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## Nancy Scheper-Hughes on the NJ corruption bust and illegal organ trafficking

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By Eugene Raikhel

One of the most shocking aspects of the sprawling corruption bust that brought down several New Jersey mayors yesterday, was the arrest of Levy Izhak Rosenbaum of Brooklyn for attempting to arrange [a donation of a kidney for \\$160,000](#). Moreover, it was apparently UC Berkeley's [Nancy Scheper-Hughes](#) who, in 2002, [first tipped off the FBI](#) to her knowledge of Rosenbaum's role as the principal US broker in an international kidney trafficking ring. The donors/victims included Moldovan villagers who were apparently promised manual labor jobs in the US and then coerced into "donating" their kidneys to recipients who posed as relatives.

Scheper-Hughes came upon this over the course of a [decade-long research project](#) on the illegal organs trade, which is the topic of a forthcoming book entitled *A World Cut in Two: Global Justice and the Traffic in Organs*. In addition to a handful of academic publications, Scheper-Hughes discussed the project at length during a recent lecture at the New York Academy of Sciences, available for viewing [here](#).

You can listen to an extensive conversation between Scheper-Hughes and WNYC's Brian Lehrer about the case here:

The story brings up numerous interesting and very troubling issues, particularly the question of how physicians and administrators at some very prestigious East Coast hospitals failed to notice that anything was amiss about the relationships between kidney donors and recipients in these cases. (Interestingly enough, this week's issue of *The New Yorker* includes [an article by Larissa MacFarquhar about kidney donation](#), which discusses the debate about legalizing compensation for organ donation).

Additionally, this case very poignantly brings up questions about the ethics of conducting ethnography "undercover" — issues which Scheper-Hughes has addressed in her 2004 article, "[Parts unknown: undercover ethnography of the organs-trafficking underworld](#)." As she writes in the abstract:

"This article addresses some of the ethical, ethnographic and

political dilemmas of an idiosyncratic multi-sited research project exploring the illegal and covert activities surrounding the traffic in humans and their body parts by outlaw surgeons, kidney hunters and transplant tourists engaged in 'back-door' transplants in the global economy. In its odd juxtapositions of ethnography, documentation, surveillance and human rights work, the project blends genres and transgresses longstanding distinctions between anthropology, political journalism, scientific reporting, political engagement, public interest anthropology and human rights work. How does one investigate covert and criminal behavior anthropologically? When, if ever (and on what grounds), is it permissible to conduct research 'under cover'? When crimes are being committed, to whom does one owe one's divided loyalties?" ([Scheper-Hughes 2004](#)).

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