Loss in times of revolution and exile

Charlotte Loris-Rodionoff
November, 2016

What does loss mean for Syrians living in Southern Turkey in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution and in the midst of an ongoing war? How is this loss experienced, and how does it affect Syrians' every-day in Turkey? Those are some of the questions I looked at during my PhD fieldwork among Syrians in the city of (Gazi)Antep.

The loss experienced by Syrians can be defined as polymorphic.

The loss of Syria takes primacy-that of the loss of one's home and homeland featuring in the myriad conversations that I had during my fieldwork. This loss was also recounted as the loss of one's past, one's former life, the loss of relatives, of kinship ties and networks. Yet, Syrians' loss is also the loss of a political project, of their revolution and the subsequent loss of one's revolutionary self.

Turkey appeared during my fieldwork as a space marked by the losses experienced in an elsewhere and in the past: being 'outside' (*barra*) – in Turkey – means having lost *the* inside (*juwa*/Syria) and *her* inside (her former life and self). The outside/Turkey was thus often apprehended through this very loss, which led to everyday practices aimed at reaching out to what has been lost – whether it is Syria, a home, the past, relatives, etc. This could be by crossing the border to continue one's revolutionary project 'inside', to meet with relatives and friends not seen for some time, or, indeed for more pragmatic reasons such as bringing back food and medicine from one's village or city. People also spend an enormous amount of time on the phone to maintain lost family connections and social networks. In the house where I lived for my fieldwork, people were constantly speaking on WhatsApp with relatives and friends inside Syria.

The meaning of living outside Syria after having experienced a multi-layered loss 'inside' seems perfectly expressed by the story of Umm Khaled, a Syrian widow in her fifties, once said in front of me. "Do you remember Abu Ahmad? (she asks her friend Umm Hala) He always used to lose his way in the village. He would never know how to go back home and he would wander around the village not recognising the streets. He never knew where he was. He would turn in vain until someone took him back home. Well I am like Abu Ahmad now: I don't know how to go home, and I don't know where to go next!" Umm Khaled's story illustrates how her life lost the certainty and stability it had before fleeing Syria. In Syria, her life seemed clearly mapped out, and she could live it with the same 'ease' she navigated her village's streets: her present and future had a sense of certainty. But outside, she became like Abu Ahmad: she is lost in a place she doesn't know,

and she doesn't know where to go.

For the Syrians' I met in the field their everyday is anchored in a multi-faceted loss which also translates into a loss of hope, of certainty, and of a future orientation with respect to major life decisions. "Syria is gone", Umm Yazan, a Syrian woman in her fifties told me before embarking on the perilous journey to Europe. "There is no revolution anymore" she added in an attempt to explain why she was leaving Turkey after having lived there for over two years. What had made her stay and try to settle in Turkey was the hope that she could go back to a new Syria in a near future, but after the war intensified, she lost hope that she could go back. Such feelings were echoed by Umm Khaled: "There is no hope to go back... And even if we go back now we won't have our lives back. They (the regime's army and militias) destroyed everything we had", she told me. Umm Hala added: "I feel like in a big prison in this city! I don't go out, I don't know anyone... This is not a life! We just eat and sleep, here. We used to have a life in Syria! But we can't go back to our lives..." These three mothers were planning to settle in Antep when I first met them in January 2015, yet they slowly changed their minds as what was supposed to be a temporary exile turned into a permanent one. Their decision not to stay in Antep were not only linked to the on-going situation in Syria, it was also inflected by the fact that they felt their future was uncertain in Turkey.

Although Turkey was commonly described as the most welcoming country amongst Syria's neighbors, Syrians in Turkey are characterized as 'guests' rather than refugees[1]. If being 'guests' was not perceived as an issue when Syrians thought they would be back home quickly, the absence of official refugee status became problematic with the fading possibility of a near return. The absence of clear refugee status and associated rights subsequently led to the lack of financial support and aid, and to new regulations limiting Syrians' mobility inside, to and from Turkey, thus increasing the feeling of instability and uncertainty among Syrians in Turkey.

These legal and administrative issues directly translate into Syrians' everyday

When I met Umm Khaled she had been living in Turkey for a year and a half with her 8 years old daughter and a son in his twenties. Her son left with his uncle to travel to Europe as the two men saw no future in Turkey. Umm Khaled was thus sharing her tiny studio flat with Umm Mohammad, her sister-in-law, and her five children, who were always around as the school did not accept children who would potentially migrate during the year. Contrary to her sister-in-law, Umm Khaled hoped to settle in Antep, despite the everyday hardships, the administrative turmoil and the constant uncertainty that it led to. She sent her daughter to a Turkish school rather than a Syrian one, she looked for a job, and she waited for her youngest son to join from Lebanon, and help them settle in Antep. But this hope soon faded away as one of the results of the EU-Turkey deal was to constrain Syrians' mobility inside and to Turkey. Syrians thus needed visas to enter Turkey,[2] and it was very unlikely that she would be reunited with her son, since visas are almost impossible to obtain.

The anxious feeling of being in an "open-air prison", as Umm Khaled described it, turned into fear after Umm Mohammad's son deeply cut his forehead. The sisters-in-law were scared to go to the hospital: What if they got arrested in the hospital and sent back to Syria since he had no *kimlik*? Umm Khaled and I finally went to the hospital, but the staff refused to treat the three years old, because of the missing document. We tried another public hospital, as the family couldn't afford a private one. After the doctor fixed the stitches, and as we explained our previous misadventure to the translator, he revealed that after two days no Syrian would be treated for free without a *kimlik* even in case of emergency. Umm Khaled was strongly shaken by the news as *kimliks* were no longer issued. What would happen if she could not get a *kimlik* for herself and she was in need of medical treatment?

Umm Khaled's elder son tried to convince his mother to cross the Mediterranean so they could be reunited in Europe. He argued that this would offer his mother and sister the most certain future. However, despite the growing uncertainty and instability in Turkey, Umm Khaled, who had already lost her husband and a child to the revolution, could not imagine losing yet another child to the sea and strongly refused to embark to Greece on a rubber boat.

Umm Khaled, akin to many other Syrians, experienced a multi-layered loss that impacted on her every-day and her future.

She had two martyrs in her family, she had lost her house, her country and was slowly losing hope in the success of the revolution for which her husband and son sacrificed themselves. She had lost her previous life, status and the feeling of relative certainty and safety that came with it. In addition to the losses experienced in Syria, exile brought increased stresses such as- the absence of status, of certainty, and the feeling of having lost her future. It is the story of Umm Khaled and many others like her that should impress upon us the urgency of understanding the important links between loss and displacement so as to work to

better the lives of all of those caught in the bind of displacement.

[1] Syrians have kimlik which is a temporary protection status delivered by AFAD (the disaster and emergency management authority). Only European citizens can apply for refugee status in Turkey. They can also apply for a residence permit Ikamet that is not restricted to Syrians – students, workers, etc. – and is harder to get.

[2] But from Syria, yet the borders have been closed for nearly a year now.

Featured image by Minamie's Photo (flickr, CC BY 2.0)

It's time for #EVENTS: democracy, art and more

Allegra
November, 2016

With the Fall semester drawing to a close and the end-of-year holidays fast approaching, what better time for one last list of events! 2017 will undoubtedly be filled with wonderful and exciting events! Get ready to travel the world, from Canada and the United States to Poland, Romania, and Thailand. In terms of themes, you will find a bit of something to please the interests of everyone: movement and mobility, women's rights and violence, democracy, art. There's even an opportunity to learn weaving techniques alongside experts!

If you want your event to feature in our next event list or if you feel like writing a short report, do not hesitate to get in touch with Andrea at andreak@allegralaboratory.net or Aude at audef@allegralaboratory.net

Conference/InterCongress: [Mo(u)vement CASCA/IUAES2017](#)

2-7 May 2017, Ottawa, Canada

Movement – as diverse knowledges, practices and problematizations – has once again become a focal point of public discussion and scholarly intervention. As such, 'ancient' ontologies that focused more on movement than on stasis and of which sight has been lost through the colonial encounter, are now reappearing as particularly meaningful, and transformative of the discipline. A longstanding concern of anthropologists, movement has most prominently been discussed through the rubric of mobility, and its attendant terminologies of flows and scapes, flexibilities and foreclosures, disjunctures and "frictions." The notion of movement resonates in studies of political, ecological, religious and economic life as well as of kinship, gender and embodiment. In so doing it highlights the promiscuous nature of the analytical space opened by the processes of life forms, things and ideas enmeshing through relationships in space and time. [[more](#)]

Deadline for submissions of abstracts: 19 December 2016

International interdisciplinary conference: [Women's rights and violence in the contemporary world](#)

30-31 March 2017, University of Gdańsk, Poland

Women's rights were never respected in the past. And they are not respected today, even though it seems that many things have been changed and that we are now much more aware of the gender inequalities than our parents were. In our crazy world increasingly accepting all kinds of extremism and fundamentalism,

there is less and less place for an open and honest discussion about women's needs and expectations. During our interdisciplinary conference we would like to look at various manifestations of violence and women's rights violation in the contemporary world, and also at the possible ways of counteracting such phenomena. We will describe them in political, social, psychological, cultural and many other terms. We also want to devote considerable attention to how the situation of women's rights is represented in artistic practices: in literature, film, theatre or visual arts. [more]

Deadline for submission of proposals: 5 February 2017

International interdisciplinary conference: Democracy in development: comparative perspectives on the governance of the public good

26-28 May 2017, University of Bucharest, Romania

The general theme of the 4th International Interdisciplinary Conference of Political Research – SCOPE: Science of Politics, i.e. DEMOCRACY IN DEVELOPMENT: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE GOVERNANCE OF THE PUBLIC GOOD, incorporates two distinct but complementary interpretations of democracy/democratization, public good, and of the relation between them.

The first one focuses on changes in the ways we define, conceptualize, and understand democracy, not only as researchers, but also as citizens.

The second interpretation focuses on the rise and falls of democracy both at supra-national and sub-national levels, transcending the traditional national sphere of politics and policy-making. **[more]**

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 February 2017

Summer Workshop: [Weaving Knowledge](#)

6-23 July 2017, Ban Rai Jai Sook (Jai-Sook Studio), Chiang Mai, Thailand

This two week workshop aims to engage both the theory and practice of craft knowledge by teaching participants the Lanna techniques of weaving alongside expert weavers, at the same time engaging with the scholarly challenge of making embodied craft knowledge explicit. As the students are trained in crafts by practitioners in a weaving workshop near Chiang Mai, they will discuss concepts such as tacit expertise and technological literacy, pedagogy in sensory and material knowledge, innovation and sustainability in traditional technological cultures, with the practitioners, as well as invited scholars and activists in history, anthropology, and sociology from around the world. Set in the rural environment around Chiang Mai, this workshop will bring together three conveners: one historian of science and technology, one weaving/craft expert, and one scholar of development practice in craft, to guide the group of doctoral candidates in reflexive practice – both of weaving and writing. [[more](#)]

Deadline for applications: 1 December 2016

Graduate symposium: Art in public life and the life of public art

1 April 2017, Yale University, Connecticut, USA

While the concept of "public art" in the American context is often associated with twentieth-century modernism and monumentality, this symposium invites scholars to consider an expanded definition of the term. For instance, how and when does art become public? And how might its meaning shift as its public changes?

At Yale, recent events have illustrated art's potential capacity to actively shape collective priorities. In 2016, the University convened the Committee on Art in Public Spaces in order to survey artworks on campus and articulate policies to guide future commissions and acquisitions. Furthermore, this past summer, in the aftermath of the University's decision not to rename Calhoun College, a Yale employee broke a stained glass window depicting enslaved African Americans picking cotton—an act of iconoclasm that exemplified the emotional, social, and political potency of art in the public sphere. The debates that have followed upon these events highlight the key role art can play in discussions of shared space, institutional memory, and inclusivity.

With these recent controversies and conversations in mind, we invite proposals that examine the public, communal, and collective in the art of the Americas. In hopes of broadening the discourse on public art, we invite a wide range of submissions from graduate students working on the visual and material culture of North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean across all time periods and media. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 January 2017

Anthropological takes on the 'return of remoteness' – Introduction

Ruben Andersson
November, 2016

For a long time, the direction seemed to be clear: the days of remote areas were numbered and it was only a question of time before they would all become developed, governed, and firmly integrated into the global ethico-politics of development, governance, heritage-making and tourism. As roads and railways, airports and mobile phones penetrated ever more distant places, the narrative went, remoteness would surely disappear for good.

This did not come to pass. Instead of the ‘flat world’ once proclaimed by leading liberal voices, the world map now looks more rugged and uneven than it has in a long time. While some areas are smoothly connected to global capital and cultural flows, others are becoming more marginalised and ‘distant’, at least from the viewpoint of global centres of power.

> *Today, a quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War – with more than half of this period under the ‘war on terror’ – we find ourselves in an era in which remoteness is returning in ways we have yet to fully understand.*

In this week of blog posts, we offer different anthropological takes on the ‘return of remoteness’ on a global scale. The starting point, much as for other recent writers on this theme, is that remoteness is not a vestige of an earlier, presumably less ‘connected’ era. Rather, remoteness is actively made and remade. And rather than being disconnected, seemingly remote areas are usually shot through with uneven forms of connectivity, wiring them to the world economy and into global politics and mediascapes. Anthropologists have in recent years shown how trade, mobility and exchange have long tied ‘distant’ regions into larger orders in ways that the rhetoric of development and modernisation rarely takes into account. As we consider how scholars trace trade and transport routes in the Sahara or across the Himalayas and unearth violent resource extraction in the Amazon or Indonesia’s rainforests, it becomes clear that a more sensible starting point is to understand remoteness not as a primordial condition but always as a relative – and in many places a relatively recent – one.

Consider, for example, the demarcation of state borders between China and its

neighbours in the early 1960s: it cut off established routes of exchange and turned busy Himalayan entrepôts into peripheries at the edge of nation states. Or consider the frontier economies based on mining, logging or a particular commodity boom, such as in Manaus in the Amazon or in the Zambian copperbelt: when a boom busts or resources deplete, remoteness may return with a vengeance. This happened, too, in places such as the Pamir Mountains of Central Asia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when a carefully curated border world generously provisioned by Moscow suddenly found itself struggling with remoteness and isolation. In all these examples, remoteness was made (and unmade) at particular historical junctures.

Seen from the vantage point of global centres of power, one driver for renewed remoteness in today's world is insecurity.

The Sahel-Sahara region; the highlands of Asia from the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands to Xinjiang, Tibet, and northern Burma; and the Horn of Africa are zones where powerful states' concerns over insecurity and danger are fuelling armed intervention and political marginalisation of a peculiar kind.

To take a striking example, the West African country of Mali – once a western 'aid darling' and (briefly) a tourist magnet of desert festivals and exotic Dogon huts – has in the past decade become incorporated into what some strategists refer to as the global 'arc of instability' stretching across the Saharan belt towards Somalia and onwards all the way to the 'AfPak' borderlands. Mali's northern desert town of Timbuktu now symbolises absolute remoteness once more, as the tourism and development worlds of a decade ago have dwindled amid security fears and combined counterterror and peacekeeping campaigns. Yet northern Mali remains *connected,* too – only in more disturbing ways than before. The drug trade across the Sahara has flourished, locking security forces, jihadist factions and government officials into an uneasy embrace, while violent attacks on peacekeepers or kidnappings of stray foreign travellers can be instantly beamed into living rooms the world over.

In this shift from (positive) economic connections to the more sinister connective tissue of danger and risk, colonial fantasies of the remote, strange and wild frontier are being reactivated – with large sociopolitical consequences for global 'centres' and 'margins' alike.

As the drug trade example indicates, markets are another key driver of renewed remoteness. Consider, for instance, the growing concerns over the loss of biodiversity and the rules and regulations regarding global conservation. [The Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES)](#) has led to stricter controls at official border posts – but not to a decline in market demand for endangered wildlife parts and rare medicinal herbs. As a result, transnational trade in these outlawed commodities moved to less policed border crossings where it produced new frontier economies. Here (as in northern Mali's drug trade), remoteness becomes an asset that guarantees a degree of illegibility and invisibility in relation to the state, giving a competitive advantage to marginal areas incorporated into supply chains feeding global consumer demands. Consequently, places such as [Mongla on the China-Myanmar border](#) are portrayed in the international press as remote, wild and lawless, when in fact they are intimately tied into both state projects and global economies.

Looking at remoteness from on high, then, it becomes clear that powerful actors of many different kinds are actively forging connections with – and in the process help defining – the distant and the wild. These connections are often shallow and brutal, as seen especially in the fields of security and war. Consider the remote-controlled drone attacks in the 'AfPak' borderlands; the use of mercenaries and fighting middlemen in Iraq or Somalia; or the extension of western-funded border controls into faraway frontier zones.

The Sahel-Sahara belt is characteristic of this trend. Colonial-era [understandings](#) of the region as a 'blank space', as dangerous and wild, and as a simple conduit between North and South are now being revived via the overlapping deployments of western counterterror operations, advanced border surveillance and

'outsourced' migration controls. Dealing with distinct 'dangers' – terror, migration, drugs – such interventions tend to [reinforce distance](#) to local society while consolidating simplistic ideas of the Sahel and the Sahara as remote 'danger zones' and supposed havens for drug lords, smugglers and terrorists. Meanwhile, rebels, border traders and smugglers can at times choose to make remote danger temporarily visible for their own purposes – as can aid organisations, militaries and other groups that depend in different ways upon the cycle of distance and danger.

In all these cases, remoteness is productive.

To security professionals, loggers and smugglers alike, being 'out of reach' is itself a key asset in that it allows for forging frontier economies and security apparatuses intrinsically tied to global capitalism yet kept away from the public eye. Remote areas of these kinds can be seen as laboratories of frontier capitalism and global (in)security, as well as key sites of grassroots resistance and collusion; and anthropologists are perfectly placed to explore these tensions and trends, given both our methods and our heritage of studying marginalised groups. However, we need to remind ourselves that our discipline itself has from the beginning been tied into the very relation between global 'centres' and 'margins' that is now put so painfully in relief on the edges of our political maps, where 'no-go zones' flourish and research access dwindles.

How to understand this return of remoteness – remotely made and remotely controlled – in the early 21st century? What stakes are involved as parts of the world are selectively distanced from and unevenly re-connected to global centers of power, and who wins and who loses out in this process? Finally, how to practically study these shifts, given our increased access problems as researchers, combined with rampant risk aversion within our institutions?

The thematic thread on #remoteness here at Allegra takes some steps towards addressing the return of remoteness from a variety of angles.

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For more on Martin Saxer's work on remoteness, see his new article "Pathways: A concept, field site and methodological approach to study remoteness and connectivity" to be online soon at *Himalaya*.

For more on Ruben Andersson's work on this topic, see his new piece ["Here be dragons: Mapping an ethnography of global danger"](#) in *Current Anthropology*.

Selective access or how states make remoteness

Swargajyoti Gohain
November, 2016

What makes a place remote? Is remoteness that which is geographically distant from the centre of administrative, political and economic activities? Or is remoteness a construct of connectivity? And is it fixed, or is it an outcome of politics and history?

Take the case of Monyul, wedged between Bhutan and Tibet in the North Eastern borderlands of India. Monyul is home to the Monpa communities, who are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Monyul is a Tibetan term meaning lowland, while Monpa means lowlander. For the Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh in North East India, 'remote' denotes multiple aspects: lack of material infrastructure and transport, improper communication and geographical isolation. Living far away from New Delhi, the national capital, in a mountainous region on the Himalayan slopes, which remains cut off from other areas by snow or rain for a large part of

the year, Monpas consider themselves to be backward, disempowered.

Yet, Monyul is of great strategic importance in the protracted border conflict between India and China. Since the India-China border war of 1962, during which Chinese troops militarily overran Monyul for two months before retreating, Monyul has been high on the defence and security radar of the Indian state. The cross-border passages between Monyul and Tibet are militarily sealed and there are permanent army settlements right up to the border. Far from the state being distant, state presence is a constant in this hyper-militarised zone.

What then makes a place remote?

Traditionally, Monyul was part of a trans-Himalayan circuit, in which traders, pilgrims, yak-herders, and kinsmen from Bhutan and Tibet moved. Popular memory stores narratives of trade; people speak of seasonal trade trips to the market at Tsona in Tibet before the border routes were sealed off. In 1680, the Fifth Dalai Lama declared all areas in and around Monyul as part of the Tibetan state, and Monpas were subject to Tibetan law and taxation until 1914, when the British colonial rulers mapped the Indo-Tibetan boundary. Even after this, Tibetan tax-collectors roamed these areas and Monpas continued to have cross-border relations with Tibet until 1950, when a paramilitary expedition sent by the postcolonial Indian government put an end to the de facto Tibetan rule. In present times, Monyul's status as disputed territory and marginal border guides its spatial representations.

The transformation of this region from a trade corridor to a marginal enclave began during colonial rule. The British not only drew the McMahon Line as the Indo-Tibetan boundary, dividing Monyul from Tibet, but also implemented the Bengal Regulation Act of 1873, which drew a boundary known as the Inner Line, roughly dividing the hills from the plains areas in North East India. While the stated objective of the Inner Line was to protect the hill tribes and their land from encroachment and control by outsiders, the actual motive was to safeguard expanding British commercial interests of tea, oil, and rubber in the plains by

reducing contact and possible friction between hills and plains dwellers. Further, British interest in this region was not actually governance but the need to construct a buffer between China and British Indian territories, since Tibet was under threat of being occupied. Creating a buffer out of Monyul meant it had to be maintained as a neutral zone with minimum state interference, which could then be forfeited without much loss in case of enemy expansion. Colonial governmentality in insecure frontiers led to Monyul remaining under a system of loose administration.

In 1943, in the twilight of colonial rule, the British government attempted to extend certain development works in the frontier areas of North East India, and for this purpose, conceived of the first Five Year Development Plan in 1946. Development, according to this plan, rather than a change of buffer strategy, was conceived as a tool to propagate the image of the benevolent state in the minds of the local Monpa population and also wean the latter away from Tibetan influence, given that Tibetan officials were still collecting taxes in Monyul until the early 1940s. Actual work for the Five Year Development Plan began only in November 1947 – after India had gained independence. However, as with many policies of the immediate decolonization period, this development plan, too, reflected a continuity rather than break with colonial ideas of governance.

Development in the late colonial period and immediate post-colonial period had a two-pronged objective; first, to expand a tenuous administration to hitherto un-administered territory, and second, through roads, hospitals and schools, to signal to the subject populations who the legitimate authority in these areas was. Especially road construction was seen as a priority. It was a selective form of development, primarily intended to pave the way for non-military penetration of the state into these border areas.

The dilemma of the postcolonial Indian government, concerned with nation-building and integration in the 1950s, was whether to adopt a strict policy of assimilation or to continue the earlier strategy of isolationism with regard to the frontier tribes.

Verrier Elwin, missionary turned anthropologist and national advisor on tribal affairs, advocated a policy that would respect tribal rights over land and forest and allow tribals to develop on their own, without "over-administering" their areas. Eventually, the approach of non-interference and gradual assimilation favoured by Elwin was adopted. In the postcolonial period, Arunachal Pradesh remains a restricted area requiring an Inner Line Permit for Indian citizens who are not natives of the region, and a Protected Area Permit for all foreign nationals. The Inner Line continues to restrict entry and settlement of non-natives in many of the frontier regions of North East India, including Arunachal Pradesh. At the same time, a benevolent state presence has to be exercised in these areas so that national boundaries are impressed on the psychology of border people. In this regard, development plays a role in fashioning border subjects.

In the period up to the Sino-Indian war and in its aftermath, military activities were appended to development in order to establish state presence in the Monyul border. But this development is of a selective kind that lays emphasis on roads and less on healthcare, education or employment. But roads too are constructed largely from a military point of view, connecting main towns and army settlements rather than rural areas, while those roads that are not strategically important are neglected. Army settlements have been built at a frequency of every 30-40 kilometre stretch on the main road, the national highway that winds its way up hilly terrain from the adjacent Assam plains to the India-Tibet border. The perceived spaces of Monyul today combine images of a remote border with that of a militarized frontier. Geographically and socially, the Monpas live an enclave existence, trapped by the border and separated from centers of power and commerce.

Security, infrastructure, connectivity

We see in the case of Monyul that remoteness is not correlated to population or state presence. Monyul is not an "out-of-the-way" place in the sense of being

overlooked; in fact, there is too much attention on it, especially in the media, which is inflated from time to time, whenever there are news reports about Chinese incursion into Indian territories. The state is not far away from Monyul but exercises a hyper-surveillance here through its military arm.

What makes a place remote or gives it that spatial optic accrues from both emic and etic representations. People often focus on certain things they do not have access to – industry and easy availability of produce; presence of cinemas and super markets; urban amenities and public transport – which makes it seem like remoteness is a simple factor of infrastructure and connectivity.

However, scholars have agreed that remoteness is a relative concept: two geographical locations may be equally distant in topographic space from a third location, but the connectedness in physical and conceptual space of the two may not be the same. Remoteness is not determined by geographical criteria but emerges through social construction, and yet, it induces a general perception of space as well as a state of mind among the inhabitants of the place.

Here I bring up Michael Mann's concept of "infrastructural power", which emphasizes how infrastructure constitutes a privileged institutional channel for social regulation, as well as the the power of the state to penetrate and coordinate all aspects of civil society though its own infrastructure. If infrastructures of communication can allow state penetration, their denial or selective withholding can also act to regulate populations through a politics of access. Indeed, in Monyul and many militarized borders, the army is often the agent of development activities, supplying basic necessities, air-dropping supplies and carrying out road construction work, so much so that the local people become dependent on military help for basic survival supplies.

Security, selective connectivity and infrastructural development are related modalities of state control and work together to make and remake Monyul's remoteness over and over again.

Banditry and the Politics of Remoteness in the Highlands of Madagascar

Marco Gardini
November, 2016

Over the past few years, the resurgence of rural banditry in many regions of Madagascar has been an important topic of public and political debate. Local and national media have reported an increase in the criminal activities of well-armed groups of young men, known as *dahalo* or *malaso* ('bandits' in Malagasy), who have started to combine their 'traditional' cattle raidings with attacks on hotels, private houses, trucks and *taxi brousse* (bush taxis). The issue of banditry has become the testing ground for all recent governments, which have tried – with few results – to reinforce their presence in regions where they have never been able to exert full political control.

State authorities and the media have defined these regions as dangerous 'red zones': a stigmatizing definition for areas of difficult access that historically have been marginalized by state policies or have been places of refuge for

people trying to avoid state impositions, both during the Merina rule in the 19th century as well as during the later colonial and post-colonial regimes.

The difficulty of access that characterized these areas has certainly made it easier for *dahalo* groups to make their traces disappear. However, due to the progressive worsening of roads and the resurgence of rural banditry in the last three decades, a number of other regions that in the past were much better connected with the major economic and political centres of the country have started to be considered 'remote', dangerous and difficult to control.

The label 'red zones' contributes to increase the marginalization and 'remoteness' of some of these areas, since the perception of growing insecurity discourages doctors, teachers, administrative staff, petty traders, NGOs, and the military form travelling to or staying in these regions. This does not mean that the red zones in the highlands of Madagascar are economically disconnected from the rest of the country. Some of these areas are, for instance, the most important producers of rum and coal. However, the long distances that separate them from the most important markets and hospitals reinforce the perception among the inhabitants of these regions of being cut off from administrative channels and public services.

Clearly, remoteness often has much to do with economic possibilities. As a coffee buyer from the highlands city of Ambositra told me: "I stopped going to the red zones east and west of Ambositra to buy coffee five years ago. First, because it is no longer possible to reach these areas by *taxi brousse* and I don't have the money to rent a trail bike. Second, because I am scared of the *dahalo*. Today, only those who have the money to have a 4×4 or trail bikes, who can hire armed guards to defend themselves and porters to carry the goods can do profitable business there".

The attacks of the *dahalo* have had important repercussions: *taxi brousse* are often obliged to stop for long hours before crossing certain regions in order to form caravans escorted by the military; people lock themselves in their houses at evening for fear of attacks or buy weapons for self- defense; and many families

have stopped investing their savings in cattle that could disappear overnight. Therefore, cattle increasingly tends to be concentrated in the hands of those few who have the means to hire armed guards. Central authorities have put the *dahalo* at the top of their agenda by [implementing a number of repressive measures](), with military attacks against *dahalo* fortresses and the systematic repression of those who are considered as colluding with the *dahalo*. However, since banditry has not diminished, many of my Malagasy interlocutors oscillated between the idea that the state was unable to deal with the *dahalo* groups for lack of resources and the idea that many state officials themselves were colluding with bandit groups at different levels. Indeed, even if it is true that the central government does not have the means to control a vast part of the island and its coast, the suspicion that the best organized groups of *dahalo* operate with the [collusion of some members of the economic, political and military élite]() of the country is a widespread one. Cases of soldiers renting their weapons to *dahalo* have been reported by the media, as well as cases of former military officials who would have been the recruiters of the best organized groups.

Despite the fact that [many scholars have shown]() that the problem of *dahalo* has resurfaced over and over again in times of political and economic crises, many of my Malagasy interlocutors preferred to stress the recent shifts in this phenomenon: in the last twenty years the *dahalo* groups have become more and more numerous and some of them are composed of a greater number of people who do not only organize raids for zebu cattle to sell in the urban market and abroad, but have also started to offer themselves as private militias that protect the business activities of Malagasy and foreign businessmen working in the illegal trade of rosewood, vanilla or precious stones. From this perspective,

> *the 'red zones' seem not to be so 'remote' for the illegal trade of resources organized by the national and international economic élites.*

Madagascar has several natural ports that enable the illegal export of natural resources and import of weapons. This allows the best organized groups of

dahalo of these so called remote areas to buy weapons from abroad and sell not only zebu, but also vanilla, rosewood, precious and semi-precious stones, rum and cocoa to various buyers coming from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

This 'extraversion' of the *dahalo* groups emerged as a response to the reopening of the Malagasy economy towards a neoliberal global sphere characterized by the progressive reduction of state control over the national economy, a consistent reduction in public investments that marginalized numerous rural regions, and the increased accessibility of the country to foreign capital. The *dahalo* responded to this new situation, making use of their existing relations with foreign markets and successfully accumulating capital. In some cases the leaders of the best organized groups have gained a degree of sovereignty over their territories, providing their villages protection against other *dahalo* groups and, most importantly, establishing commercial relations with international traders. In this sense, the reopening of Madagascar to global markets encouraged the emergence, or re-emergence, of a number of brigand chiefs who have shown great skill in managing and intercepting the trade flows that have reached the island in recent decades.

If the red zones are increasingly cut off, stigmatized and marginalized by formal administrative channels, they are also increasingly connected to illegal trade networks that relate these 'remote' areas with the global economy.

The more the red zones are considered remote, the more they emerge as attractive for those who are trying to evade taxation and are interested in extracting resources at low prices.

In this way, and from a social science viewpoint, they become privileged places for the analysis of how social inequalities and power relations are reshaped in regions that are increasingly incorporated into neoliberal global markets *thanks to*, and not in spite of, their politically constructed remoteness and marginalization.

Being there: Humanitarian remoteness

Ignacio Fradejas-García
November, 2016

During World War II, Ruth Benedict conducted research about Japan at a distance. Challenging the stereotypical image of the white male researcher risking his life alone under fire, Benedict overcame the problem of accessing the no-go war zone by interviewing Japanese informants in the US, doing 'remote

ethnography'. The result, her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, is one of the most famous anthropology books among readers outside the profession.

Nowadays the effects of modern remote-controlled war are a topic of research in itself, from the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War to the current strikes in Syria. The latter is a paradigmatic remote war, in which the airstrikes may be decisive in the day-by-day battle but *being in the field* remains a basic requirement to 'win'.

The Syrian conflict started as a civil revolution evolving into a bloody proxy war between global powers supporting different factions. It has created a combination of risk dynamics keeping hidden what is happening into the country. Death and kidnappings constitute clear risks for journalists and aid workers whose press vests and NGO T-shirts are no longer protecting them in battle. The same applies to researchers, who face similar security constraints.

All Syrians are overcoming the war limitations using information collected by social networks, websites and VoiP technologies broadcasting news 24/7. Global media are also covering the war but due lack of access and partisan positions there is no guarantee of truthful information from these sources.

Publics around the world are aware of what is happening in Syria but also tired of war images while powerful governments are not committed to stop the conflict. Thus, by now, the only support to the Syrian population is humanitarian action.

Humanitarian remote management in Syria

Syria is the biggest humanitarian challenge since World War II. The aid industry has been overwhelmed by a lack of funding, political polarization and difficulties of accessing millions of people in need. Medical facilities, humanitarian convoys and aid workers have been targeted militarily. Humanitarian access changes constantly depending on the military group who has the power in each area. In

this context, humanitarian delivery is always an active process of transformation and adaptation.

Aid operations are concentrated along two main axes: from Damascus to areas controlled by the Syrian government; and from neighbouring countries to areas of opposition to the Syrian government. As for the latter, successive UN resolutions ([2139](), [2165](), [2191](), [2258]()) have created an international legal framework for a 'humanitarian cross-border operation' from Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. [Similar practices]() of 'remote control', 'remote management programming', 'limited access programming' or 'remote partnership' have been deployed in many varying ways in Somalia, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Sudan. [Existing research]() suggests that such remote programming transfers risks and redistribute the responsibilities from internationals to national or local aid workers and organizations, who carry out the dangerous frontline tasks.

Consequently, the remote management from third countries and the implementation inside Syria implies crossing national borders, negotiating with different governments and opposition groups with various political agendas, dealing with national and international laws, administrations, procedures and languages; and it moreover involves overlapped categories of local, national and international aid workers and organisations with unequal power and practices.

Aid work from 'Little Aleppo'

I have studied the aid workers and organizations whose objective is delivery relief assistance crossing the Turkish-Syrian border. I have been based in the city of Gaziantep, near the Syrian border. This Turkish city is a 'little Aleppo', hosting more than 300,000 Syrians. Only 118 km separates both cities, so close and so far at the same time.

Programmes are managed by NGOs, UN agencies and other humanitarian actors from their offices established in Gaziantep where Syrian, Turkish and

international aid workers take big decisions, dealing with donor relations, writing project proposals, controlling budget, and so on. Work in this volatile environment is a big challenge and remoteness is always in process of reconfiguration.

All aid workers in Gaziantep are facing similar problems mostly derived from the remote nature of work such as limited previous experience, lack of coordination, weak accountability and deficiency of reliable information. The impossibility of *being there* is also a common frustration: they cannot see the projects in Syria first hand. Only a few Syrian aid workers have been able to go back and forth. In addition, while in Gaziantep the officers have good living conditions, Syrian aid workers implement projects inside Syria under fire – one of the riskiest jobs in the world.

Aid workers also face other frustrations and imaginaries about humanitarian remoteness. Not many Turkish and international aid workers have been in Syria and/or speak Arabic and their limited knowledge and experience about/in the country have produced a total **dependency** on Syrian partners and Syrian staff for project implementation.

Some Syrian aid workers are highly valuable because they have previous face-to-face relations, local knowledge and experience overcoming access problems: *erasing* the remoteness. Their frustration is due to their need to be in touch with their people inside the country facing connectivity concerns and the pressure of implementing projects while coping with their sense of personal loss.

Humanitarian aid as strategic resource

'Remote-controlled humanitarianism' is a growing trend, as seen in the proliferation of workshops and initiatives for different operational modes and remote sensing capabilities. Innovative tools to collect and analyse information, new job positions and original uses of technology and big data have been developed in Syria to remotely manage this long-distance relief operation.

In the past five years, an enormous quantity of resources —people, ideas and commodities— have been moved across borders. Donors want *to be there* and Syrian workers have already got experience in the aid business. This has created some [normalization](#) of remote management to fulfill the requirements of the aid system under the coordination of UN agencies, creating new power relations in decision-making and resource allocation.

The economic dynamics of operations are marked by funding appeals that are not fulfilled, creating a race between humanitarian actors for scarce resources. Meanwhile, a big [corruption case](#) in procurement has affected operational principles. Sometimes the adjective 'remote' is used as an excuse to justify the lack of effectiveness in relief delivery while direct implementation in other settings has never been totally effective.

Moreover, the aid sector is transferring money remotely – via cash transfers, cash for work programmes and vouchers – into Syria. How is this impacting on local economies? With volatile prizes and lack of basic needs, how are these resources being used and how are they affecting power relations? Control of these aid resources is strategic for the Syrian Government and opposition groups while respecting humanitarian principles and measuring efficacy is essential for humanitarian actors. But, is the aid system able to retain control remotely? In essence, this would require additional adaptation of humanitarian tools, [build trust and improve local actor capacities](#) as well as more research and analysis.

Being *there* while being *here*

In war, remoteness is the impossibility of *being there*. Every war creates remote areas where physical participation is difficult for some people, especially researchers, aid workers and journalists, among other witnesses. Ruth Benedict could not go to Japan but this obstacle was, for her, an opportunity to develop alternative ways to do ethnographic research. If she had worked today, she would

have used new technologies to overcome this distance, making people from the no-go areas more 'accessible'.

Anthropologists can keep advocating for the need to 'be there' while defending ethnography at a distance as an imperfect but suitable tool to 'be' in no-go zones. In this vein, conducting our research among people who work remotely on crisis zones is one of many other ways of studying [war at distance](#).

In this, we may learn from the struggles of aid workers to retain a remote presence. Being there is not *always* a pre-requisite to delivering aid effectively, even though operations do become considerably more complicated. Operations in Syria have been adapted to [risk dynamics](#) producing ways to manage remotely the delivery of humanitarian support, employing Syrians *here* to explain/manage the remoteness, and *there* to have a physical presence in Syria for implementing the projects. As a result, the construction of remoteness is a complex process between different aid workers and organizations with different frustrations, various imaginaries and the same humanitarian framework to overcome the difficulties and reach Syrians in need. The results will be far from perfect, but the alternative – to let Syria slip completely out of our field of vision – is much worse to contemplate.

Making Remoteness in the

Sonoran desert

Marko Tocilovac
November, 2016

When we think about deserts, we usually imagine them as quintessentially remote. We tend to take their remoteness as primordial rather than see it as a result of social or cultural construction. This, at least, was the image I had in my head when I started my fieldwork on the United States-Mexico Border in southern California in 2009.

My initial intention was to focus on the spectacular aspects of the border: the incredible asymmetries of power, living standards and economic conditions visible at the U.S.-Mexico border, all of which keep bringing it back to the very

center of political attention.

Since the early 1990s, the border has seen a proliferation of infrastructure development, the deployment of thousands of additional Border Patrol agents, and an increasing use of surveillance technologies. In the San Diego area, this vast and diverse set of tools, whose objective is deeply entwined with the idea of securing the U.S. homeland from different forms of threats, has been – and still is – highly visible. Many scholars in border studies have pointed out that the political construction of the US-Mexico border as a line of defense, for instance through 1994's [Operation Gatekeeper](#) in California, has been one way for the state to exercise its sovereignty, to show that it effectively "regained control" over its territory. One of the most dramatic symbols of these border politics is the double-layered fence known as the "border wall" around the cities of San Diego and Tijuana.

At first glance, the Sonoran Desert, which branches inland from the northern end of the Gulf of California, could be seen as being profoundly isolated and far away from the issues at stake in San Diego. But the specific modality of this desert border is intrinsically connected to the more urban ones. Sovereignty, I argue, is exercised by the state also through the making of remoteness.

The double fence surrounding border cities, the huge increase in Border Patrol officers and the new technologies deployed at the border did make the crossing much more difficult within urban areas. As a result, migrants were forced to cross the border in more "remote" locations. Over the years, the Sonoran Desert became one of the cheapest and most popular migration routes for Mexicans and Central Americans seeking to cross the international border illegally. This bordering process has created different borders that are deeply connected to each other. If the "border wall" in San Diego is made to be seen, the Sonoran Desert is the place that the majority of undocumented migrant cross to enter the southwestern United States, out of public view. The Sonoran Desert, and its remoteness, has then to be understood as part of the socio-historic process of the

U.S.-Mexico border construction.

In the lingo of Customs and Border Protection, the federal agency in charge of the border, the desert works as a "natural deterrent" for migrants. As a matter of fact, crossing the border in these areas involves overcoming huge difficulties and dangers. The distance migrants have to walk is up to eighty miles, and during the crossing, migrants are subject to extreme temperatures – above forty degrees Celsius in summer and below zero degrees on winter nights in the mountains. This can cause dehydration, hyperthermia and severe hypothermia leading to death. Migrants are also confronted with dangerous animals and often become victims of thieves operating on the U.S. side of the border.

But this deterrent is all but "natural". Not only did the Sonoran Desert become a migratory route as a consequence of specific border policies, it is also a territory in which remoteness is actively shaped by the American federal state.

First of all, numerous portions of the border only have vehicle barriers or no fence at all, making it easy to enter the United States. But in those desert areas, almost uninhabited, crossing the border is not enough. Once on U.S. territory, you actually need to bypass the numerous Border Patrol checkpoints located on all roads nearby. For this, you must continue walking north through Arizona or California, often for four or five days.

However, the Border Patrol is not only tasked with deterring migrants; they also operate a search and rescue team named BORSTAR – the Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue Unit. Founded in response to the growing number of deaths in the border area, BORSTAR has been criticized for having a very small number of agents and therefore for not being effective.

Apart from BORSTAR, various small NGOs operate in the Sonoran Desert. The Border Messengers is one of them. I participated in their search and rescue missions taking place every weekend. During those missions, volunteers mainly walk through the desert, looking for migrants who get lost while trying to cross

the border illegally. Usually, search and rescue missions are activated by the families of migrants suspected to have disappeared in the desert, who contact the Border Messengers for help. In the case a lost migrant is found dead, the NGO will contact both the Border Patrol and the family of the victim. Migrants found alive and able to continue will be given food and water for their onward journey. When somebody is found injured and unable to proceed, the volunteers contact the Border Patrol, who take him or her to a medical facility nearby.

I had the opportunity to observe many conflicts between the Border Messengers and the Border Patrol. The Border Messengers were frequently accused of facilitating illegal migration while helping injured migrants. When the NGO members approached the media and blamed the Border Patrol for letting people die in the desert, their search and rescue activities were sometime prohibited, before later being authorized again. The position of Border Messengers is highly unstable and needs to be constantly negotiated.

What does this tell us about the making of remoteness? First, remoteness is neither a "natural" nor a "neutral" characteristic of the Sonoran Desert.

It is part and parcel of the larger political apparatus at work. The wilderness, the isolation and the danger of the desert are shaped by the state in order to achieve strategic objectives, such as "regaining control" of the nation's southern border. Second, new actors – the search and rescue NGOs – move in to mitigate the humanitarian tragedies resulting from the state's effort to keep this territory remote and dangerous. This remote border area works then as a heterogeneous and unexpected assemblage of state and non-state actors. The interplay of making remoteness and mitigating its effects is productive, as it feeds directly into the migration industry developing around this desert border. The federal state has not abandoned the Sonoran Desert: it is present at some key locations and tries to keep the non-state actors intervening in check, so that the deterring effects of remoteness continue to work for regaining control.

Economic Remoteness and the 'Development' of Rural Ukraine

Deema Kaneff
November, 2016

Brega, a village in Odessa province, Ukraine, has not always been a 'remote' place. During Soviet times, it was part of a thriving agricultural district, with the nearby port towns of Reni and Izmail, on the Danube River, acting as a market hub for local produce. With the thousands of tonnes of cargo and high numbers of

passengers moving through daily, these port towns were important gateways that connected Brega and the entire district with the rest of the Soviet Union.

Those days are now long past. The fortunes of the district, and the village in particular, have undergone a drastic turnaround since the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

The port towns today operate at only a small fraction of their capacity. The huge cranes on the docks stand like rusty dinosaurs, monuments to a bygone era. Evidence of the decline is everywhere: the main road that connects this region to the provincial capital of Odessa, some 300 km away, is riddled with craters and potholes so large and deep that in certain places cars can barely pass; untended gardens and deserted fields are a testimony to the vast number of people leaving the region in search of work.

Remoteness is due not only to poor communications and transport links to the rest of the country; it is also economic. The end of the Soviet-era agricultural collectives created massive unemployment. While 95 percent of Brega's working population had been employed by the collectives, the new cooperatives that were formed in their place took on only a minute proportion of this workforce, leaving the vast majority – over 90 percent of the original collective labour force – without work. Hardest hit were the unskilled or less skilled workers, mostly women – those who pruned the vines, weeded the vast vegetable gardens, etc.

It was in these conditions that local elites welcomed foreign development workers into the village in 2003. Their hope was that connections with these outsiders would help bring in investors and find a market for local produce. The British Know How Fund (as it was known then) introduced a number of projects in the village. One, specifically aimed at women, tried to tackle the problem of high female unemployment through the generation of non-agricultural work: producing handicrafts for the market. A sewing centre was established and two local teachers were employed to train 18 women in the craft of embroidery. The funding was for one year after which it was hoped the centre would be self-

financing. Development officials working for Know How made trips to the village from their base in Odessa, and twice that year a consultant was flown in from Britain to provide much-needed guidance as to what should be produced (mainly small embroidered items such as book marks and draw string bags – see photos).

Despite the development workers' good intentions and the project's noble aims, a market was not found for the items produced. Within two years the sewing centre had closed. The failure of the project exacerbated the community's decline, driving even greater numbers of younger women to Odessa in search of work.

Development projects often fail in their objectives and much has been written on this topic. Here my concern is not, however, to focus on the failure of the project – the whys and hows. Instead, my concern is to look at the way in which 'the market' – as both an abstract concept and physical place – was exported to this east European site. The case serves as a means to examine how 'the market' was used as a 'distancing device' that, in the hands of the development workers, helped reinforce, and indeed amplify, the (economic) remoteness of this village.

I see such renewed remoteness as being established in two ways: spatially and temporally.

Spatially, remoteness was created through the search for a market that was seen as located in the West and for Westerners. The project did not try to make use of the infrastructure already in place – for instance the port towns that constituted previous socialist gateways, which could have provided access to less nebulous markets. Instead, the project's production was aimed at Western consumers and tourists: those in Britain searching for that exotic rural handicraft; or cruise ships which, it was anticipated, would visit Odessa, and whose Western passengers would buy the souvenirs as mementos of their trips.

The 'market' was exclusively associated with the West: located in the West and aimed at Westerners. In this sense, the targeted 'market' was indeed situated spatially far away from the villagers while the products were designed for a

distant world of imagined consumers.

Temporally too, the market served as a device to compound the remoteness of Brega. In this respect it is the very products made by the women that helped create a degree of new remoteness. As ideological sites of 'tradition' and of the 'pre-modern', rural places are frequently seen as backward. They are the place we go to in order to get away from the hustle and bustle and stresses of 'modern' urban life. Sometimes rural sites are romanticised as places of 'nostalgia', locations that satisfy our deep desire for the 'good old days' of wholesome living and traditional ways of being. In other words, 'the rural' remains a place of the past, an anachronism that serves to portray how far we, in the modern urban civilized world, have moved away from this backward, rural condition.

From this perspective, 'traditional' embroidered crafts are seen as a suitable form of production for rural areas, because rural sites are where such arts and crafts are seen as still being kept alive as part of the rustic lifestyle from which urban cities have progressed.

In this sense, the production choices made by the development workers were significant; the items Brega women were asked to make aligned them, conceptually and temporally, with a 'backward' rural lifestyle.

Such endeavours to conjure up a potential market in the West for products that signify the 'backwardness' of the rural ignore fundamental historical, social and geographical features of this area. Not only do they ignore the existing – although admittedly rundown – infrastructure that could have been re-developed to establish new markets using local assets, skills and resources that are already present; they also ignore the previous 50 years of socialist industrialisation that gave inhabitants opportunities to be educated and to specialise in forms of agricultural production that took them far away from the traditional rural lifestyles imagined by Western development workers. The latter incorrectly assumed that east European villages were 'rural' in the same way as villages in

other regions of the world.

> *This had real consequences for the type of market Brega women were encouraged to engage in. It was a market that linked 'first' world consumers and 'second' world producers in relations that ultimately reinforced the former as at the centre of market activity, and the latter in various degrees and distances of remoteness.*

In this sense, the vision of 'the market', as exported to Brega, served as a device that engaged and incorporated the village. However, it did so in terms that relegated the village, and the region, to a global 'rural' hinterland – far away, both in time and space, from the market centre in the West.

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It has been more than a decade since Know How tried to help the village find a niche in the global market. Since then no other foreign aid agencies have worked in the village, nor has any successful pathway to a global market been found. There have been a few infrastructural improvements in the village itself; for example, the number of houses connected to gas has increased giving a greater number of inhabitants access to running water,. However, overall, little headway has been made in terms of Brega's economic remoteness. No new markets have been found for its agricultural produce. In fact, the cooperatives have reduced their range of crops as a way to cope with declining market opportunities. Economic remoteness has been compounded by an entire generation excluded from engaging in forms of production for the market, having reached pensionable age without having had employment for the last two decades of their working lives; and by a younger generation which has escaped the village to find work in the cities of Ukraine and Russia, thus potentially condemning the community to continuing remoteness into the foreseeable future.

A decade ago, there was one publicly located computer in the village. It occupied its own desk in the Council building, unconnected and unused, although carefully

covered up by an old table cloth to protect it from dust. Council workers occasionally uncovered the computer to show it to a visitor, before carefully replacing the protective covering. The unused but cared-for computer remains a suitable symbol of the remoteness of this village in the globalised world. It stood as a testament to local hopes that one day, again, Brega would find a way to be reconnected.

Updated July 2022.

Zomia 2.0: Political remoteness and neoliberal connectivity in two casino towns in Myanmar and Laos

Alessandro Rippa
November, 2016

The forested hills where Myanmar, Laos, Thailand and China meet are commonly known as the Golden Triangle, the world's second largest opium-producing area. A common narrative when it comes to those secluded borderlands is that of lawlessness, danger, and perversion. This characterisation seems reinvigorated today by the existence of two casino-towns: Mong La in Myanmar, and the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos, both (in)famous for their role in drug and human trafficking, as well as in money laundering and wildlife trade. In recent reportages, for instance, the BBC called Mong La "Myanmar's lawless region where anything goes", and Time defined it as "the ultimate oasis of sin".

Then there is another narrative, a more academic one, which goes back to the historian Willem van Schendel's definition of 'Zomia'. With this geographical label, van Schendel proposed to consider the highlands of Southeast Asia as a

political and historical entity significantly distinct from the usual divisions of area studies, an idea that was later famously developed by James Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed*. For Scott the central issue is arguably not 'Zomia' as a delimited geographical unit, but rather Zomia as a state of mind and a mode of behaving. Particularly, Scott's argument is that the Zomia region until recent times was one of the last zones of escape – an area to which people moved to in order to avoid incorporation into states. Thus, a significant part of the Zomian population consisted of people who chose not to be part of a state and who acquired cultural inventories that were appropriate to this goal: forms of agriculture compatible with frequent movement, the ability to shift between multiple ethnic identities, non-hierarchical religious systems, and so on. According to Scott's analysis, Zomia and other similar escape zones have by now effectively been incorporated into nation-states, thanks in particular to what he calls "distance-demolishing technologies", such as railways, all-weather roads, and telecommunication.

However, my argument here is that Mong La and the Golden Triangle SEZ are *not* – as the lawlessness narrative seems to imply – the last remains of Scott's Zomia; rather, they represent a different attempt to reach the same goal: escape state power.

A new Zomia – a Zomia 2.0 – that is characterised as much by political remoteness as by neoliberal connectivity.

Mong La is the largest town in the small autonomous strip of land on the Chinese border formally known in Myanmar as Special Region 4, created in a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in 1989. Special Region 4 has ever since been governed by a Shan-Chinese named Lin Mingxian. Initially built on drug money, several casinos appeared in Mong La in the 1990s. As a result of two Chinese crackdowns in the early 2000s, Lin invested into the growing online gambling industry. Soon he began to build new casino facilities ten miles south of town, where they can be found today, bustling with Chinese costumers.

Beside Lin Mingxian several other Chinese have invested in Mong La's casinos. Zhao Wei, a businessman from northern China, opened a casino in Mong La in 2000 and later exported the Mong La model to Laos, where he established his own Kings Romans casino in the Golden Triangle SEZ, an area that he leased from the Laos government for 99 years. Like Mong La, the Laos SEZ was built for Chinese gamblers and tourists; accordingly, Chinese currency, language and phone networks are widely used.

Both Lin and Zhao, moreover, seem to spend great effort mimicking state practices and aesthetics, relying on their own bureaucracy and police force dressed in uniforms that look very much like the ones of their Chinese peers. Thus, the so-called casino-towns in Myanmar and Laos are not just private enterprises based on the profits of gambling, but modest attempts at state-making, or at least 'state mimicking', as anthropologist Pal Nyiri puts it.

In the 21st century, I argue, the best (or, perhaps, the only possible) way to keep the state out is to let it in – through investments, infrastructures, and deals with officials and governments on all sides. However, this "bringing the state in" occurs in terms of exceptionality, which means that the state "gives up" its regulatory power in exchange for formal recognition, infrastructure development, and the possibility – for those in power – to accumulate hidden fortunes. It is *through* the ambiguous presence of the state that these spaces manage to maintain a unique level of autonomy within the modern nation-state system.

Or, to put it in other words, it is by making themselves "legible" to state authorities, on the surface at least, that Mong La and the Golden Triangle SEZ can remain largely outside of the regulatory power of the state.

Moreover, as the cases of the Kachin Independent Army and the United Wa State Army show, while in the highlands of Asia it is still possible to evade the state, it has become utterly impossible to do so without coming to terms with a growing and increasingly influential Chinese presence. To be sure, if we look at the aforementioned armed groups in northern Myanmar, they both would not last

long without some kind of support by China – with regard to both government support and access to the Chinese market. Zomia 2.0 thus refers to the fact that Mong La and the Golden Triangle SEZ might not necessarily represent an attempt to escape the state in Scott's sense, but certainly represent an attempt to deal with China on the best possible terms: a "China effect" rather than a "state effect".

The main difference with Scott's argument, and the reason this is a story of *neoliberal* connectivity, is that both Mong La and the Golden Triangle SEZ are elite projects. Unlike Scott's Zomian societies, there is no sense of egalitarian community. Rather, we find an enterprise envisioned and carefully implemented by powerful elites. As is increasingly the case elsewhere, here only elites can afford real mobility and exceptionality. The profit-driven system in place even seems to reinforce economic inequality and the marginalisation of local groups. Casino employees, construction workers and the labour force on the local plantations are disposable and easily replaceable. Zomia 2.0 is, at its very core, a project of and for profit-oriented and ideology-free elites.

To conclude: what does this tell us about remoteness, or the *return* of remoteness? Mong La and the Golden Triangle SEZ have formally achieved some form of autonomy from state rule. By mimicking state practices, and through careful cultivation of relations with state and non-state actors in the area, they are able to generate licit profit through illicit means. By bringing the state in, and thus achieving formal recognition, they are able to keep its regulatory power out. These are, then, stories of political remoteness. But they are also stories of neoliberal connectivity, based on global investments, satellite phones, online gambling, and Russian croupiers to project a more trustworthy and international image. Today, these two things, here as elsewhere, are inseparable, and I believe this is how the "return" of remoteness should be analysed. As in:

> *What happens in remote areas has a global impact, precisely because the very existence of those areas relies on global connections.*

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Interrogating Evidence: Epistemological Challenges in the Contemporary World

Agathe Mora
November, 2016

What social practices are used to constitute evidence? What counts as evidence and why? How are different types of evidence processed, and how do evidence protocols participate in the making of institutional practices that are represented as transparent and 'truthful'? How does evidence itself constitute forms of technology, materiality, and affect as it enacts and mediates these forms?

These are some of the questions that were raised at a panel on evidence making in bureaucratic settings at last year's AAA meeting. Interrogating evidence seems to have gained momentum in the last few years, with more conferences (including this year's AAAs!), panels, research groups[ii] and publications[iii] interested in probing techniques of evidence making as part of an anthropology of knowledge production practices.

This series of posts proposes anthropological, reflexive accounts of the production

of evidence beyond the disciplinary confines of anthropology.

Our aim is to render analytically fruitful the tensions between anthropological evidentiary practices and those in other fields of contemporary public life such as law, science, biomedicine, economy and politics to ask why, and when, evidence matters.

Evidence making is an epistemological exercise in translation, as chains of interpretations work to assess the validity of factual representations (Latour 1987), and 'evidentiary nomenclatures', or classificatory systems of naming and writing, construct institutionally vetted truth(s).[iv] Facts become evidence through processes of selective omission, often constructing 'black boxes' along the way (e.g., Valverde et al. 2005; Rottenburg 2009; Mosse and Lewis 2006); 'black boxes' which abstract away, de-historicise and de-politicise, and thus render the conditions of evidentiary production implicit in the final product (Latour and Woolgar 1986; Silbey 2008). Black boxes and other 'oblique forms of knowledge production' (Sullivan, this series) also have 'chronotopic' effects (Valverde 2014): they curb time and interpret spatial categories in their own, particular, epistemic terms (Schubert, this series, and among others, Boswell 2008; Hirsch 2006; von Benda-Beckmann 2014).

Evidence is thus about making visible what makes knowledge-making evident enough to be accepted by peers. In other words, evidence is self-evident: presenting evidence is claiming the mantle of truth to assert a position of authority.[v]

As such, it stands for itself and forecloses the possibility or even the need to call into question the social processes of selection and vetting that go into its production. As the papers in this series show, this generates what could be called a 'conundrum of visibility': what remains hidden is as important as what is made visible; and the context in which evidence is produced matters as much as the context of its reception.

Questioning knowledge-making practices through the prism of evidence in various ethnographic settings, the papers in this week's thematic thread shed light on some of the moral and political economies involved in processes of evidence making, and how they impinge upon the contemporary world. We very much hope this becomes a lively conversation; following this first series of posts, a second 'week of evidence' will gather posts that take up and directly reply to some of the concerns raised in this first, perhaps more theoretical, instalment. Please get in touch if you wish to contribute.

The week hits off with a post by [Tony Good](), which highlights some of the tenets of the dilemma of translation I sketched out above. Good's argument is twofold. First, the nature of evidence in law and anthropology is different to the point of almost being incommensurable (although there may be more overlap in practice than there appears to be in principle). Thus, and this is his second point, to make the stuff of anthropological evidence useful in court cases, anthropological evidence has to be made commensurate with, or adapted to, in this case, judicial notions, and rules of evidence — the risks for the expert anthropologist being to either become complicit in a reification of culture in legalistic terms, or becoming altogether irrelevant to legal proceedings (see also, Kelly 2012; Fontein 2014). Those risks, in turn, present ethical, epistemological and methodological challenges for anthropology.

[Julia Eckert]()'s paper departs from a similar observation to Good's: that the attribution of responsibility and liability are central to any concept of law. The duty to decide seems to be a defining feature of judicial decision-making (Luhmann 1995; Twining 2006). Eckert's distinctive argument, however, is that the idea that responsibility can be assigned, and guilt determined — both being essential to judicial notions of evidence — become problematic in a context of increasing technological complexity and global interconnectedness. Chains of causation become more and more complex; in fact, she wonders, perhaps too complex for the terms of current judicial modalities of establishing the required level of factual certainty. In such context, she asks whether we could find new ways for asserting facts, and how those new ways of ascertaining facts can be

made useful for evidentiary practices in law. Hence the question: does evidence matter? If in a given legal system the idea is to attribute responsibility, or determine guilt in order to mete out punishment or compensate victims, in the case Eckert describes, the question becomes not one of reparation but one of insurance.

The notion of insuring oneself against future damages is also very much at the heart of [Jon Schubert](#)'s essay. Here, he looks at evidentiary practices in commercial risk forecasting to raise questions about the temporalities of evidence: how, when and in which sequence can openly available facts become proprietary evidence? To make events both relevant for the future but also reliable, the evidentiary practices put in place create what he calls a 'feedback loop' between past and future, or future and past, which ultimately reinforces rather than challenges dominant modes of economistic thinking.

In her essay coming out this Thursday, [Kate Sullivan](#) looks at the translation into evidence of abstract and seemingly neutral electronic signals, such as measurements of wave frequencies, water temperatures, etc., collected by many different hands and through a plethora of technologies to determine the state of marine reserves. Such translation, she argues, follows not so much scientific evidentiary practices, but political ones. In a similar fashion, Jasanoff explains: 'Any selection inevitably blends scientific with policy considerations, and policymakers accordingly are forced to look beyond science to legitimate their preferred reading of the evidence' (1991: 29).

How, Sullivan thus asks, do highly complex and malleable iterative social practices and their artefacts become available as scientific evidence? Not so much science, but 'best available science', she argues, impacts on how decisions of ocean governance are made, and in turn, how portal managers make data available in the first place. Creating 'available evidence' rather than simply 'evidence', she concludes, points to the creativity involved in making political decisions about uncertain facts, however indeterminate the nature of final forms of knowledge products. In other words, Sullivan shows that in a world

characterised by highly complex and global causation chains, evidence being limited and incomplete is a condition of evidence being evident.

[Lewis Gordon](#)'s fascinating enquiry into what he calls the 'evidentiality of evidence' closes this first week of posts by reminding us of the 'criticality' of taking evidence for what it is. Drawing on his work on 'bad faith', Gordon highlights how what is made evident is as important as what is omitted. Gordon argues that the making, selection and interpretation of evidence not only depends on disciplinary conventions, or on one's membership in a specific epistemic community, but also on one's capacity for intersubjectivity.

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[ii] Lost Research Group; Spaces of Evidence, etc.

[iii] Among others, Engelke (2008); Chua et al. (2008); Csordas (2004); Hastrup (2004); Riles (2004; 2011); Street (2011); Berti et al. (2015); Turner (2016).

[iv] By 'truth', I am not so much referring to the term in an abstract, literal, unqualified sense, but rather to the different forms of truth that are constructed in the assessment of facts in terms of more or less 'reasonable certainty', in particular contexts. Evidence, and rules of evidence are, moreover, often used to (more or less openly) pursue interests that are not about truth at all: one can think of many situations where, for example, the liability, guilt, levels of a chemical, number of suicides, etc. is right there for all to see and evidence is not made to reveal something to be the case, but to construct it within some other established framework of action.

[v] See, for example, this recent article on the rise and fall of experts.

A Short Reflection on the Evidentiality of Evidence

Lewis R. Gordon
November, 2016
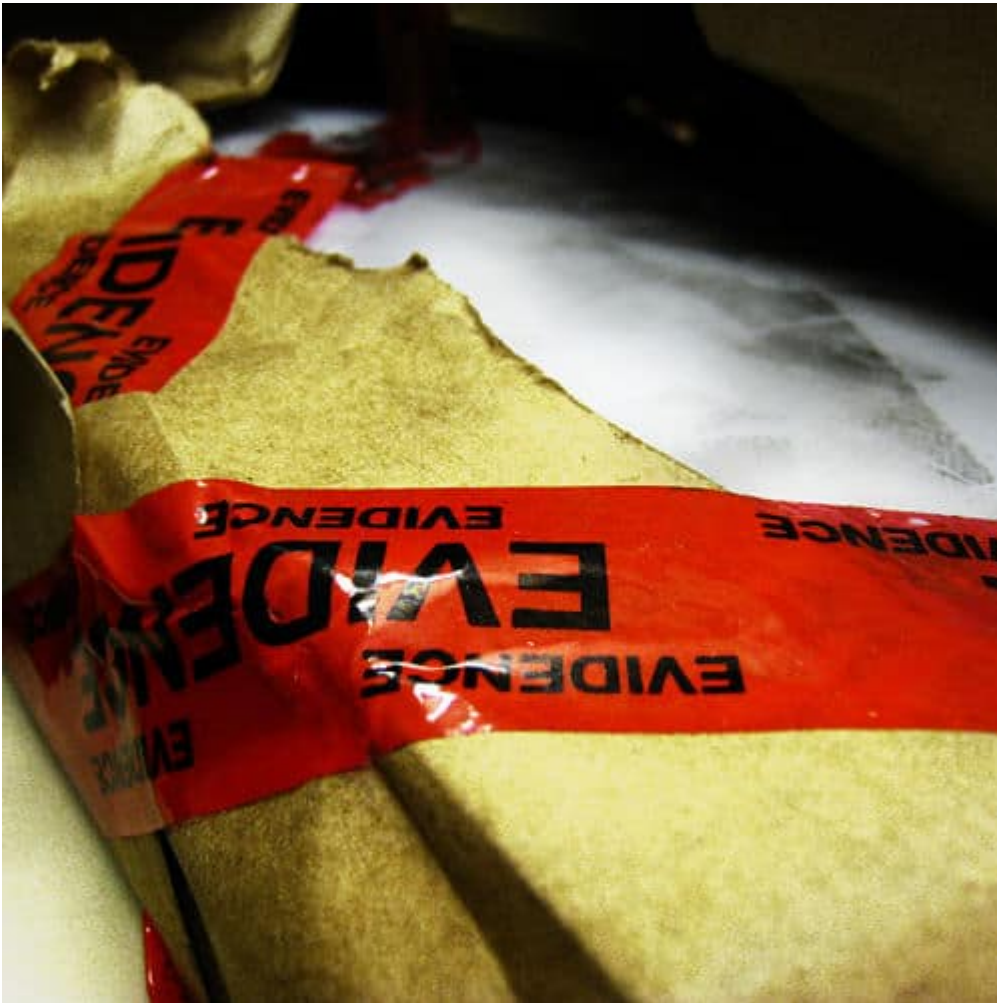
Evidence sometimes suffers from a peculiar problem. It is not always evident. I call this the problem of the evidentiality of evidence.

By definition, evidence is that which in its appearance facilitates the same for something else.

If it appears, something to which it is necessarily connected must also appear if even as an inference of thought. Evidence is summoned, in other words, because of what is absent.

There is at times circularity with such efforts—for instance, *proof*. What is proof, however, but offering evidence?

Sometimes evidence doesn't appear even though it stands before us. Its

appearance, in other words, requires understanding it as what it is. A pair of shoes in front of a door of a house where people take off their shoes when entering doesn't mean anything among a set of other shoes. A missing pair in the pile informs members of the family of which one of them is not home. A visitor, however, would notice nothing more than the etiquette of taking off one's shoes when entering that family's home. Evidence, in other words, must be understood, and understanding it leads to its simultaneous appearance and realization of the absent thing, person, or event to which it points. In phenomenological terms, one must be conscious of it.

An objection could be made that consciousness is not a necessary condition for evidence. That which is evident is simply out there, in the world, waiting to be discovered, and is still there even if never found. Conceding this doesn't change the point, however. Evidence never found is simply absent evidence.

> *My point isn't about what constitutes evidence. It's about, in effect, evidence of evidence. What is discovery but to make something apparent, stand out, or exist, and what is appearance without a relationship to what appears?*

The details cannot be spelled out in the small space afforded by this forum, but consciousness as articulated here is about a relationship with an object, which could also be formal or intended but not necessarily psychological. An object of investigation here is evidence and the challenges of establishing a relationship with it.

Evidentiality involves the fundamental relationality of evidence. Imagine a non-relational view of the world. That would require ignoring conditions by which a phenomenon could appear or "be" in the first place, since one would not be related or connected to anything, including the most basic relation of identity—that is, related to oneself. In philosophy, such a collapse is called solipsism—making oneself into all there is or, simply, the world. The contradiction from eliminating all relations, including to the self, lead to disappearance of any basis from which to make distinctions, think thoughts, and do anything. It leads

proverbially nowhere.

Evidence is the appearance not only of phenomena but also the inferential or, in phenomenological language, the appresentation of not immediately appearing phenomena.

Appresentation refers to what we perceive without its visibility. For example, we are aware of the back of someone's head while speaking to her face-to-face. Or more intimately, our organs are appresented to us daily. Evidence, in other words, brings to consciousness or any field of disclosure what *must be*, which requires connecting a series of missing phenomena, in effect, an ordering, or, in old-style philosophical language, *logos* (whose origins are from *logging*), which also points, inevitably, to a point of reference beyond the self. Evidence, thus, requires intersubjectivity, a world of others, even with regard to the self—that is, the self taking on the perspective of another and also acknowledging its capacity to be another—and is therefore symbiotically linked to social reality.

Realizing something as evidence entails seeing it as others are compelled to see it as well.

Evidence is peculiarly social. By social, I simply mean it is at its core that which must be communicable to others. Where one has difficulty communicating evidence to others, one must ask how it was initially communicated to oneself. Where one continues to see evidence as evidence, there is reputed communication of meaning. This basic point extends not only to communicating with others in a shared language but also others across languages, where two possibilities emerge. The first is the translation of evidence. This requires additional acts of evidentiality such as determining isomorphic and shared terms in different languages. The second is the communicability of the untranslatable. Here that which must be understood to appear as evidence must be *learned*. Again, for the sake of brevity, the basic fact that people from different societies speaking different languages do manage to learn untranslatable terms and

expressions from other societies, as Kwasi Wiredu showed in his classic *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, is sufficient for the basic provision of communicated evidence.

My initial forays into what could be called evidence studies began in my research on *mauvaise foi* or bad faith, the phenomenon of lying to the self, in my book *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*. A lie told to others is one thing. It involves not only false statements but also the withholding of what may alert others about the speaker's not telling the truth. To some extent, a successful liar must not in her or his disposition slip up. The liar must at least appear "sincere." This means to some extent convincing oneself of the lie as truth while telling it. Many liars thus not only withhold evidence from others but also from themselves. In effect, they must identify the evidence to be withheld and then refuse its evidentiality (appearance). Such liars must then disarm the evidential force of evidence. Understanding this brings forth the philosophical problem of bad faith, since it involves the liar and the lied-to being the same person or, as Jean-Paul Sartre formulated it, the unity of a single consciousness.

Critics may be perplexed to discover that good faith is a form of bad faith. The observation about sincerity reveals the problem. One could sincerely be in bad faith. To be critical of that sincerity, however, requires bringing in an account of one's position beyond oneself as a source of legitimacy. In effect, one reconnects with a world that had to be put at bay in order to maintain such sincerity. As bad faith is a flight from social reality, a return brings along with it the variety of public resources it offers. One of them is evidence.

Before I continue, I would like to stress one thing. In this context, bad faith is not a moral judgment. It's simply description of a capability or something people often do. At times, it is so for good reason. In moments of trauma, for instance, one may wish to avoid displeasing truths through taking refuge in pleasing falsehoods. That said, let us return to its relationship to evidence.

Bad faith attempts to disarm evidence through appeals, at times, to non-

persuasive evidence.

> *One could, for example, set unreachable criteria for the acceptance of evidence such as "perfect evidence" or "ideal evidence," when in truth evidence appears at the point of its sufficiency.*

If it appears, then something else is already known or is evident. Its sufficiency and necessity are one. As there isn't room to elaborate bad faith here, I'll just close with a recent context in which the evidentiality of evidence is crucial.

Evidence often becomes problematic in the human sciences. A particular field in which this takes place is research on race and racism. Although I'll focus on race and racism studies here, my preferred approach is multifaceted, where the embodiment of class, gender, race, sex, sexuality, and more are brought together and interrogated through human study. As I often put it, I never see a race or gender or class or sex walking but instead a manifestation or functioning of all in which one is more emphasized or functions stronger than others at different moments, though all are always present.

The historical social pressures to avoid addressing race and racism took form also in their study. Thus practitioners of the human sciences often attempted to avoid the taint of race and racism to the point of contradictorily delegitimating or denouncing the study of such phenomena while studying them. The performative contradiction notwithstanding, other consequences include the confusion of problems faced by subjects of such study with such people *being problems*. In the first instance, their problems appear where racism appears. If, however, racism is denied but the problems appear, the trail of causes stops at the people themselves. The problems and the people become one, and, as Franz Boas, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and many others have shown, they become problems supposedly alleviated ultimately by the elimination of such people. Race and racism therefore raise problems of rigor in the human sciences, as ultimately racial subjects are human ones.

In *Disciplinary Decadence*, I argue that bad faith disciplinary practices involve the fetishizing of method, where practitioners presume the completeness of their discipline and its methodological resources. Treated as if created by a god, such methods need simply be applied with assurance of their outcomes.

The evidentiality of evidence in such instances becomes the affirmation of the hegemony of the discipline.

Such practitioners reject what is offered from other disciplines basically on the grounds of its not emerging from or being their own. Natural scientists who criticize social scientists for not being natural scientists is an example, and, as social constructivism reached beyond its scope attests, there are social scientists who reject natural scientists for not being social scientists. These rejections are specific at disciplinary levels as well: biologists who reject cultural anthropology, historians who reject psychologists, literary scholars who reject other disciplines for not being "textual," philosophers who reject nearly everyone else's participation in theory, and the list goes on. Lost, however, is how such methods initially emerged. Their suitability for a fragment of reality (a specific subject of inquiry) is not necessarily so for larger portions. Refusal to admit this leads to the effort to squeeze reality into the discipline instead of adjusting the discipline to reality. Turned inward as complete, the discipline collapses into a form of solipsism. The portrait I offered of evading evidentiality returns.

I've argued that overcoming disciplinary decadence requires a *teleological suspension of disciplinarity*. This is where a discipline is willing to go beyond its presuppositions for the sake of maintaining or re-establishing a relationship with reality. I use the term "teleological suspension" in light of the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of ethics. The irony of strict adherence to morality is that it has sometimes led to unethical behavior. Women and men of right could sometimes be very cruel. It's a good idea to reacquaint ourselves with why we do what we do. This is an existential paradox brought to the level of disciplinary practice. A practitioner at times must be willing to go beyond her

discipline for the sake of reality, which may reinvigorate disciplinary integrity. That leap of faith, so to speak, is often ironic, since instead of abandoning a discipline, it sometimes offers an expanded portrait of it. One version of such is the communicability of a discipline and the very pragmatic outcome of using resources from other disciplines better suited for a particular problem at hand. Anténor Firmin argued such in *The Equality of the Human Races* (1885) when he pointed out the problem of anthropology as this: there are so many elements manifested in what we call human beings that such study requires not only multiple disciplines but also their working together, communicating, to make evident what is often overlooked—namely, the unfolding of meaning as lived by a being of projects in variation.

Returning to the evidentiality of evidence, bad faith in the human sciences disarms the critical norms of evidence. Criticality and evidentiality are intimately related. The former has etymological origins in the ancient Greek verb *krinein* (to decide), from which emerged not only the nouns *kritēs* (judge) and *kritērion* (means or standard of judgment) but also *krisis* (crisis). The link with evidence, whose Latin roots *evidens* means "obvious" or "apparent," should be clear (that is, evident): good judgment involves making a decision based upon standards (criteria) whose appearance are compelling. That the etymological origin of "critical" is shared with "crisis" is significant, as a critical situation is one over which a decision must be made, and a crisis is one in which a choice faced is also often one preferred avoided or deferred. The classic choice not to choose is a performative contradiction rich in bad faith. It requires, as Kierkegaard once formulated, failing to see what one sees. With regard to the evidentiality of evidence, this means addressing the metacritical relation to evidence—namely, the admission of evidence *as evidence*. The etymological thread boils down to the appearance of appearance.

At this point, reasoning demands exploration of the various fallacies often brought in the service of occluding evidence. Such elaboration is beyond the scope of this forum. For our purposes, however, the basic point should be obvious (evident), that a challenge posed by evidence is our willingness to respect it. Human agency

at the heart of our relationship to evidence ultimately comes down to the amount of reality many of us are willing to take. This is not in and of itself pernicious, since, as finite beings, most of us could only accept reality in small doses. All at once is overwhelming, and as no one can be everywhere, everyone must rely on what, by virtue of its presence, alerts us to what is absent.

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Emerging Evidence

Kate Sullivan
November, 2016

My goal is to skirt gingerly around evidence leaving it just where it lies, and instead to prod the contingent margins where iterative social practices and their artifacts are in the process of becoming available as evidence. In what follows, I explore a site where evidentiary practices are configured through efforts to create and maintain a catalog of scientific geospatial data sets, web services, and data tools pertaining to the eastern Pacific Ocean, lying within the jurisdictions of the U.S., California, Oregon, Washington, and various Native North American tribal governments. Scientific geospatial work gathers and organizes numerous discrete bits of information, each recorded with its own specific time, location and other attributes, into visual tools, such as tables, maps, atlases, which model, for example and among other things, commercial fishing catch sizes and compositions landed along the Pacific coast, the numbers and sizes of ships passing through a shipping lane at given points in time, and the amounts of

different kinds of trash collected on hundreds of different beaches on given days. The gestalts produced by the tables and maps give rise to new questions and make visible hitherto unseen conditions and connections. This technical approach to picturing and understanding the oceans has grown hand-in-hand with the development of more comprehensive approaches by governments to managing oceans, especially the creation and implementation of ecosystem-based marine spatial planning and zoning.

Since late 2013, I have been studying the efforts of a group of people, composed largely of geospatial experts from government agencies and government-supported science entities, as they create and maintain a regional data network, including an online catalog which harvests and then provides access to numerous ocean observation data sets and web services. This portal provides links to existing data sets, web services, tools, and other catalogs, which are in turn housed by their various producers, who likely produce, maintain, manage, and house not one but many such data sets and end-products. The aim of the portal builders, in this specific capacity, is not to create data sets, nor to collect data, nor to house data, but rather to make existing data sets discoverable and accessible, and to network data providers. Initially, they focused on bringing data providers and data tool makers into the network, along with links to their materials in order to create the catalog. As the catalog has become established, their focus is expanding to better include data users. The portal effort has been supported by limited funds from various government agencies, private foundations, and contributions of volunteered time and expertise by portal builders. Federal level efforts to create open access to federally funded scientific research, coupled with the U.S. Oceans Act 2000, the formation of Regional Ocean Partnerships, Executive Order 13547 (Stewardship of the Oceans, Our Coasts and the Great Lakes 2010), the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan (National Ocean Council) 2013, have fostered both data sharing practices and ocean conservation efforts, which in turn rely on some kind of networking of data resources, data providers, and data users.

Evidence and oceans have much in common. They are easy to see in their

particularity, but their knowledge forms resist legibility, and thus evidence and oceans demand more oblique approaches to making them visible.

By definition, evidence is categorical and particular, although often only ideally so (Engelke 2008:S4-S5). Evidentiary practices produce and reproduce evidence according to rules, or at the very least, protocols, while the material boundaries of the abstract category 'evidence' are determined by purpose and disciplinary context (Kandel 1992; Rigby and Sevareid 1992; Hastrup 2004; Engelke 2008; Good 2008). Given that oceans too can be difficult to 'see' below their surfaces, and that 'seeing' requires a high level of expertise, often gleaned through years of practical experience in sea-based activities, the products of geospatial technologies have been a real eye opener for people whose expertise lies not in practical sea-based trades, but in understanding and predicting the ocean's behaviors and conditions in order to manage various and often competing uses of the ocean.

Significantly, geospatial data, like evidence, leave us to wonder at the kinds of influential and shaping cultural logics that underpin their final forms, and which contribute to their status as proof of particular conditions.

Over the last several decades, the legibility of ocean resources has become increasingly important and increasingly the focus of technological innovation, especially as the impending effects of ocean warming, ocean acidification, increased competition among users of oceans, and sea level rise press governments toward more proactively planning for the futures of their constituencies. Numerous entities, including universities, NGOs and government agencies have worked to make ocean surveillance more effective, by systematically accumulating and organizing large collections of temporally and spatially sensitive observational data. However, the many quotidian decisions and their logics that make oceans visible cannot be pinned to a specific group's actions, nor to a few technologies, because knowledge sharing and knowledge production are built on an expanding repertoire of transportable and

transformable knowledge forms. Geospatial data sets, maps, models, web services, and tools are the products of many hands, eyes, minds, ideas and technologies, and they remain malleable even once catalogued, ready to be recombined into new products in open-ended rhizomatic practices of knowledge fashioning.

Evidentiary practices in the social site of the portal are not confined to a single register, but of necessity operate in several registers at once, each register producing its own effects, which are connected to each other but which cannot be reduced to each other.

To become part of the catalog, data sets and tools must meet portal evidentiary criteria and standards, while the portal itself must provide evidence of its worth as source for finding reliable evidence about ocean conditions. Portal builders see their work, as well as their catalog, as instituted by and responding to policy needs, which they themselves do not delineate, and which they are studiously careful to avoid defining and/or creating, as that would be to overstep their place in the hierarchical system of defining policy and making policy decisions. They are keenly aware that the future of the portal depends on demonstrating the worth of the portal to policy makers, management decision-makers, and funders, which include government agencies.

The portal catalog is built on the notion of 'best available science,' a notion now widely circulating in ocean governance circles, but only recently so in so ubiquitous a manner. The notion of 'best available science,' now ensconced in and promulgated through laws and policy documents [Note 1], has its own interesting history, which is much too long to cover in my short discussion here. The notion is often invoked to assert the idea that government should use the best science available at the time to make decisions, because decisions have to be made, and we cannot wait until all of the science is known, there will always be knowledge gaps, and what we know is always changing. The terms 'best' (which can refer to most up-to-date, most comprehensive, most authoritative, peer-reviewed, etc.)

and 'science' are terms entangled with, more immediately, the history of the emergence of the notion of 'best available science' in U.S. governance circles, and in a broader sense, entangled with the history of what Poovey refers to as "the epistemic unit" that she calls "the modern fact" (1998). However we bracket 'best' and 'science' for now, 'availability' is exactly the piece of that notion, 'best available science,' that portal builders are tasked with defining and making operable, by various policy assemblies and funders.

This interdependence of providing evidence in several concurrent registers creates a situation in which there is an impetus toward creative problem solving directed at creating 'availability,' even as this rhizomatic inclination is not free of constraints.

Over time, the portal builders, who once explicitly focused on harvesting and cataloging, have expanded their efforts by creating a few of their own geospatial products, which freshly synthesize data sets and web services available through the portal catalog, and which, in turn, provide both new information about the ocean, as well as evidence of the portal's worth. Evidentiary practices in bureaucratic undertakings police the boundaries of what counts as authoritative knowledge, and as Mathew Hull (2003) suggests, also police present practices in anticipation of uncertain future conditions. The uncertain futurity of both ocean conditions and political configurations within the many participating governments and agencies helps foster the emergent aspects of portal creation, especially as the catalog's contents are assembled in order to address the policy priorities of the policy assemblies directing the portal builders and drawing on the portal.

Theoretically astute approaches (Sedgwick 1994; Poovey 1998; Daston 1994, 2005; Strathern 2008) aiming to illuminate the epistemes informing both the context of and evidentiary practices themselves, are a promising starting point for investigating the emergent cultural logics operating in oceanic knowledge production sites. Daston (2005) argues that efforts to establish scientific authority from the 1500s onward are accompanied by an increasing certainty that error

lurks everywhere and that the job of science is to root out, expose and correct error through epistemology. I would argue that the link between error and epistemology that Daston (2005) posits evinces a fresh iteration in the currents of ocean governance practices. This iteration is not an effort to avoid error but rather one of embracing error, flipping the orientations toward error that Daston outlines onto their heads, without abandoning a concern to correct errors and to expose and fill gaps in what is known.

> *The notion of 'best available science' embraces error as a necessary condition of scientific knowledge, and thus frees scientific knowledge from the need, and indeed even the possibility of ever being fixed, final, or complete.*

The notion of 'best available science' is closely tied to the notion of 'adaptive' management, i.e., a willingness to change management practices in light of new scientific knowledge. 'Adaptive' management is ensconced alongside 'best available science' in the same laws and policy documents. These intertwined notions of 'best available science' and 'adaptive' management work together to situate governance practices (like scientific knowledge) as open-ended, reflexive, and responsive to changing policy needs and priorities.

Fisher points out, "emergent forms of life" are sites of contestation saturated with "the continual negotiation of historical and emergent modalities of ethical and political reason" (2005:56). Certainly the generation and, equally significantly, the availability of numerous large data sets that can be used alone or in ever changing combinations constitutes one such site of emergent social life.

> *Making these data sets discoverable and accessible, and thus open to recombination relies on a network of human beings, a point that the portal builders have expressly emphasized and fostered in the creation of their data network.*

This human network is in turn subject to numerous social tensions that have to be

negotiated, including finding funding, implementing data standards, and to paraphrase one person, grappling with the persistent invisibility of IT (information technology) to everyone else, especially when the technological interfaces are functioning smoothly.

[Note 1] In California, the approach of combining 'best available science' with 'adaptive' management was stipulated in the Marine Life Protection Act of 1999 (Fish and Game Code chapters 2850-2863), reinforced in supporting policy documents, and frames the comprehensive (eco-system based and cooperation among agencies) marine spatial planning effort that established the now operative California network of marine protected areas. The U.S. Oceans Act 2000, and subsequently Executive Order 13547, also embrace this approach for all U.S. oceans, and also concern the fostering of marine spatial planning and integrated inter-agency cooperation.

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