enhanced. I should try to do that myself.



Tony’s Chocolonely chocolate bar wrapper, Tony Chocolonely, Photograph, 2017



Petropol map, Bureau D'études, Various Media, 2007(a40)

A good example to observe is the Petropol map designed by Bureau D'études(a2,41). This map has thoroughly documented the history of oil production. It's an example of how a product designer could map out the greater complexity of the social structures and historical influence oil & petroleum have had on history and still have on contemporary society. The approach could give an in depth understanding of the larger historical processes involved in Agrilogistics(b1). However I would have to research and create a topographical map, so as to provide the narrative for the ecological system which designs, manufactures, distributes and uses polymer objects such as the OLA/Unilever Schatkist.





Still from the "Death of Yugoslavia", Nikki Vieler, Various Media, (title, producers & distributors & date documentary: Death of Yugoslavia, Norma Percy, Brian Lapping associates, BBC,1995), 2017<sup>(a42,43)</sup>

The final example of counter-cartography consider and to avoid at all costs is the map depicted above. This map, presented by Ratko Mladic at the Serbian assembly during the proposal of the Vance-Owen peace plan in the Bosnian wars is (speculated as) a historical polymer object<sup>(a42,43,44)</sup>. This map is still related to the contemporary discourse concerning the trial of war criminals and the material turn in forensics of such cases<sup>(a44,45,46,b2)</sup>.

As a product designer working on my map I should be deeply aware of the complications & possibilities of abuse and violence which a map designed to highlight the Agrilogistics system and violence could lead to. Therefore I shall test any counter-cartographic maps which I shall make, amongst people who are prepared to test the map for rhetorical use. I shall do this so as to ensure that my map remains informative, as opposed to becoming a rhetorical device to further inflict violence in an already violent Agrilogistic<sup>(b1)</sup> system such as the map depicted above.





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**Notes(c):**

The Notes have no direct bearing on the essay, but are annotated as to avoid confusion about the reading of the document.

- (1) The text under the images does not include in the word count. They are merely there to assist the reader in understanding the visual element in the essay and to provide sufficient source documentation, and do not directly contribute to the content of the essay.
- (2) It may seem that I am highlighting the violence and destruction perpetrated by the Saudi government in an orientalist manner, however I have taken note of Edward Said's notion of this and I am merely conforming to the assigned 2000 words in the essay. If I was granted more words to write this essay I would have taken the time, effort and words to explain and write an essay that did not contain a hint of orientalism. However I am ascribed to limit it so far to this short notation. I would love to write a more complex and strongly non-orientalist essay, but I am limited to the amount of words that I have. I intend to write a more comprehensive essay in the future given the time to do so.
- (3) Thanks to my parents (Andrew and Glynis Vieler) and my teacher Mariska Versantvoort, for helping me with this essay.