Of Critique, philosophy and anthropology – An interview with Ann Stoler

Julie Billaud
September, 2015

The Institute for Critical Social Inquiry (ICSI) is a program run by The New School for Social Research for the second time this year. It brings together graduate students and junior faculty members to attend intensive seminars ran by distinguished thinkers at The New School's campus in Greenwich Village, in New York City. This year, participants will have the privilege to work in close

collaboration with Jay Bernstein, Gayatri Spivak and Judith Butler during an entire week. Applications are now open and financial support is available. Have a look here for more info.

Allegra sat down for a virtual interview with the program's director, Ann Stoler, a renowned post-colonial historian and anthropologist whose most recent work includes *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (2013) and *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009) and we look forward to her new book *Duress: Concept-Work for Our Times* coming out with Duke University Press next year. Here is what we discussed…

Julie: We, at Allegra, have always looked up to The New school as a refuge for radical critical thinking, a bit like the « University of Muri », the imaginary university of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem. It is a similar refuge, away from the increasing neoliberal pressure imposed on our universities, that we – at our very small level – are trying to preserve via the online world. In which ways does the ICSI embody the 'spirit' of The New School?

Stoler: Thank you for your thoughtful questions and provocations. ICSI to my mind is so much in the spirit of The New School I'm not sure I can count all the ways. My first priority is to make sure that a range of young scholars in the making, seasoned ones, and otherwise strapped and harried intellectuals around the world can have the opportunity to take out time to think otherwise (Foucault's wonderful injunction to himself and us to "penser autrement") in a setting that encourages them to do so. Not everyone has the time or funds to take off for a full summer course which is precisely why I did not go for one. I chose a time frame and moment in the academic calendar when classes are over in many places. We

designed a tuition scale that would allow advanced doctoral students, post-docs and faculty who do not have access to university funds, to make this work for them. We supply dorm rooms at the new University Building on 5th avenue at a reduced rate.

> *But most importantly, this institute is designed for academics seeking an infusion of learning—those of us who never had the opportunity to learn about a certain philosopher or a certain way of thinking about which we've yearned to know more. How many of us have the time to read Heidegger? Or Hegel? How many of us have the time to study Marx's work and how it speaks to contemporary social, economic and political issues?*

Photo credit: Matt Mathews

I've chosen a range of leading scholars who are brilliant, generous, and politically engaged—people who are not content to do "critical theory" exclusively, but those who care about the resonance that conceptual work has in the world. They are scholars who are eager to explore how critical social inquiry can be used to confront diverse predicaments and situations.

The ICSI pays homage to the University in Exile by rethinking how truth, parrhesia, and "fearless speech" can address our worldly conditions. It's designed to facilitate an environment that challenges the analytic and conceptual

vocabularies and frames that have been central to intellectual work.

Julie: You chose well established scholars to run your seminars and it seems like you want to bring their thoughts as closely as possible to participants during this one week of intensive training. The kind of relationship that the ICSI seeks to establish between senior and junior scholars resembles the one of the Master and its apprentice. Why did you choose such a "somewhat old fashioned" model? Why not a 'summer school' instead?

Stoler: By "masters," I don't think about those who sit in an ivory tower, but those who engage with and are shaped by their pupils. I don't think about those who are geared so much to answers and resolution but to a way of thinking, a style of thought, that places, as one of its first questions, "Are certain queries worth answering having answers to?" And, "How are those assessments made and by whom and for whom in the world today?"

In his beautiful book, Lessons of the Masters, George Steiner understands teaching in two ways: positively, i.e., "share this skill with me, follow me into this art and practice, read this text" and negatively, i.e. "do not believe this, do not expend effort and time on that." The teacher and student, as Marx said, should "Exchange trust for trust … the teacher solicits attention, agreement, and optimally, collaborative dissent." Informed dissent is what we are after. We are also informed by the teachings of Socrates, who encouraged people to be in the presence of wisdom that manifests as a "clear perception of his (sic) own unknowing." We are also inspired by the Zen masters and hail great teaching as that which instills insomnia, the exhilaration that dispels somnambulists and defers sleep. None of us slept very well during the ICSI week this year!

> *The master class is an occasion to think hard about critique as an "ethics of discomfort." And maybe we'll find that the ICSI master classes are transformative, not only revealing the lessons of masters, but what a master is and should do and be.*

Photo credit: Paulo Salud

Julie: I see…the 'Master Class' as a 'caquetoir', to use De Certeau's definition of the seminar: a place or a moment when a certain "politics of word" is expressed through real (!) participation and public intention…

Stoler: I love this! What a wonderfully rich way to think about this venture: De Certeau's notion of the seminar as a place that can produce a common language and a personal way of speaking, a meeting place, a "plural laboratory."

Julie: What kind of intellectuals do you aim to produce through the ICSI? Why do you think this intensity is productive or adequate to shaping contemporary thinkers? On the contrary, we, at Allegra, tend to think that 'slow food for thought' is better than intensive productivity.

Stoler: I totally agree with the notion of "slow food for thought," but there are many different ways to prepare for such an exercise, and to cultivate a capacity to do so. Foucault's warning that genealogy is always slow and belaboured is one I take to heart. As one who has worked on tedious colonial archival documents for so many years, as one who has amassed an archive for some twenty years on the French Front National, as one for whom new books take a decade or more to think and write, the notion of sharing ways of learning to attune oneself to the details of thought and practice is something I cherish. But this doesn't just come from saying "I'm going to work slowly." One has to be trained to sense and see discernments and details. One has to learn how to question one's own most

cherished thoughts, particularly those that seem most clear and most obvious. Getting there is no easy task. Most of my own teaching is about how to pause, to work between the empirical and analytic details, to learn how to ask better questions and about the phronetic work allows one to do so. How do we learn to identify what Roland Barthes called "the punctum"—that which pricks and shocks?

Julie: Last June was the first year you ran this "experiment" (is it the correct word?). You invited Talal Asad, Simon Critchley and Patricia Williams to 'inaugurate' the program. Why these three scholars? And what did you learn from this first experience? What kind of feedbacks did you receive? Did the program get slightly 'tweaked' after its first session?

Photo credit: Paulo Salud

Stoler: It is an experiment (thank you) and I hope it remains one. The size of the Master classes is key; they're never more than 20 odd fellows, sometimes less. Readings are provided a month in advance so that new conversations can take place right away. The inaugural year of ICSI was astounding, a vibrant experience. Each of the seminars provoked more questions than they could address. Each one produced new exchanges and conversations with fellows from Pakistan, Australia, Denmark, India, Brazil, Goa, the U.S. and elsewhere. We had fellows from seventeen countries who brought their unique energy and knowledge.

They did more than make it work; they transformed the ICSI in its very formation and shaped its course. For example, they decided to interview the seminar leaders; scholars met with the Masters outside regular seminar hours, and through the week, transformed our aspirations. This might sound over the top, but there were fellows who said it was a life-changing experience. Simon Critchley said it was one of the most exciting teaching experiences he has ever had (and Simon does not dispense accolades easily).

> *In the U.S., we are so privileged to move about easily, to go to conferences wherever we like. We inhabit a multi-disciplinary world. But not everyone has that luxury.*

What was most striking to me was how the fellows reshaped the Masters' approach. Those unschooled in Heidegger and those who had been reading his work for years took so much away from Simon Critchely's close readings of Being and Time. Pat Williams's seminar on racial formations resonated with what was happening in the world today. Talal Asad's seminar achieved an intensity of shared knowledge for those who had been studying secularism and those who had been studying Islam.

Julie: In an interview you gave to Savage Minds in December 2014 you quote Raymond Williams and Judith Butler to articulate your vision of 'critique'. In your opinion, critique is not about judgement but rather, as Butler phrases it, it is "a way of disclosing spaces that are secluded from us". What are the contemporary "spaces" (imagined or real) you could think of that could apply to this definition? What kind of profiles are you looking for when selecting ICSI fellows?

Photo credit: Paulo Salud

Stoler: Thank you for drawing attention to the phrase, “Disclosing spaces that are secluded from us.” This, to me, is what the politics of knowledge is in large part about. It calls for vigilance, not revelation; it takes hard work to unthink what too often passes for habit and common sense. The contemporary spaces I think of are obviously related to my own work on imperial formations, as well as racial politics and the ways in which racial distinctions lodge in affective dispositions of “distaste” and “disgust” that we don’t immediately associate as racially inflected. But the ICSI is not confined in anyway to these perspectives. I’m eager for us to address these issues from new vantage points, to attend to ways of knowing that have been disqualified and to understand the strictures of thinking that have made that so.

As for the fellows, we want those who truly want to be here with us, not those who want to make an entry on their resumes. Three of us selected the fellows, independently ranking each one. Invariably, our lists looked similar. When they didn’t look similar, we looked again carefully and revised our list and our thinking. Hopefully, we’ll be able to take the same approach this coming year.

> *We are looking for a spark in whatever form it stakes, and thus there is no formula for what counts as a good application.*

Julie: We noticed that in spite of the fact that the ICSI wants to promote the

production of 'grounded knowledge', no anthropologist was selected to be a "Master" of the "Master Class" this year. Instead, philosophers seem to dominate the program. This is not to say that disciplinary boundaries matter that much for critical inquiry but the strength of anthropology has always been its emphasis on 'theories from the South', as the Comaroff phrase it. Why, as the director of this program and an anthropologist yourself, did you make such a choice?

Stoler: In this initial phase of the ICSI, I decided to call on the diverse and eminent scholars in the New York area. New York City attracts a fabulous range of thinkers from all over the world, with scholars attending The New School, Columbia University, CUNY, NYU, Princeton and Yale. The response has been tremendous. But we don't want those who can only speak to a small elite, privileged group. That's too easy and makes for a homogenous mix. The idea is not to stay within the constricted circles of high theory but to generate new conversations across the globe.

Julie: We are asking this question (a bit provocatively) because, as anthropologists, we feel that our discipline is in grave danger of loosing what made its original relevance, namely the translation of alien concepts with the power of decentring Western world views and modes of being. As Da Col and Graeber phrase it in their forword of the first issue of HAU: Journal of Ethnograhic Theory, "Nowadays the situation is reversed. Anthropologists take their concepts not from ethnography but largely from European philosophy—our terms are deterritorialization or governmentality—and no one outside anthropology really cares what we have to say about them. As a result, we have become a discipline spiraling into parochial irrelevance".

Our concern is then: what will remain of anthropology if our concept work draws from continental philosophy instead of drawing from the vernacular social philosophies we come across through our fieldwork? Is it even a concern of The New School? And what do you think is the added value of anthropology in critical social inquiry?

Photo credit: Paulo Salud

Stoler: This is not an anthropology institute. I have never worked within anthropology exclusively and would not know how to do so. That said, there are people in anthropology whose thinking and political sensibilities stretch far and wide: Talal Asad, who joins the ICSI in its inaugural year, was a strategic choice. Talal is now on the ICSI's board of advisors as is Simon Critchely, Patricia Williams, and Jay Bernstein. Simon writes for a large audience, as does Pat. They are not limited by academic protocol, nor its internal debates. In the third year (2017), we will have two anthropologists and more in years to come.

As for the problem with philosophy, I don't relate very well to this fear of Eurocentrism, though I abhor genuflection toward it. Over the last few years, I have been working on a project and teaching on "Fieldwork in Philosophy" that takes its inspiration from Austin's first use of the term, Bourdieu's adaptation and Paul Rabinow's later revision. Fieldwork in philosophy is a place where anthropology and philosophy intersect—not in order to "borrow" concepts, not in order to adhere to the authorization that philosophy offers and affords, but to think deeply about how conceptual work matters and about resistance to conceptual formulation. Anthropology offers a rich site precisely to disrupt the conventions of what counts as philosophical inquiry and how we do so.

Julie: Agree! And if the ICSI is serious about disrupting the conventions of what counts as philosophical inquiry, why not inviting Davi Kopenawa (the Yanomani shaman, author of The Falling Sky) or other indigenous thinkers to give a Master

Class next year?

Stoler: And so it may be!

Allegra WANTS you!

Allegra
September, 2015

Allegra Lab is looking for **Editorial Assistants** to strengthen the capacity of its enthusiastic team of volunteers and spread the Open Access gospel!

The tasks involve:
– The technical realization of posts,
– The collection of reports from recent anthropological events for the EVENTS section of the website,
– Correspondance with authors of recently published anthropological books

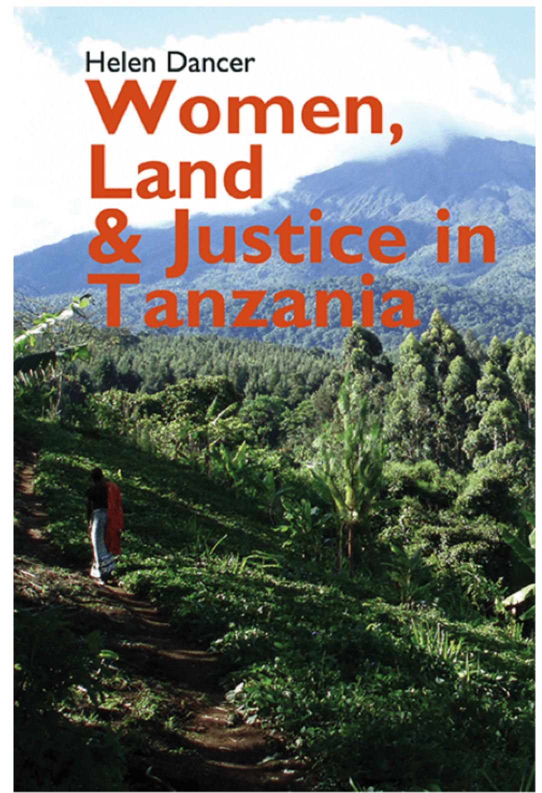
reviewed on Allegra,
– The circulation of all Allegra’s content in the social media and the animation of Allie’s Twitter and Facebook accounts.

The ideal candidates are postgraduate students in anthropology with experience in publishing, blogging and social media. Knowledge of wordpress is a plus! Unfortunately, there is no financial compensation for this job. But we hope this experience will help you gain useful knowledge for your future academic and professional endeavors.

Please send a letter of motivation mentioning your skills and interests and a CV to stuff@allegralaboratory.net before **October, 15th**.

Journeys for Justice in Tanzania

Helen Dancer
September, 2015



Much has been written about women's land rights in Africa, but little research has been undertaken on how law works in practice, particularly in statutory court systems. Before I began the research for my book, *Women, Land and Justice in Tanzania*, I was a practising legal aid barrister in England. My 'black-letter' legal training had encouraged me to see law as a tool and my approach to human rights had much in common with the 'rights-based approaches'[i] of many lawyers, international organisations and NGOs. In the early stages of planning my research however, I reflected on the limitations and pitfalls of pursuing a rights-based approach to research. Postcolonial and feminist legal scholars point to what Ratna Kapur has described as 'victimisation rhetoric'[ii] surrounding many human rights campaigns for women's rights. Moreover, rights-based approaches take the concept of human rights and human rights law, rather than the lived experiences of people, as the analytical starting-point. The presence of human rights provisions in laws and constitutions represents a vital political and legal commitment. However, arguably,

> *the rights-based approach is too narrow a conceptual lens through which to ground an understanding of the issues surrounding women, land and access to justice in practice.*

I decided to turn my research methodology on its head, making people and women's claims to land, rather than legal and human rights principles, the starting point and touchstone, both during my fieldwork and in the writing and recommendations.

Women, Land and Justice in Tanzania is a book about journeys for justice. It is based on a year's ethnographic fieldwork researching women's claims to land in practice. The book traces the progression of women's legal claims to land in Tanzania from the home, through social and legal processes of dispute resolution to judgment. It considers the extent to which women are realising their interests in land through land courts, the obstacles and pathways to justice that they face along the way, and the role of social, legal and political actors in processes of justice. It is also a book about life cycles and land. In Tanzania, as in many other African countries, gendered and intergenerational social relations are the foundation of customary land tenure systems for men and women. Many legal claims to land are the result of life changes, whether following relationship breakdown, or the death of a husband or father. In circumstances of tenure insecurity and pressure on land generally, life events can provide a catalyst for disputes and claims to land. It is often women who are in a particularly vulnerable social position who face the greatest risk of losing their land, or having a legal claim to land brought against them.

The question is then raised: To what extent are women securing justice in their legal claims to land in practice? Tanzania's Land Acts of 1999 include some of the most gender-progressive land rights provisions in Africa. They enshrine the equal rights of men and women to acquire, hold, use and deal with land.[iii] Yet the letter of the law is only part of the picture of how legal systems operate in practice. As became evident during the course of my fieldwork, the interactions and power relations between social, legal and political actors both inside and outside the walls of the courtroom are a critical issue for access to justice and the progression of women's claims. This is a well-established theme in legal anthropology, where processes of disputing are studied across multiple legal, political and social sites, as encapsulated in Moore's classic concept of the 'semi-autonomous social field'.[iv] However, generally speaking, this is unfamiliar territory for practising lawyers and judges who are embedded within the legal system itself.

The positivist disciplinary tradition of law does not require lawyers to think much

about the social dynamics of a legal dispute or the impact of their social position on the process of justice, or that of other actors involved in the dispute. However, my year of research in African courts gave me the distance from my own practice back in England and the comparative perspective to reflect on the dynamics of disputing in African and English courts.

> *It changed the way that I understood legal disputes and the role of a lawyer.*

Legal anthropological approaches shed light on the realities of the whole process of justice. Social power relations between the various actors, their internal values and wider social norms are illuminated as critical factors. After following the journeys of women's claims, I was driven to conclude that ultimately legal claims are shaped and determined by social power relations. As a practising lawyer, this was one of the most important lessons I learned from my research, and something that I hope other legal practitioners and NGO activists will also gain from the book.

In the context of the law in action lawyers and judges have a key role to play in the realisation of women's land rights and access to justice. As powerful actors in legal disputes they have the capacity to challenge and rebalance power dynamics through processes of negotiation, mediation and litigation. In both African and English legal systems considerable importance is placed on the desirability of peaceful settlement of disputes. Yet in situations of unequal power between litigants, 'harmony ideology', as Laura Nader[v] has characterised it, risks undermining the claims of the most vulnerable party.

> *An important lesson for legal professionals from legal anthropology is to be mindful of the power relations underlying a dispute, both inside and outside the walls of the courtroom.*

Equally, if courts are to do substantive justice, then lawyers and adjudicators must ensure that the social context, values and perspectives that underpin

peoples' legal claims are properly heard and understood. Seen in this light, the primary responsibility of a judge or a lawyer is not simply adjudicator or advocate, but facilitator of access to justice.

A special offer discount of 25% is available on the hardback edition of the book *Women, Land and Justice in Tanzania* (James Currey, 2015) until 31st December 2015 (offer price £33.75/$60 + p&p). Visit the publisher's website www.jamescurrey.com and quote 15828 when ordering.

References cited

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[ii] Kapur, R. (2000). 'The Tragedy of Victimisation Rhetoric: Resurrecting the "Native" Subject in International/Post-Colonial Feminist Legal Politics', *Harvard Human Rights Journal,* 15 (Spring 2002).

[iii] Land Act No. 4 of 1999 and Village Land Act No. 5 of 1999, section 3 (2).

[iv] Moore, S.F. (1973). 'Law and Social Change: The Semi-Autonomous Social Field as an Appropriate Subject of Study', *Law and Society Review*, 7(4): 719-46.

[v] Nader, L. (1993). 'Controlling Processes in the Practice of Law: Hierarchy and Pacification in the Movement to Re-form Dispute Ideology', *The Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution* 9: 1-25.

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Allegra Turns 2! #Best Of

Allegra
September, 2015

Our baby just turned two…and in this short pace of time, it managed to attract a constantly growing readership. Ok, let’s be frank: we suck with stats and Google Analytics! That’s a fact! But we eventually managed to identify our top 20 most read posts. How best to celebrate this second year of adventures than by sharing

the jewels of Allie's archives with you?

So here are the posts which, according to Google Analytics, attracted your attention the most, dear readers:

1. Yes You Can : Being a Mother and an Academic. Carole McGranahan. May 11, 2015
2. Interview : Tim Ingold on the Future of Academic Publishing. Antonio De Lauri. July 1, 2015.
3. « Think Like an Anthropologist » : An Interview with Laura Nader. Antonio de Lauri. December 18, 2013.
4. Bourgeois Knowledge. Antonio de Lauri. April 7, 2015
5. What does humanity look like ? Ethnography of the CIA with Carole McGranahan. Miia Halme-Tuomisaari. June 19, 2015
6. After elections : Hope #Afghan Elections 2014. Antonio de Lauri. September 12, 2014
7. Why Povinelli's Talk at the EASA 2014 was a failure ? Sylvain Piron. August 19, 2014.
8. Public Engagement vs Ontological Turn. Isaac Morrison. January 24, 2014
9. Flatulanthropology. Gavin Weston and Jon Mitchell. May 25, 2014
10. European Savages at the AAA 2013. Miia Halme Tuomisaari and Julie Billaud
11. The neoliberal race to the bottom affects us all ! Mariya Ivancheva. April 8, 2015
12. Persistent Point of First contact. Julie Billaud and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari. August 22, 2014
13. Snapshots of British Islam : Halal Dating in London. Julie Billaud. December 9, 2013
14. Anthropological Job Hunting and Gathering. Isaac Morrison. March 5, 2014
15. Bears and the Russian Body Politic. Judith Beyer. April 22, 2015.
16. « I Love Polyandry, yo ! » Tibetan refugee Citizenship and the Politics of Culture. Carole McGranahan. October 27, 2014.

17. The Archaelogical Study of Children. Jane Eva Baxter. May 12, 2015.
18. From Maya Enthusiast to Occupy Activist : Allegra Meets David Graeber. Allegra. June 13, 2014
19. Going Native at Home. Charis Boke. June 17, 2015
20. Which Constitution ? What order ? Constitutional Politics in Ukraine. Judith Beyer. April 14, 2015.

We asked our Allies to pick up the post they prefer and explain why in a short paragraph. Some chose one in our top 20, others picked one outside of the list. And here is what they said:

Judith Beyer picked up Alice Elliot's recent post on the European crisis as seen from the other shore of the Mediterranean sea

> *Alice Elliot's post on 'Crisis on the other shore' offers a rare glimpse into social relations between those who have stayed behind in Morocco ('inside') and those who have made the strenous journey to Europe ('outside'). Evocatively and engagingly written, Elliot attends to the socio-linguistic nuances of how 'crisis' is locally understood. What surprised me was the sending of basic food products by Moroccans to their family members living "outside" in Italy where buying food has become so expensive that even pasta is no longer affordable.*

Gavin Weston chose Carole McGranahan's blog post on being a mother and an academic:

> *This is my favourite Allegra post (so far) because it addresses a topic that so many of us discuss as academics, but generally behind closed doors. We live in a world where anthropology students complained about their lecturer breastfeeding in class (Adrienne Pine – mentioned in the post). To foster the greater institutional work/life flexibility that would make academic parenthood easier we need to have these conversations out in the open and students need to be included.*

Carole's post is also Fiona Murphy's favorite :

> *The reason why I choose this particular post is that it highlights the challenges faced by mothers in academia in a sensitive and enlightening way. I feel this post is particularly timely given that in the neoliberal university it is often women and indeed, mothers who most likely to end up in adjunct or temporary positions. The post is both illuminating and inspiring.*

Felix Girke selected Allie's post on "European Savages at the AAA"

> *While not perfect as a text, and the two authors would probably write it rather differently today, this is (for me) Peak Allegra: speaking truth to pompousness. This impressionistic rendering of the rationalized-technocratic-neoliberal conference environment by some self-styled savages from the old old OLD world just works well as a collage combining fragments of description, introspection, analysis, and (of course!) provocation.*

Toby Kelly chose a post written by Rubina Jasani and Atreye Sen comparing episodes of violence in Mumbai and Ahmedabad:

> *An interesting exploration of the relationship between fear and aggression, victims and perpetrators, friend and foe in the context of ongoing communal violence.*

Joshua Clark picked up Heath Cabot's post on the Greek crisis

> *I really enjoyed Heath Cabot's piece showing that the everyday sociality of dealing with "crisis" in Greece is less rupture than continuity. The essay read like a "dispatch from the field," but one that offers a nuanced, of-the-moment counter-story about resilience and solidarity in contrast to sensationalist, often judgmental corporate media accounts. And wow, I didn't have to wait 6 years for such an analysis to appear in a peer-reviewed journal!*

Nirmala Jayaraman chose Judith Beyer's post on "Bears and the Russian Body Politic"

> *Cultural Anthropology has had its fair share of transformations and the discipline is at its best when applied to understanding key changes of public and private perceptions of current events. What I liked about the piece "Bears and the Russian Body Politic" were the observations made concerning a familiar historical image. The competing narratives behind what the "bear" represents will continue to interest us for as long as we have media.*

Constanza Curro chose Mariya Ivancheva's post entitled: "The neoliberal race to bottom affects us all!"

> *Mariya's analysis reminds academics that our opportunities to develop and voice dissent against inequality, precariousness and exploitation, in the labour context and beyond, partly stem from our privileged and somehow detached position. However, such critical distance is nowadays no longer enough, and amid neoliberal policies undermining and denying all workers' right, active solidarity is very much needed.*

Rosie Gant also picked Carole's post.

> *Flying in the face of what is still taken as conventional wisdom on the nigh on impossibility of combining motherhood with a successful career in academia, Carole McGranahan debunks the myth and offers encouragement to those considering doing just that. Despite the obstacles that still exist, McGranahan's piece offers a welcome reassurance to those understandably apprehensive at the prospect. As such, Yes You Can is not only one of my favourite posts, but is no doubt a firm favourite with many Allies too.*

And what about you, dear readers? What was your favorite post this year and why did this particular text appeal to you? Share your view with us in the

comment section below and we’ll re-run your favorite posts in the weeks to come!

Life After Fieldwork: of leaving the field, entering liminality and relocating the mind

Franziska Fay
September, 2015

The bulky and weirdly shaped package I hold in my hands weighs nearly 20 pounds. 20 pounds of memories materialize in a final leaving present that now makes going away feel even harder. I struggle trying to give the impression of it being much lighter, but I have started to worry that customs might take it away from me. Needless as it turns out when the woman at the check-in that screens my bags – including this particular piece of hand luggage – just smiles and tells me that I made a good decision taking lots of shoki shoki (a type of lychee) home as a present.

The shoki shoki were one of many gifts I was sent off with by people I got to know as friends and informants over the past 18 months of my fieldwork in Zanzibar. The sister of one of the children I worked with at a madrasa (Qur'an school) decorated my hands with Henna as is custom before celebrations or journeys. A friend who works as an artist and architect came to give me two drawings of the house I had lived in for the past year which we always sat outside of talking for hours. And a woman from one of the communities I worked in spent three hours with her daughters baking a specific cake for me – and starting again from scratch twice while I sat next to her feeling embarrassed and humbled at the same time – until she decided it was "good enough" for me to take home.

These goodbye presents were more than gifts. They made me realize the depth of relationships I had been able to form in ways that went beyond researcher-informant interaction. They were labours of kindness and generosity, yet deemed natural, to send me off on my journey home.

Looking at fieldwork itself an act of travelling makes the moments of arrival and departure key, and juxtaposing them now – post fieldwork – makes me feel like I have travelled to far more than one place during this time. I feel like constantly

having left and resettled even though I spent 18 months on only one small island. Still, the new spaces which with time lost their unfamiliarity and became something in the wider sense of home, were less geographically bound and lay rather within the people that constituted my experiences. Primarily I locate these spaces with the 60 children from 4 primary and 2 Qur’anic schools whom I worked with throughout my field research.

Flashback: Sensory Childhood Research

In Zanzibar my aim was to explore the different meanings that children and their adult counterparts (like parents, teachers, development workers) attribute to the wider notions of childhood, manners, punishment and safety in their daily lives. I approached my research questions through the use of child-friendly research methods such as "photovoice" and "draw and write". My use of these methods turned out to reveal much about the social system children live in and their relationships with adults. The conditions under which these methods were applied proved to be as important as the approach itself as children's participation and agency remained dependent on the actions of the adults in their lives and showed

to be a rather relative and fragile concept. All stages and spaces of working with these approaches were mediated by adults and had to be negotiated in reference to them. As much as I had intended to put children at the centre of my research, my methodology proved how inseparable they were from the adults in their lives and how I would have to consider them both. The presumed adequacy of my methodology for my project was challenged regarding this inevitable adult presence and influence. Reaching the aim of giving the children the chance to take a lead in the research themselves and to emphasize their usually sidelined voices (Wang 2006) was not immediately guaranteed. The following example shows this clearly.

“You really want this picture developed?” the guy in the photo shop asks me, when I point at the image that he critically examines on the screen of his photo print machine. I tell him “yes, I would like all pictures to be developed, every single one”. He seems confused and asks again, pointing to the next photo that has turned out similarly dark and out of focus. “But these are bad photos, you cannot see anything. My boss told me to only develop the good ones”, he responds

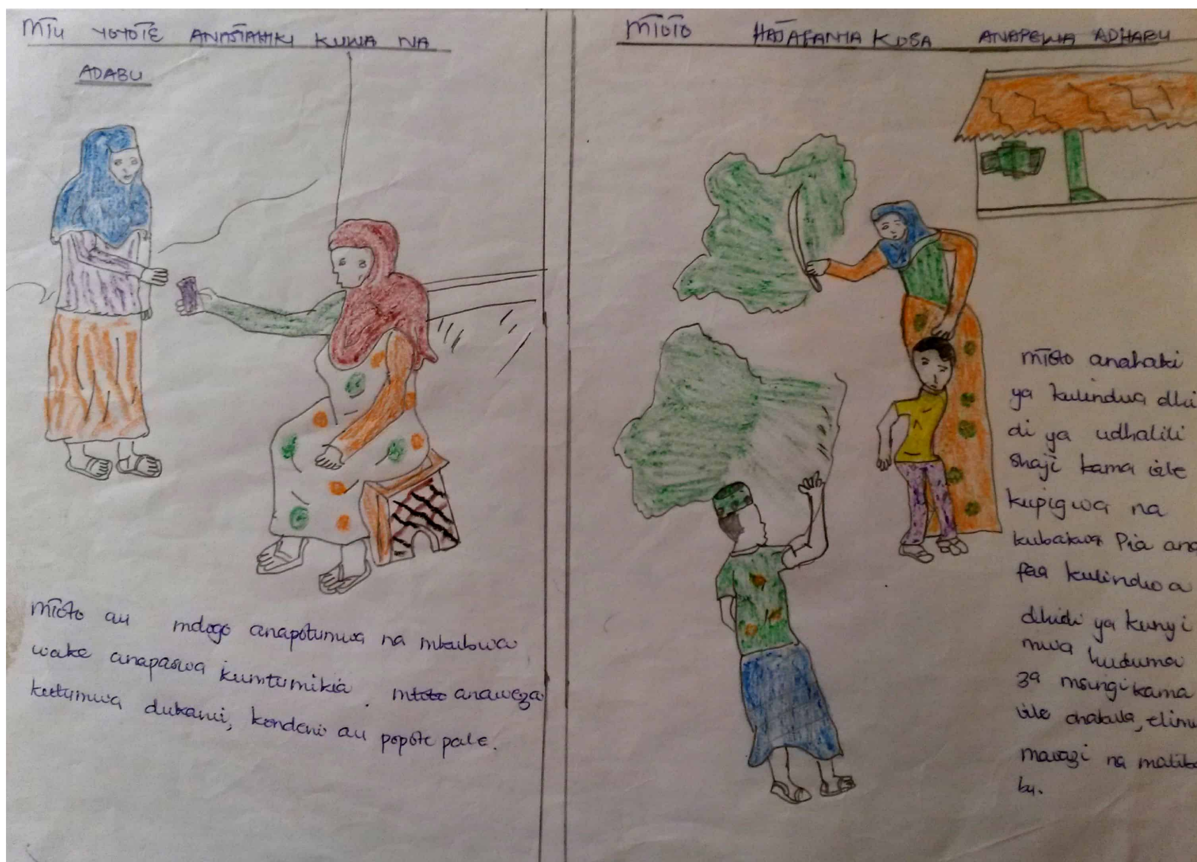
to my question about why half of the children’s photos that show on the negatives have not been developed.

“This photo shows a student being punished by being hit” (Picha hii inaonesha kuwa mwanafunzi anapewa adhabu ya kupigwa) is what the 14-year old photographer wrote on the back of his photograph.

The image was taken as part of one of the photovoice workshops I conducted with children in primary and Qur’an schools.

> *The children’s images became personal accounts of their everyday lives which were not biased by my physical presence as a researcher and would not have been accessible to me in any other way.*

They showed a variety of scenes ranging from moments of play to actual situations of physical violence. My research participants themselves chose the photos they would want to be included in the research and explained to me what each one showed. The two ethnographic vignettes show that regardless of how clear and meaningful the above picture’s message seemed to the child-photographer and to myself, it was not immediately obvious for other people involved at different stages of the research process.



My experience with a “draw and write” approach was similarly challenging, but more in regard to children’s limited familiarity with drawing as a task of self expression. Another challenge was children’s and teachers’ lack of familiarity and hence discomfort with creative arts as the curriculum neither includes arts or music classes, as these are often considered haram – forbidden according to Sharia/Islamic law. Where the drawing part of the research activity only offered partial perspectives onto children’s viewpoints and could not be considered an adequate “substitute for children’s voices” (Mitchell 2006: 69), the writing activity added valuable insights. What turned into a great opportunity here was that children would dare to voice their opinions in a very different way than when I would sit down together with them. Many of the children I worked with were extremely shy to speak their mind, especially in a critical way. This shyness or restrained is highly valued in Zanzibari society and hence perceived as necessary to adhere to by most children to avoid punishment, but of course rather hindering in an attempt to gather their views. Here, especially writing poems – a respected

skill in Zanzibari Swahili culture – and within that the recreation of the social order they live in, turned out to be an insightful way into their lifeworlds and views of protection and personhood.

Entering Liminality and Relocating the Mind

Research journeys consist of many attributes, which the recent [#fieldwork posts]

at Allegra all showed in different ways. Now, as I move in between my field site and back to my academic home in the UK, my identity and self-representation as a researcher shifts. Baginova's thoughts on the relevance of certain footwear for her research reminded me particularly of consistently wearing a veil for the past 18 months, and it now not being an unquestioned part of my daily dress. With similar ease I could relate to Tawasil's discussion of her relationships with her informants and friends in the field, and to Swamy's reflection on maintaining the border in between professional and personal identity and its influence on scholarly analysis.

Instead of defining my research journey as a process with a clear end-point, it seems to consist of different stages of reflection – the current post-fieldwork stage being one of them. Disorientation is probably the most fitting description of this state, where I no longer am the researcher in the field and not yet have completed the whole process of the PhD project. More than 4000 miles away from my field site, my ethnographic journey still feels far from completed.

> *I relocated my body, moved it away from my field site, but find my mind catching up only slowly.*

I am in the in-between – I have entered liminality (Turner 1970). I suddenly am out of touch with my research participants when engaging with them had become a kind of routine. This everyday research routine now has to be transformed into a more distant way of analytical thinking, away from the field, about what happened during the time in the field. My "fieldwork self", the researcher, has merged with my "everyday-self" and I struggle making a distinction as I am still the researcher with the same questions and ideas but now again in a different space that mirrors those ideas in other ways than my field site could. I know that this uncertain state will dissolve eventually, once I will fully reintegrate in the structured academic world, but while I'm waiting for this to happen, it is the space that connects me with both the field and the non-field, my field- and desk-researcher selves.

Rethinking Child Protection Programming

The distance between me and the island will create a new space for thought and for doing what I set out to attempt: to reconsider the way child protection programming is currently done. ‘Child protection’ interventions in Zanzibar have contributed to establishing a symbiosis of co-existing systems of thought about childhood and safety. While following my main research themes of protection and

personhood by working with children and adults, there were three different discourses that kept overlapping: the international aid discourse, the religious discourse, and the Swahili socio-cultural discourse. These discourses proved to be critical in structuring people's narratives of "child protection" and made sense of what it means to be a child and to be safe differently. Answers to seemingly simple questions like Who is a child? became more complex when, for example, the international aid discourse considered everyone below the age of 18 to be a child, but the socio-cultural discourse would mark the end of childhood between the age of 12-15 with the onset of puberty (kubaleghe). Such differences are often ignored as they might seem irrelevant to policy makers or, more often, as they require extra time for contextualizing interventions which is usually limited in the development world that has to stick to log-frames and budget lines. Nevertheless taking into account information "about the ways children actually live in their communities, as well as local beliefs about childhood" (Ennew 2002: 350) is exactly what those in charge of policy- and programme-making for children should consider to do more.

What often falls short in this context is the fact that child protection as well as child disciplining practices are also embedded in cultural and religious values and play a role in the achievement of social personhood. Individuals – both adults and children – exist in social and historical contexts that cannot be ignored (Crewe 2010).

> *There is a need for recognizing, respecting and integrating all of these conceptualizations in contextualized "child protection" programmes, instead of simply overruling religious and cultural ideas with universalized standards.*

As through the lens of medical anthropology, "everyone may share the same elements from which diagnoses may be made and therapies initiated, [but] each person can have a slightly different view of how categories fit together, and, therefore, of how the illness can be best progressed to cure" (Davis 2000: 69). If

we consider harms to children's lives, i.e. illnesses, abuse etc. as curable, what is necessary in child protection programming is "to see into the social circumstances surrounding an illness and to give them definition" (ibid.: 103) – to the social circumstances surrounding harms to children's lives in Zanzibar and to create a contextualized response to them. Instead of further "rendering technical" (Li 2007: 123) social problems like violence against children, these should be "rendered intelligible" (Davis 2000: 103) and hence more likely to be "treatable".

All photos in this post are courtesy of Fanziska Fay.

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Universit(ar)y journeys: an ethnographic play

Sonja Trifuljesko
September, 2015

Prologue

When the fireworks in the Senate Square in Helsinki announced the beginning of 2015, they also marked the start of a special year for the adjoining University of Helsinki: its 375th anniversary. Though this jubilee per se might not seem to be a particularly significant, it became one. Many happenings have been linked to the occasion. However, in spite of a variety of events, not many occurrences have left such an impact on the university's immediate environment as the renaming of a Helsinki metro station.

I have already written partially about one particular repercussion that occurred: a dispute brought up when a discount retail store (located in the metro station) was about to change its name to the University of Helsinki's Tokmanni. I am developing now that story further by tracing its echo through 3 ethnographic

snapshots, chronologically reversed for a dramatic effect.

Scene one

The doors to a Helsinki metro single line are closing at the Hakaniemi station and the wagons start moving towards Ruoholahti. The coming stop is the recently renamed ‘University of Helsinki’. Now present in my environment, after slipping into the Internet to read yet another story about precarity in a ‘neoliberalized’ university, I put my phone in my bag and slowly prepare to get off at the next stop.

> *“Hey”, exclaims a Finnish woman in her forties. Sitting in a compartment opposite of mine, she attracts the attention of her female companion situated across from her. “You know they’ve changed the Kaisaniemi station to the University of Helsinki, don’t you?”, she asks casually. It was as if someone poked me with a stick. I couldn’t believe my ears. Again this story! Who would have known that riding public transportation would turn out to be so beneficial for my research?*

“Really?!”, says the woman’s friend, slightly puzzled. With the renaming having occurred two months ago, I assumed she was not a frequent rider.

“But then you probably haven’t heard of the scandal concerning Tokmanni either?”, the first female continues in a nonchalant manner.

This is getting better and better, I think to myself. How can I move closer to them, but in a way that would not look obvious that I am eavesdropping?
“What scandal?”, utters the companion.

“Well, they renamed it as the University of Helsinki’s Tokmanni”, replies her friend.

The other woman’s face began changing form and colour like she had eaten a

really hot chilli and was only able to utter “Seriously?!” before bursting into a vehement laugh. “I’m not kidding!”, says the first one, joining in with an even louder laughter. The train is coming to my stop and I stand up to move closer to the door. It was a pity that I had a meeting in fifteen minutes, otherwise I would have stayed to listen to the rest of the discussion.

“Well, I guess the name change is helpful for tourists”, says the second woman after calming herself down, occasionally still disturbed by violent after-laughs. “I guess so”, says the first one even more calmly, almost as to proclaim that the joke has come to an end.

“Helsingin yliopisto, Helsingfors universitet, University of Helsinki”, echoes throughout the wagon as it enters the metro station. The orange train slowly stops and I exit.

Scene two

Tram number 9 heading from the West Harbor to Pasila is stopped at Kaisaniemi to pick up passengers. I enter with my husband to ride two stops to Hakaniemi square in order to catch a 12 o’clock IKEA bus. It is a cold and rainy, early March morning and since there’s not much else to do in weather like this, we have decided to go to buy some extra carpet for our draughty student apartment.

As soon as the doors of the tram closed, a 50-ish year-old woman strikes up a conversation with her somewhat senior female friend. Sitting on the left side of the tram she points towards the Tokmanni store and says “Look at it now”.

> *“Here it is…here is THE store”, she continues excitedly in Finnish.*
>
> *Catching my attention, I hear the other woman ask a bit baffled, “What store?”*
>
> *“The University of Helsinki’s Tokmanni”, answers the first one with a grin.*

My husband begins to tell me something, but I signal to him to wait. He is a bit

confused, so I tell him in Serbian: “I will explain everything to you as soon as we get off”.

“Don’t you know what happened?”, continues the first woman following a dramatic pause. “They’ve changed the name after renaming the metro station without asking permission and now the University wants to sue them”, says the woman almost ecstatic at this point.
However, the other woman seems to be unaffected by all the excitement of her friend. With a completely flat voice she utters: “But, that’s something you’re not allowed to do, aren’t you?”.
“No”, answers the first woman somewhat sharply, “you are not allowed to do that”.

She abruptly turns her head towards the window, cutting all communication channels with her companion. She seemed to be hurt by her friend’s sober comments, preventing her from turning this whole thing into a mockery.

As we exit the tram, the women continue to sit in silence. On the sidewalks, I enthusiastically start explaining to my husband why I had previously shushed him.

Scene three

Running to the metro station in order to catch the 8.50 train, I feel already late in starting my day with lots to do before 10am. Entering the metro panting, I sit in my favorite spot – the front seat in the first wagon, just behind the driver. As soon as I take my winter coat off to cool down, like any other day I grab a copy of the free “Metro” newspapers, left below the window by a previous passenger. I unfold them and recognize a photo of a budget store in the University of Helsinki’s metro station on the front page. The image is featured with a yellow title:

“A P E C U L I A R N A M E D I S P U T E
University of Helsinki Gets Angry at a Cheap Retail Chain.”

This was followed by tiny white letters:

“Tokmanni retail chain will open on Thursday a store previously known as Kaisaniemi’s Tarjoustalo under a new name, “University of Helsinki’s Tokmanni”. University of Helsinki plans to sort out legality of the name”.

Intreagued, I flip to the rest of the story on page four. Under a title “University Gets Annoyed by a Cheap Store”, there is a half-page account of the name dispute. With different views from the University’s Communications Director, the Executive Director of the Tokmanni concern, and the Name Planner at the City of Helsinki, there was also bizarrly information for the opening ceremony of the store at 9 o’clock that day. To the first 1000 customers there would be a plastic bucket.

It was already 9:05. I think to myself, I don’t have time for this, I need to start replying to all those e-mails that have been piling up. However, when I disembark from the metro and I bump into a person carrying a white bucket with the red “Tokmanni” label, my curiosity overruns my sense of responsibility and I instead head towards the store. While I didn’t know the bucket I acquired during this detour would become one of the central artefacts of my research, I did immediately appreciate the toothpaste that was placed in it, since we had just ran out that morning.

Epilogue

In its 375 years of existence, the University of Helsinki travelled not only through time, but also through space, as it was moved from Turku to the new capital and was spread from its initial location in the Senate Square to other parts of a growing Helsinki. Parallel to all these movements, the relationship between the university and its environment has also changed, which my study, through events like this name dispute, tries to explore.

> *However, simultaneously in the journey of an ethnographic object, there is also a journey of an ethnographer. This is almost always a physical journey (in my case mostly by public transportation), but also an intellectual one, as I attempt*

eventually to give a theoretical significance to my ethnographic material (cf. Strathern 1999:1-11).

For an anthropology doctoral candidate, conducting research is also a social journey, since it constitutes a rite of passage for becoming a full member of both academic and anthropological 'communities'. The former entails graduating from a university PhD programme, the latter completing long-term ethnographic fieldwork. However, nowadays since these two seem to be predominantly associated with different modes of knowledge production – one demanding a strictly defined research framework, the other an utterly flexible one – anthropologists might not often be the most exemplary of doctoral students within an 'efficiency-obsessed' university environment.

Yet ethnographers' continuing presence in the academic setting inevitably reminds researchers of other epistemological possibilities beside the currently hegemonic ones, where something as extraneous and banal as an ordinary metro or tram ride could yield enormously important insights into one's research subject.

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References Needed!

#Crowdsourcing

Mark Goodale
September, 2015

Mark Goodale is currently writing *Anthropology and Law: A Critical Introduction* for NYU Press. The manuscript is due at the end of December 2015. One of the ideas behind this volume is to ensure that the voices of scholars outside the dominant Anglo-American tradition are represented, both in terms of region and in terms of generation.

As an experiment in intellectual (and perhaps ethical) production, he is offering to take any and all suggestions for references. It is not exactly like he is crowdsourcing the bibliography, but rather participating in an experiment in democratizing knowledge.

The categories are the following;

—the anthropology of justice
—the anthropology of human rights

—law and different forms of regulation
—law and indigenous peoples
—law and gender
—law, ethnic conflict and nationalism
—law and language
—law, history, and memory

Please feel free to make suggestions (these should be anthropological references) in the comments section below. Do not miss your chance to get quoted in a book that promises to become a reference in legal anthropology!

Contextualizing Exclusion: Lessons from Kambis

Amina Tawasil
September, 2015
In my first blog installment I described one of my bus rides in Tehran in order to show that education, the transmission and acquisition of knowledge and sensibilities, is not confined to schooling. By delineating education from schooling, I was able to show that the processes of critical thought also, and perhaps more importantly, take place in moments and places unnoticed. Through my description of the bus ride I attempted to show that learning how to think critically with others necessitates learning how to relate to others. This process cannot be detailed in textbooks, and must be accounted for in order to show that learning how to think with others is not exclusive to the methods or spaces of classrooms, schools and universities (Cremin 1978; Gundaker 2008; Klemp et al

2008; Lave & Wenger 1991; Ranciere 1999; Spindler 1967; Varenne 2007).

If so, what then is schooling for? One way to explain the function of schooling is to first assume that it is tied to systems of power; specific to my last post- the state and socioeconomic class. For the state, schools are meant to produce future technologically advanced and scientific revolutionary Iranians. For the secular-leaning upper class in north Tehran, schooling is a mark of social status. They defined educative success as specifically linked to having completed degrees in prestigious Iranian, European and North American universities, and doing the right secular things with those degrees.

Here we can gather that competing ideologies inevitably undermine the intended purposes of higher education. For instance, becoming a technologically advanced Shi'i revolutionary was hardly the case among the upper middle class in north Tehran. What one does with an education is subject to assessment and social approval. For the upper class, leaving Iran for Europe and North America was a better option than becoming a revolutionary who upheld the ideals of the 1979 revolution.

In both competing ideologies, however, schooling has been, as in the case of Iran during my fieldwork, singled out from other forms of education and socially produced as the only acceptable proof that a person is capable of critical thought.

> *Although purported as a space of critical thought, schooling is also and more importantly for this blog post, a space of exclusion for those who could not perform propensities towards a particular kind of "critical thinking" that are deemed necessary to successfully maintain a seat in the university.*

In other words, the hierarchical value of schooling, socioeconomic status and the exclusion of others enable the would-be revolutionaries and the secular upper class. It is this exclusion of those 'others', that producing technologically advanced Shi'i revolutionaries and/or upper middle class secular sensibilities become possible.

This second installment explores my interaction with a 40 year-old man from Mashhad named Kambis, whom I met after getting off the bus at Park-e Daneshju in Tehran, and what exclusion meant for him. Here, I consider DeCerteau's *a walk in the city.* A subject enunciates its presence by taking space and making it its own place. I explore the idea that a particular kind of be-ing in Iran, that of Kambis as 'uneducated', is "critical thought" in action, one which sometimes escapes the itineraries of both revolutionaries and the secular upper middle class in Iran.

I stepped off the bus at chahor rah Vali Asr one early evening right before sunset, and struck a random conversation with a man named Kambis. His beard length covered the entirety of his neck. Although I suspected he was a Basiji (member of the volunteer military organization) because he was dressed in a dark gray business suit with a black office shirt, something about his appearance did not quite fit the description of a Basiji. We walked about 100 meters to Park-e Daneshju and sat in front of the theater about three feet away from each other. I assumed, that he, too, knew to avoid being noticed by the Irshad (morality police) since we were of the opposite gender and were not related to each other.

He said although he had been called Kambis since he was a child, his name was actually Mojtaba. This was on his national identification card. What struck me most was Kambis's long hair because I knew that Iranians overall didn't look too kindly at men with long hair. Before meeting Kambis, the government had just decided to crack down on men keeping long hair. Visuals were being offered on both television and print on the "proper" length of a man's hair. I asked Kambis why he kept his hair long. He said, "It's love, love of religion and life." I then asked about the four rings he wore on his two fingers. One ring was from Mashhad, "For 'enerjie'," he said. One ring was from Karbala, one from Kabul, and one from Damascus. He traveled to these cities to do ziarat, pilgrimage, in the Shi'i holy shrines. When I asked if he was mazhabi (religiously conservative), he smiled, waved his hand to the side, and said, "I pray."

I asked where he went to college. Shrugging his shoulders, he told me he did not

pass the Konkur exam (the nationwide university entrance exam), and he could not afford to pay tuition for the private institutions. He then pulled out his phone that had an up-close picture of Khamanei's face as his wallpaper. He turned the phone towards me so I could see. I asked him if he liked Khamanei. He said, "I like him as a person, but for the people, no." He handed me his phone to show me a short video clip of a musical group he was a part of. He explained that he knew how to play several string and wind instruments and the accordion.

For many of my friends in north Tehran, Kambis was provincial, un-aware, with the sensibilities of the lower class. Moreover, most Iranians deem Kambis as having foreclosed for himself upward mobility in what would be considered the professional job market because he failed the Konkur exam. Here, I'd like to consider the opposite- Kambis did not necessarily fail himself of opportunities. That is, certain conditions in Iran, which essentially place greater vested interest in those who do well in the university entrance exam, fail individuals like Kambis rather than Kambis failing himself of mobility. Kambis was able to join a musical group and perform in front of a large audience. That, too, necessitated a particular kind of education that made Kambis successful in what he did. Kambis did not travel to Europe, the Americas or Southeast Asia. Instead, he would frequently visit his family in Mashhad, as well as the different shrines inside Iran, the cities of Damascus, Kabul, and Karbala. For Kambis, he was well traveled.

> *I push this further- Kambis's ways of carrying himself was a manifestation of critical thought. That is, assuming that institutions of higher education are spaces where the ability "to think together" also involves the push to homogenize the terms of belongingness, greatness and mediocrity, as I gathered from my friends in north Tehran, there is much to be drawn out about Kambis's lack of interest in exhibiting 'sameness' based on class, intellect or merit.*

To explain, I had come to learn about the visible markers of levels of religiosity by the time I met Kambis. The beard and the quintessential dark gray dress suit were

markers of the religiously conservative man. At first, I became confused in trying to determine "what Kambis was" and how I should behave towards him. His dark gray suit, rings, and Khamanei's face on his phone exhibited that he was religiously conservative- what Iranians call "hizbullahi" or mazhabi.

Yet, the way Kambis presented himself said otherwise. For one, Kambis's hair and beard length exceeded the norm. He was a Mojtaba named Kambis, who visits shrines, performs in front of crowds, makes his appearance similar to that of religiously conservative men, and likes Khamanei for himself but not for the people. His opinion about Khamanei taught me that it was possible to like Khamanei as a person enough to make his face a cell phone wallpaper, but not as a leader. It was also possible to exhibit exaggerations of religious conservativeness, to express ambivalence towards the markers of Iranian religiosity. I am not asserting that Kambis was able to escape 'structure', yet Kambis dressed, behaved and spoke in ways that unsettled my cookie-cutter assumptions of religiosity in Iran as simply Islamist or Islamist-Reformist.

I now return to the connections I draw between schooling and systems of power. The means to an education differed between my friends in Tajrish and Kambis. A university education was deemed more economically, politically and socially worthy. Expanding the definition of education beyond the classroom makes it possible to tie together the previous narratives in that it allows us to explore the different subjectivities produced out of schooling and higher education in Iran. Although not unique to Iran, recognizing that education takes place outside of schools allows us to ask what then is schooling for? Who is excluded from this project and what happens to those excluded? It allows us to examine schooling as a contested space; a tool of the state, as sites of secular or liberal resistance. And, equally telling, what and whom this binary is overshadowing.

We may also ask, which groups of people constitute the state with enough vested interests to use schooling as a tool to maintain the state? And, who is resisting as a response? That is, who is doing the decolonization of state ideology? Which system of power are they drawing from? Through time, it became more apparent

that by wanting a better Iran, my friends in north Tehran meant wanting more for the urban and secular Iranians like themselves. What they meant by technological advances and social freedoms resembled what their counterparts, the elite and upper middle classes in North America or Europe experienced. My friends' belief in knowing what is best for all Iranians is grounded in their assumptions about education as schooling, as earned merit through schooling; that, the Iranian poor's lack of 'schooling' deprives them of "critical thinking", thus, incapable of knowing what is best for themselves and for all.

Envisioning a future Iran that is defined by upper class sensibilities is not new in Iran. From the nineteenth century onwards, Iranian elite reformists deemed the non-urban, the lower class and the religiously conservative as obstructions towards modernization (Sullivan 1998; Najmabadi 2005 & 2013) that needed to be schooled and brought up to speed about becoming proper Iranians through scientific journals and literacy campaigns.

> *Contextualizing exclusion, that is, the fact that an 'educated' person's entrance into a university system was partly enabled by the exclusion of individuals like Kambis allows us to further examine class-based politics.*

When exclusion is taken into consideration, who, then can rightfully, speak for all Iranians? When does the answer to this question matter? It is not enough to assume that the high premium Iranians place on a university education is a naturally occurring phenomenon. How this premium has been and continues to be produced (Najmabadi 1998; 2013) over other forms of education (Street 1984) must be contextualized and historicized (Menashri 1992). Especially so, since this premium is also very much tied to whose points of views, political opinions, social design, economic visions – whether one is secular, reformist, modern, or religiously conservative – are considered credible in the public sphere within and without Iran.

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From the Centre of Europe to the End of the World: Intimate

reflections on activism, healing and belonging in the field

Mina Baginova
September, 2015

I was not feeling any particular excitement or thrilling feverishness. Preparing for the unknown journey into fieldwork in Santiago de Chile to research inner dynamics of the student social movement, I felt extraordinarily calm and peaceful, with a firm sense of knowing that everything was as it was supposed to be. I knew that, somehow, I was departing to a place where all previous journeys both academic and the most personal have lead me to. Even the streets of Santiago and my first contact with fellow activists in the field seemed strangely familiar

almost immediately upon my arrival. These emotions of intimate affinity towards a place and people with which I have seemingly only little in common have become a tool for a profound self reflection about who I am both as a researcher and an activist, identities that have in time merged, unapologetically, into one.

My research methodology is firmly grounded in the tradition of activist ethnography, produced in conviction that today research can not be impartial. After all, activists are rarely interested in why I am doing this research. Instead, they ask me how exactly I am engaged in activities elsewhere and for what reason I want to collaborate with them, leaving little room for mere observation. With such a close engagement, intimate self reflections on how I got to this particular field have therefore become an important part of my research. I was intrigued by the article on Allegra by Anne-Marie Martindale about the significance of emotional work during the whole process of an anthropological research. In a similar vein, I have found that emotional work is essential in activist research. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) whose book 'The Radical Imagination' incorporates key elements of how I think about social movements research, emphasises the importance of creating the safe space within social movements that offers spheres for both personal and collective reflection of activists, opening thus zones of healing and possibility of rearticulating the political and ideological direction during the time of collective crisis within and outside of social movements. Bearing in mind that activist research does not stand merely for documenting social movement's activities and networks but is an element directly engaged in the collective social struggle, taking time for my own activist meditation has become necessary. How have I gotten here? What can I give back by being here? What can I take away with me from this invaluable experience?

I have no roots in Chile, or Latin America for that matter. It took me 30 years of various experiences and life journeys across many places to reach the point of choosing to conduct this particular research, and to come from the centre of Europe where I was born to Chile, a country at "the very end of the world". I was born in 1980s in the Soviet Union and growing up in early 1990s in the new aggressive capitalism, I have no memories of the political as related to social

excitement and dedication. I only recall distorted pictures of collective and personal defeat followed by social paralysis. The excitement of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989 very quickly turned into an economic shock that followed the fall of the the Soviet regime, resulting in social breakdown of early 1990s. My earliest memories of the political include disillusioned dissidents and aggravated former political prisoners, recollections which, for a large part of my growing up years, resulted in associating of doing politics with unavoidable cynicism, bitterness and sarcasm towards anything that may have potentially breathed hope.

> *The crisis of the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe has, from a very early age, shaped my life as a 'perpetual migrant' who spent her life either waiting for migrant worker parents to come home or migrated to other parts of Europe herself. Themes of movement and looking for alternative ways of belonging have been a fundamental aspect of my life and, ultimately, these were also the main reasons for my decision to study anthropology.*

Mostly because of my diasporic background, it came naturally that I have been involved for the last 10 years in activities concerning immigration and wellbeing of asylum seekers across Greece, the UK and the Netherlands, witnessing first hand the cruelty of the discriminatory European system that includes only few and excludes most. There are several crucial moments in a form of snapshots that I recall as decisive for my eventual journey to Chile. One is being forced to live on the streets while trying to finance my studies and fighting for the labour conditions and legal wage at several precarious jobs. Another, international student friends being forcefully deported to unsafe countries of their origin by the police and immigration officers. It also includes witnessing a suicide of an undocumented immigrant in a cold cell of the detention center. It was also when watching refugees and asylum seekers begging for the sip of water on European borders.

But the breaking point that has changed my whole life and how I see myself

fitting into the academic and activist world came when I myself became a part of the unaccountable number of women who have been subjected to gender based violence. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to find refuge in my studies and I chose to conduct research in Colombia, my dream destination for years. Interestingly, my professors initially did not support my decision as I had no previous experience or knowledge of Latin America and thought of my choice as strange and irrational. Survivors of violence often talk about dissociation from oneself and I could not bring myself at that time to explain that, not only had I never felt that I belonged to any place in particular, but that going to strange places and opening myself to strangers is a natural aspect of who I am. I did not feel comfortable or obliged to explain that, somewhere at the moment of the violent attack, I had lost a part of myself which I needed to rediscover anew and being a new researcher was a way of pursuing that. Indeed, in Colombia I learnt more about myself and how I fit collectively into the wider society than I had ever done previously in Europe. My research topic was not based around activism as such but my journey towards healing started somewhere in the meetings of the displaced campesino women who showed me that, before they could protect and help their communities, it was essential to create a safe zone and a healing space for themselves. Creating such spheres is today widely used as a methodology tool in activist ethnography, which helps to develop the radical imagination as a collective process within social movements and among activists individually (see for example 'Insurgent Encounters: Transnational Activism, Ethnography and the Political).

> *At last, choosing my latest fieldwork in Chile was a result of a conscious, well-thought, almost logic decision that came to be born at the right time of my life when I was ready to commit and fully appreciate this particular type of research. It has taken me all those previous journeys to translate my most intimate experiences into the political as I understand it today, which has further enabled me to exchange my experiences and connect with my fellow activists in Santiago.*

Like my previous work in Colombia or any other activist commitment for that matter, working closely with activists has become an opportunity to find a space for healing. A large part of my research includes a close engagement with political victims of Pinochet's dictatorship. Knowing intimately people who experienced torture, rape and disappearance of their loved ones, but who are nevertheless continuing to fight for the justice and recognition while working with the younger generations of activists has, perhaps strangely, made me think of the field as I imagine more rooted people feel about their home. In Santiago with my fellow activists, after years of moving from one place to another with a silent acceptance that I am a 'foreigner' everywhere including my country of origin, I feel a new emotion of belonging. I feel at ease with my fellow activists with whom I am comfortable sharing my past. It is here that I have taught myself to counteract cynicism, a feature I despise the most and yet I am often guilty of, both as an activist and a researcher. I keep thinking of another Allegra post by Charis Boke who asked herself if "is 'going native' anything other than letting go of our specific agendas, simply feeling like we belong?". It certainly has been my case, in which activism has become an opportunity for healing, a fresh space to explore myself as a researcher and a way of returning to myself as a more dedicated activist.

Feature image by Michael Pardo (Flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Journeys Within and Between the City – Part Two

Amanda Reinke
September, 2015
In the field, anthropologists are often presented with competing narratives,

imaginings juxtaposed with reality, and the collision of facts with opinions and perceptions. The narratives of research participants (also read as friends, colleagues) are often tangled, intertwining, or interconnecting, but collectively make visible wide arrays of experiences, perceptions, and understandings. Ethnographers are charged with the challenging task of navigating these narratives and the relevant scholarly bodies of work, finally coming to an anthropological perspective. This ethnographic journey is often presented as a linear process: from problem to research questions, data collection to analysis, and then to the final write-ups of the analysis, wherein we support/reject hypotheses or provide the answers to initial research questions.

> *However, research rarely follows the linear research model presented in textbooks or the classroom.*

This two-part series presents my decidedly non-linear ethnographic journey. The first post offered tendrils of thoughts, perceptions, and opinions of individuals I encountered during my first seven months of dissertation fieldwork on alternative justice in the San Francisco Bay Area. When taken together, these tendrils present the convoluted and tangled narratives illuminating the myriad ways in which otherwise disconnected Bay Area residents are intricately bound up in the same story. As of 2014, when I first embarked on the project, this story also includes me. While the first article presents the larger context of journeys and transformations in the Bay, this post narrows in on the research process itself and the implications of rapid change for research participants.

My journey to San Francisco began in December 2013, when one of my previous research sites erupted into civil war. For me, the beginning of the war signaled the end of my research project. Although I won't enumerate the full journey that took me from my previous research project in northern Uganda to working in the western U.S., but suffice it to say that my central interest in legal anthropology, alternative conflict resolution options, and structural violence all guided me to research alternative justice in the Bay Area.

Alternative justice practitioners and organizations – individuals and groups offering conflict resolution services outside the legal system – purport the ability of their work to advance social justice, particularly for groups marginalized by the formal legal system. As a result, alternative justice programs are implemented widely to address contemporary issues, such as combating the school to prison pipeline, providing sustainable alternatives to litigation, and offering cost-effective and less damaging justice options.

> *Marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by these issues and, although they purport to reach these groups, a number of political and economic constraints often impact the ability of alternative justice programs to reach individuals marginalized by the formal legal system.*

These individuals are often members of minority ethnic or racial groups, non-English speakers, LGTBQ, alternatively abled, and low-income or homeless. However, much like my work abroad, the San Francisco Bay Area challenges homogenous assumptions about marginality.

Who is marginalized? How do they come to be considered marginalized? What does marginalization mean and what does it feel like to those that experience it?

Marginalization manifests visibly and invisibly. Makeshift homes from cardboard, sheeting, and other usable materials visibly dot the landscape under highway overpasses. Shopping carts and bags filled with personal belongings are evidence to highly mobile street living. These are often regarded as visible markers for economic, political, and social marginality with implications for health and well-being, inclusion, power, and stability.

Other forms of marginalization are less visible. Workers commuting an hour and a half to work each day, because they can't afford to live in the places they work. People living in crowded conditions that far exceed the legal occupancy limit, renting portions of living rooms as though it's a bedroom, and barely scraping by every month; all in the hopes that they are moving towards a better life. Although I embarked on this project anticipating that those visible marginalities would predominate the research, it is these invisible marginalities that began to emerge through observation and narratives.

In particular, alternative justice practitioners reveal the ways in which they experience marginalization. They share stories of low pay and long commute times, jeopardizing their ability to professionalize and become better practitioners. Family time is cut short; they stop pursuing hobbies they love so they can keep the job they have. For many, the cost of living in the Bay Area is more than financial: it's personal and it's social. Although these concerns seem to pale in comparison to other forms of marginalization, they are important because they impact alternative justice practice.

> *The core purpose of alternative justice is to resolve conflict in ways that build and strengthen communities and at little or no cost to disputants. This is often achieved by empowering individuals by building their skills and promoting healing after conflict has occurred.*

Many practitioners consider these activities particularly important for low income, non-English speakers, and marginalized racial groups, because they are disproportionately affected by state violence and systematically excluded and/or

targeted by the formal legal system. Thus, practitioners try to target these groups for their services. Ideally, practitioners speak (or employ individuals who speak) the foreign languages represented in the areas they serve. They train individuals from these communities with conflict resolution skills. Practitioners enter these communities to directly connect with people. However, practitioners are shifting these activities in response to professional and personal pressures.

Although there are different ways practitioners and organizations cope with operating in an area undergoing major transformations, they often face similar political and economic repercussions. Budget cuts force non-profit and for-profit conflict resolution practitioners alike to close or consolidate offices, moving service locations further from target communities. These journeys are paired with hiring fewer staff and increasing training costs. The result is greater responsibilities on fewer staff, mounting cost barriers for individuals wanting conflict resolution skills, and low to no cost conflict resolution services are placed at risk.

As budgets decrease, practitioners may begin to target clients who can afford to pay higher fees, shifting organizational missions and foci away from the most marginalized in society towards individuals and companies that can afford the fees for conflict resolution. Recognizing the potential deleterious effects of making this shift, some practitioners cope by increasing meeting facilitation services for other community-based organizations. Others steadily increase training fees, but continue offering low to no cost service fees, in the hopes that training fee income will compensate for decreasing grant or donor funds.

> *In addition to the economic challenges facing alternative justice practitioners and organizations, there are also legal and political obstacles. Potential changes to confidentiality for justice processes could affect the nature of alternative justice processes and the ability to ensure legally-binding confidentiality and anonymity for their clients.*

This would disproportionately affect clients who have already been targeted by or

involved in the legal system and effectively diminish one of the most compelling reasons to engage these models. There are calls to mandate rigid certifications in conflict resolution, professionalizing the field and standardizing practice. However the added cost barriers to maintain certification would again inhibit marginalized individuals from practicing alternative justice in their communities. The political and economic pressures are bound up in one another.

One of the most stunning examples is the uncomfortably close relationship between some conflict resolution organizations and the formal legal system. Conflict resolution cases are sourced directly from the police who have already responded to the incident. Many non-profits also receive substantial amounts of funding from various justice departments, municipalities, or counties, linking them with the associated political interests.

The configuration of conflict resolution practitioners in a challenging political and economic context provides a generative space for understanding the nature of alternative justice. In particular, increasing strain between imaginings of justice as it exists as a theoretical ideal versus the actuality of justice practice reveals complex contemporary challenges.

> *Where does the ideal alternative justice, which serves the most marginalized individuals, fit into the landscape when it receives funding and support from the police? What is the future of these models when they are pushed out of rapidly gentrifying communities?*

The tension between the imagined idyllic world and difficult realities poses several challenges for alternative justice practitioners, but, in many ways, these are abstract and tangible challenges for all Bay Area residents. Whether it's the imagined ideal of offering justice for the most marginalized communities or moving from underpaid start-up employee to millionaire investor, the imagined and the tangible, and process of making the imagined tangible, poses similar challenges for all the Bay Area's residents.

All good things come to an end – or do they? #Fieldnotes

Allegra
September, 2015

What do you know: the summer is already gone! It feels that only moments ago we solicited contributions to our fieldwork thread, and now it is time to bid them farewell. During this summer we have shared a fascinating journey – to make full use of the overarching metaphor that has accompanied this thread – from far-away places to those most near and dear to us.

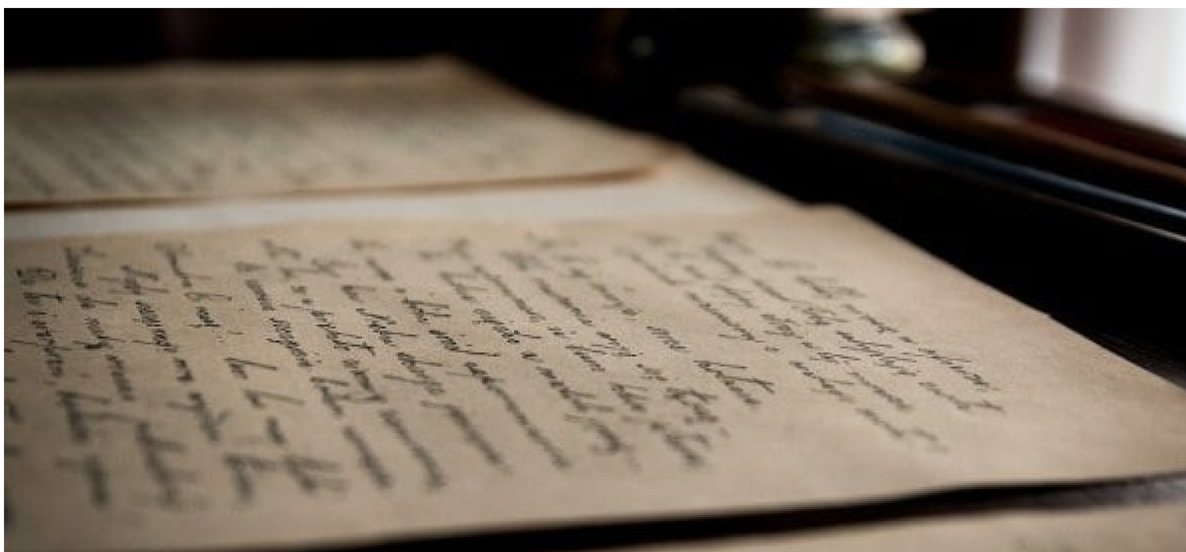
Concretely we refer to the relationship that anthropologists have to their research topics, informants – and their identities as anthropologists. Our journeys, whether

occurring on foot, via bus or subway, have reminded us once again how in anthropology few things are what they seem at the outset, and how this quality continually makes our discipline unique.

> *On the basis of this thread we can confirm, echoing what Tim Ingold has recently highlighted: anthropology is, and always has been, much more than ethnography characterized by arduous journeys to remote geographies.*

When one's anthropological lens is properly attuned, one can complete this journey by simply walking from one coffee shop to the next – or better yet, by not moving at all.

This week concludes our thread via five posts from authors who have become familiar to us by now. We open the week with two posts that both discuss arriving to one's field site, simultaneously demonstrating how this journey often begins much earlier – be it via the unexpected ending of old projects or other unexpected turns that life outside our fieldsites brings with it.



Amanda Reinke discusses this theme via her post focusing on the transformations characterizing San Francisco. In this second part of her fieldnotes she illustrates how the proliferation of tangible everyday journeying impacts work on alternative

justice.

Mina Baginova discusses arriving in her field, both in concrete geographic terms as well as in terms of becoming an activist anthropologist. She concludes with familiar sentiments to all anthropologist: how her journey made her eventually feel at home in a place that was alien to her prior to her work, impacting profoundly also her analysis.

Amina Tawasil continues the theme of belonging and being left out as she elaborates her earlier glimpse of education and schooling occurring on a bus in Northern Teheran. She discusses the notion of journeying via upward mobility alongside strategies for choosing to stay outside recognized avenues in this path.

Her post results in a powerful reminder of how the anthropologist should always remember the individual agency of their informants rather than merely view them from the omnipotent forces of 'culture' – no matter how busy they/we are to travel to the final outcomes of our analyses.

In her post Sonja Trifuljesko continues her journey on a subway in Helsinki, Finland, simultaneously following concrete changes in the city's landscape as well as the university of Helsinki located at its heart.

Via soundbites from fleeting conversations by strangers she captures an ongoing change that the university is currently undergoing – in resonance with university transformations globally.

> *Jointly these layers of her description remind us of yet another crucial ingredient to organic analysis, an ingredient that is continually more difficult to adhere to in the midst of demands for quantified 'transparency': chance.*

Perhaps more anthropologists in the future need to embrace the opportunities to coincidence as Sonja Trifuljesko has done – via her recorder that has the curious habit of switching on at odd, unsuspected moments.

This week – alike this year's fieldwork thread – concludes with Franziska Fay's post on yet another highly familiar moment: returning from the field. In her post she describes likewise familiar experiences of receiving gifts from informants that clearly surpass ordinary politeness and extend to the realm of friendship.

This is yet another part of the anthropological journey worth highlighting, and one that often requires significant work.

> *How does one maintain one's analytical eye on the lives and actions of people who have over this shared intellectual journey become much more than living databanks of information?*

This is, of course, yet another familiar question that is intrinsic to anthropological research – and also one of the many elements that keep our intellectual journey in motion long after our concrete travels have ended.

This is also an apt moment for summarizing our collective #Fieldwork thread. Warm thanks to all of our authors for sharing their journeys with us, and thus once again illustrating the full diversity of what our discipline has to offer.

We continually feel that there is truly nothing else like anthropology – and it remains our most sincere pleasure to continue spreading 'anthropological gospel' via our collective work!

Can a gas pipeline heal Bolivia's wounded geo-body?

Carwil Bjork-James
September, 2015

During the May 2015 announcement for Bolivia's new cross-country Incahuasi–Cochabamba Gas Pipeline, a high official in Bolivia's state-run gas company looked beyond the three-year, half-billion-dollar project to the future ahead. The company proposed a future connection to Peru's fuel transport network in the southeast of the latter country. "With that," said Cristian Inchauste, general manager of YPFB Transporte SA, "We would arrive at the Pacific, the great beauty is to arrive at the Pacific. Con eso llegaríamos al

Pacífico, la gran belleza es llegar al Pacífico.”

Welcome to the strange, emotion-laden world where Bolivian nationalism and infrastructure planning overlap. In this executive speech, “we” is understood to mean all Bolivians. Literally, that arrival will be squeezed within a twenty-four-inch diameter metal tube. Metaphorically, the arrival comes through exporting a major product, transported by a nationalized company, to the Pacific Ocean and beyond. And the Pacific, well that is the stuff dreams are made of.

> *The nineteenth-century loss of Pacific coastal territory to Chile constitutes the greatest wound to Bolivia’s national pride, a wound that continues to be deeply felt.*

During one of my first stays in the country, I joined in the celebration of Aymara New Year at dawn on the June 21 solstice. I spent the morning on “the rim,” the edge of the high plateau overlooking the capital city of La Paz. Residents of El Alto had gathered overnight for the Aymara New Year festivities, awaiting the sunrise in the chilled high-altitude air. Libations and dancing kept them warm. Now in the almost-too-bright early morning sun, Andrés and Angel—clearly friends—chat with me, the foreigner.

“Where are you from?,” they ask. I have them guess. Once he knows I am not, Angel volunteers, “If you were from Chile, I would fight you.” His taller and more imposing friend Andrés is quick to dispel the threat, “If you would fight someone from Chile, you would lose.” “No! Why?” “They eat meat and you eat chuño.” Chuño is a dark, flavorful food made by repeatedly freeze-drying potatoes in the Andean cold, but eating meat from cattle is a ready marker of economic success and is presumed to provide greater strength. The contrast between meat and freeze-dried potatoes sums up the economic gap between Bolivia—long South America’s poorest country—and its wealthy neighbor.

On the Bolivian side, that gulf feels more like a theft. Chilean troops occupied the coastal region of Antofagasta in 1879, during the War of the Pacific. Unlike the

country's other territorial losses—to Peru, to Brazil, to Paraguay—this one left the country landlocked. For reasons of economics and national dignity, it stings differently. Bolivia has nursed and nurtured this sense of injury in public ever since.

> *How and why did people come to understand the loss of territory as a kind of wound?*

In studying Thai nationalism, Thongchai Winichakul (1994; 1996) proposed the notion of a *geo-body*: the imaginative, practical, and emotional way in which a mapped territory is made into the object of nationhood. Like a biological body, the demarcated territory has integrity and is vulnerable to painful dismemberment. Losses on a map are felt as though something personal was ripped apart, held captive. This construct, Winichakul (1996, 88) writes, transformed the defeats of Siam royal government into "the agony of losing Siamese territory, the victimization of Siam." Transposing this concept to China during the period of Western imperialism, William Callahan (2009, 141) explores "the continual self-crafting of any nation's image," as told through maps that celebrate sovereignty but "also mourn the loss of national territories through a cartography of national humiliation."

> *Bolivia's national story is told in a similar register of enduring and overcoming humiliations. The national anthem concludes with a thrice-sung vow "to die before living as slaves."*

The captured province of Litoral was given representation in the national parliament for two decades after it fell. Since 1963, foreign diplomats entering the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have walked past the massive mural *Hacia el Mar* (*or Alegoría al Mar Boliviano*)by Miguel Alandia Pantoja in La Paz. In it, a figure representing the Bolivian nation stretches his body from the Andes over the coast plain, stretching out an arm over the Pacific Ocean. Every year, Bolivia's tiny Navy (it patrols Lake Titicaca and other territorial waters) files through the

capital in dress uniform, marking the Day of the Sea. Just this year, the Navy's Ensign has joined other Bolivian flags to fly over government buildings in La Paz.

No issue unites the Bolivian political spectrum like the demand for the return of maritime access. The recent Bolivian novel *Palacio Quemado* (Paz Soldán 2006) centers on a unscrupulous political speechwriter, ready to serve any client, to shift with the political winds to embrace any policy, but never to renounce the right to the sea. Five ex-presidents comprise the country's advisory committee to the General Directorate on the Maritime Demand. This year, the country's diplomatic campaign for Chile to negotiate Bolivian sovereignty over some portion of the coast reached the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In defiance of history and the only borders any living Bolivian has ever known, all these practices keep the enlarged geo-body of the country, the one that reaches the sea, alive.

So it is no surprise that a general manager at the national oil company, too, dreams of reaching the Pacific. Or that the past president of YPFB, Carlos Villegas Quiroga, who presided over the 2006 nationalization of the country's gas industry, held out connecting the company's network to the sea as a "great longing." In the globalizing world of recent decades, the lack of a port has merged with the country's other economic wounds. Not having the sea came to be seen as another reason why some Bolivians—especially its poorest residents from the Altiplano—eat so much chuño and not enough meat.

But there is another vision of the relation between gas export and the nation. If Bolivia's great territorial wound is the loss of the Pacific, its great economic wound is its continual role as provider of its precious resources to others. Left nationalisms in Bolivia have long mourned the loss of its wealth, extracted laboriously but leaving little trace of wealth or industry. Summing up a generation of leftist economic critique, Eduardo Galeano (1973, 237) lamented that "The region has been condemned to sell primary products to keep foreign factories humming." Galeano's polemical *Open Veins of Latin America*, used the Cerro Rico silver mines in colonial Potosí and the foreign-owned tin mines of the Bolivia's

southwest as touchstones of extracted wealth coupled with local poverty.

In 2003, El Alto—a city of migrants that is the symbolic capital of the indigenous (mostly Aymara) Altiplano—did get a chance to fight, to fight that poverty and, in a way, to fight Chile. The city was at the forefront of a nationwide revolt against a government proposal to export gas resources to Chile. (This "Gas War" is part of a series of events I chart in my fieldwork on recent protest in Bolivia; see Bjork-James (2013).) The grassroots campaign proclaimed, "The gas is ours." Residents organized weeks of road blockades, isolating the capital La Paz from the rest of the country. Dozens of Alteños were killed in government attempts to break the blockade, most of them dying on a single weekend in October 2003.

> *Ironically middle-class residents of La Paz, who get their food from supermarkets, ran out of food before poor Alteños, who buy their chuño in fifty-kilo sacks for slow and steady use. Matching their chuño-powered bodies and an innovative set of tactics against government soldiers with guns, they prevailed.*

The government of Evo Morales, and the national gas corporation YPFB, which expanded after Morales' partial nationalization of gas resources in 2006, are the product of the Gas War. Government policies are still described with reference to the "October Agenda" that emerged from the 2003 conflict, a list topped by resource nationalization, a new plurinational Constitution, and greater indigenous autonomy. Morales has pledged to "close the open veins of Latin America for the good of our peoples."

> *And so, there is something deeply disconcerting about narrating a gas export pipeline as a national dream or a great beauty.*

Leaving aside the circumstances and consequences of gas exploration, drilling, and extraction for the moment, the grassroots campaigners who fought in the gas war saw keeping gas in the country as part of the fight against poverty. They

envisioned it being used for domestic industrialization, restoring high-paying jobs and economic strength within the country. These ideas continue to circulate in current social movements. I learned not to be surprised when an unemployed worker or a teacher at a union picket spoke to me of "the reactivation of the productive apparatus."

The new proposal to propel gas out of the country, so as to export it overseas from southern Peru, has some differences from the 2003 proposal. It would be pumped through the pipeline by a public gas corporation, YPFB Transportes SA, and pumped to Peru not Chile. On either end, however, that Bolivian gas will be in foreign hands. Partial nationalization means that the gas resources of the country formally belong to the state, but the foreign corporations invested in the sector have seen little change on the ground. Under the new rules France-based Total, which will supply the pipeline with gas from the Incahuasi field, only keeps half of the proceeds, paying the other half to the Bolivian state (32% as tax, 18% as royalty).

Many of the objections from 2003 still apply, though: much of the wealth generated by this new megaproject will be enjoyed far from Bolivia, whether by Total's shareholders or through industrial ventures fueled by the exported gas. The nationalist dream of the Pacific, and the idea of healing Bolivia's geo-body through a gas pipeline that reaches that ocean, papers over these concerns. "Forgetting… is a crucial factor" in nationalism, wrote Ernest Renan (2013), one of the first theorists of the subject.

Gas executives aside, "arriving at the sea" will be a very distant metaphor from the realities of this new infrastructural endeavor.

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