The *Irish Journal of Anthropology* is the organ of the Anthropological Association of Ireland. As such, it aims to promote the discipline of anthropology on the island of Ireland, north and south. It seeks to provide coverage of Irish-related matters and of issues in general anthropology and to be of interest to anthropologists inside and outside academia, as well as to colleagues in a range of other disciplines, such as Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Development Studies, Ethnology and Folk Studies, Gaeilge, Irish Studies, and Sociology.

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The *Irish Journal of Anthropology* appears twice a year, in Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter.

**Annual Subscriptions**: Members: Waged – €30/£20; Student/Retired – €15/£10

Orders, accompanied by payment, should be sent to *Irish Journal of Anthropology*, c/o Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth, Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland. Telephone: +353 1 708 3984; fax: +353 1 708 3570; e-mail: anthropology.office@nuim.ie

Members of the AAI receive the journal as part of their membership subscription. Information about membership can be found on the AAI web-site: www.anthropologyireland.org

**Advertising Rates**: Full Page: €100; Half Page: €60; Quarter Page: €40
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Editorial Note (Fiona Larkan)

As incoming editor of the Irish Journal of Anthropology I take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Dr Séamas Ó Síocháin, for the many years of work he has dedicated to the task. Under his editorship we have seen the journal develop a strong identity and high production values, while remaining faithful to the AAI’s remit - to maintain a focus on anthropology on, of and from the island of Ireland. It is only when shadowing Séamas during the last six months of his editorship that I fully appreciated the time, effort and personal commitment he put into this work – big shoes for me to fill!

Thankfully I was helped for my first issue as editor by guest editors Fiona Murphy and Keith Egan. The collection of articles contained herein is drawn from a week long writing retreat organized by Fiona and Keith in May 2010, and guided by Professor Michael Jackson who gave so generously of his time during the week and in the months since. We are grateful too to Monika Weissensteiner for her design of the original front cover artwork depicting the Celtic mythical figure Ogma who represents ‘the power of the word’; most appropriate for this special issue on the value of ethnographic writing.

Front Cover

Ogma, a Celtic deity that in Irish mythology represents the ‘power of the word’, is considered to be the inventor of the Ogham alphabet, a system of writing developed around the fourth century. It is composed of strokes and notches, which were cut upon the edge of a piece of wood or often into stone. Only insiders could read the signs and understand the meaning; and only the select few had the authority to write. Ogma is usually represented as a wise old man, with a lion skin, a baton in his hand and with chains, which lead from his tongue to the ears of the people; his words guide but also bind them. Ogma, for his strength, his eloquence, and maybe for his trickster-like-being, has been compared to the figures of Heracles and Hermes in Greek methodology.

‘Writing’, written text codified within particular forms of social science writing, has been perceived as the most scientific—read ‘authoritative’—form of representation of social life. So who, if not a slightly differently painted Ogma, could therefore look from the front-page of this edition of the Irish Journal of Anthropology, titled ‘The Value of Ethnographic Writing.’

Through the cover I aimed to literally ‘draw’ attention towards the conditions of anthropological knowledge production. I chose a rather ‘surreal’ image to reflect upon the social life and epistemological grounding of anthropological-‘text-making’ and to represent existing power-relations in which ethnographic encounters have been imbedded throughout our discipline’s history. But are they therefore less real? Today, the ‘butterfly-catcher’/ethnologist may provoke a smile. And it is not only anymore exclusively ‘white men’ who are throwing out their nets of interpretative grids from different academic chairs or schools of thought. The ‘other’ has been fighting to receive a voice of her own and looks straight from the cover. So, what stories are being told by whom and to whom—and how are they told—are questions never out of place. The traditional imaginary of Ogma may suggest that the chains that bind us to particular narratives, to writing and publishing practices that can both guide our endeavour, but also bind us. Thus, parallel to its content, the drawing as creative means of representation and communication was also meant to be a statement in itself. And herewith I quit this writing, and leave it to the viewer to discover meanings in the picture. I thank the editors for ‘loosing the chains’ and calling for innovative contributions to re-explore the power of the word.

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How precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined … encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross-purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more or less discrete “other world” composed by an author?

*The Predicament of Culture*

James Clifford

This special edition of the IJA is the result of a collaboration between PhDs and Postdoctoral fellows from Anthropology departments in NUI Maynooth and Queens University Belfast. The articles herein found their shape and form on a weeklong ethnographic writing retreat organised by Dr. Keith Egan and Dr. Fiona Murphy. The bucolic Sli na Bande in the verdant Wicklow Hills was the setting for the writing retreat, which was organised out of a concern for the dearth of dialogue on the power of ethnographic writing in the shaping and crafting of texts and selves amongst postgraduate and newly qualified anthropologists on the island of Ireland.

In seeking to situate the guest editors’ hopes and wishes for this journal, the words ‘there is always a certain arbitrariness in one’s choice of intellectual forebears and reference points’ could not help but spring to mind. They were written by New Zealand anthropologist Michael Jackson (Jackson 1996: vii), who graciously accepted our offer to come to Ireland for a week in June of 2010 to assist a number of postgraduate students in considering what may well be one of our foremost skills as anthropologists: writing. We chose him deliberately because of the power in his writing, his commitment to place himself in his texts and refusal to follow a ‘literal line of reasoning’ (2011: 187) that would truncate the people who populate his writings. In his turn, he chose us, and as a group, we pored over each other’s efforts at articulacy in an academic idiom and comment in order to improve the writing and support the writer.

For the writers gathered in Wicklow last year, writing was as much a rite of passage as a professional activity. Producing a piece of writing is a socially mediated process, and never, as it often seems in preparing a thesis, a solitary activity. Writing also requires knowledge of many audiences and the politics that inheres in a text’s reception (see for instance Brettell 1993). The act of writing is to strip away, back to things as they are, in Wallace Steven’s phrase, with an honesty and an urgency that compels not only the writer, but as many readers as possible. To write ethnographically is not so much an act of fiction, but of ‘faction’. Writing, especially ethnographic writing, is more than an academic pursuit, too; it can be an existential dilemma. Theory can often stand in the way of the anthropologist’s efforts to evoke and preserve the nearness and thickness of his or her fieldwork. At such times the writer is complicit in blocking such access to the fieldsite in the text, the rawness of the field jarring with its weighty encoding into a difficult language as Theodor Adorno once commented that is often still hibernating (cited in Eriksen 2006: ix). Coupled to that is the awful rite of passage of preparing a thesis, for most people one of the longest tomes they may produce, and fear of the field and of the academy can easily overcome the neophyte writer. Such were the issues that we tried to bring to light in such a short time. We hoped to encourage experimentation within ethnographic writing practice, to inspire a challenge to the conventions of voice, tone, structure and narrative in the telling of our fieldwork.

As the week unfolded the complex blend of story, fact, ethics, methodology, reflexivity, representation, and theory yielded interesting and often bold discussions on the nature of our ethnographic enterprise. Our opening session on the very first day of the writing retreat was led by Professor Jackson as a reflection on the enigmatic qualities of the written word (included herein). His talk evoked in the retreat’s participants the important sense that ethnographic writing ought not to be divorced from the cadence and rhythm of emotion, storytelling, and reflexivity. The organisers followed this session with a discussion of the value and difficulties of ethnographic writing. In the dappled half-light of the yoga room turned classroom for the week, we positioned texts on ethnographic writing across a wide range of styles. Under Michael’s guiding presence, the texts and discussions of fellow anthropologists, we recognised and reflected on the role of ethnographic writing in constructing a text and in deepening our relationships to the field. From these reflections come the possibility to further one’s understanding of human nature, culture and society writ large, and the emotional nexus traversing encounters and relationships in the field, the academy and personal lives.

Together we decided to choose an ethnographic writing that would help us navigate our encounters in the field and more broadly, the discipline of anthropology and its practitioners. Influenced by Michael Jackson’s approach, we learned that the multivalent configurations of memory, imagination,
affect, near-experience, and understanding have an important place in writing. Good ethnographic practice leads to good writing, and in turn that writing well lends itself to the cultivation of better field relationships, and a more profound understanding of the craft of ethnography.

We presented our work to one another in this atmosphere of collegiality, support and understanding. Each in our turn spoke about our ethnographic work, the challenges of PhD writing, and our aspirations for our writing craft. In this journal we want to explore ways in which the experience of fieldwork and its construction as a text can be achieved creatively for audiences that extend beyond professional ethnographers and other professional colleagues. By engaging new ways of writing about others, traditional limits of representation may be explored and probed for new gaps and fresh paths, asking questions of disciplinary boundaries, between fiction and fact-finding, between literature and sociological information in order to consider new methods and modes of apprehension. The varieties of information field-workers record, from gossip to kinship charts, lexicons and local techniques, are often poorly communicated within the genre of social science writing. As a result, the value of learning in the ways we do, from those who have come to trust us and believe in or at least tolerate our research projects is written out of our professional writing.

Herein is the fruit of our discussions, reflections and studied writing. Following Jackson, retreat participants bring the voices and stories of their research participants into critical focus. Keith Egan walks a traditional pilgrimage at a watershed moment in Irish self-consciousness. Athenian Jazz musicians and their lyricism come to life in the work of Ioannis Tsoulakis. School children's voices echo in the work of Carol Barron, studied in their own right, the emotionality and haunting of the grieving strikes us in the work of Barbara Graham, while Fiona Larkan evokes the troubled stillness of death, dying and discourse in her portrait of Henry. Finally, Yan Hu imaginatively evokes the lives of the Dai people of China, coming into being between official formations of identity and the choices they make.

We also include a number of book reviews reflecting on recent debates and considerations within anthropology on the nature of ethnographic writing. These books drop anchor in our broader concerns with the role of reflexivity, experimentation, and voice in the ethnographic writing project. A poem by anthropologist Ghassan Hage, read to us by Michael Jackson as we sat one evening midway through the writing retreat watching a political crisis unfold in international waters as a flotilla of humanitarian aid ships were blocked from reaching Gaza by Israeli special forces, evoked for us the ‘lived moment’ of our writing retreat and is presented here to remind us all of the need for committed public intellectuals to constantly seek more immediate and creative ways of engaging with the world. The controversial killings aboard these protest ships and the wider crisis in the Middle East, examined by Ghassan Hage through the medium of poetry and shared by Michael Jackson, elucidated and clarified the importance of the writing project. Writing ethnographically is also an ethical project, one that can never be divorced from the various strands of moral reasoning at work. For Hage, as for the editors, the poem is thus deeply ethnographic, an experiment in commentary and a committed response as events are unfolding to a crisis that requires clear and concise observation. The poem shows that there is often quite a bit at stake in the world at the limit of the unspeakable that still deserves to be spoken about, that our pause from the academy was not an academic exercise—we were trying to foreground our common humanity as funds of experience to ground our writing practices. Anthropology—whether it be a cosmopolitan overview from somewhere or a practise by a tribe who have been studying other tribes (see Farmer 2009:182)—is just as fundamentally something that humans do when they want to speak precisely about other humans in terms that evoke the richness of those other lives and indeed the richness of studying them in the first place.

To conclude then, this journal is a product of the need for postgraduates to take time away to consider the purpose of their research, for their careers and for their lives. It speaks to the need to spend time identifying the skills and relationships required to produce texts that can stand as documents of excellence, masterpieces that have embodied the purgatorial journey through grad school via the fieldsite. This journal testifies to the possibilities of a coming together of new academics away from the strictures of academia and shows how such a communion in the form of a writing retreat can engender strong collegial bonds, good writing, as well as equally enthusiastic plans for the future shape of cross border anthropological relationships on the island of Ireland. Like the Celtic God of writing who inhabits the front cover of this journal, we conclude with a hopeful esprit and will to continue the journey into a scholarly world where ethnographic writing is placed centre stage, encouraging the anthropologist to willfully engage with the craft of writing and the art of experimentation. We thank the participants for partaking in this imaginative journey and Michael Jackson for being our guide and friend.

References


Notes:
The editors wish to take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the funding provided them to allow the writing retreat to take place. Chief among them were An Foras Feasa, Dr. Mark Maguire and Dr. Abdullahi El-Tom from NUI Maynooth, Prof. Lawrence Taylor from the International Office and Prof. Fiona Magowan from Queen’s University Belfast. Deirdre Dunne and Jacqui Mullally assisted us greatly in the organisational details of the retreat. Marlene Ffrench Mullen, Jane Perneel and the silent yet courteous WWOOFers housed us, cooked for us, entertained us and made each of us feel at home in Slí na Bande for our time there. We would also at this time wish to acknowledge the input of the anonymous reviewer who helped us usher several of the papers presented in Wicklow last year into this forum. We thank Ghassan Hage for granting permission to reproduce his poem in this journal as an example of how clarity, expediency and humanity can coalesce in other writing forms. Finally Michael Jackson’s patience, companionship and guidance made something special of the retreat for us all.
But we will analyze the metaphysical exchange, the circular complicity of the metaphors of the eye and the ear.

‘Tympan,’ from Margins of Philosophy
Jacques Derrida

In his childhood memoir, Dreams in a Time of War, the Gikuyu and Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o describes his first experiences of school at age nine and the Gikuyu primer with which he learned to read. At first he is attracted to the pictures that accompany the text, and only gradually does he learn to tackle long passages that lack any illustrations. One passage he reads over and over again until suddenly, one day, he begins to hear music in the words:

God has given the Agrikuyu a beautiful country
Abundant in water, food and luscious bush
The Ahikuyu should praise the Lord all the time
For he has ever been generous to them.

‘Even when not reading it,’ Ngugi writes, ‘I can hear the music. The choice and arrangements of the words, the cadences. I can’t pick any one thing that makes it so beautiful and long-lived in my memory. I realize that even written words can carry the music I loved in stories, particularly the choric melody. And yet this is not a story; it is a descriptive statement. It does not carry an illustration. It is a picture in itself and yet more than a picture and a description. It is music. Written words can also sing. (Wa Thiong’o 2010: 65).

There is a long tradition in scholarship of seeing oral and literate technologies of communication as entailing radically different sensibilities and essentially different ontologies. It is argued that the transition from orality to literacy entails a dramatic transformation in consciousness in which words cease to sing, intellectuality becomes divorced from feeling, the arts of memory atrophy, vision is privileged over all other senses, thought becomes independent of conventional wisdom and the reader is alienated from his or her community (Carothers 1959; Goody 1968; McLuhan 1962; Ong 1982; Riesman1960).

These arguments are often informed by a romantic view that oral cultures enshrine a more ecologically balanced and socially attuned mode of existence in which the life of the community takes precedence over the life of the mind – as in Walter Benjamin’s lament that modernity prefers information processing to storytelling, data to wisdom (Benjamin 1968) echoes Socrates’ conviction that writing is a phantom, undermining memory, poisoning/drugging the mind, and leading us astray. (Plato 2005: 61-64, see also Derrida 1981)

I want to contest the assumption that orality and literacy are mutually antithetical and that writing necessarily entails a loss of authentic values, eclipsing oral modes of expression and undermining social bonds. I also want to argue against the view that we can characterize and contrast entire societies in terms of their dominant technology of communication – or for that matter, their dominant modes of government, economic life or social organization. As George Devereux pointed out many years ago, a complete understanding of any social formation demands that we explore the ambivalence that arises from the co-presence of manifest and latent patterns, and hence the tension that exists between that which is publicly emphasized and that which is publicly suppressed, between dominant and sub-dominant leitmotifs, alternative ethical values and different modes of consciousness. No society exists or has ever existed that comprises individuals whose consciousness is wholly self-absorbed or entirely diffused into the collective, even though these polar positions may find expression in dominant ideologies. Just as persons exist both in their own right and in relation to others, so writing and orality imply both divergent and overlapping modes of communication. This undoubtedly explains the apparent contradictions in Walter Ong’s celebrated work, where he claims a ‘vast difference’ between literacy and orality only to speak of this relationship as ‘complementary’ and to assert that ‘writing can never dispense with orality’ (Ong 2002: 13, 5, 8). In this vein, he writes that ‘in all the wonderful worlds that writing opens, the spoken word still resides and lives. Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings’ (ibid.: 8). Jacques Derrida takes this argument even further, arguing that writing is haunted by a sense of all that lies beyond its margins in the same way that philosophy is inevitably written in the shadows of the nonphilosophical. Derrida uses the image of the tympanum to capture this sense of sound, albeit muffled, that counters the apparent silence of a text, or the reader of a text, and is vital to the intelligibility of the written word. (Derrida 1984: x-xii).

I have a tin ear. Cannot hold the simplest tune or learn a foreign language by listening alone. Much as I admire John Blacking’s How Musical is Man, his thesis that everyone has a capacity for music...
does not apply to me. If deafness is a disability, so, arguably, is tone deafness – the inability to discern, recall or mimic sound. But it is said that people deficient in one area of the sensorium will compensate by developing skills and sensitivities in another, and Oliver Sacks describes how a person with expressive aphasia (speechlessness) may still be able to sing very tunefully and with great feeling, but only getting two or three words of [a] song (Sacks: 2007: 232). My eidetic memory is excellent. And since childhood I have depended on the written word to make good my aural-oral ineptitude. Yet writing has never been, for me, a substitute for speech any more than scholarly pursuits have been imimical to sociality. One mode of being or communicating does not necessarily preclude another. And so when I ask whether the oral is entirely absent when I read or write, I can confidently say no, since in composing this very sentence I am murmuring the words as I write them down, trying to get a feel for how they will resound in the sequence I am testing on my tongue, seeking a structural balance that will be easy on the ear. Fiction writers often confess a similar sense of hearing voices, of writing down dialogue they have heard, and assessing its verisimilitude less against the standard of recorded speech than against an inner standard of what rings true. The idea is very old that thinking is a form of talking to oneself, which is why people who undergo surgery on their vocal chords are told not to read until the lesions heal. In brief, the distinctions we like to make between speech and writing, or speech and thought, are largely artificial, and there are greater phenomenological continuities between these conventionally contrasted activities than we are ordinarily aware of.

Consider, for example, the opening lines of Seamus Heaney’s poem (1979: 11), Oysters:

Our shells clacked on their plates.
My tongue was a filling estuary,
My palate hung with starlight:
As I tasted the salty Pleiades
Orion dipped his foot into the water.

Alive and violated
They lay on their beds of ice:
Bivalves: the split bulb
And philandering sigh of ocean.
Millions of them ripped and shucked and scattered.

Is it not true that as one reads these lines one also hears them – and, furthermore, that one sees and tastes the brine-slicked bivalves lying in their flaking, ice-caked shells on a pewter plate? Surely the written word not only conjures sound and sense; it is haunted by sound textures; it possesses metrical properties. And is this not true of both self-consciously rhythmic and tonal poetry and the less carefully composed, atonal prose of a novel, essay or tract?

The inextinguishable presence of a voice in a written text may be a result of synesthesia – a faculty that all human beings share to some degree, making it inevitable that one area of the sensorium will evoke others, including touch – which may explain why we speak of a piece of writing as a text – a term that derives, like texture, from the action of weaving. Whether written or spoken, language is always interwoven with threads of experience that are, strictly speaking, beyond words. Writing puts a spin on the ineffable, making it seem to be sayable, or subtly indicates what is outside its ability to signify. We might therefore say that the look of a particular writer’s prose, or our sense of his or her style, will evoke a memory of his or her voice – or, if we have never heard the writer speak, summon ‘a’ voice that goes with the text, that makes it audible.

Despite these claims that literacy never entirely divorces itself from orality, the view is still held, particularly in the academy, that a logical, analytically coherent and thoughtful disquisition on any subject requires the suppression of what Derrida, following Husserl, called ‘the sensory face of language’ (Derrida 1984: 161). Making experience intelligible requires the subjugation of its sensible properties, including sound. Yet we seem to have reached a moment in the history of the academy when this paradigm is giving ground to a new realism where in depth, detailed, direct recounts of experience are considered to be as illuminating, edifying and thoughtful as the experience-distant jargon extolled by the rationalists of the Enlightenment. Arousing emotion, moving a reader, describing the living context in which one’s thoughts unfold, and using artistic devices – narrative, imagery, idiomatic speech, montage - are valid ways of communicating a point of view, making an argument or revealing a truth. It is becoming acceptable to stir or disturb one’s audience in the same way that music or movies do. Rather than distrusting prose that evokes a slice of life, a lived event or a personal experience, we are learning to distrust forms of discourse in which the assertion of authority requires an autocratic manner. We crave sincerity as much as scholarship, direct testimony as much as indirect speech. The world of thought is being brought back to life. The test of the soundness of philosophy – and by extension, the writing of philosophy – is whether, in the words of John Dewey, it ends ‘in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make out dealings with them more fruitful … does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things’ (Dewey 1958: 7). And so we ask, how may anthropology or philosophy become what Ivan Illich (1973) called ‘a tool for conviviality’?

In addressing this question, my concern is less with the sound of writing than techniques of writing soundly – with writing that resonates with and remains in touch with the events, persons, and things being written about, writing that does justice
to life, that makes sense, that rings true. This is not a call for reverting to old ideas of writing as mimesis or representation – mirroring the nature of the world or creating naturalistic images. Sound writing may capture or convey the spirit of lived experience by radical departures from naturalistic conventions, in the same way that literary dialogue can sound real without resembling actual conversation.

For me, the heart of the matter is what I have called elsewhere ‘writing intersubjectivity’ (Jackson 1998: 32-36)—developing a poetic and paratactic style that interleaves story and essay, and strikes a balance between the voice of the author and the voices of his or her interlocutors. One’s writing thus preserves the oscillations in lived experience between moments of complete engagement and moments of detached reflection, while echoing the continual switchings in everyday life between moments of self-absorption and moments of absorption in others. Ideally, one’s writing shows how understandings emerge from the space between people – a space of conversation, negotiation and encounter that switches unpredictably between accord and discord, attunement and disharmony. Indeed, the wealth of vernacular images derived from music and applied to both writing and sociality attests to the profound similarities between our relations with others and our sense of sound. Fieldwork is a way of sounding the other out – giving him or her a hearing, getting a sense of the world from his or her point of view. By extension, sound writing echoes the events, encounters and conversations that make up our everyday life in another society, bringing them back to life on the printed page while at the same time offering our reflections on them.

I now turn to exploring in more detail the analogy I have drawn between the technical relationship of experience to writing and the social relationship of private to public life. I begin by spelling out some of the principles that have guided my own experiments in sound writing, and go on to provide an example of these principles in practice.

First, just as sound ethnographic writing is careful not to mute the voice of the ethnographer or his interlocutors, it does not exclude the reader. Rather, it invites the reader to enter into the text, to feel free to get his or her own sense of the scene or events unfolding, and to arrive at his or her interpretation of what the text conveys. This is what Eugenio Montale meant by ‘the second life of art’ (Montale 1982). While the author owns the process of authoring a text, painting a picture, performing a role – he or she cannot lay claim to the work once it has been put into circulation in the public sphere. For the work is now not only available to readers or audiences; it belongs to them; it is theirs to interpret according to their own persuasions and predilections.

Second, sound writing reflects sound research. And the key to sound research is openness and inclusivity. This implies an observational alertness to what is happening in the field. But more important, perhaps, is one’s social sensitivity to the people who have accepted one into their households and everyday lives. Sound research is, therefore, not simply a matter of suspending preconceptions and going with the flow; it is predicated on an awareness that the quality of what one may know is determined by the quality of one’s relationships with those one comes to know in the course of fieldwork.

Third, it is imperative that one allows one’s empirical material to determine any interpretative response. This means paying meticulous attention to vernacular expressions, local figures of speech and ontological metaphors. These, rather than any theory one has acquired, provide the windows through which one may glimpse the inner workings of another lifeworld. In his fieldwork with ex-combatants in Guinea-Bissau, Henrik Vigh became familiar with the vernacular term, dubria. Young men would use the word in describing their struggle for work, to make ends meet, or to find sources of enjoyment in an impoverished social environment. One informant conveyed the meaning of dubria to Henrik by moving his upper body in a disjointed yet rhythmical sway, looking somewhat as if he were shadow boxing: arms along his side, weaving and bobbing his torso back and forth as though dodging invisible pulls and pushes. ‘Dubria! Pedro exclaimed. ‘You dubria … so that you can see your life.’ Henrik realized that dubriagem connoted the ‘use of shrewdness and craftiness to navigate dangerous or difficult terrain,’ and his concept of navigation as ‘motion within motion’ – action in an unstable environment when you are yourself destabilized - was born of listening hard to what his informants were telling him.

Fourth, one must entertain the possibility that every situation calls for a different response. Just as joking and avoidance are universal strategies for dealing with socially ambiguous or non-negotiable relationships, so the ethnographer sometimes turns to contemplation, sometimes to writing, sometimes to speech, sometimes to direct action in seeking the most appropriate way of responding to what others say or do, or demand. But even when one writes, there is always the question of what kind of writing is called for.

In early 2002, I returned to Sierra Leone after many years away. I took with me a book I had hastily bought at Gatwick airport, and I would read and re-read this book during the following weeks, finding in its elegiac tone echoes of the devastated social landscape and tragic stories to which I would bear witness. When I came to write of that time, W.G. Sebald’s Austerlitz haunted every phrase, every sentence, imparting to my narrative something of the sadness and resilience I experienced in Sierra Leone. In the following pages I describe an episode in my journey north, in the company of my old friend, S.B. Marah, a few weeks before peace was officially declared over.
This was S.B.’s first visit to his political constituency in a long time, and a way of mending the political fabric torn apart by years of pillaging, violence, neglect and scarcity. I hope this text will exemplify what I have been saying about sound writing, as well as provide a variation on the theme that has run like a red thread throughout two of my recent books (Jackson 2004, 2011) – namely, that it is extraordinarily difficult, in a society of scarcity, to strike a balance between acquiring what one deems vital for one’s own wellbeing and providing others with what is vital to theirs. How can there be social justice when the basic requirements of existence – food, shelter and water – are insufficient to go around, so that one person’s feast is always another’s famine, one person’s gain is inevitably another person’s loss? The beef has, therefore, dual meanings: connoting an argument or point of ethical contention, as well as denoting a cattle beast, a source of life energy and power.

The Beef
For two days, a young steer had been tethered by a short rope to a mango tree at the edge of the compound. It was a gift to S.B., intended to be taken to Freetown, along with several goats. Constrained by the rope, the steer was unable to stretch its neck to the ground; all it could do was occasionally nose or lick dew from the long grass that was within its reach. When it defecated, it held its tail horizontal, its spine as straight as a spirit-level, and the tuft of hair by its penis twitched when it finished urinating. So forlorn did this animal seem, that I became convinced that it knew its imminent fate.

On the morning that we packed the vehicles, preparing to leave Kabala, it became obvious that there was not enough room in the back of the pickup for the steer. As the Big Men discussed their quandary, I sat some distance away, listening to an elderly man recount the history of Mande to a young newspaper reporter – passing from a description of Sundiata, who ruled the empire in the mid-14th century, to an account of the first clans, the origins of the xylophone, and the birth of praise-singing. Old Musa’s spectacle frames were tied upside-down to his cap, because this was the only way of praise-singing. With its wailing sirens as we drove over the rice and dry, or through smoke from burning elephant grass.

The sun was hot. The summit of Albitaiya was lost in the haze of the harmattan. In the back seat of the 4-Runner I felt cramped and uncomfortable. Underfoot were several bags of meat, including the steer’s severed head. Copies of the Noble Qu’ran in English, which Fasili had mysterious acquired in Kabala, kept falling on my head. And our Police escort again filled the landscape with its wailing sirens as we drove over the rice and clothing that villagers had spread on the roadside to dry, or through smoke from burning elephant grass.

At Fadugu the police Land Rover left us, and as if released from an obligation to behave itself, the 4-Runner began to lose compression and suffer from brake failure. Yet even as we labored up the last hill toward Makeni, S.B. was pressing his nephew to overtake slower-moving poda podas, and urging us on. ‘Le’ we go, ‘le’ we go’, he said, as if his impatience and willpower would be instantly transmitted to the vehicle and it would obey. By the time we crawled the last few yards into a roadside repair shop, I realized

Suddenly a young man standing next to Leba muttered something about how short life was. When I asked him what he meant, he said: ‘The way they slaughter these cows for these ministers. If we the young men wanted some of that beef, those Big Men would fight us, juju-way. They’d say, “If any young man looks at the meat, let him beware.” So they make you afraid to go there. That is why we young people should not open our eyes too much on the meat. The big men could make us impotent. Or they could shoot us with their fetish guns.’

I knew that many older men were similarly possessive of their young wives, but this was the first time I’d heard of possessiveness toward meat - though one heard rumors of Leopard societies that, in days gone by, committed ritual murders so that Big Men might augment their power by eating the vital organs of children. The logic ran as follows: Children, women, and cattle were wealth. A man’s capacity to father children, to marry many times, and to acquire cattle were signs of power. And status and stature were intimately linked. It was not for nothing that one of S.B.’s praise names in the north was simba, elephant - an allusion to his physical bulk as much as his commanding presence, his social standing and his political power. Still, it amused me that so many Big Men were immobilized by their own obesity - sluggish, unwell and impotent. Was this why they were so preoccupied with the virility and appetite of young men? If so, the young men, denied meat and obliged to do the Big Men’s bidding, seemed to find little consolation in the fact that what they lacked in status they made up for in strength and vitality.

When we drove off, I noticed that the vultures were clumsily contesting the spot where the steer had been butchered, and picking at the blood-blackened earth.

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The sun was hot. The summit of Albitaiya was lost in the haze of the harmattan. In the back seat of the 4-Runner I felt cramped and uncomfortable. Underfoot were several bags of meat, including the steer’s severed head.
it had taken us five hours to travel seventy miles. The hood of the 4-Runner was quickly opened and propped up, and the engine exposed to the scrutiny of a dozen or so grease-monkeys, while the Big Men issued advice, diagnoses and orders from the makeshift seats that had been brought out for them. ‘This car na too slow,’ S.B. observed. ‘It don vex us too much’, added his acolyte Fasili. Watching the Big Men as they sat unmoving and unmoved in front of a rusty, wheel-less vehicle that had been choked up with drive-shafts and a wooden mortar, I had a flashback to Gatwick airport, when had I found myself with several hours to kill before my flight. The Departure lounge had been almost deserted, though not far from where I was sitting a young businessman was talking on his mobile phone. As I listened to his conversation, a woman began vacuum-cleaning the walkway between us. As she drew near, I lifted my feet so she could reach under the seat. But when she moved on to where the man in the suit was talking on his mobile phone, he ignored her completely. It wasn’t as if he could not see her; he simply did not want to acknowledge her. Nor, it appeared, did she expect anything of him. When he showed no sign of moving either his feet or his bag, the woman left the space around him as it was - littered with candy wrappers and used telephone cards. Trivial in itself, this incident left me troubled. Not only did I want to know why certain people, as a matter of principle, will make absolutely no concession to those they consider their inferiors; it made me ask myself why I felt so acutely uncomfortable with status distinctions, and sought, wherever possible to avoid or nullify them. Recollecting this incident at Gatwick also reminded me of how awkward I sometimes felt at the hotel in Freetown where I had lodged before traveling up-country. Where most people would readily accept being waited on - for after all, this is what waiters are paid to do - I felt embarrassed by the deferential or obsequious rigmarole, and could not abide having someone pour water into my glass, place a napkin over my lap, or call me sir. No one could be less suited for being waited on - for after all, this is what waiters are paid to do - I felt embarrassed by the deferential or obsequious rigmarole, and could not abide having someone pour water into my glass, place a napkin over my lap, or call me sir. No one could be less suited for high office than myself. Indeed, so assiduous was my habit of seeking the margins and the shadows under which old car seats, cylinder blocks, radiators, brick building that served as an office, the lean-tos - the world of the underdog or the young.

I wandered away across the tamped, grease-and-oil-stained earth, past the decaying mud brick building that served as an office, the lean-tos under which old car seats, cylinder blocks, radiators, differentials, mufflers, and cannibalized engine parts had been stacked, to where I could sit alone, collect my thoughts, and scribble some notes. Then I strolled up the road to buy a bread roll and a tin of sardines from which to make a sandwich.

When I returned to the vehicle, S.B.’s nephew, who was known as small S.B., explained that the brake fluid line to the rear wheels had been burned through by the broken muffler and needed to be replaced. The air filter also required cleaning. As one of the grease monkeys was dispatched into town to find a spare brake fluid line, food was brought for the Big Men - for the third time that day. But eating did not interrupt their critical commentary on the mechanics’ efforts. ‘Why you no fix em before now?’ the Alhaji asked testily. Dr K said nothing. He was too busy ordering one of the mechanic’s boys to uncaps two bottles of Heineken beer for him as he tugged rubbery strands of meat from a cooked goat’s head.

When he had finished eating, Dr K removed his gray Safari shirt, and summoned another small boy to scratch his back. He was like a hippo. As dour as he was massive. And while he picked his teeth with a sliver of wood, the boy started to massage his enormous shoulders.

S.B. was being earbashed by two local men who had lost their local businesses in the war. Makeni, I knew, had been an RUF [Revolutionary United Front] stronghold. Even now there were billboards at the roundabouts in the centre of the town with photos of Foday Sankoh and RUF political slogans.

Perhaps this was why S.B. showed so little sympathy for their plight. ‘No one went into exile here’, he asserted. ‘You have only yourselves to blame for what happened here’. ‘We had nowhere to go’, one of the Makeni men replied. And then, as if to elicit my understanding, the second man described how well the RUF were organized. ‘They would send small boys to spy on prominent people’, he said. ‘The kids would disguise themselves as cigarette-sellers or petty traders. They would carry messages. We never knew who they were. They would get information about a place before they attacked it.’

‘You know’, S.B. said, half-smiling, ‘one time the RUF entered a mosque and asked, “Anyone here believe in God?” “No, we don’t”, everyone said. Even the Imam “No, no”, he said, “I do not believe!”’ The Makeni men both laughed.

‘But seriously’, S.B. said, ‘the SLPP [Sierra Leone People’s Party] expects people to work for the country. Government is composed of people. You should not fear to speak the truth to your government. The government does not want to hurt you. As long as you are on the right side, you have nothing to fear.’

As S.B. was talking, a truck had pulled in at the roadside. Intrigued by the slogan emblazoned on its side - Fear not the World but the People - I walked over to the truck to see what it carried, and was dismayed to find that twenty-five steers were crammed together on the back, their horns roped to wooden beams that were in turn lashed to a metal frame covering the vehicle’s tray. The animals were unable to move. The flank of one had been so badly lacerated by the jolting of the truck over degraded roads that its hip bone was exposed. They had been packed top to tail, in rows of five, to maximize space. Their muzzles were dry, foam flecked their mouths, their eyes were closed with pain and exhaustion, and their heads had been forced up over the rumps of the animals in front. From time to time a moan was released from the herd, and I was reminded instantly of the bobby calves I used to hear...
baying mournfully in the night when I was child, as they waited out the hours of darkness in a cramped railway wagon on a siding in my home town before going on to the slaughterhouse the next day.

The driver and his side-kick tilted the cab of the truck forward and began inspecting the engine, while a couple of other young men clambered up onto the back of truck and walked over the steers, checking the lashings.

‘You should have bought your camera Mr Mike.’ It was small S.B, who had sidled up to me unseen.

‘I was thinking;’ I said, ‘that this is how Africans were once packed in the slave ships, head to foot, to save space.’

But where I saw slaves, or imagined myself, small S.B. saw only cows. And I did not feel inclined to share with him my ruminations on when, and under what circumstances, we might extend human rights to animals or, for that matter, deny these rights to our fellow human beings, treating them as if they were mere chattels or beasts. Yet it was suddenly very clear to me that my own notion of rights reflected the egalitarian ethos of the country in which I was raised. In tribal societies such as Kuranko, one’s worth was ostensibly relative to one’s patrimony, rank and title, which is why, I guess, the Big Men always wore their status on their sleeves - Honorable, Doctor, Paramount Chief. In such a society, one’s due was generally reckoned in terms of birth, not worth. A chief was due a retinue, and tithes, not to mention praise and honor. A father was owed his children’s respect. And a wife was duty bound to honor her husband, and obey him without question. For the Kuranko, this calculus of social distinction was both categorical and unambiguous. People were superior to animals, first-born were superior to second-born, men were superior to women, adults were superior to children, the patriline was superior to the matriline, rulers were superior to commoners, and commoners were superior to praise-singers, blacksmiths, and leather-workers. At the bottom of the social scale, finabas - the bards and custodians of chiefly traditions - were superior to no one, except perhaps slaves. In practice, however, the worth of a person was less fixed than this schema would suggest. When Keti Ferenke explained this to me many years ago, he began by punning on the word kina, which, depending on a subtle difference in pronunciation, could mean either beehive or elder. His argument was that someone who is nominally elder could lose the right to be considered superior if he behaved unjustly or idiotically. A person could be an elder, a status superior, he said, but if he acted like a child he was a child. Superiority, he noted, derived not only from being born first, or from being big and powerful; it also stemmed from the way one behaved. For Keti Ferenke, whose pride in his own intellectual adroitness was, at least in my company, undisguised, a person’s true worth was defined by his or her social gumption, or nous, though other innate traits, such as temperament, bearing and moral courage might also elevate a person beyond his given social position. Consider the myth of Saramba, for instance, a warrior chief of great renown, whose jealous half-brothers decided to waylay and murder him. When Saramba’s humble finaba, Musa Kule, got wind of the plot, he devised a plan to save his master’s life. After persuading the ruler to exchange clothes with him, Musa Kule rode the chief’s horse ahead along the road where the ambush had been laid. As a result, Musa Kule was killed instead of the chief. In recognition of his sacrifice Saramba declared that from that day hence their descendants should be considered equals, because the moral qualities of the low-born fina had effectively eclipsed the status superiority of his master.

Subtle reciprocities are disclosed here. The relationship between respect paid and recognition returned, for example. Or the implicit understanding that a chief will give his protection to those who submit to his authority and place themselves in his hands. But what if a chief or political leader turns into a tyrant - seizing people’s property, taking advantage of his subjects, repaying tribute with obloquy? What if a husband abuses his dutiful and obedient wife? And should the young have regard for the ancestral order of things when it is evoked only to bolster the powers and prerogatives of an elite that is indifferent to their needs, contemptuous of their aspirations, and blind to their talents? For many young people in Sierra Leone, their patience with autocracy, traditional or modern, has worn thin. For them, their due was determined by need, and this is not delimited by their inferior station in life but by what they imagine might be theirs as citizens of the world. These questions, born of my Kuranko research, were, I realized, not unrelated to the RUF rebellion, but at that moment, as if to derail my train of thought, small S.B. said that the 4-Runner had been repaired and we could go on our way.

As I walked back to the 4-Runner I found the boss mechanic negotiating with S.B. for a little extra money. The mechanic’s son was at his father’s side. He was about the same age as my own son. As the father spoke to S.B. he cradled his son’s head in his hand. Then he ran his hand over the boy’s shoulders and back, pressing him to his side. And all the while, the boy was beaming with happiness. One and one another. The two of them mirroring my relationship with my own son. Myself a part of and apart from their lifeworld, at once close and distant.

Spinoza was right. Rather than speak of ontologically different types or entities we must learn to speak of different aspects or modes of the one inexhaustible reality. (Spinoza 1996: 16, 23). In this vein, anthropology can only become a truly dialectical science when it finds ways of doing justice to the interplay of particular and universal modes of human being in fieldwork, analysis and writing alike.
References


Pantheon.


1 David Howes (2003: 64-67) speaks of this as ‘a crisis of intonation,’ and describes the ‘dwindling power’ of traditional songs in the Trobriand Islands where older people lament the passing of a ‘golden age of orality’ when the measure of human greatness was the resounding quality of one’s vocal presence.

2 Each culture contains the negation of its manifest pattern and nuclear values, through a tacit affirmation of contrary latent patterns and marginal values. The complete real pattern of a culture is a product of a functional interplay between officially affirmed and officially negated patterns possessing mass.’ (Devereux 1967: 212).

3 This argument has also been made, eloquently and empirically, by William A. Graham (1987: ix, 7-8) in his study of the vocal and sensual character of scriptural texts, and he cites examples of how scripture is not only written but recited, read aloud, chanted, sung, quoted in debate, memorized in childhood, meditated upon in murmur and full voice,’ its sacrality realized in the life of a vocal community.

4 John Blacking (1973: 102) argues that ‘the essential differences between music in one society and another may be social and not musical. If English music may seem to be more complex than Venda music and practiced by a smaller number of people, it is because of the consequences of the division of labor in society, and not because the English are less musical or their music is cognitively more complex.’

5 In chapter 14 of his book Musicophilia (2007), Oliver Sacks provides wonderful examples of musical synesthesia in which musical keys and chords are strongly associated with colors and tastes.


7 More recently, Pierre Hadot (2002: 275) has made a similar case for ‘philosophy as a way of life – less a theoretical discourse than a “practice, an askesis, and a transformation of the self.”’

8 The term is no longer current in Portuguese, though is cognate with the French se debroutiller meaning to fend for oneself, to get by in a murky situation in which one cannot see far ahead (brouillard = fog). (Vigh 2006: 128-130)

9 Though I translate ‘God’ as ‘Reality.’
If there was a road, I could not make it out in the faint starlight. There was nothing but land; not a country at all but the material out of which countries are made.

My Antonia
Willa Cather

Have not all races had their first unity out of a mythology that marries them to rock and hill?

Celtic Twilight
WB Yeats

Abstract: In the last decades of life in Ireland, religious devotion has waned significantly, yet people persistently attend pilgrimage destinations in their thousands. This article attempts to chart the kind of journey possible at one site, Croagh Patrick, the holy mountain dedicated to the patron saint of Ireland where it is said be spent forty days and nights in the sixth century. Rather than just 'explain' the popularity of the mountain, this article draws the episode experience of travelling to the mountaintop as an experiment in being among other people with a range of reasons for being there, and writing a credible account that can engage the reader's curiosity through non-linear reflections on personal and public walking, ritual and recovery.

Keywords: Ireland, pilgrimage, ethnography

Before I've joined the Murrisk road I know I'm too late. There ought not be so much activity this early in the morning, but with three miles before I reach the sacred mountain of Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, Croagh Patrick, the police are directing the flow of traffic and cars are abandoned at the side of the road all the way to the holy reek.¹ It is clear that everybody has been taken by surprise by the popularity of the pilgrimage on Reek Sunday, the third Sunday in July that draws thousands of people to the county of Mayo in the West of Ireland. From a distance, the mountain is threatening to disappear at its apex in cloud cover, which will hinder walkers trying to complete the pilgrimage. Later in the day, the national media will nevertheless claim that up to forty thousand people walked the pilgrimage.

At the foot of the mountain there are a number of booths set up and invested figures mill about, ready to give pilgrims some food for thought as they climb. One figure holds a sign proclaiming the apocalypse, as the US Army has built a bridge across the Euphrates in Iraq—a clear revelation, it seems, of God's intent as laid out in Revelations chapter 16—while another sign urges pilgrims to remember the plight of the unborn child. The archdiocese of Tuam reminds everyone that 2008 is the year of vocations; theirs is the largest tent. A man renting out walking sticks is doing the briskest trade so far. Niall Mellon the builder asks people for their support, while another sign declares that medical health checks are on hand. Further up, several stalls try to sell the usual paraphernalia of rosaries and sacred images as their vendors stare off into the middle distance, waiting for a customer. Next to them a stall proclaims free literature, though not, I cynically note, any Tolstoy, Joyce or the like. The table is covered with copies of three of the gospels. I ask why there are no copies of the fourth gospel, Matthew, as it is the year of Matthew in the Church cycle of liturgical readings. I receive a blank stare for my question, and I realize that these people are not Catholic. The realization catches me unawares, as I am expecting everyone here to be Catholic. Instead I find dozens of proselytizers trying to convince the pilgrims of the folly of ascending the mountain. The creationist stand a few meters away consequently holds my attention for nearly an hour, as I talk to physicists, biologists and astronomers who all believe the age of the universe to be less than ten thousand years old, and who have the science to prove it.

I leave the stalls and their hawkers behind, walking from the heritage centre to the first staging post. The Reek's clouded-over summit stands forth from the landscape behind a raised statue of Patrick himself. Several pilgrims are walking around the statue's base in prayer, though the majority head directly for the mountain path. Swaddled babies and young children are set to follow their parents along the pilgrimage even as some old and sturdy people are already down from the mountain. Other, even older patrons of Patrick, mostly women, are walking more slowly, with rosary beads held tightly in their hands. Too elderly to climb, they have brought proxies to reach the summit on their behalf; children and grandchildren are dispatched to the top to complete the traditional pilgrimage, told to circle the cairns while praying the rosary. Irish people have gathered here in their thousands, but the range of accents, languages and faces I notice as I move through the throng suggests other European tongues, a number of Americans and Asians too. The mountain itself is the draw for these individuals, though the occasion of the official pilgrimage on Reek Sunday exerts its own influence too.

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Patrick, the sixth century patron of the Christian faith in Ireland, represents a certain stability in worship, stretching from the beginning of a golden era of the Irish imagination of itself—the roots of a Celtic faith at the top of the mountain, as the archbishop of Tuam recently called the mountaintop. Mary is present too, in the rosaries that flesh out the ritual action of walking with a ‘verbal act over time’ (Flannery 2008:185). I notice the irony that this experience of national religion is brought about by invoking an Israeli woman and a Welsh man. And yet the public rituals associated with St. Patrick do sketch out something of the Irish ‘spirit’. St. Patrick’s Day is a key metonym that allows hundreds of millions of people around the world to claim a common albeit temporary heritage with the Irish Diaspora and people everywhere to drink towards an ecstatic solidarity with the homeland of Ireland.

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The walk itself is exhausting. I feel the dread of walking over territory I have crossed many times before and being challenged by it in a way that reminds me that I am less fit than I should be to climb today. I cannot help but recall the first time I moved so confidently up the mountain, nearly twenty years ago, when I had opted to do it barefoot. Even now, my feet remember picking their way gingerly across the sharp stones. The feeling is intensified as my eyes drift to a young man with bare muddy feet descending past me, already, his pilgrimage done, pain mixed with determination on his face as he shuffles past. Others around me acknowledge him too, muttering solidarity with his effort a ragged chorus of *maith an buachaill* (good lad) meeting him as he passes. It seems to me that it does not matter why he might have done it; the achievement is impressive enough in itself. It seems too soon for me to struggle this much up the mountain, my expensive walking boots and my trusty walking stick, a companion from numerous pilgrimages across Spain, little comfort to me. I fall in with the great amount of people trudging upwards, smiling sympathetically with the people, less fit than I, who are obviously struggling much more. Still though, my feet do not let me forget these sharp stones and my thighs sizzle as I go higher with each step.

The mountain remains obstinate, tiring pilgrims on the first leg over the stony ground before lulling us all into a false sense of security at the saddle point halfway up. Crossing over to the windward side of the mountain and turning south, backs against the north that medieval pilgrims considered a source of evil, the permanently cold wind drops our core temperature as our bodies readjust to the slightly downward trajectory for the next twenty minutes. My legs are pushing back at the ground too strongly, mistrustful of the easy strides after the hour or more of slog, which also awaits me on the return leg of the pilgrimage. This is a different kind of experience of religion, one that draws pain into the core of my experience of history, myth and religiosity. Pilgrimage is supposed to mark me before it remakes me; the land of milk and honey is earned through a lifetime of wandering and struggle. The wind is still too cold though, and I do not want to stop to consider such things. All around me are people in brightly colored hiking gear plodding to the summit and I remember the radio having reported that a woman had to be rescued from the mountain in the night when she fell while doing the traditional pilgrimage, marked not by the effort, but by doing it at a different time. The local mountain rescue, the police and the local priest have been warning people over the radio in the lead up to Reek Sunday that walking the mountain at night is dangerous and could lead to loss of life. There have even been warnings against people walking barefoot (Shiel 2009). These warnings seem to miss the point though, that suffering and dying while on pilgrimage may not be as terrible an outcome as they are suggesting for those entertaining the notion. Contact with nature, whether to conquer it or commune with it, is often a precarious activity.

Most people on Croagh Patrick who want to enjoy something close to that kind of authentic pilgrimage have managed a compromise, leaving before dawn so that they can enjoy the scant company of other authenticity seekers while they negotiate the unwelcoming test of the final part of the mountain’s profile, the steep shale to the summit by dawn’s early light. Closer to noon, I take one last deep breath and begin the last leg of my careful ascent, picking my way up the narrow path over loose shale and past descending pilgrims, my eyes darting across the landscape to steady my nerves at the incipient feeling of vertigo.

Croagh Patrick is for many an intergenerational affair, a concrete experience of a mythic tradition of Irish devotion that draws together versions of the past to be transmitted to the next generation. At the same time, many who do the pilgrimage only engage in the physical act of getting to the top, where they mill about and, backs to the chapel, admire the view of Clew Bay when the weather permits. The Church meets its tired pilgrims at the summit, the holy edge once more a sacred centre, most notably, today, the feast of the harvest moon, a day historically dedicated to the Celtic harvest god Lug, and brought into the Catholic faith as Reek Sunday. Ireland’s ‘different tradition’ (Nolan 1983:422, 428) of privileging place over relics or image veneration means that the mountain’s peak makes an impression on the pilgrims. Some people stray into the chapel to experience it, but it is clear that there are various levels of authentic religious motivation and skill among them. The innovation of televising the Eucharistic liturgy at the summit has finished several hours ago, so ecclesiastical rituals no longer provide a focus. Some bless themselves and say a private prayer; others finger rosary beads. Most clasp their hands in front of them in pious postures, shoulders hunched, heads bowed with eyes upraised towards the small window above the
altar, postures dimly remembered from catechism years before. But that is what is surprising, that so many people, to my eye, do not or cannot perform Catholic rituals in the chapel, having made the three-hour climb here. This scene gives context to a statement of Archbishop Martin’s comments in May 2010 that Ireland’s children are the most catechized and the least evangelized. It is clear in fact when I speak to a couple of men sharing a flask of coffee in the shelter of the chapel that Croagh Patrick in fact represents a way of doing religion without having the Church dictate terms. This pilgrimage is for them some kind of negotiation with their received faith.

When members of the travelling community do the pilgrimage they do the full thing, stopping at appointed stations to recite the rosary and circling the chapel fifteen times to complete all the mysteries. The voices are noticeably of traveller women, and their husbands walk behind quietly behind them. The women’s confident stride and the orthodox recitations texture the pilgrimage for others within earshot, and I hear a man comment to his young son that they are getting in the way of him doing his pilgrimage when his son asks what they are saying. In his response he stumbles over the word ‘rosary’ as he sits admiring the view with his son over a ham sandwich and a soft drink. His jokey statement, delivered in a stage whisper, is a counter-utterance, a way of claiming back some of the choric space that the travellers are shaping with their prayers. Motivations pass each other by, showing the ambiguity in such sites that is able to encompass a multitude of motivations for coming. The traveller women are doing the pilgrimage for their mother, one of the women waiting for her children at the bottom, while the man next to me is doing the pilgrimage for his son.

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The last two decades have taken a toll on Irish Catholicism, as the ‘long nineteenth century’ of Irish devotion to Rome (see Hynes 2008: 91ff) waned and the Celtic Tiger replaced a spiritual habitus with a symbolic labor that read prestige in new but just as constrained ways. And yet as a new story was told, that the Church had held the Irish back, that the country had finally come of age in the European Union as a shining star of the model of development that the expanding EU offered potential new members, other facts were being missed or ignored. From 2001, one foreign business left Ireland every week, in that same year a study in teen and young adult sexual behavior found that STIs were on the increase, far too fast. The bodies of the ‘Pope’s children’ (McWilliams 2005) had embraced the noughties, but their minds and their morals belonged to the Church still. 3

By the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century, everything had changed. The boom had become a bubble and burst, and despite several clear and frightening warnings about the inevitability of such an occurrence, everybody was caught unawares. Two reports on institutional clerical abuse of children in state care, the Ryan and Murphy reports, had revealed how deep the shadow of Irish Catholicism was, and the revelations that abounded about the banking sector as a discrete, and therefore convenient, subsection of Irish society, and their role in the downfall of Ireland’s second Eden had begun to be heard. Caught between these two visions and versions of Ireland, the Ireland that everybody thought they were living in was smothered in its sleep. The dust has yet to settle.

There is however a need for the life of Ireland to continue to make sense; the images and places that suggest a solid sense of identity have not disappeared, and Croagh Patrick still calls to people. Patrick has work to do to repair the Irish self-image, the sense of being assuredly Irish that had been learned during the boom (see Coulter 2003: 1). 4 Media discourse today casually references zombie hotels and dormitory towns, and one cannot help but be reminded of the Australian Aboriginal Dreaming stories. When we see the world as standing forth before another world, not exactly a parallel world underneath this one, but a world that has passed, we see that that world remains with us, latent, and that we are capable of dreaming a particular grounding back into a ‘moral geography’ (see Basso 1996) of our dissatisfaction or disorientation. The past is no longer what has passed or what has constituted us, but what is remains available to us in our perennial ‘struggle for being’ (Jackson 2005). In this world, apparitions are as much about human strategies for gaining purchase in a world that is slipping away as it is about the reappearance of the Divine.

Irish history is populated by revenants that continue to haunt a precarious present; characters who, it was believed, had gone away, but return to a present ill-equipped to receive them. In short, Ireland seemed to have no need of religion as it had established, if not some kind of heaven on earth, then an end to a purgatorial existence in the long nineteenth century of Irish Catholicism. In the convergence between the real of political and economic climates, Ireland finds itself at a threshold, moving away from new wealth into an abyss of debt that will cripple the country for generations. At the same time, as people most seek answers, pilgrimage numbers have begun to rise again; at the edge of the real is the religious experience once thought left behind. The real is shadowed by the religiosity that had warned of the follies of modernity; in effect, the ghost of Catholicism has haunted the spirit of neo-liberal hedonism. Pilgrimages permit people more ambivalent and more fertile experimentation with organized religion and while some people are fighting for the extermination of the Church, others are seeking solace in itineraries at the edge of organized religion.

At most of Ireland’s shrines today, public displays of faith are not personal but inherited social
memories. Private rituals of public worship seem to dominate, as people find in the similar rhythms of those around them some sense of connection, but the rituals have a somewhat protestant feel to them. There is an irony that, in sweeping away the enduring and cloaking truths of Latin symbolism, the power of the religion was more exposed, and thus more exposed to critique. In the decline of the more public and monolithic events that celebrated orthodox faith, then, one can discern in the patterns of more private devotions rituals at shrines today the persistence of a variety of attitudes, experiences and expressions of religiosity.  

While many public and church-based liturgical activities were declining in popularity the numbers for pilgrimages remained high (Fuller 2002: 228). In the midst of an incredible number of upheavals, pilgrimage sites maintain a constancy, a link to previous generations at the edges of institutional control, reminding pilgrims that, as William Faulkner (1996 [1951]) put it, ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past’. The symptomatic motion of people as they pass through religious sites, nodes that continue to mark the Irish moral landscape, still invoke in many a reflex gesture, a pause, a glance, a quick touch of cupped hand to their chest in secret imitation of blessing themselves, a momentary unshaping of ‘incipient ashes of the past, of the unconscious and of the body’ (Flannery 2008: 186). As modern as the Irish have become, they have not left the past in the past. Irish Times columnist Fintan O’Toole summarises the predicament that results: ‘What is our “now”? It may be globalisation and lattes, cybersex and property prices, but it is also the revelation of the past. Irish society, to an unhealthy extent, lives retrospectively.’ (O’Toole 2010).

Ethnography is, writes Michael Jackson, ‘an errant art’, providing us a means to recover ‘the occluded, denigrated or masked dimensions of our common humanity’ (2011: 188,191). The journey up a mountain, whether sincere or playfully ironic, and the writing of the journey in a way that resists both a lineal narrative and a definitive closure yet suggests a combination, a sense, is a return to the empirical in writing. Various elements echo each other, without much else other than ‘the active imagination of the person whose consciousness encompasses these things… combination and recombination’ (Jackson 2011: 132). There is no final truth, only fluidity and fixity as moments and memories interact, disrupt and distort as we strive to speak of a truth that feels true to us, of ‘retrospectively and selectively acknowledging those experiences of a relationship that have confirmed a moral ideal’. This is what William James spoke of as truth happening to an idea (Jackson 2011: 182). Walking a mountain can in this frame be an exercise in making sense by stripping away the excess, an exercise in hope in the face of, or via, the limits of life.

Pilgrimages are not arenas for discourses or meaning-making, I am coming to realise; they are ways of making sense, literally through rituals that restore or augment what has been lost in the daily degradations of life. They are formulas for experiencing what Virginia Woolf (2002) called ‘moments of being’, places that tame thought, restore a sense of humanity and participate in a crowded and complicated present that is nevertheless the only present available, somewhere that Michael Jackson (2009) talks about as the ‘ambiguous borderlands between the religious and the real’. It is late afternoon as I sit in my car and take off my boots, invigorated from the last five hours hiking. I jot down some notes from scraps of conversations with other pilgrims and then I drive home along the coast road to avoid the gridlock. People are still arriving and the cloud that threatened to cut the pilgrimage short for everyone stays a safe distance away, even though it has begun to rain again.

References


Notes:

1 Throughout the paper I refer to the mountain by its local names, Croagh (Irish for mountain) and Reek.

2 For medieval pilgrims, going on pilgrimage often involved settling one’s affairs and dying in a social sense before setting off, especially on one of the larger pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Rome or Jerusalem (Sumption 2003) and the word travel itself is rooted in the *trepalium*, a medieval instrument of torture. Dying on the path to a sacred relic or holy place often meant direct entry into heaven.

3 ‘Between 1973 and 2005, the proportion of Irish people agreeing that sex before marriage is “always wrong” fell from 71% to 6%.’ (Layte et al. 2006: 96)

4 Regular visits by relics of John Vianney and Therese of Lisieux (who in 2001 received three million visitors, more than John Paul II did twenty years previously [Fuller 2002: 251]) on reverse pilgrimage to Ireland are important, interceding at key points to make sense of hope and the loss of hope while attracting millions of ‘visitors’.

5 The homogeneity of Catholic devotion served another, powerful purpose in the aftermath of the Civil War (1922-23) in Ireland; Catholicism provided the least divisive means to draw the pro and anti Treaty factions together and restore the nation as an ‘imagined community’ once more; the Eucharistic Congress had brought people together ‘as no politician could’ (Chesterton, cited in Kenny 2000: 139).

6 Figures show that three-day pilgrims to Lough Derg dropped from 22,122 in 1992 to 11,079 in 2001 at the height of the Celtic Tiger (Fuller 2002: 271). Pilgrims to Croagh Patrick in the millennium year totalled 30,000 and in 2008 were estimated at over 40,000. In 2009, the figures were estimated to be lower. There is no official mechanism for registering numbers of pilgrims to Croagh Patrick, unlike pilgrims to Lough Derg. In 2009, 300 people per weekend could be expected to arrive for one day or three day retreats on the Island, a 10-15% increase on the previous year (McGarry 2010).

Although only ‘a small number’ adolescent respondents openly agreed that carrying contraception gives a message of promiscuity, the larger trend whereby these respondents have absorbed the message that contraception is in some fundamental way wrong stems from a successful absorption of a Catholic habitus that equates morality strongly with sexual continence. While this trend is being countered by a secular rational model of attitudes and behaviours to sexual activity (Layte et al. 2006: 9, 10), other factors such as socio-economic status play a part, though those of lower SES tend to hold more conservative views with regard to contraception and sexual morality according to exposure to Catholic teachings (Layte et al. 2006: 147).
‘At first I saw it as a toy’: life stories, social consciousness and music ethnography

Ioannis Tsioulakis*

Abstract: This article examines the role of life narratives as discursive spaces for the performance of individual resistance. Through the inspection of three interviews with professional musicians in Athens, the essay will illustrate how the recounting of nodal events in their lives and careers facilitates an assertion of their current social ideology and their disillusionment with the popular music industry in which they operate. Ultimately, what follows will suggest a mode of listening to individual utterances and narratives as discursive forms of resistance that need to be appreciated as social acts as opposed to mere ethnographic data.

Keywords: ethnomusicology, Greece, professional musicians, narrative, discursive resistance, power and social ideology.

‘So how do we start? What do you want to know?’ asked Kóstas; the two sentences separated by a good sip of iced coffee. It was he who chose this suburban café for our interview. He thought it would be quiet and hopefully breezy enough for an Athenian July evening and he was right. ‘Well, you could start from the beginning’, I replied. ‘When did you first hold a musical instrument? ’What, you mean as a child?’ he enquired, evidently confused about the relevance of such a question. ‘I don’t know...were you a child?’ I answered with a further question. ‘I sure was, still in primary school. A guitar was brought to my house, don’t even remember by whom. So, at first, I saw it as a toy. And come to think of it, this is what keeps me going until today. I saw music as “playing” from the beginning.’

The first contact with music served as the subject of my initial question in all the 34 interviews that I carried out with professional musicians in Athens, Greece. This question, I initially thought, served as a good ice-breaker. But I soon realised that it was far more significant than that. It had something ‘journalistic’ about it, a character which served two purposes: Firstly, it gave the discussion an identifiable form (‘oh, it’s going to be like one of those TV interviews huh?’ I remember one informant saying). Secondly, and most importantly, it allowed my interlocutors to imagine themselves in a position of power, a rather rare occurrence for a backing instrumentalist. This interview was a discursive space where their stories mattered. Once they realised that, my informants were not only eager to respond in great detail, but they went on covering the whole spectrum of enquiries included in my research agenda through a straightforward (if lengthy) life narrative. And they did not hold back.

A combination of memories, ideologies, professional strategies, betrayed and accomplished expectations, and aspirations for the future sprung out of their narratives in a way synthesising and transcending my preconfigured questions.

The life of the individual has occupied an ambiguous role in ethnographic research and writing. On the one hand, cultural/social constructivist approaches have focused on individual life stories as a terrain where social phenomena become tangibly manifest and observable. As Pierre Bourdieu famously argued, the particularity of empirical reality serves social sciences insomuch as it is ‘an exemplary case in a world of finite possible configurations’ (1996: 8). Conversely, poststructuralist anthropological literature has tended to focus on individual agency, seeing sociocultural phenomena as dialogical processes which are being actively negotiated by human action and discourse. Recently, even poststructuralist approaches to agency have been criticised as unproductive as far as the power and autonomy of the individual is concerned. The tension between societal constraint and individual imaginaries, however, is not a figment of social theory. Michael Jackson has illustrated that the examination of this struggle should be in the centre of an existential anthropology. In his words,

"life is a struggle between one’s inner resources and external conditions. Expressed in a more existential vein, one might say that human existence is a struggle to strike some kind of balance between being an actor and being acted upon. (2005: 143)"

In this light, life narratives need to be seen as privileged spaces within which one can observe how these kinds of struggles unfold. Anthropology has conceptualised and utilised life-narratives in diverse ways. Narrative has been described both as ‘the form in which we come to consciousness’ (Rapport 2003: 29), and as a performance (Bauman 1977). Life-narratives, more than simple illustrations of events, serve as active constructions of selfhood and claims to individual authority (Josephides 1998). In accordance with these views, I attempted to examine life-narratives as strategies through which musicians cope with the existential struggles involved in their everyday activities.

This article draws upon my three-year-long doctoral research among Athenian professional instrumentalists (Tsioulakis 2011a). Focusing on ‘backing musicians’ of the local popular music

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industry, my research illustrated the divisions of power and sociocultural ideologies implicated in Athenian music-making. Throughout my analysis I argued that professional musicians construct a dualism of ‘work’ versus ‘play’, where the former describes their experience of powerlessness and constraint within the professional milieu, while the latter speaks to their momentary glimpses of ‘creative freedom’ in contexts where they can perform music for their own pleasure. The dichotomy of ‘freedom’ and ‘constraint’ is also inextricably connected to the sociality that is being performed. ‘Work’ is where a musician needs to satisfy his or her superiors and build the appropriate personal relationships that will lead to professional advancement. ‘Play’ on the other hand, is arguably where musicians get to express their true social selves.

The examination of life stories has been pivotal in my endeavour to document these experiences and ideologies in two ways: in their descriptive and sequential capacity, life stories illustrated the way that this oscillation between ‘work’ and ‘play’ defined my informants’ life choices and the construction of their identities. At the same time, seen as discursive constructs, the narratives provided strong manifestations of current individual ideologies. My essay will focus on this latter aspect of life narrative and its importance for the ethnographic process. Specifically, through the examination of extracts from three life stories I will discuss how my informants used our interviews as modes of discursive resistance. This term relates to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls ‘heteroglossia’ (1981: 291) and to James Scott’s (1990) notion of the ‘hidden transcript’: the dissonant, subversive discourse that develops among subaltern groups away from the gaze of the power-holders. Simultaneously, the term draws on the theoretical field of discourse analysis and its attentiveness to speech-actions as modes of (re)constructing the social world. As Margaret Wetherell asserts, a discourse ‘is constitutive of social life [...] discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations.’ (2001: 16). The consistency of the way that power-holders are portrayed within the musicians’ narratives suggests a use of language as an instrument of opposition. In this sense, the utterances presented in this text serve as counter-narratives to the dominant social order of the Athenian music industry. Even if life narratives do not have the potency to reverse social orders, this essay will argue that they still serve musicians as negations of the power schemes within which they operate.

Kóstas: from ‘bands’ to ‘work’ – the instrumentalist’s role
Kóstas, the musician whose words feature in the title of this article, is a professional bass player in his late thirties. Although he has ‘worked’ in diverse musical contexts serving different styles and genres, he started (and continues to identify himself) as a rock-band bassist. Elaborating on his opening declaration that music was always ‘playing’ for him, Kóstas continued:

I never saw it as study or work and I still don’t see it like that today. At least I manage to maintain the artistic aspect and get some personal enjoyment. I never studied music at all. I taught myself by playing with my brother. For the first seven years I only played in bands, where we did our own music.

For Athenian instrumentalists, ‘doing your own music’ refers to the rare occasions where they are in charge of the produced result of their performances. This includes choosing the repertoire, performing their own compositions as opposed to well-known ‘hits’, orchestrating the music according to their taste, and having the freedom to improvise. Although most musicians start by participating in these settings of ‘democratic’ music-making, the ones who succeed in entering the Athenian popular music industry are employed in larger productions characterised by more rigid hierarchies. Kóstas offers his experience of ‘working’ for the first time. He was employed in the band of K–, a well-known male popular singer:

When I played with K– this was my first ‘job’, but it was still more like a band, close to the style that I was used to. I mean the guys there [other instrumentalists] would not only do their job and go. They cared about how successful the result was musically, but they also tried to make sure you’re properly in the group, you know, how much of yourself you’re willing to put into the band, hang out with them, open up and all that. And these are things you don’t see in regular ‘work’ settings. So it was good for easing me in.

Continuously in our discussion, Kóstas drew this division between ‘work’ and ‘bands’. Shifting between these two contexts was crucial for Kóstas’s survival as a professional musician. But remaining faithful to his musical aesthetics was conceptualised as an important ideological matter:

I had many gigs that I would call ‘pure work,’ you know what I mean? But I always tried to hold on to my ... well, I don’t want to say ‘dignity’ ... but at least to do things that were compatible with my aesthetics. Not to drift too far away from it.

Kóstas presented this quest for aesthetic integrity within a world of popular music labour as a struggle that he had to deal with repeatedly throughout his life course. His life narration was engrafted with this dichotomy, making the description of life occurrences hardly distinguishable from didactic speeches:
I played for a *laikó magazí* for a while. And then the summer came and they proposed a good deal for the summer tour to us. It started troubling me, I was like ‘wait, what am I doing?’ This was not why I became a musician, and yes the money is great, but how long will I do this for? How long can I do it for? Because, after a point, you won’t be as pure and innocent as when you started. Something is destroyed inside you. I know people who have gone half mad because of that! You can’t keep a good aesthetic while playing at the *magazí*.

Kóstas’s words resonate quite well with what Arlie Hochschild has called *emotional labour*, a term that describes settings where ‘the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself.’ (1983: 5) In Kóstas’s view, what makes musical labour all the more burdening is the fact that it requires him to entertain people by suppressing his own sense of pleasure. According to Hochschild, emotional labour ‘sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality.’ (1983: 7). In Kóstas’s case this source is his personal musical taste. Later in our discussion, worried that the term ‘aesthetics’ is far too disengaged to describe his experience, Kóstas states:

> All this ‘aesthetic’ discussion might sound a bit ‘theoretical,’ but ultimately all musicians…we’re trying to be ok, you know? And the thing is, if we don’t follow what we feel musically, sooner or later we’ll have problems; physical and psychological problems.

For Kóstas, protecting his cultural integrity is more than an ideological construct; it is an existential necessity which ensures his psychological health. ‘Playing’ with bands that ‘do their own music’ is an antidote to the constraint of popular music labour. However, the eloquence with which he described these dichotomies and the vigilance of the justifications he used for his stances suggest that Kóstas was not uttering these words for the first time. I argue that the construction of the discursive space within which Kóstas features as a struggling individual, is an act of resistance in itself. By deconstructing the ideologies of the popular music industry, Kóstas momentarily (and within our specific discursive space) exorcises its authority over him. This discursive resistance is an act that musicians constantly perform in their private discussions and narratives. Althusser has argued that conformity with a ‘ruling ideology’ is necessary for any kind of practice to be possible, and that ‘[a]ll the agents of production […] must in one way or another be ‘steeped’ in this ideology in order to perform their tasks “conscientiously”’, (1972: 133). In this sense, although (or exactly because) musicians have to conform to the dominant ideologies of the music industry while performing in (and for) it, their private discourses serve as speech-acts that counteract this domination.

**Dimítris: from singer to ‘musician’ – choosing your position**

Dimítris is a 30-year-old multi-instrumentalist, singer and trained ethnomusicologist. He has worked as a backing musician for a number of well-established popular singers in Athens as well as composed and released his own music. I have known Dimítris for almost 20 years during which time we studied music, performed in bands and socialised extensively together.10
My interview with Dimitris concentrated on a specific transformation of his musical role that occurred in his early twenties. Dimitris had been singing on stage with different bands since his early teenage years. Growing up, everyone complimented his confident presence in front of the central microphone, and his competence as a band leader. After the end of secondary school, however, and increasingly during his academic studies in musicology, Dimitris was more attracted to playing instruments, a fact that eventually led him to reject of the role of the singer.

The music genres I listened to since I was a child led me to work on my voice and the way I sang. This was what came natural to me; I was only playing an instrument in order to support my voice. For a long time I only identified myself as a singer. [...] I think the reason has to do with my home. My family only used the term ‘song’. That’s how we related to music. This, however, changed radically later in my life. Now, I consider myself more of a ‘musician’ or specifically an ‘instrumentalist’ than a ‘singer’. I much prefer playing instruments than singing, and even when I sing, my mind concentrates on the arrangement, the harmony and the overall sound rather than my own voice.

This shift in musical roles signalled a profound change on Dimitris’s identity. This change was manifest throughout the years in both a performative and a rhetorical way. Being his musical collaborator for many years, I had personally witnessed this transformation as we both became increasingly involved in the Athenian ethnic jazz scene. Dimitris moved from the centre to the side of the stage, a move representing his resignation from the lead-singing role. He also started performing in a seated position, illustrating his concentration on the instrument while further disassociating him from the theatricality of the popular singer. At the same time, Dimitris started to verbally identify himself as an instrument player and express criticism towards the singer was definitely transmitted to us in the Athenian ethnic jazz scene. Dimitris moved from the centre to the side of the stage, a move representing his resignation from the lead-singing role. He also started performing in a seated position, illustrating his concentration on the instrument while further disassociating him from the theatricality of the popular singer. At the same time, Dimitris started to verbally identify himself as an instrument player and express criticism towards the popular music circuit and its strategies of promotion and consumption. This change featured as a central theme in Dimitris’s narrative. Interested in the course of this transformation, I asked him further: ‘So did you decide at some point in your life that you wanted to be a musician rather than a singer?’ Dimitris replied:

Yes, exactly. Well, I mean, it was a process for me that lasted about 10 years. I increasingly wanted to write, orchestrate and play music, which I would occasionally also perform using my voice. But I didn’t want to conform myself to the role of the ‘singer’, with all its connotations.

Ioannis: What kinds of ‘connotations’ are these?

Dimitris: Because in order to be a singer you need to have a certain… ehm… extroversion, if one wants to describe it in a positive light. In reality, this means that you need to be bold and cocky, and to employ measures that never felt suitable for me as a person. [...] You know, there’s a certain theatrical aspect to being a singer, captivating the audiences and pretending you’re something different than what you really are. This pretentiousness is not valued among instrumentalists who care more about the sound and the music itself.

While describing this change in his performative role, Dimitris evokes a number of dilemmas concerning a musician’s social identity. The ‘cocky’ and ‘pretentious’ singer is juxtaposed with the more modest instrumentalist who concentrates on his or her specific task: playing music. No matter how conscious this identification process was at the time when Dimitris was going through it, his current words make it more than a report of the past. This is an ideological construct of the present and it is here and now that Dimitris’s words serve as an act of resistance to the system of popular music-making that he repudiates. I urged him to elaborate on this division between ‘singers’ and ‘musicians’, and asked him what he thought the role of formal music education was in maintaining it. Dimitris explained:

Look, as you know, there are major differences between the ‘musician’ and the ‘singer’. One is the visible and obvious one, having to do with the role they play on stage, which can be seen by insiders and outsiders alike. There is also a more ‘esoteric’ difference though. Musicians intentionally distinguish themselves from singers. This is because in Greece, the role of the singer is mediated by a specific star-system. The mass appeal of the singer, achieved through advertisement and the media, soon became appalling for ‘musicians’. The singer’s ‘deification’ in Greek popular culture meant that the instrumentalist was marginalised. As a result, while singers gained in fame, they started losing their credibility and recognition within the music circles. This repulsive view of the singer was definitely transmitted to us in the Music Schools, by our teachers who were all skilled professional instrumentalists.

In this extract, Dimitris recognises both the historicity of this cultural antagonism and the way that he was introduced to it. Choosing, therefore, the position of the instrumentalist is in his words a conscious decision. Dimitris’s description, however, also involves two conflicting sets of future aspirations: while the singer is striving for popular recognition, the Athenian instrumentalist is confined to the margins of the local industry. How did the gravity of such a conviction
affect Dimitris’s life decisions? Did his fantasies of the future change along this process?

Of course, I had the dream of becoming famous. This fantasy is what gets everyone going. If anyone tells you that he first became a musician because he wanted to ‘serve the art of music’ he is a hypocrite. But at some point I realised that there was only so much I would do in order to chase that dream. [...] I had to satisfy the people who were above me in the hierarchy with whom I did not agree. This was an ideological problem for me. [...] Soon enough I came face to face with reality and I decided that there are requirements to becoming successful that comply with neither my ethics nor my musical training. So I set different priorities that took me away from the vision of the ‘famous musician’.

The narrative of the betrayal of his fantasy again becomes a manifestation of identity politics for Dimitris. There were choices to be made, which were entangled with personal ethics and social ideologies. While discussing those choices, Dimitris illustrates his current social consciousness, which in turn was shaped by those exact choices. In other words, while actively constructing his life-narrative in the present, Dimitris performs an act of resistance to the hierarchies of the music business that defined his past.

Antónis: making sense of an uncommon power reversal
This section will follow the life-story of a jazz-trained saxophone player, and his unique encounter with the popular music industry. This analysis will provide a perspective of the music power struggles in a public context and the way that they are viewed by the individual musician. In contrast to the previous two sections, this case study will feature a musician in a rare triumph against the power-holders of the industry. By examining this I aim to reveal the way in which a victory among the power-holders of the industry. By examining this I aim to reveal the way in which a victory within the milieu of social power serves the musician’s narrative as a nodal point for assessing the meaning of his past experiences. In Antónis’s storytelling his whole life-course is purposefully portrayed as building up towards a specific event, a collision point where experience and ideology clash and eventually become reconciled in his favour.

Antónis is a saxophone player in his mid-thirties. He was born in Trikala, a town in Northern Greece, where he received his early music education:

I started with music when I was 12. My first instrument was the guitar, classical guitar, you know. But it didn’t go great [laughing]. It was too hard for me. I mean, in order to be a classical guitar soloist? God! You need to give your every waking hour. Plus it was also hard professionally. My family wasn’t rich or anything. What kind of work was I going to get in Trikala as a classical guitarist? So we [the family] decided that I was going to switch to the saxophone. For the army brass band, you know, I’d be a military musician. They were hiring a lot of people at that time.

Antónis described his earlier years of music education with contempt. Since he could not find a proper saxophone teacher in Trikala, he started his training with a clarinettist. After a few frustrating years of ‘very little technical advancement’ Antónis was, eventually, directed to a saxophonist who resided in Lárisa, the nearest city. It was during one of his visits to Lárisa that he watched a concert of The Blues Bug, a reputable Athenian funk-soul band:

They had saxophones, trumpets, a whole brass section! There were like 15 people on stage. And it made me think, ‘wait a minute, they are improvising and playing all this funky stuff, and I’m going to stay here and play marches for parades on national holidays? No way!’ So I forgot about the army and everything. Because I realised how amazing the instrument was, you know what I mean? I thought, ‘if they made it, I can make it too. I’ll study hard; I’ll do whatever I need to do.’ I was 18 years old at that time.

A few years later Antónis moved to Athens. He started studying with a highly recognised jazz saxophonist and, simultaneously, undertook some training in classical and jazz music theory, composition and orchestration. He managed to gather various music degrees that secured him some sporadic teaching jobs and orchestra placements. But his finances were far from healthy:

When I arrived in Athens I was 22 years old. I needed to support myself. Especially after giving up on the army idea, I couldn’t ask for my family’s support. So I worked as a waiter for a while. Restaurants, coffee-shops, you name it. In the meantime I started getting hooked-up with different bands. We played funk, jazz, things like that. But these bands never pay, you know how it is. And I had a hard time arranging my schedule between gigs and nightshifts at work. I did that for a few years, but it was exhausting.

Luckily, after 2005, Antónis started participating in some more ‘professional’ music projects. He worked as a backing instrumentalist for a few successful singers, and managed to have a steady, if low, income. Finally, in the spring of 2008, Antónis received a quite promising proposal: N—, a well-known singer of the laikò genre, required a full horn section for his orchestra:

A colleague, trumpet player called me. N—, he said, wanted to make his orchestra more...’glamorous.’ You get the story. He wanted 5 horns! I accepted of course. I thought it would
be good money. I'd save a good bit, and then I'd be able to do whatever I wanted for the next year. It was only for the summertime. The band was really impressive. About 25 musicians, string sections and stuff, all in their black suits...it didn't feel like a skyládiko at all. But the music and the working hours were typical of a skyládiko. We played for 5 hours: midnight to 5 am.

This was Antónis's first experience of properly working 'in the night' (sti nýhta). Unfortunately, the collaboration did not go as smoothly as planned. The shows started on 29 May, 2008, after a month of unpaid rehearsals. But three weeks later, the whole horn section was fired. When I first asked Antónis about the reasons behind their lay-off, he focused on economic disputes:

They told us, 'you either stay for half the money, or you go.' They had a group of young Macedonians that were going to replace us. You see, we were getting 180 euro per night at that stage, and they found these kids who would play for 100.

Although the simplistic economic explanation of the lay-offs seemed to make some sense, this would be a rare occurrence in the popular music industry. If not for any reasons of professional ethics, firing the whole horn section a month into the show-season would present the music producers with the inconvenience of having to train the new instrumentalists. After questioning Antónis about that, he proceeded with what he considered a 'deeper' reason for the termination of their employment:

You see, the other musicians and the maéstros felt that their prestige was in danger. They were like 'these guys are better musicians than us. They spend less time on stage and get the same money! We better get rid of them.'

While the interview was being conducted, I remember reacting with scepticism to this part of the narrative. How grounded was Antónis's claim that the newcomers were 'better' than the senior members of the band? Surely, since the other musicians had been collaborating with N— for longer, they must have had more professional experience. I asked Antónis to explain what he meant by 'better musicians.' What exactly intimidated them? Antónis explained:

Well, you see they didn't have proper musical training. For example, they brought us these scores, and they were full of mistakes! We had to correct them. So when they saw that they couldn't justify their role as our superiors in the band, they felt threatened; especially the maéstros.

The justification of knowledge through the use of the term 'proper' (systematic and institutional) training clarified Antónis's assertion. What is worth noting here, therefore, is that the entire negotiation of power is entangled with a discussion of knowledge and competence. "The endangered 'prestige' of the official power-holders (maéstros, senior musicians), and their failure to justify their positions within the social setting, are explained by Antónis as a result of their perceived lack in 'proper' training when compared to the horn section.

After being fired, the horn section decided to proceed to litigation. They contacted the official trade unionists, and got in touch with experienced lawyers who helped them file a lawsuit against the club-owner and the band manager. According to Antónis, although the singer was the main decision-maker behind the incident, he did not occupy an official position that would justify his prosecution in this case.

In the lawsuit, the musicians maintained that they had been unjustifiably fired by the club's management, while their agreement dictated that they would be employed for the whole summer season. Moreover, they supported that at that late time, midway through the summer club-season, it would have been impossible for them to find any employment. Therefore, they claimed monetary compensation that would cover both their unpaid rehearsal hours, and their loss from the rest of the concert season. Although they had no written contract, the lawyer assured them that the court would recognise the validity of a 'verbal contract', as dictated by the nature of their occupation.

In Antónis's account, the subsequent trial unfolded like a parody. The club's production team testified in front of the judge that 'the horn section was fired because they were not up to the required playing standards'. Significantly, they chose to direct the litigation again to a matter of competence and skill. 'What? All of them?' The judge responded. 'And it took you one month of rehearsals and another three weeks of shows to discover their incompetence?' she allegedly remarked. According to Antónis, the judge proceeded to explicitly mock the representatives of the production team: 'The whole courtroom was laughing for about half an hour.' He quoted some of the judge's comments: 'So what was wrong with them exactly? Were they playing out of tune? Out of rhythm? What? Your report here doesn't make it clear.' Later, she reportedly asserted: 'From the musicians' CVs, I see that each of them have a long list of music degrees, and they are employed in the orchestra of ERT [Greek National Broadcasting Network]. What kind of musicians does Mr N— [the singer] need after all, if they are "not up to his standard"?' The trial concluded with the judge deciding in favour of the laid-off musicians. According to Antónis, the amount of money that they received as compensation was larger than what they would have made even in the most optimistic scenario of a successful season at the club.
This case study provides an unusual example in the music industry. Instrumentalists are rarely fired during a playing season, but even when they are, they seldom consider prosecuting their employers. This strategy would generally be considered catastrophic for a career that is largely based on personal relationships. What makes this case worth examining, however, is the way in which it serves Antónis's narrative as a triumphal incident. The power reversal in the court case is presented by Antónis as an optimistic occurrence, one where the instrumentalists received a much needed recognition. In this sense, the incident becomes the social equivalent of a moment of musical ‘play’: the musician succeeds in momentarily subverting the typical social order. It is the rareness of such an event that makes it an ideal medium for discursive resistance. In narrating this incident, Antónis not only recounts one of his few moments of pride during his involvement in the popular music scene, but also advocates his decision to fight against the established hierarchies of the popular music industry. In this effort, he carefully orchestrates the protagonists of this narrative (the popular singer, the entrepreneurs, and the female judge) and their words in order to serve his subversive discourse. In fact, one of the elements of the story consistently stressed by Antónis was the judge’s gender. I take his frequent smiles when referring to the words of the dikastína (female judge), as a subtle suggestion that this was a dual power reversal: not only the subaltern instrumentalists won the battle against their dominators, but they did so with the help of a female judge.

**Conclusion**

At the early stages of my research, I anticipated that it would be difficult to convince my informants to share their life stories with me. I also expected the presence of an audio recorder, a piece of equipment notorious among musicians for its ability to decontextualise performances (musical or verbal) to make things worse. I feared that they would resort to clichés about communal music-making, praise the professional circuit within which they make their living, and keep their dissident opinions for less formal settings. As it turned out, not only they did not hesitate to share their life-stories with me. I also expected the presence of an audio recorder, a piece of equipment notorious among musicians for its ability to decontextualise performances (musical or verbal) to make things worse. I feared that they would resort to clichés about communal music-making, praise the professional circuit within which they make their living, and keep their dissident opinions for less formal settings. As it turned out, not only they did not hesitate to share their life-stories with me, they were also more than willing to share them.

Throughout this article, I have argued that these life narratives served my informants as acts of discursive resistance. By saying this, I don’t mean to imply that the narratives themselves, or the interview process for that matter, provided them with direct ways of defying the hegemonic forces that shape their social experiences. I am, rather, suggesting that their rhetorical constructs serve as a paradigmatic (if private) language of opposition. Thus, to echo Bakhtin, the above words are populated with a ‘semantic and expressive intention.’ (1981: 293) My informants’ narratives are vehicles of a rhetoric with a specific purpose to challenge what is perceived as a perverse system of authority. The evocation of this rhetoric through the discussion of nodal life incidents helps musicians to achieve a sense of balance between their initial fantasies, the chronology of their social experiences and their current ideologies.

Music ethnography demands two kinds of listening. Participant observation in music entails a close process of listening for diverse sociocultural cues that can be easily missed within the turmoil of performance. On the other hand, the observation of interview performances – the meta-process including listening to, transcribing, translating, indexing, and analysing interviews – requires a different aural sensitivity; one that listens for the active ways in which informants construct their self-perception and socially position themselves through speech. A finalised ethnographic text cannot but be analytical; therefore an ethnographer can never claim to unequivocally represent his or her interlocutors. I do hope, however, that my attention to the life-stories and social ideologies of Athenian musicians has made a good case for an anthropology that listens to the individual voices and an ethnographic text that facilitates their discursive resistances.

**References**


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Notes:

1 For a classic outline of poststructuralist approaches to culture, see Rosaldo (1989).

2 In Nigel Rapport’s words, ‘[a]gainst the likes of structuralist positing of “deep enculturation”, poststructuralist positing of “habitus” and “hegemony”, or psychoanalytic positing of the “unconscious”, it must be argued that neither the inner organisation of individuals’ possibly multiple identities nor their content is removed from their own manipulation and control.’ (2003: 31-32) It is worth mentioning, however, that the debate is one of analytical attention rather than understanding. Even in its earliest stages, social science was aware of individual agency and its role in social change. In his discussion of ‘social facts’,

for example, Durkheim asserts: ‘Even when in fact I can struggle free from these rules and successfully break them, it is never without being forced to fight against them. Even if in the end they are overcome, they make their constraining power sufficiently felt in the resistance that they afford.’ (1982 [1895]: 51-52) The analytical strategy of ‘distilling’ cultural phenomena of their individual nuances practiced by early social sciences, has led to a common misunderstanding that functionalism and structuralism were blind as far as human agency is concerned.

3 I find the concept of the ‘social imaginary’ very useful in describing human motivation as it is situated within social-historical-cultural milieux. This draws on Althusser’s definition of ideology as the ‘imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.’ (1972: 153) For a discussion of the imaginary as a mode of social belonging and a force of cultural change, see Castoriadis (1987, 1997), Gaonkar (2002) and Taylor (2004).

4 Pavlos Kavouras (1999) has very successfully discussed the performative aspect of narrative in the biography of a folk musician in Northern Greece.

5 The term describes instrumentalists who make a living mainly by performing in backing bands accompanying popular Greek singers.

6 This view is in accordance with John Gledhill’s (1994: 80-93) portrayal of resistance, where the effectiveness of undermining power structures is not a necessary prerequisite. It is, rather, the expression of ‘antagonism’ (Gledhill 1994: 92) in the presented rhetorics that qualifies them as counter-hegemonic.

7 Nightclub that features the ‘urban-folk’ music genre. Magazí literally translates as ‘shop’, a degrading term qualifying them as counter-hegemonic.

8 Lisette Josephides (2008) has also elaborated on this technique of blending ‘narrative’ and ‘paradigmatic’ speech, which she has found to be a common feature in Papua New Guinean life-stories.

9 The West-vs-East debate has tantalised Greek culture since the foundation of the independent Greek state in the 1830s. This theme has been widely explored by social studies of Greece, in relation to cultural politics (Herzfeld 1987; 1995; Danforth 1984) rhetorics of Europeanisation (Faubion 1993; Calotychos 2003) and Greek people’s view of neighbouring nations (Theodossopoulos 2006, 2007; Kirtsoglou 2006). For a discussion of the Greekness-versus-cosmopolitanism debate and its contesting manifestations within the community of Athenian professional musicians, see Tsioulakis (2011b).

10 Although my discussions with Dimitris have influenced my research in many and profound ways, the extracts used for the needs of this article are taken from a specific interview that we conducted in January 2011.

11 Dimitris is referring here to ēntehno (‘art-song’) and laikó (‘urban-folk’), the main genres of Greek popular song.

12 The roots of ‘ethnic-jazz’ can be found in a wider multicultural sensibility that arose in urban Greece during the nineties and manifested in a general taste for the ‘exotic’ within the fields of music, decoration, and cuisine. Although within some music circles ‘ethnic’ was used as a denigrating term to describe a blend between traditional and contemporary musical idioms that were not well articulated (Kallimopoulou 2009: 171), in the wider Athenian musical context the word ‘ethnic’ was used to denote world-fusion performances by both local and international artists. The ‘ethnic’ aesthetic was followed by a number of Greek jazzmen who integrated elements of the wider Balkan and Mediterranean traditions into their music, which was almost exclusively instrumental. For a discussion of ‘ethnic-jazz’ and its aesthetic debates, see Tsioulakis (2011b) and Dawe (2007).

13 Probing questions concerning ideological divisions can be a risky strategy in personal interviews. Jonathan Skinner has explored the way that the ethnographic interviewer often works as an ‘opportunist’ who pushes the boundaries between data collection and personal or even intrusive questions (2010: 115). Although semi-structured interviews (such as the one I had with Dimitris) can provide an ideal discursive space for unfolding and clarifying such ideologies, the process often demands a level of articulation that the interviewee might never have consciously attempted before. In all of the described cases, however, I discovered that my questions were welcomed by the interviewees who enjoyed my interest in their idiosyncratic views.

14 The dichotomy between singers and instrumentalists is a very powerful cultural construct that permeates urban Greek music-making. Surprisingly, while much of the literature on Greek music has focused on the singers and songwriters who have marked its history (Tragaki 2005; Papanikolaou 2007; Cowan, 1990) the backing instrumentalists have been consistently ignored by Greek music ethnography. Even Despina Michael’s article (2009), which deals with an extensive range of private interviews with musicians, focuses on the commonalities between their rhetorics of creativity ignoring the age-long antagonism between instrument-players and their singing colleagues.

15 The word literally translates as ‘dog’s den’. It is commonly used as a degrading term for the laikó (urban-folk) song genre and the nightclubs where it is featured.

16 This phrase, very popular among musicians for describing their experiences, associates professional musicianship with late-hour labour. The ‘night’ (nýhta) is projected as both a rite of passage and a source of ‘street credit’ for a musician, as it is considered the sole context within which one can effectively earn a living.

17 The term is used within the nightclub circuit to describe the musical director of the backing band.
18 Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has argued that the possession of knowledge (cultural capital), especially in its institutionalised form, serves as a central aspect of the everyday micro-struggles of power. It is no wonder, then, that musicians exercise claims to knowledge in their discourses of resistance.

19 Discussing illness narratives, Byron Good (1994) and Jonathan Skinner (2000) have also shown how patients actively construct their personal histories as fiction, where the efficacy of events and actors becomes unveiled within a specific interpretive framework with a clear purpose of recounting and fighting illness. In these contexts ‘[n]arratives are organised as predicament and striving and as an unfolding of human desire.’ (Good 1994: 164)
A Massacre is Not a Massacre

I don’t write poems but, in any case, poems are not poems.

Long ago, I was made to understand that Palestine was not Palestine;

I was also informed that Palestinians were not Palestinians;

They also explained to me that ethnic cleansing was not ethnic cleansing.

And when naive old me saw freedom fighters they patiently showed me that they were not freedom fighters, and that resistance was not resistance.

And when, stupidly, I noticed arrogance, oppression and humiliation they benevolently enlightened me so I can see that arrogance was not arrogance, oppression was not oppression, and humiliation was not humiliation.

I saw misery, racism, inhumanity and a concentration camp.

But they told me that they were experts in misery, racism, inhumanity and concentration camps and I have to take their word for it: this was not misery, racism, inhumanity and a concentration camp.

Over the years they’ve taught me so many things: invasion was not invasion, occupation was not occupation, colonialism was not colonialism and apartheid was not apartheid.

They opened my simple mind to even more complex truths that my poor brain could not on its own compute like: ‘having nuclear weapons’ was not ‘having nuclear weapons,’ ‘not having weapons of mass destruction’ was ‘having weapons of mass destruction.’

And, democracy (in the Gaza Strip) was not democracy.

Having second class citizens (in Israel) was democracy.

So you’ll excuse me if I am not surprised to learn today that there were more things that I thought were evident that are not: peace activists are not peace activists, piracy is not piracy, the massacre of unarmed people is not the massacre of unarmed people.

I have such a limited brain and my ignorance is unlimited.

And they’re so fucking intelligent. Really.

Ghassan Hage
May 2010
Enabling Children’s Voices in Ethnographic Writing: an evaluation of photographs by children as a data generating tool

Carol Barron*

Abstract: Anthropologists, according to Helen Schwartzman (2001) have in the past been guilty of placing children on the peripheries of anthropological research. The last two decades have seen the rise of childhood studies (James and Prout 1997) and a corresponding rise in research with children—not simply on children. While the traditional anthropological methods of participant observation and informal interviews were employed during a year’s fieldwork, I also used the participatory technique of photographs generated by the children in middle childhood. Images recorded by children fit squarely into Michael Gallagher’s (2008) interpretation of participatory methods as a ‘diverse set of techniques bound together by a common concern for actively involving research subjects in the construction of data’ (2008: 138). This paper evaluates the use of disposable cameras as a data generating tool for children by children to reproduce and represent the authenticity of children’s voices.

Keywords: research with children, participatory techniques, children’s evaluation

Child research and anthropology

The positioning of children within anthropological research has somewhat of a chequered and contested history. The British anthropologist Charlotte Hardman asked the question ‘Can there be anthropology of children’ back in the 1970s as she regarded children as ‘people to be studied in their own right, and not just as receptacles of adult teaching’ (Hardman 2001 [1973]:504). A similar view was echoed by the American anthropologist, Helen Schwartzman a few years later when she suggested that ‘Children are important because they are children, not because they will become adults’ (Schwartzman 1978: 19). Until recently however there were few major anthropology works that focused specifically on children which is peculiar considering that much contemporary anthropology is based on the premise that culture is learned, not inherited (Hirschfeld 2002). This is not to say that anthropologists have not studied children and childhoods; one only has to recall the work of Mary Ellen Goodman (1970) Robert LeVine et al (1994), Margaret Mead (Mead 1933, Mead 1942, Mead 1954, Mead 1963, Mead 1975), Helen Schwartzman (1978, 2001) and Beatrice and John Whiting (1975) amongst others. However this work claims Lawrence Hirschfeld (2002) failed to form a sustained tradition of child-focused research. Heather Montgomery (2009) acknowledges that while historical anthropological research may not have focused specifically on children and childhoods, nevertheless we have much to learn about both from past ethnographies. The last decade have seen a growth in the anthropological scholarship on children (Schwartzman 2001, Montgomery 2009, Goldman 1998, Nieuwenhuys 2006, Boyden and Hart 2007, Lancy 2008).

Research with children rather than research on children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted by the United Nations in November 1989 was the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights for children and Ireland ratified the Convention back in 1992. Within the UNCRC, Article 12 focuses on the child’s right to express their opinion and have it taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting them. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989).

The UNCRC has at its core I suggest a universalized and essentialist view of ‘the child’ which is based on Western assumptions about children’s best interests and a single chronological age definition of childhood, which is 18 years and under. This universal definition of children is of course very problematic as it assumes wrongly that all children and childhoods are the same globally irrespective of culture, ethnicity and history. Nevertheless, the UNCRC is clearly viewed as a milestone in how we view children and childhood in both the development of national and international policies related to children and also in terms of scholarly activity that includes the views and active participation of children in the research process.

Numerous researchers now cite Article 12 almost as a commandment in their arguments to support the view of children as citizens who are agents of change and capable of sharing their perspectives, (Bluebond-Langer and Korbin 2007, James 2007). Thus, Article 12 is employed by academics to support

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the movement of conducting research on children to research with children there by enabling the child’s voice to be heard more clearly. My PhD thesis follows the spirit of Article 12 in that children acted as co-researchers during part of the data generation and collection. However I make no outlandish claims that children were full researchers or indeed co-researchers throughout the fieldwork. They did not decide to undertake a PhD nor did they decide on the specific topic area of children’s play in middle childhood. Rather the children in this study found themselves with an anthropologist amongst them, yet the decision to interact, develop a relationship and co-produce data was made by them.

**Research Methods and Children’s evaluations**

Along with the increasing volume of research on children and childhoods is a parallel increase in the publication of research manuals and text books (see Boyden and Ennew 1997, James and Christensen 2000, Greene and Hogan 2005) dedicated to dealing with specific areas of methodological interest when conducting research with children. Within childhood studies many of those who call for the use of these innovative or adapted research techniques, are also those who emphasize the competence of children. Interestingly, Samantha Punch (2002b) highlights the paradox that ‘If children are competent social actors, why are special “child-friend” methods needed to communicate with them?’ (Punch 2002b: 321). Do these methods give more insight into children’s lives or are they just more methods?

There is no one single childhood and clearly there is no single method or technique to research the diversity of childhoods while taking into account children’s varied social competencies. This has led to researchers using techniques which are based on children’s skills and initiated the development and or adaptation of existing techniques, such as the draw and write technique (MacGregor, Currie and Wetton 1998, Gabhainn and Kelleher 2002) visual techniques (Thompson 2008) and the use of diaries (Mackett and Paskins 2008). However, such techniques should not unquestionably be assumed to be more appropriate for conducting research with children. The use of so called innovative and participatory methods does not automatically make research ‘better’. Rather a variety of methods should be employed which are appropriate to the children’s various competencies and have been reviewed and evaluated by children as effective.

Unfortunately when searching the published academic literature looking for evidence on children’s views on research methods it quickly becomes apparent that with a few exceptions (Punch 2002b, Borland et al. 2001, Hill 2006) there is minimal literature which evaluates differing research techniques with children. This is despite the paradox of the recent proliferation of literature on ‘how to’ use participatory techniques when conducting research with children. In the 1990’s, Melton and Stanley (1996) concluded that virtually no systematic research exists on children’s understandings of research and response to research procedures. A committee of the Scottish Parliament commissioned Borland et al (2001) to review evidence about the ‘best’ ways of obtaining children’s views. The study incorporated interviews with academic and professional ‘experts’, a cross-section of children in schools, children with disabilities and the views of children who had not participated in research as well as those who had. They explored the use of a variety of

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*Sam’s play objects*
differing research methodologies/techniques used with children such as individual and group interviews; draw and write technique; on line methods; questionnaires; and task activities which are some of the most commonly used data collection techniques employed. Children discussed the importance of acknowledging the importance of diversity among children themselves in deciding on the most suitable approach, for example some children like group interviews, while others prefer task orientated activities. Most children agreed that group discussions work best if members know each other - it is easier talking with your friends. Differing researchers have asked children to express a preference between individual and group interview formats. Usually, most express a preference for the group mode of communication (see Punch 2002a, Lightfoot and Soper 2003) though a minority hold the opposite view. Borland et al (2001) also report that children identify the importance of individual personalities, shy children may not like communicating in any form of interview situation and that their views may be best gathered in written format. In relation to surveys, children acknowledged their ability to represent many children’s voices but also that they can be boring. Overall, Borland et al (2001) found that children, similar to adults expressed a diversity of perspectives on each of the main research methods, and recommend that a variety of methods and techniques are required.

Samantha Punch (2002b) evaluated interviewing strategies with children aged 13 to 14 years from school and residential settings. The majority of children from the school setting preferred the group interviews where as the majority of children from residential settings preferred the individual interviews. With both individual and group interviews the children expressed enjoyment at being asked straightforward questions as much as the carrying out of task based activities. This meant that some of the materials developed to actually take away the perceived pressure of asking direct questions were not seen as preferable by the children. Malcolm Hill (2006) points out that when feedback from children about research methods is addressed in the literature it is usually based on spontaneous comments from children taking part in a particular study rather than an evaluation of the various research techniques employed. Hill (2006) found that children themselves identify the problems with varying competence levels with regard to reading and writing, which preclude some young people from responding to questionnaires, diaries and so forth. It has been noted that children can devote a lot of care to producing drawings or paintings in order to illustrate and make tangible a theme or experience (Hill, Laybourn and Borland 1996, Morrow 2001).

Thus the main implications, from the very limited research available for adult researchers are not about children’s consensual views about different methodological approaches and techniques as children like adults hold varied opinions. Finally when conducting research with child participants Barry Thorne (1993) makes a salient point when she warns of a form of ethnocentrism in research with children - we think we are closer to children than we really are because we too were once children. The same can be applied to research methodologies with children, for adult researchers to learn from children we have to challenge the deep assumption that we already know what children are ‘like’ and “like” both because, as former children, we have been there and because as adults we may regard children as less complete versions of ourselves (Harden, et al. 2000).

Photography, Anthropology and Children
The collection of image-based data in the form of photographs has a long tradition within anthropology. Margaret Mead in collaboration with Gregory Bateson co-authored the photographic ethnography Balinese Character: a Photographic Analysis, published in 1942 which was the first attempt at a complete visual ethnography. Within the past 20 years, visual anthropology has been transformed into an established sub discipline of socio cultural anthropology (Davey 2008) and the visual is seen as a phenomenon worthy of analysis itself rather than being solely illustrative (Banks 2001, Collier 2001, Pink, Kurti and Afonso 2004, Thompson 2008). Recently interest in visual techniques has led to a proliferation of research that use visual images as a data collection tool with children (see for example the work of Sharples, et al. 2003, Burke 2005, Nic Gabhainn and Sixsmith 2006, Kaplan 2008). The current interest in the visual, argues Thompson (2008), stems from simultaneous proliferation of the means of taking images, such as disposable cameras, digital cameras and cameras in mobile phones and the proliferation of image-based systems of communication in everyday life such as films, television and the internet. While the use of photography alongside other methods of data collection is increasing (Prosser 1998, Punch 1998) they are still considered to be underused with the images being predominantly produced for the participants rather than by them. The use of photography by children as a method of data production enables data to be generated by rather than of children (Nic Gabhainn and Sixsmith 2006). This differentiation is important as the use of cameras by children is a move towards providing insight into the emic perspective and this in turn also allows the child’s ‘voice’ to record and capture what is important to them.

Background to Research
As part of the year long ethnographic study children were given disposable cameras to record where and what they like to play outside of the school environment over a one week period. To account for seasonal variation in both the types of play activities and play spaces, cameras were distributed in the winter and summer. Prior to the distribution of the cameras, children
undertook a workshop on how to use the camera which was supported with written documentation developed in partnership with children. No instruction was given to the children in relation to the number on images to be recorded. All children returned the cameras after the week. The film was then developed and the children took the pack of pictures home to review and withdraw any of the photos they or their parents did not want included in the study. In total 63 children took part in this phase of the study, 35 girls and 28 boys. The children were in 4th, 5th and 6th class in two single sex primary schools in the same town. Ages ranged from 9 years 6 months to 13 years. Ethical approval for the study was granted from NUI Maynooth, permission was also granted from the two school Governing bodies, written parental consent from the parents and written assent/consent from the children.

In total 1,028 images were recorded, of these 940 were included in the study. The overwhelming majority of images not included in the study were because the film was either under or over exposed. For several of the images that included the child’s friend I did not receive the additional consent form back from the friend’s parents giving me the permission to include the image(s) in the study and these were also excluded. Two parents out of 63 removed pictures from the study, one parent of a young girl removed seven pictures of her daughter where she was clearly identifiable in the images, another parent removed one image for aesthetic reasons (a child’s picture of their bike in the utility room showed a basket of ironing and piles of washing in the background). Parents withdrew 0.68 of 1% of the total number of images recorded. Children removed pictures from the study for aesthetic reasons only, the explanation given by the children focused on the image being ‘fuzzy’, I think I’ll take out this picture [out of focus image of a mobile phone] cause it’s not good, you can’t really see it’ [Sean 9 yrs]. Of these 940 images, the boys recorded 471 and the girls 469. The Mean number of pictures taken by the children is 16.32. Girls recorded between 4 and 26 pictures (M=13.4). Boys took between 2 and 27 images (M=16.32).

Evaluation of Visual Imaging - The children’s perspective
54 of the original 63 children (28 girls and 26 boys) took part in eleven group discussions using photo elicitation. The discussions lasted between 50 to 60 minutes inclusive of a 5 minute break. As part of these discussions, specific questions were asked to evaluate the use of disposable cameras as a means of generating data by children. Each group discussion consisted of single sex children with participants of their own age group; the children also knew each other well as they were from the same class. The numbers in each group discussion ranged in size from five to seven. All discussions were tape recorded for accuracy and transcribed. The interviews were analysed using content analysis and we now turn to the findings of the analysis as they relate to the children’s evaluation of disposable cameras as a data generating tool by children.

Fun, fun and more yet more fun
By far and away the most common initial response to any questions relating to an evaluation of the cameras as a data generating tool by the children was related to fun. ‘It’s fun’ or ‘it’s great fun’, a few ‘it’s great craic, fun like’, throw in ‘cause it’s lots of fun and top off with ‘because it was fun and I like taking pictures’. Thompson (2008) suggests that children find taking photographs fun and this research would definitely support this view. But what do children in middle childhood mean by the term fun? When asked, several children explained fun as an emotion ‘it’s exciting’ or ‘enjoyable’ or a pleasant bodily sensation ‘it’s like when your tummy turns upside down, good like that’. Most children however defined fun by explaining it in opposition to the concept of boring, ‘fun, its not boring like’. The term ‘boring’ was used in numerous ways to identify the opposite of fun. Boring was viewed as an activity that was not fun rather than ‘being bored’ or having nothing to do.

Power and Control
Having the camera enabled children to set the agenda in recording the play spaces and play activities that are important to them. The children took their role as co researcher very seriously, only 6 images recorded by two children were of non play places or play activities (one girl took 4 pictures of her friend sticking out her tongue and making funny faces in the classroom and one boy took 2 images of the empty school playground). The children demonstrated a clear understanding that they had the freedom to capture the images that best portrayed their play activities and play spaces.

Gus performing a cartwheel
Sam: I liked that I could express what I was thinking in my mind, that I could show something what I played with and that I could put it in whatever way I wanted and take a picture of it so that I could express what I was feeling about my toys, put them in whatever position ……it was good that I was in control of the camera, that nobody could tell me what to take or not.[9 years 4 months] [See image 1 for one of Sam's Pictures portraying his play objects]

The children here felt able to record what they viewed as important, framing the image to include and depict their important play objects so that their voice could be heard and were confident with this technique that 'nobody could tell me what to take or not'. When analysing the images it became apparent that the children themselves were appearing in some of the pictures. Initially I feared that the child may have lost control of the camera to a parent/older sibling and that the images may not portray what the child liked to play and where. It was only through asking the children, ‘Who took the pictures that you are in? and ‘Why did they take that picture?’ that it became apparent that the children had directed their parents, friends and siblings to take particular shots which portrayed the child undertaking a play activity they particularly enjoyed; playing with a particular toy/object; playing with their peers and finally playing in a particular physical place [See image 2 where Gus had his friend take a picture of him performing a cartwheel over his friend in the road]. Siobhan (aged 11yrs) took an image of herself looking into a wall mirror and she informed me that ‘my mother told me to take a picture of myself looking in the mirror cause I’m always doing that so I did’. However, Siobhan also directed her mother to take pictures she wanted with her favourite play objects and in her favourite play places.

Some children prefer to tell their stories through the lens of inputting themselves into the photographs, others preferred to recount their stories verbally using their photographs and still others used a mix of the two techniques. Discussions about the power relationships between children and parents always have the child as important, framing the image to include and depict their voice could be heard and were confident with this technique that 'nobody could tell me what to take or not'. When analysing the images it became apparent that the children themselves were appearing in some of the pictures. Initially I feared that the child may have lost control of the camera to a parent/older sibling and that the images may not portray what the child liked to play and where. It was only through asking the children, ‘Who took the pictures that you are in? and ‘Why did they take that picture?’ that it became apparent that the children had directed their parents, friends and siblings to take particular shots which portrayed the child undertaking a play activity they particularly enjoyed; playing with a particular toy/object; playing with their peers and finally playing in a particular physical place [See image 2 where Gus had his friend take a picture of him performing a cartwheel over his friend in the road]. Siobhan (aged 11yrs) took an image of herself looking into a wall mirror and she informed me that ‘my mother told me to take a picture of myself looking in the mirror cause I’m always doing that so I did’. However, Siobhan also directed her mother to take pictures she wanted with her favourite play objects and in her favourite play places.

Some children prefer to tell their stories through the lens of inputting themselves into the photographs, others preferred to recount their stories verbally using their photographs and still others used a mix of the two techniques. Discussions about the power relationships between children and parents always have the child as powerless or less powerful (Lynch 2002, Christensen 2004). However family power relationships are not static and in this instance with minimal interference, children clearly maintained control of the camera and instructed their own parents, friends and siblings to record particular images that the child deemed important to them, The use of photography is viewed by Burke (2005) and Thompson (2008) as reducing the power imbalance between the researcher and the children and the findings of this evaluation support this view.

Right and Wrong answers
The issue of power and control underpinned other themes generated from an analysis of the children’s evaluation of the cameras as an effective tool to generate data by children. Research with children has been criticised previously where children may feel that the researcher, particularly in an individual or group situation is looking for a right or wrong answer to their question(s) (O’Kane 2008). In this context the children demonstrated their clear understanding that there was no such thing as a right or wrong answer or right or wrong picture in relation to the data they generated. They understood that they had the freedom to capture the images that best portrayed their play activities and play spaces with no element of right or wrong.

Patricia: I just took whatever I wanted and nobody could tell me that that was wrong or not. Like there is no right or wrong taking the pictures, so it’s good. [aged 11 years 5 months]

Conducting research with children in school settings may also cause children to believe and view their research participation as school work (Delamont 2002) which they must undertake, thus blurring the lines between what is school work and research. Children did not view the data generation with the cameras as school work, this is not simply because they used them outside of the school hours (children undertake homework nightly after school) rather they liked having the cameras and recording their images ‘cause there’s no learning involved’ [Aileen 9yrs] and ‘you don’t have to know any real stuff, you just do it’ [record the images] [Simon 10yrs 2mts]. The research was clearly perceived of as ‘different’ to school work and exempt from ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ answers.

Limitation
Children did not identify any limitations of the cameras however as a researcher one limitation of the use of disposable cameras when examining the lived experiences of children is in relation to third party consent. Children in middle childhood like to spend time with their friends. I had to obtain written consent from their friends parents for any pictures which included their child for the picture to be included in the study. Not all of these additional consent forms from the friend’s parents were returned and thus I had to exclude their images from the study. Disposable cameras gave the children control of the data generation and collection; however I took back part of this control by having to remove these images. A final limitation of the technique is a very practical one. When purchasing disposable cameras in large quantities you have no idea if all the cameras actually work and several were very evidently substandard and the images produced were under or over exposed.

Conclusion
Article 12 of the (UNCRC) has enabled the shift from conducting researching on children to research
with children there by enabling the child’s voice to be heard more clearly in parallel with the development of ‘childhood studies’. Recent decades have seen the proliferation of research books and journal articles on ‘how to’ conduct research with children, both espousing the use of ‘participatory techniques’. However these various techniques should not unquestionably be assumed to be more appropriate for conducting research with children. Their use does not automatically make research ‘better’ and evaluations of these techniques needs to be conducted with children, their strengths and limitations identified and the findings published to generate a more in-depth understanding of the major participatory techniques that are currently being used by children to enable their voice to be heard.

In middle childhood, children are eminently capable and competent to generate their own data with disposable cameras, and thus represent the authenticity of children’s voice more effectively. Children find disposable cameras as a data generating tool fun. They have no difficulties maintaining control of the instrument; indeed they clearly controlled others around them to generate images that best demonstrate their own play spaces and activities. When conducting research with children in school environments one must be rightly cautious of children giving answers that they feel the researcher is looking for, however children in middle childhood clearly appreciate that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer when using cameras to portray their worlds. Ethnographic writing is not just textual ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer when using cameras to portray their worlds. Ethnographic writing is not just textual 'right' or 'wrong' answer when using cameras to portray their worlds. Ethnographic writing is not just textual ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer when using cameras to portray their worlds. Ethnographic writing is not just textual and anthropology has a long tradition of employing photography. I suggest that photography as a visual technique is eminently effective in reproducing and representing the authenticity of children’s voice.

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A pair of spectacles and a lump of coal: objects of the dead and the stories they tell

Barbara Graham*

Abstract: This paper examines the stories people tell about objects of remembrance. Drawn from fieldwork along part of the Irish border in 2006/7, they contain various overlapping narratives; the stories of the objects, the stories of the dead; how the living tell the stories and how they are related in the ethnographic writing. The boundaries that are fused in these different tellings are mirrored in the blurring and renegotiation of boundaries that are present in how people use and interact with the materiality of the dead. The various elements of these processes of interaction, through myriad contexts and associations, are dependent on diverse forms of materiality. The experiences also of the dead, who they were and what they felt, are relayed in the voices of the living. The representation of these coalescing elements through ethnographic writing reveals how the memories of the dead are materialized through objects, senses and stories. The challenges in providing an account that illuminates the voices of participants and their essential connectedness to the dead through materiality, and accomplishes the promise of authenticity in portrayal and analysis, are negotiated through delicate balances of interaction between teller and writer and between personal and professional boundaries.

Keywords: materiality, the dead, narratives, boundaries, memory.

Introduction
This paper examines the stories of former possessions of the dead as told to me by relatives. They are presented as representative of hundreds of interviews and conversations over the course of fieldwork and provide an insight into how materiality, whether it is objects, places, ephemera or embodied experience, is central and crucial to processes of remembering. The data were collected in a variety of settings and illustrate not only the voices of the narrators, but also the voices of the dead as heard through the connections to things and places. Material culture is used to evoke memories, commemorate the dead, and facilitate ongoing connections between the living and the dead. Yet none of this is possible without narratives, for they are fundamental to the centrality of how material items are used in remembrance. They also arise out of a long tradition in Ireland of being concerned with the dead and of narrating about the dead through conversation, stories and song (for example, Carleton 1862; Craig 1998; Gilbert 2003; Hyde 1910).

Various items may be kept after someone has died because they have particular resonance for the surviving family members, or are known to have been of special importance to the deceased. Remembering through these former possessions can be diverse and idiosyncratic. While almost anything can serve as a keepsake or object of memory, treasured items attain a special quality which rests on the ‘private or personal meanings’ that are ‘central to their worth’ (Belk 1992: 339; Cursai et al. 2004: 609). The working of meanings into an object creates value and imparts a sense of the former owner. This is achieved through the re-telling of the stories attached to someone’s life; thus stories and objects are bound inextricably.

Portraying a justifiable account of the difficult emotions of grief and memory, requires a balance of representation that justifies the voices of participants with the responsibility of situating ethnographic writing within wider academic and theoretical perspectives. Like all fieldworkers, I was involved in continuing negotiations regarding trust, access and relationships. The months spent collecting data were peppered with interactions that were mediated along sifting boundaries; oscillations of positions that are encountered in everyday life (Rosaldo 1989: 29-30) and that were present in a variety of ways: during interviews in people’s homes and participation in social and memorial events; in justifying my research; in the realisation of the emotional involvement demanded by the work; and in the degree of self-exposure necessary for meaningful relationships to develop.

An important part of fieldwork when dealing with sensitive issues is empathy but it would be facile to argue that it is necessary to experience personal pain in order to understand how it affects people (Beatty 2005: 21-22). Not everyone going into the field will have been confronted with personal loss, or the conditions they seek to analyse. Yet, as Hastrup (1993) contends in her examination of famine, no-one expects anthropologists actually to experience starvation, but to imagine it (1993: 722-23). We can, as anthropologists, have profound experiences while still being structurally distant from events, as exemplified by Connor’s (1995: 537-99) description of

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and began to explain the figures in the picture: ‘academic armour’ (Lerum 2001: 473), and presents us with Hastrup’s (1993) imagining in vivid technicolour.

Echoes of memory
In telling their stories people unfold their thoughts and feelings; they interact emotionally, physically and mentally with objects and things, and give expression also to other voices, those of the deceased. Analysed within their specific context of death and remembrance these tales and interactions provide insights into the interplays between the materiality of death and the responses of the living. As one example, photographs are commonly used as memory triggers and images that are displayed in frames or kept tucked into drawers and old albums can bring forth a well of emotion and sentiment in people. One man, Alan, keeps a picture of his father that was taken at a family wedding. During one of my visits to him he went into his study and brought out the photograph from a drawer in his desk and began to explain the figures in the picture:

He’s (his father) wearing the suit that I kept for a while after he died. There I am on his right and that’s my brother on his left. He's standing there talking to me. It’s an eternal spake. He’s standing talking to me and I’m doing the listening. That was really the only photo I wanted of him because of that. It’s an eternal physical capturing of something that is gone. I had this picture before he died and for some reason I don’t want to make it feel something more than it is so I don’t put it in a frame. But it’s the most watched and touched photo that I have. I take it out and look at it a lot. While talking about this picture Alan constantly ran his hand over the image, as if physically touching his father. The paradox in his desire not to make it ‘something more than it is’ while admitting how much the image is examined and touched is akin to the ‘letting go’ but ‘holding on’ conflict in dealing with a death; a conflict that is assuaged by recourse to material items such as the photograph. The images kept ‘loose’ in drawers and packets do not have a layer of glass or plastic that divides the pictures in frames or albums. Not only are they more available to tactile interaction but also they can be stroked and the imprint of fingers left on them. The living and the dead are connected through the physical interaction of touch. This example also illustrates how materialising is a two-way process; senses, memory and emotion are fused and exchanged between subject and object. Parts of Alan’s body, through his fingerprints, are mingled with the photograph. Thus imprints and photograph touch and embody each other and evoke what Geurts (2003: 188) described as seselame – ‘feeling in the body.’ Her elucidation of the sensory world of the Anlo-Ewe of West Africa incorporates their concept of seselame as a way in which many of these people ‘read their bodies while simultaneously orienting themselves to objects’ (Geurts 2003: 18). An awareness of the intermingling and embodiment of the senses (Guerts 2003; Fernandez 1986; Sutton 2002) is glimpsed in Alan’s narration and interactions.

But Alan’s emphasis on the memory of his father’s speech, reminds us that auditory episodes can be reconfigured in the senses, transforming the one dimensional picture further through the synaesthesia of not only different senses, but also the emotions and past events that render them memorable. In these processes are the ‘echo in our body’ that Merleau-Ponty (1964: 164) believed was awakened when people are confronted with the materiality of ‘quality, light, colour and depth’ of a Cézanne painting. Those echoes extend, however, beyond paintings, into multiple materialities and exist in the ‘toing and froing’ between receiver and received that ‘vibrate and linger’ (Feld 1996: 93).

The imparting of memories, however, through story and anecdote, will, over time, weave into someone’s consciousness and create connections between subject and object. The ‘significance and connotations’ of items that appear ‘fixed’ can and will ‘change over time’ (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 131). An example of this, in terms of the emotional and functional significance of an object, is seen in the next story about a pair of spectacles.

Peter desired his grandmother’s spectacles specifically because of their intimacy in relation to his grandmother. This everyday item was in daily intimate contact with the deceased but was coveted by Peter. He explained what the spectacles meant to him:

...
This was how she saw the world, through these glasses. Every morning she put her sight on and every night she took her sight off her. This is a thing that was with her, it was so close, and it was the most precious thing, she couldn’t exist without it. Just had them for a keepsake. Whenever there were photographs those were on her face and I wanted those and every time I looked at them I thought those were the glasses that she wore for 30 years of her life. When you couldn’t afford new glasses you kept the one wee thing, the particular bendy hooky thing that you put on. I remember when she would take them off her; they would fold in a funny way, and she would put them on her with a real ceremony.

For Peter the glasses were ‘living’, something ‘real’, almost ‘as if there was a part of her sitting around.’ The spectacles symbolised much more about his grandmother who was a local folk singer and musician. This particular object brought back memories of his grandmother and what she contributed in life – who she really was. ‘It was a symbol of something deeper – her singing and her songs.’ Yet, despite all that this woman had handed down to her sons and grandchildren through music and songs, it was the one artefact that she would have touched and used every day that was most precious to them. These spectacles, and other objects, are seen as providing access to deeper things, sensations, and are gateways to feelings and meanings: ‘they speak volumes that cannot be said in words’ is how Peter describes it.

Yet the desire for the spectacles and the almost covetous way that Peter held and stroked them contrasted with reactions to other bits and pieces of clothing, bed sheets and shoes, that were viewed by many people as undesirable after a death. The processes that determine the acceptability of the glasses but the repulsion of sheets and shoes involve both cognitive and bodily factors. The bed sheets and shoes are organic items that mould and shape into a body. They are also items that are expected by people to be renewed and replaced. One woman hinted that re-using these particular items of the dead suggested that ‘you can’t afford the money for new ones.’ More pressing reasons for the dichotomy between the reactions to the sheets and the spectacles are connected to the stories to which the objects are attached. The sheets and shoes had no narratives or anecdotes associated with them that allowed them to hold or impart positive memories.

The reading glasses exist as the antithesis of this. Peter’s animated description of them evoked, in teller and listener, the mental image of an old lady fixing and adjusting her glasses; as if she was back in the room with us. The power of objects to trigger memories of someone’s past social life (recognised in relation to photographs by Hallam et al 1999) provided Peter with happy memories of his grandmother. The positive/negative reactions to the different items were channelled through the senses, resulting in strong, but opposing, sensory and emotional reactions.

The sense of who a person was can be present when considering items that they made during their lives or crafts in which they were involved. How someone worked or sweated over a task is, in turn, evoked by the living through their interactions with material items and the stories they relate through the medium of objects. Michael believes the sentimental value of objects rests on the usage made by an item in life and the connectedness that he believes it symbolises. He keeps his grandfather’s shaving cutlass, and explained what it meant to him:  

Well, a thing like the cutlass was something very personal to that person, it was something he touched and used every day. It touched his skin in a very personal way. I also keep his last for making shoes. I think of all the shoes that were repaired on it, and all the sweat that dripped over it. All the curses that were said over it while someone was working!

In this instance the artefacts physically embody the person, in that they retain bits of blood and sweat from the grandfather as he shaved and repaired shoes. It is how the shaving cutlass and the shoe last were used, and the mixing of materialities of objects and body, that makes them special for Michael. The cutlass and shoe last have not lost that authentic quality of ‘engaged human contact’ or association with ‘human endeavour’ that Benjamin (1968 [1935]: 233) maintained was the difficulty in reconciling any type of ‘aura’ to mechanically reproduced art.

The physical objects are connected fundamentally to the physical body. They touched the body and parts of the body (like sweat, and the curses emanating from a frustrated craftsman) were mingled with the object in a lasting connection. The fusing of materialities transformed these objects into something beyond functional commodities and converted them into items which had a life of their own through that association and physicality with the person who is now dead. Just as when Pollak (2007: 226-7) uses her grandmother’s rolling pin, feeling ‘its texture and weight’ against her hands, it anchors her ‘in the past, yet continues to create memories for the future. The object becomes timeless.’ The intermingling of people and object through sensory memories creates a fragment of
memory that can be grasped anew with each repeated interaction with a treasured object.

Memories, senses, emotions and stories are dependant on a materiality that is present in many forms and combinations. Whereas the bedsheets are considered ‘too intimate’ to be reused by relatives, the grandmother’s spectacles or a shoe last play positively on the subject/object boundary and oscillate between ontological states. These items become similar to Knappett’s (2005: 33-4) hybrid forms, made possible by the human tendency to ‘co-opt inanimate objects into their physical and psychological operation.’ By paying attention to the ‘reverberations’ (Bachelard 1957) that are instigated by materiality, we can listen to the ‘echo in our body’ that is ‘awakened’ and ‘welcomed’ by things that, in turn, make other things material (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 163- 4). The process of embodiment fuses the sensory worlds of the living with the dead and mingles artefacts and materiality with those senses and bodily activities. Csordas (1993: 138-9) talked of ‘attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others.’ Ultimately it is sensation and its related emotions that set us on a path to particular memories. As Merleau-Ponty (2007 [1962]: 243) argued, the ‘perceptual’ and ‘motor’ sides of sensations are in communication with each other. In other words, sensations are the sense of something. What that sensation articulates, or how it is articulated (felt), is often reactive and involuntary but always rooted in memory and experience.

And it is memory and experience of the living and the deceased that is manifest in a particular material symbol of a relative, kept by one family that operates as a succinct metaphor for the person. Jane, a 48-year old health worker, keeps a lump of coal that belonged to her father-in-law. She and her husband Joe regularly move the coal around the house, as Jane explained:

> Sometimes it’s on top of the dresser in the kitchen; sometimes it’s on the piano. It’s been here for a few years now and it’s part of the house. Joe’s father was a coal merchant and that was the piece of coal he brought into the house the last New Year’s Day he was alive, so it’s special. Sometimes it even sits on the oil tank. I would die if anything happened to it, but it’s just a lump of coal. Yet it means so much more because it tells you who Joe’s dad was.

The piece of coal not only conjures up memories of Joe’s father as a working merchant but is also tied into the magical symbolism of pagan rituals connected to New Year’s Day. No other piece of coal would hold the same set of meanings for this couple. It is the combination of the practical and the magical entwined with its dual symbolism of ending and renewal that has transformed it into a treasured item, and imbues it with sentimental value. The lump of coal serves not only as a memory-trigger for specific events in this family’s history but is also a symbol of relationships among an extended family and community. Coal also acts as a metaphor for durability and change. In its original mineral form it is a durable substance, but one that can easily be changed with use as a fuel. The piece of coal kept by Joe and Jane is an expression of continuity in the face of the social fragmentation that occurs with death. Its value lies in numerous meanings and encapsulates a rich sense of Joe’s father as a person. So death can transform the nature of ‘even the most mundane of goods’ (Weiss 1997: 165-70).

This is true also of objects that held some special meaning for the dead, things that were cherished by them in life. The belongings of the dead take on a particular significance when the realisation of the loss of the physical person is coupled with the acknowledgement that someone’s ‘special things’ have acquired a deeper sentimental value. The living feel a sense of duty to retain certain items and talk of holding onto things because they feel the dead would want that to happen. ‘I wouldn’t like to think that it would be lost or forgotten about’, one man said of his father’s microscope. ‘It was important to him; he kept it since he was a child.’ And an elderly woman has her husband’s Bible on the table in the living room. ‘It’s just there where he always kept it. That was his most precious possession and it means that much more to me now, to know I have it around and what it meant to him is not forgotten.’ Another woman, Maureen, related how her sister keeps her dead husband’s coats because he was ‘especially fond of them.’ She has tried three times to get rid of them but can’t bring herself to do so. ‘Alan liked those coats so much; she just can’t seem to part with them because of that.’

### Conclusion

The stories of the dead and their objects, therefore, take a number of overlapping forms. The dead are physically gone but remain in places, in objects, in narratives and in mind. We have seen that objects, senses and emotions are visceral and embodied (Csordas 1993; Damasio 2000). In addition, cognitive and sensory aspects of remembrance are linked in realising the ability to recall and tell stories. The above examples show that objects that once belonged to the dead may become imbued with meaning and vehicles for signalling and perpetuating personhood. The things thus become more than material objects as they are enmeshed with the immaterial presence of someone who has died. The boundary between objects and people depends on the meanings projected onto objects by the living but also
depends on a notion of the ‘self’ as being separate or capable of disconnection from the body (Hallam et al. 1999).

The stories of objects are embedded within the stories of people’s lives and are crucial to the transmission of history, beliefs and cultural values (Hoskins 1998). Materiality and the importance of human engagement with its diverse manifestations plays a central role in social relations (Edwards et al. 2006; Miller 2005).

Insights into the roles of various material forms are teased out from the stories that people told, from their interactions with items and from the relative importance placed on particular things. In these stories also, and in their telling, we see the fusing and mixing of boundaries, between object and subject, living and dead, and between senses and physicality. Presenting these stories allows readers to hear the different voices and perhaps experience their own sense of fusion between reader and those whose narratives are here set down.

**References**


**Notes:**

1 Bringing coal or turf into a house on New Year’s Day is part of a tradition called ‘First Footing’ which is practised in parts of Ulster and in Scotland. The ideal
is that the first person to come into your house on New Year’s Day should be a dark haired male who brings a piece of coal, something to drink, or something to eat to symbolise bringing good luck to the household for the coming year. Joe’s father came from Belfast where ‘First Footing’ would have been widely practised.
Abstract: Extreme human suffering and death has the potential to bring about a paralysing discomfiture, not merely about situations witnessed, but how they should be represented. Should it be enough to tell the story, free from the trappings of disciplinary theories, of one man’s attempt to live his death according to his own moral framework, and hope that there are enough people who will take the time to contemplate it? The story below is Henry’s story. It does not seek to arouse moral sentiment by the exposition of one man’s suffering. Nor does it attempt to valorise the man, or romanticise the abject poverty in which he lived. Rather it seeks to represent a life lived - to the death - on its own terms and according to its own morality.

While drawn to the life-force of this man, and the brutality of his circumstances, my personal, moral and emotional responses conflict with my academic and social position. This demands a level of conscious intersubjectivity and critical self-reflection which, I argue, is a necessary part of the process that is too often glossed as fieldwork experiences or ‘data’ but in fact represents part of our lifeworld.

Keywords: Critical self-reflection, reflexivity, intersubjectivity, HIV/AIDS, South Africa, representation, bearing witness, social suffering

‘Ek eet baie, ek slaap baie, en soen baie baie’ (I eat a lot, I sleep a lot, and kiss lots and lots)

‘Henry’

This is the longest complete sentence that Henry spoke to me in the six weeks prior to his death, and is the only form of verbal self-representation he made to me throughout our interactions. Without wishing to overanalyse it, it is telling that he made the statement in response to my questions about the availability of food with which to take his antiretroviral medication. As I sat on an upturned crate by his bedside, I was caught off guard by this vibrant individual who, despite the fact that he was emaciated and lying on a bare mattress in a dark shack, was still living his life to the full. It was apparent from the start that Henry had never been and would not, in its final chapter, become a passive observer of his life. The twinkle in his eye as he uttered the last four words left me in no doubt that he was flirting with me. Outrageously! It was wonderful. The transcript of our conversation cannot do full justice to my reaction - ‘Interviewer: [Laughs]’. Henry’s partner, Winnie, and the home-based care worker present were visibly embarrassed, rushing to interject and redirect the conversation to ensure that for the rest of the interview Henry was effectively prevented from making any real contribution and things could be kept on a more ‘appropriate’ footing. Sadly, the ‘appropriate’ conversation was the all too familiar macro-narrative of hardship, poverty, AIDS and death – a story told by millions throughout Southern Africa and beyond. In the circumstances, Henry’s failed attempts to shift the narrative of his life from a medical to a human sphere, seemed far more remarkable.

From the outset my visit to Henry’s home was a challenge, the first of many that he would present me with. As we headed back to the clinic that first day Jill, one of the Home based carers, said to me ‘OK, so now we know you will visit people in their homes’. Only some months later was I told there had been substantial doubt that I – a white, middle-class, female researcher – would really be willing to visit some of the most destitute areas on the edges of a deprived informal settlement. Henry’s home, known to the whole clinic as one of the most problematic environments, had been chosen as some kind of induction for me.

Over the next six weeks as I was drawn into meetings with Henry, his partner, extended family and medical team, my role as a white, middle-class, female researcher became increasingly irrelevant as I was forced to interact as a fellow human being. The effect was profoundly unsettling. Although I had been in similar situations previously, this time, for all I had learned (and taught) as an anthropologist about the clinical gaze and the need to bear witness to those whose lives we seek to understand, I was completely unprepared for the raw, visceral reaction I experienced.

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While attempting to conceal my reaction from Henry and his family, privately I found myself at sea and unable to deal with the turbulent emotions that arose. In the months after his death I could not begin to write without becoming overwhelmed. How could I possibly do justice to the man, his memory, or our encounter? The genuine voice of suffering would be trivialised by the translation of Henry’s experience into the language of science and technical expertise (Arendt, 1968). Given that his voice had not been heard during his treatment, writing such a paper would compound that injustice. A rational vocabulary would contribute to a ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 1999). ‘Giving voice’ or ‘bearing witness’ would simply become a means of arousing moral sentience to create a ‘compassionate moment’ (Fassin, 2008), or worse, an exoticization of African AIDS – something I have always fought to avoid. As part of a multi-disciplinary team conducting ethnographic research such issues, while regularly discussed, are seldom resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. The ethics, morals and politics of representation are such that there can be no definitive answer.

Objective measurements cannot convey the distress of poverty and social degradation in lived experience (Kleinman & Kleinman 1997). Jackson (2010) contends that we ‘do violence to the complexity of lived experience when we make analytical cuts between emotion and thought, or emotion, the senses, thought, and action and indeed field experiences can be highly emotional, often unpredictable, sometimes distressing. For that reason, our multidisciplinary team has chosen to tell two stories. One (under review elsewhere) is an academic assessment of the myriad state, social and community structures and services that failed to save Henry’s life. To some extent this has rendered Henry’s presence invisible so he has become almost secondary to the process. The second story, this paper, is situated in the gulf between that battery of agencies and the lived reality of individuals who access those agencies’ services.

The guiding framework for this piece is one of ‘radical empiricism’ (Jackson, 1989), which can be understood in two separate senses (Davies, 2010). Firstly, that the relationships between things (person–person, person–methodology, person–environment) are matters for empirical study. Secondly, radical empiricism takes as critical those periods during fieldwork when we are not applying a self-contained method (defined as a method productive of formal interview, statistical, or inventory data)” (Davis, 2010:23). Rather, it occupies the spaces between things in relationship, and between each separate use of a self-contained method. Crucially, this recognises the use of both approaches (traditional and radical empiricist) in any ‘season of research’ (Davis, 2010:23). This piece is drawn then, from extensive field notes, recorded interviews and participant observation. It also draws on my own ‘non-cognitive modes of learning – the bodily, emotional, or imagined modes of learning which can provide entrées into knowing’ Luhrmann (2010).

There is much that could be said about the social order of Henry’s life – the structural violence which formed its backdrop; hierarchical structures and racial organization which predominate; moral economies which confound; historical inequities which persist. All of this has been done elsewhere. Insofar as his story is one of hardship, pain and eventual death, Henry is all too familiar, so much so that he disappears into the local, national and eventually international statistics about deaths from AIDS. Perhaps there is a paragraph somewhere that speaks of virological failure on first round ARV treatment, or the impact of abject poverty, maybe even the social barriers to accessing and adhering to medication; Henry will be one of the millions represented there; lost in what Rapport (2003) would consider ‘reductive essentialisms’.

This paper is not about how Henry’s death is represented, but about his life and how that is represented. While referencing the evil of totalitarianism, Arendt (1994) argues for the development of a style of writing that allows debate on the issue that ‘solves no problems and assuages no suffering’. Such writing will ensure that we be challenged and perplexed by the ‘difficulty of understanding how our world could be made so inhuman that we might be drawn to engage with the political project of building more humane forms of society’ (Wilkinson, 2006). I do not wish to equate or compare Henry’s experience to the suffering of anyone else, nor to suggest that the care he was given should in any way be considered totalitarian or inhuman. However, sometimes, as Das (1997) observes, pain and suffering ‘may also be experiences that are actively created and distributed by the social order itself’. The complexity of writing about his life and these circumstances calls for a style of writing which will neither turn its face from, nor swallow in, his suffering. I present a short biographical narrative representing the individual life wherein we will hopefully find ‘the data with which to overcome the reductive essentialisms of gender, class, nationalisms, race, ethnicity, religion, age, epoch, locality and so on, regarded as imperative statuses’ (Rapport, 2003:16). It considers Henry’s ‘self-conscious, life-project’ and asks whether it provided ‘a route to a dignified and accomplished life’ (2003:14) or can be seen to have increased his control over his life course (2003:21).

I do this through the multiple lenses of those who knew him – as a fun-loving partner and lover (partner); a doting father (youngest child); a
misguided innocent (absent adult children); a hapless victim (home-based carers); a non-compliant patient (medical team). To these I add my own representation, and Henry's representation of himself to me. It is undoubtedly the case that none of these is entirely accurate, and several are disputed, but all may be moral insofar as they are principled and decent, or have at their heart 'that which is at stake for individuals and collectivities' – 'what really matters' (Kleinman, 2006). What really mattered to those around him, his family, loved ones and medical team, was keeping Henry alive. What really mattered to Henry was to be allowed to live what was left of his life as he chose.

For much of our interaction Henry was silent – either by choice, necessity or imposition. Such silences are deeply contextualised and defy simplistic interpretation but any confusion arising therefrom is, Loeb (2006) argues, a direct result of its connection to power as currency for its exercise. At times Henry's silences were what made people listen. The silences are deliberately echoed in this account. Any attempt on my part to ‘give voice’ to them, or to resolve some of the paradoxes and present a nicely rounded conclusion would, I believe, be unforgivably crass. In the final analysis Henry's story is cut short, deliberately and brutally.

Henry: Although he said little during our interactions, Henry was quite capable of making his views apparent. I watched in many family meetings with his medical team while people spoke about him, around him and at him, while Henry was effectively rendered mute, giving little indication that he was aware of the efforts being made on his behalf. When he did speak his voice was unclear and sometimes unintelligible. With the benefit of voice recordings we can rewind continuously to decipher what was being said, but even that is not always clear. In general, decisions were made about his medical care with minimal involvement from him aside from a random grunt or muttered ‘Ja’, when elicited. However, on rare occasions he made it very clear that he was listening, and as those around failed to pay attention to his wishes he chose to register his objection in ways that were increasingly distressing and uncomfortable. When his partner Winnie tearfully challenged his children about their lack of support, and tensions threatened to spill over into recriminations, he raised his head from his chest and fired a painfully slow joller, [pick-up trucks] whatever they asked him to. They were happy together for a very long time, despite Henry’s jolling, until one of the women he was with got sick and came to Winnie to tell her.

'I didn't tell her I knew already' Winnie confided ‘I just let her tell me’. Winnie tested and found that she was HIV-positive and was prescribed antiretroviral medication (ARVs). For more than two years Henry refused to test. 'He just kept saying “no, don't tell me these things... I don't believe this thing.”' When he became too sick to drive he worked in the garage as a mechanic. Then one day they let him go. 'No bonus, no pension, not even a goodbye gift...' Henry's son Noel told me ‘...just lock up the doors on Friday evening and that's goodbye...after 26 years'. In fact, his employers of 26 years had also refused to give him any papers which would have allowed Henry to draw from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). Whether this is because they were operating outside the law and had not passed remittances on to the authorities, or because it is illegal to dismiss someone because of their HIV status, is unclear. What is clear is that Henry was desperately sick and in no position to attend to the bureaucracy required to access support. Nor were those around him conversant enough with their rights, or how to claim them, to help. Winnie, now the more physically able of the couple, had been awarded a six month disability grant but this was not renewed once she was deemed fit for work. In an area with 80% unemployment.
the prospects of either partner finding work were, at best, remote. In any event, no employer would take on anyone so visibly debilitated by illness. Eventually, nine months before our first meeting, Henry tested HIV-positive at the local clinic and was referred for treatment.

When we met, the couple’s only income was a monthly child benefit of R230 (approx. €23) for their 8-year old daughter, Henrietta (the only child they had together). They had built themselves a shack on a piece of land which they were renting for R200 (£20) per month. Winnie’s face lit up with pride as she described to me how they built their home together against all the odds. With no access to water or electricity, this shack sat in a cluster of 5 or 6 others, about a mile from the main informal settlement of the area. Scraps of furniture, discarded from other homes, were arranged in two dark rooms – a single bed, a broken dresser, a chair, some plastic shelves, some crates, an assortment of battered tin plates and pots. When rent wasn’t paid the landlord came and removed anything of worth from their shack, so there was no question of them having a radio or mobile phone, or anything of apparent value. Neighbours helped out as much as possible, but support from friends and family was erratic. At the back of the shack, out of sight of the road, was a dumping ground where the landlord illegally dumped the contents of factories he was contracted to clear – empty industrial drums; chemicals; resin.

**Intervention:**

Two days after our first meeting Henry arrived at the clinic three hours late for his scheduled appointment. I had offered transport for the three mile trip but what was needed was manpower to carry Henry to the car, which could not get closer than 100m to his home because of the soft sand. The almost entirely female medical team are delighted to see the daughters joined by Winnie, and two of Henry’s adult daughters. A small entourage – the two home-based care staff are, and despite the heat, a black zip-up sweater and heavy work-boots with no laces. His grey hair peeps out from beneath a grey knit peaked cap.

In stark contrast to their skeletal father and his partner, Henry’s daughters are both overweight, cheerful girls. In a stuffy, over-crowded office Henry, his daughters, Winnie, myself and June, the ARV counsellor, listen attentively as the senior clinic nurse, Sr. Charlene, explains that Henry is seriously ill and something urgent needs to be done. Winnie cannot cope because she is HIV-positive and unwell herself, and because of their living conditions. No mention is made of Winnie’s alleged drinking problem, although in private conversations with me this point is constantly revisited. There is no appetite on anyone’s part to meet Winnie’s repeated requests that they be provided with the support they need to remain in their own home while they continue treatment. There is obvious tension between Winnie and the girls but everyone seems to have decided to co-operate in Henry’s best interests. Sr. Charlene is brutally direct – unless these medicines work, Henry will die. They need someone to take responsibility to help. Henry is bent forward in the wheelchair seemingly ignoring proceedings. Tracy, his youngest daughter has said her father can come to live with her, but there is not enough space for Winnie. Although there has been some resistance to this in the past, Winnie now agrees that it is probably best that Henry go to his daughter while she returns to her father’s home. It is emphasized to both Henry and Winnie that this is a temporary measure and once Henry is ‘back on his feet’ they will be together again. No mention is made of their 8 year-old daughter and who she will stay with. The meeting is emotional and once or twice threatens to break into recriminations between the daughters and Winnie. Finally, Sr. Charlene asks Henry if he will agree to this course of action and he mumbles ‘Ja’, but it is difficult to say how much he is really taking in.

Once this has been decided, I listen as June counsels Henry’s daughters about the affect and effect of the ARV medications, while Henry and Winnie return to the waiting area. Tracy and her sister are told that these are 2nd line drugs; that there are no 3rd line drugs; this is their father’s last chance; the tablets must be taken at the right time; the combination must be taken together; if one tablet is left out of the combination the therapy becomes ineffective; diet is important; Henry must eat fresh fruit and vegetables, etc. The instructions come thick and fast as the two girls listen, wide-eyed, and have no questions to ask. I am a bit doubtful whether Tracy can comfortably accommodate her father because she has now said quietly on a couple of occasions ‘I must just make space for him’. She also lives in a shack, albeit one with electricity and access to water.

Outside in the waiting area Henry is ponderously eating some kind of stew from a plastic
And so the day proceeds. At this stage Henry and his family have been at the clinic for three hours. The heat is oppressive but although the emergency doors have been opened no air circulates and Henry is becoming confused, irritable and belligerent. It takes a further four hours for us to complete the doctor’s consultation, fill Henry’s prescription at the hospital pharmacy and return to the doctor’s office so Tracy can be fully briefed about the medication. I count 14 different types of medication. Every morning Henry must take 19 tablets (7 ARVs and 12 for other conditions) and every evening he must take 7 (3 ARVs and 4 for other conditions). Finally the doctor is satisfied that the family is sufficiently prepared and they head home. Tracy’s preparation for the transition from daughter to carer is deemed complete.

**Shifting the lense:**
As the family left that day, I was called back by the doctor who commented ‘You look like you need some counselling yourself’. Immediately I realised that the day’s trauma had etched itself on my face and I had failed utterly in my attempts to remain distant. Distraught and frustrated with myself, my tears seemed futile and completely self-indulgent. On one level I was distressed by Henry’s condition and circumstances, the seemingly forced compliance and a sense that Henry’s care was to some extent being imposed on his children who were not only acting from a sense of duty more than compassion, but seemed ill-equipped to cope with the level of care needed. But my distress was further compounded by my inability to intervene and speak for Henry in a situation where his voice was drowned by the voices of reason from those who sought to help but left him bereft of any agency. I felt my professional role as researcher, which might have indicated some level of empowerment, prevented any intercession. Jackson (2010:47) contends that ‘to participate in the lives of others, in another society, is to discover the crossing-points where one’s own experience connects with theirs – the points at which sameness subsumes difference.’ This was my crossing-point with Henry. Having witnessed others, including my own father, make the painful but informed decision to refuse potentially life-saving and/or life-enhancing medication, I was privately of the view that there were other options available to Henry which no-one seemed willing to offer – the support required to stay in his own home as he wished and undergo treatment, or the option of palliative care in his own home with his partner. From this point on my role became increasingly complicated. As I fought to maintain ‘professional distance’, I was increasingly drawn (by family and the medical team) into an intervention with which neither I nor Henry
agreed.

A week later I discovered that Henry did not in fact move to Tracy's house as planned; I was asked by the home-based carers to collect him from his home and bring him to the clinic. On later enquiry I was told that the previous week when driven to Tracy's house he had sat in the car and screamed, refusing to get out. I arrived at Henry's shack and was met by his 8-year old daughter, Henrietta, who led me into the dark room where Henry lay on the bed. Winnie was not at home.

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As I explain why I'm here, Henry says something to Henrietta and she takes a small bucket from under the bed and holds it so he can pee into it. Although she seems to take on the role of carer with great ease, the shock of seeing an 8-year old acting outside of the normal role of a child; holding her father's penis to guide a stream of urine into a bucket, spurs me into action. I cannot remain the passive observer in these circumstances. I am forced to engage fully as a fellow human being. We set about trying to dress Henry in a pair of tracksuit pants that I take from the washing line. I have done this before for sleepy children or for loved ones for whom I have been caregiver, but there is something incongruous about sharing such an intimacy with a virtual stranger. Now I am engaged in the physical act of supporting Henry, touching his emaciated body; feeling the coolness of his skin against mine, his jutting bones; leaning forward to allow him to rest his weight over my shoulder; shifting his weight onto my back so I can manipulate the trousers over his protruding hips. The sudden catharsis I experience from stepping out of the restrictive role of observer is brought crashing to a halt as I realise that without this space I simply cannot do what you can... what you believe to be the right thing... under the circumstances.

Eventually he is told that he must now go to Tracy's house because Winnie cannot cope. 'Winnie doesn't want you any more, do you know that?' June tells him. 'Winnie doesn't want you. She said she has no time for a sick man,' The words strike me as unnecessarily brutal but Winnie sits impassively. Nor does Henry react to this news.

Tracy explains what they have been doing up to now to try to ensure that Henry has taken his meds. Her husband goes over to Henry and Winnie's home at 7 in the morning on the way to work and makes sure he has his first dose of ARVs. At 9 a.m. Tracy goes over to give Henry his other medication (non ARV related) and to treat any pressure sores and put in the catheter. Her father is not co-operative, she explains. He hides the tablets in his cheeks and under his tongue and spits them out; she finds them under the bed; he removes the catheter immediately Tracy leaves.

The doctor again stresses the importance of Henry moving in with Tracy. She explains that he doesn't have any more chances. If he will not move in with Tracy then the only alternative is for him to be sent to the hospice and his family may not see him for up to six months (the cost of transport is prohibitive). She asks Henry if this is what he wants and he says it is not. Her tone is urgent, but kind, throughout and she includes me in her gaze as she says 'I know you're tired, Henry, but there are people here in this room who will help you if you will let them help you.' She tries to encourage him to make the effort for the sake of the other people in his life. Eventually Henry is cajoled into saying that he will go to Tracy's house.

On the drive home Henry lies sideways on the back seat with his head in Noel's lap. I am pre-occupied - conscious of the fact that Henry may again be unco-operative when we get to Tracy's house. How will I react? I decide that if Henry refuses to get out of the car I'll tell him that I can't take him to his own home; he'll have to get someone else to take
him. I am conflicted here because I feel that would be patronising and disrespectful to his wishes. Surely that should be his choice. As it turns out, my concerns are unnecessary. We pull up outside Tracy’s house and there is no protest from Henry as Noel lifts him onto his back and carries him through to Tracy’s room. A small entourage of children assembles to greet us and escort us into the room. There Noel turns with his back to the bed and sits down, placing Henry gently on the bed where he falls backwards so that his frail body bounces slightly with the pressure. He laughs. There is no sign of any distress on his part with being at his daughter’s house, or of Winnie’s absence. I notice that his handshake is surprisingly firm as I wish him well and say goodbye.

Some two weeks later, and six thousand miles away I receive a text message:

Sorry to say our friend died this morning in hospital. RIP

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Notes:
1 Although written in the first person, this paper would not have been possible without constant support and invaluable input from my colleague, friend and co-author, Brian Van Wyk. Many thanks also to numerous colleagues and fellow writing workshop participants for encouragement and advice on earlier drafts, and to the anonymous peer reviewers for their feedback.
2 It should be pointed out that while I might generally consider myself to be middle class, it has been argued that for those living in reduced circumstances such as we encounter here, my status would be seen as considerably higher.
3 This work arises from a 30 month ethnographic study conducted in the West Coast Region of South Africa’s Western Cape Province – ‘Understanding barriers to access and adherence to antiretroviral treatment in the Western Cape’. The study was funded by a Global Health Research Award (GHRA) from the Health Research Board and Irish Aid, with additional support from the Combat Diseases of Poverty Consortium (CDPC). I am grateful also for the support of the staff at the School of Public Health at University of the Western Cape (UWC) where I was based while in South Africa.
Audience-related Phenomenological Multi-vocality or Multi-perspectives: Cultural Landscaping of Dai People

Yan Hu*

Abstract: This article begins with a brief introduction of the official ethnic identification of Dai people in China in the 1950s which provides a historical background for the debates among scholars (Harrell 1990, Li 2002, etc.). This is followed by a comparatively detailed analysis of ideological changes from ‘Tianxia’ ideology to the framework of a nation-state implied in the identification—the long-term historical dimension missing from these critiques. By reflecting on local voices and the relation between scholars, subjects and audience, an open conclusion on the possibility of multi-vocal writing will be reached.

Key words: Dai people, ethnic identification, Tianxia, multi-vocality

Introduction:
The national ethnic identification carried out in the 1950s and the cultural landscaping in a nation-state framework afterwards can be viewed as one of the most important measures to incorporate the frontier people into the modern nation-state, whether culturally or politically. Then how should we evaluate this large-scale ethnic identification? This will be explored through a discussion of the cultural landscaping of the Dai people living on the Sino-Burmese border.

By reframing the official ethnic identification in China from different perspectives by different actors, I argue that the phenomenon of diversified interpretations is historically existential (Heidegger 1927) and hence audience-related phenomenological multi-vocal. It is phenomenological because the interpretations are variable accordingly with those situated actors. Different actors appropriate their social and cultural resources interactively (in response to different people) and intentionally (with different aims and in different contexts) (Jackson 2005). Therefore, all these different explanations are multi-vocal. As a result, all the actors are landscaping Dai people or Dai culture. As Handler (1984) argues in his exploration of nationalism and cultural objectification in Quebec, no ‘authentic’ culture can be documented and culture should be understood as the thing itself. All attempts to grasp a culture are semiotic and creative. The discussion also leads to briefly reflecting on the role of scholarship as well as exploring whether in one text, contextualised multi-vocality can be achieved by putting different voices together, being ‘things as they are’ (ibid.), instead of the out-of-context multi-vocality discussed by Strathern (1987). In the article ‘Out of Context: The Persuasive Fictions of Anthropology’, she asks whether postmodern writing is a return to out-of-context Frazerian fiction style. By analysing why the once popular out-of-context multi-vocality is out of fashion, she implies that fashionable subjective writing is temporary. I agree that it is the cultural comparison with the progressive framework made Frazerian fiction out of date. This is in the same vein as Gupta and Ferguson’s (1992) criticism of Marcus and Fisher’s (1986) idea of ‘anthropology as a cultural critique’ as a kind of clearly-cut cultural comparison. But I am wondering whether contextualised multi-vocality in a writing or text can be worthy of exploring.

The article begins with a brief introduction of identification of Dai people in the 1950s which provides a historical background for the debates among scholars discussed in the following parts consecutively. This is followed by a comparatively detailed analysis of ideological changes from ‘Tianxia’ ideology to the framework of a nation-state implied in the identification. By reflecting on local voices and the relation between scholars, subjects and audience, an open conclusion on the possibility of multi-vocal writing will be reached.

Official identification and definition: One of 56 Minority Ethnic Groups and ‘中华民族多元一体格局(the Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation)’

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the national government spent a lot of human power, financial power and material resources to carry out the official identification, which is a work involving time-consuming investigation, statistics, classification and
identification. Unprecedentedly, teams of scholars have carried out detailed investigations by going to different areas and collecting comprehensive data about the origins, distributions, languages, and other social and historical information. By 1990, 56 ethnic groups had been recognized by the national government (Huang and Shi 2005). Since then, China has been described in the ideological discourse as a big family composed of 56 ethnic groups, an integration and reconfiguration of all the ethnic groups within a framework designed and instructed by the national power. Such an ideology was best represented in the phrase of ‘中华民族多元一体格局’ (the Pattern of Diversity in Unity of the Chinese Nation) proposed by Fei Xiao Tong in the 1990s and soon accepted by the national government.

The Dai people are one of the 56 ethnic groups classified and defined by the national government in this process (Figure 1). Afterwards, ‘Dai Zu (傣族, lit. Dai ethnic group)’ became a term including a large group of people distributed in more than thirty counties across Yunnan province (Figure 2). Behind this unified term, there are diversified self-ascribed subcategories bordering with Thai, Laos and Shan (Table 1). In addition, two categories, ‘Han Dai (旱傣)’ and ‘Shui Dai (水傣)’, are still widely used by locals, though the two names were classified by Han people before the 1950s according to the closeness to Han culture.

Different approaches by western scholars to Chinese ethnic politics:

Following this large-scale official identification of ethnic groups as well as the ethnic policy, different analytical approaches have been adopted by western anthropologists after the 1980s when they got access to Mainland China.

Among them, Harrell (1995) argues that, by linking a ‘civilizing project’ to ideological dominance, the cultural politics of the Chinese Communist Party do not differ much from Confucianism because the centre-periphery relationship between Han and ethnic minorities has changed little. Harrell (1990) also argues that ‘minzu’ is a term uniquely produced under Chinese despotism and manipulated by the elites in the central regime to objectify ‘others’, that is, the ethnic minorities. Hence it cannot be translated into nationality or ethnic group, as ‘ethnic group’ is a subjective term which emerged in western ordinary language which entails openness and mobility in its connotation. Similarly, Gladney (1996, 1998) argues that the ethnic minorities, such as Chinese Muslims Hui, were the ‘other’ to Han constructed by the Communist Party in the 1950s. In his opinion, through the construction, the Han people become unified and define themselves against marginalized ethnic minorities. His argument is based on the analysis of Sun Yet-siu’s nationalist ideology made in his early revolutionary career. And even further, Gladney argues that Han people have been constructed by the government by questioning the obvious variance of Han people distributed in different areas and casting doubt on how Hui can become one ethnic group as they live across a vast area in different ways.

Such nationalist and cultural critiques have been widely used by the scholars who study ethnic tourism popular in the 21st century. They hold similar standpoints although they propose different terms. For example, Kaup (2000) uses ‘creating the Zhuang’ to criticise the ethnic politics in China; Schein (2000), through studying Miao people, views Chinese ethnic politics as an ‘internal orientalism’ and Litzinger (2000) directly uses ‘other Chinas’ after doing research on Yao people.

In short, in their view, the national ethnic identification in China is a process of redefinition and cultural landscaping intended to incorporate frontier people into the modern nation-state. By doing so unequal centre-periphery relations were formed between the central area and the borderlands, between the Han people and the ethnic minorities.

Implication of the dualism between civic/the Western and ethnic/the Eastern

In response to such overwhelming cultural criticism, Li (2002), who took part in the identification, argues that the identification is scientific and objective and it also takes the actual conditions into consideration. In addition, Li has responded that both ‘minzu’ and ‘zuqun’ (the Chinese translation of ethnic group) are alien (also refer to Hao 2002e). So the untranslatability of the terms argued by Harrell is not applicable to the Chinese case.

Pan (2009) goes further to defend the identification by criticising that the post-colonialist deconstruction of ethnic identification is theoretically a misunderstanding caused by the dualism of ‘civic/Western’ and ‘ethnic/Eastern’—viewing the western society as civic one while evaluating the ‘exotic’ eastern countries by use of ethnicity (cf. Gellner 1969, 1983). He points out that the identification is politically a negotiation and inter-recognition between the nation and the ethnic groups. In particular, for the first time all the ethnic minorities share the ‘equal’ political status recognized by the central government. Furthermore, by comparing the identification of American Indians carried out by the USA government, he questions why those scholars have assumed that an ethno-nationalist discourse is adopted in China, instead of a civic-nationalist approach; whether the measures adopted by the American government are more ethnically objective; and why the identification of American Indians is
viewed to be politics of recognition while it is assumed as politics of otherness in China. In his conclusion he asks whether this is a way to reify a mysterious hegemonic China by ignoring or even wiping out the mixing of both ethnic and civic nationalism—a way to orientalise China.4

It can be argued that the national government of the People's Republic of China showed their respect during the identification process when compared with other powers. Those scholars were required to respect locals' self-ascription.5 Before the ethnic identification, Dai people were called 'Baiyi', an offensive name, by the central regime and Han people.6 It is recorded that 'Dai' was adopted with the agreement of Dai people themselves, and it is true that this word is being used by the Dai people to call or categorize themselves in Dai language even today.

**Ideological changes implied in the ethnic identification: 'Tianxia' ideology to modern nation-state**

I want to point out that what is missing from these critiques is the long-term historical dimension making those researchers neglect the forced abandonment of the previous regime and the ideological base—'Tianxia (天下) ideology' and its administrative institution. It cannot be hard to get the point that if the ethnic politics are viewed merely from the non-contextualized cultural perspectives disregarding the real situation that China had to face domestically and internationally at that time, it will facilitate orientalising China as an exotic area because the ethnic identification can be easily viewed as a political manipulation for the convenience of governance. Take Gladney's analysis for instance. He quoted Sun's words out of context by claiming that Sun Yet-siu's nationalism is instrumental, but why? What is the connection between Sun's idea and ethnic identification? And why was the ethnic identification carried out? These are crucial questions to be answered in order to understand the necessity and complexity of ethnic identification. The answer can only be attained by resorting to the historical approach.

Before the opium wars in late 19th century, the relationship between the central regime and the frontiers can be described as 'the tying-up/binding policy (羁绊政策Jiban Zhengce in pinyin)' or 'the subordinate institution (朝贡体系Chaogong Tixi)', which can be traced back to Xia Dynasty several thousand years ago. The cultural or ideological domination based on 'xia yi zhi bian', literally 'the differentiation between the central regime and less civilized frontier people' (Tang 2005, Yang 2010, etc.), is implied in such policies. Governed by this ideology, those who accepted central civilisation could become Han people.7 So 'minzu' in China was dynamic and flexible with cultural connotation taking central civilisation as the criterion of the inclusive boundary and inter-recognition.—Here in a sense historical cases challenged the assumption of Harrell in his idea about the fixed connotation of 'minzu' discussed before. Correspondingly, there are different relevant terms such as 'tianxia (天下)', 'guojia (国家)', and 'heshan (河山)'. Among them, 'guojia' is similar to 'nation', 'country', 'dynasty' or 'regime' while 'heshan' is somewhat like 'territory'. But 'tianxia' is hard to find a similar term for in English. If translated literally, 'tian' means 'sky' or 'heaven' and 'xia' means 'under', so together 'tianxia' is 'under the heaven'. It has different connotations. It can be viewed as a kind of 'imaginary empire' and it also represent a moral (national, in a broad sense) culture or a civilisation. It transcends 'guojia', meaning 'nation' or 'dynasty', although sometimes 'tianxia' can also refer to a country. Gu Yanwu, a famous Chinese thinker living in the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, once said that dynasty could be changed or the nation could be subjugated, but 'tianxia' should not be destroyed and everyone alive should have a duty to defend 'tianxia'. From the linguistic level, it is clear that a political regime in ancient China is entangled with cultural dominance which involves the justification of a new regime as well as a certain kind of inter-recognition. Such a feature is kept to today until the regime was forced to change to modern nation-state and all frontier areas had to become borderlands.

More specifically in Qing Dynasty, the tying-up/binding and subordination policy is called Tusi system, which was formally established in Yuan Dynasty in 13th century, improved in Ming Dynasty and further developed in Qing Dynasty. On the frontiers a Tusi is the highest leader governing and is formally appointed by the emperor of the central regime who confers on each Tusi an official seal, a letter of appointment and the formal attire. In this way, the central regime recognized the legitimacy of the Tusi, who could enjoy certain autonomy to rule their domains in their own customs and regulations. In return, the Tusi admitted his subordinate status to and remained the tributary of the central regime. Like in all feudalist organisations, only the eldest sons could inherit the titles of Tusi.8 (Fang 1987, Wu 1988, Gong 1992, specific for Dai areas refer to Li 1955, Jiang 2003, and Huang 2008)

However, since Burma became a British colony in late 19th century, there have been many deliberate provocations by British soldiers in the territory administered by Tusi in Southwest China. These resulted in different unequal treaties between Britain and late Qing Dynasty until the independence of Myanmar and the signing of Sino-Burmese Border Treaty in 1960. Historical records have shown
numerous events or wars on the frontier and the relevant agreements conceding large tracts of land for more than one hundred years. ‘Save the nation and the people (救国救民)’ and how to save were the main concern of the elites and scholars in China. Under such circumstances, scholars began to pay attention to the frontier areas and some of them began to get different people living in this vast land united by the use of the ‘weapon’ of nationalism. In other words, it was imperative to integrate and reconfigure diversified ethnic groups within the bureaucratic institution of a nation-state framework. In particular, at that time the border issues had not been solved because of the burden of history as well as the interference in the Cold war.10

Such incorporation initiated in the reign of Kuomingtang government which established ‘Shezhi Ju(设治局, the Bureau of Administering borderlands)’ and tried to abolish the Tusi system. But it failed until the 1960s after the Chinese Communist Party entered Yunnan province in the 1950s and took a series of measures to abolish the Tusi system and establish local government, thus changing the frontiers into borderlands. All these cultural, political and economic measures together were called ‘Democratic Reform’. They included the stationing of working teams in different areas where mainly ethnic minorities lived; the sending of Central Missions to different border areas; the carrying out of Peaceful Land Reform; and the establishment of Democratic Coalition Governments for Minority Ethnic Groups (‘Minzu Lianhe Zhengfu’ in pinyin) and Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities.

The records kept in the archives of present local government clearly indicated that the aim of the reform was to establish the new power and demolish the old institution by arousing the ordinary people to action with the ideological propaganda, education and effective organization. The reform was very successful. In the spring of 1954 many farmers refused to pay rents to Tusi in Dehong area. Kan Jing Tai, the last Tusi of Mengmao, was so shocked by this event – as the base of the Tusi system was shaken – that he stated to the officers of the county party committee of Ruili that he supported the land reform and would collect no more rents. At the beginning, though, he had felt reluctant and distressed because he was worried that the Tusi system, inherited for 18 generations of more than 600 years, would end by his hand. Unavoidably, history bore out his fear—the Tusi system was abolished—its inevitable ending in the incorporation. In the end, Kan Jing Tai was redeployed as the county magistrate of Ruili County, Deputy Governor of Dehong Autonomous Prefecture and Member of CPPCC successively after Dehong Dai People and Jingpo People Autonomy District was established in 1953. There were also Tusi who went to live in Burma. Nevertheless, a new power and institution has been established.

In sum, politically speaking, the creation of the Chinese Nation (中华民族) within the nation-state framework was eventually achieved after this large scale identification. And consequently ethnic consciousness, national identity as well as transnational identity coexisted accordingly. Seen from above, it is obvious that ethnic identification and the creation of national identity are the requirements for the transition from the empire to the nation-state after the Opium Wars. It was both forced by the outside forces from the mid-19th century as well as fulfilled by the agency of Chinese people, particularly politicians like Sun Yet-sun.

Ethnic identification as a text: Local voices and phenomenological understanding of the cultural landscaping

As I pointed out above, because of the instrumentally negotiable boundary of the ethnic group (Barth 1969) the connotation of ‘minzu’ is dynamic in history. Before the ethnic identification, ‘minzu’ could be an open and inclusive term whose connotation has been changing through history, which challenges the assumption of the post-colonial critique.12 However, on the other hand, in fact the post-colonial critique implies a dilemma caused in practice and faced by the government after the national ethnic identification. The temporary cultural landscape at that time of ethnic identification is recorded in the official writing, described or visualised in many writings or films, forming stereotypes of the ethnic groups. And this ethnic difference within national framework has been overstressed and reproduced (Yashin 2007). As time went on, it became an out-of-date fixed framework, particularly, in the context of globalisation characterised by frequent mobility and entangling multi-scapes (Appadurai 1990). Hence it became a problem vulnerable to critique—a fixing cannot reflect the real situation.

Then what is the situation of Dai people in practice? In the field I found diversified voices. I learned that the Chinese character for Dai, i.e. ‘傣’, was created by Premier Zhou Enlai in the 1950s and it has become a unique code for those people in Chinese territory, together with other measures such as language reform distinguishing from those on the continuum on the other sides of the borders (Moerman 1965). As remarked by a local Dai scholar interviewed at his home on 16 October 2008, ‘The idea or ideology of the nation-state along with the border was imposed on local Dai people through a series of political movements.’ Some of Dai villagers were still hanging the picture of Chairman Mao in a prominent place in the living
room. And some Dai officials told Dai friends coming from other areas the rumour created in the 1950s or 1960s about how the ghost of ancient Dai King Zao Wu Ding would fight against a company commander of the first People's Liberation Army stationed in Ruili. (Similar stories could also be found among other ethnic groups. cf. Mueggler 2001). There were also villagers who praised the security brought by the Communist government and told me that before the 1950s they had to go to bed with a knife or shotgun in case bad people broke into their houses. Locals noticed the institutional change and viewed it from different perspectives as well as adapted themselves to the rapid political and social change.

This kind of adaptation and reconstitution is also reflected in locals' hybrid identities composed of their ethnic identity, national identity and transnational identity. In the investigation, I found that Dai villagers had a strong sense of belonging to their village instead of the border as shown in their religious activities. Also, the local Dai people identified more strongly with those living closely with them in Burmese territories than with those so-called 'Han Dai'. The categorisation of 'Han Dai' and 'Shui Dai' once used by Han people now was adopted by Dai people to judge their own acquisition of Dai culture and customs. For geographical reasons, after the Cultural Revolution Han Dai villagers in Manshi had no idea of many customs, which were alive only in elders' memory and oral history. Furthermore, more changes in different aspects have appeared and will emerge among young Dai people who are under influence of commercialisation and urbanisation in Ruili.

When comparing local voices and agency with the scholars' debates, it is not hard to find that local diversified opinions were the basis of different articles. The approaches of post-colonial criticism have overstressed the agency of the government and nationalist elites while neglecting local agency implied in Pan's critique, as well as the historical dimension. Ironically, my original endeavour from a historical perspective is framing the connotation of 'minzu' and defining Dai people, a dilemma caused by the phenomenological feature of writing in the time being, particularly in anthropological study (Jackson 1996). Some questions arise if reflecting on the relationship among the researcher, the subjects and the audience: whether all these interpretations represent Dai people themselves? Or do they represent the voices of particular interest group who are appropriating the 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983)? Or do the voices reflect the power of researcher and writer, an academic phenomenon criticised by Writing Culture? All the answers can be both 'Yes' and 'No'. And 'anthropology as cultural critique' (Marcus and Fisher1986) might be an answer. It is true that the post-colonial criticism has inspired the communication between scholars who hold different views and is helpful for retrospection. Two problems emerge here. First, cultural comparison, a way of otherness, is implied in this approach which takes a singular culture as a comparative unit or a problematic 'spatialized understanding of cultural difference' as its presumption (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Second, as some Chinese scholars have pointed out, each perspective is like a part of an elephant felt by a blind man in the classic Indian parable. One-sided emphasis can be placed without comprehension, making the natives feel over-interpreted, blurred or even unacceptable—a question of whether being partially true can present the whole truth. (cf. Ge 2002)13

**Multi-vocality or multi-perspectives in context: the role of the researcher**

Recalling the different responses among Dai people themselves facing different audiences in different situations,14 which is too situational changeable to be summarised in one perspective, I realise that the interpretation by differently situated actors should also be audience-related multi-vocality or multi-perspectives. Even in debates on China's ethnic politics, different authors target different audiences, though potentially larger audiences are there: national identification was responding to the political reality as well as challenging the inadequate ideology; post-colonialism was criticising an outdated definition and nationalist objectification; Chinese scholars were communicating with those western scholars as well as criticising the Chinese scholars who proposed to cancel 'minzu'. I propose to add the historical dimension as I feel the critique is merely for critique's sake if not contextualised. Therefore the phenomenon of diversified interpretations is historically existential (Heidegger 1927) —a kind of contextualization, and hence phenomenological audience-related. As a result, all the actors are engaged in landscaping Dai people or Dai culture.

In a sense, different interpretations reflect the subjectivity, self-consciousness or background of situated actors; even avoiding subjectivity or pursuing objectivity on purpose is a kind of subjectivity. Furthermore, if viewed again in a dynamic way, the production of knowledge, specifically here about the event of ethnic identification, is in a process of (academic) accumulation of interpretation and interaction, the way trans-cultural dialogue and understanding entail. But whether it is the scholar's responsibility to unfold the multi-vocality or multi-perspectives in a text to show the different subjective situations or context of the actors, instead of the out-of-context Frazerian fiction (Strathern 1987), whose
progressive theme and categorisation made the fiction itself out of fashion, seems worthy of exploring.

The concept of ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) becomes problematic, as the question of whether there really is a so-called thick description might arise if multi-vocality is taken as existing. Even in Geertz’s own description of cockfighting, he mentioned that people had different explanations of the same ritual (as a text). What was the thick description? Can all contextualised multi-vocality or multi-perspectives, particularly in this contemporary intertwined world, be put together in a writing or text as ‘things as they are’ and hence be viewed as a ‘thick description’?

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Notes:

1 I would like to thank Keith Egan and Fiona Murphy for their organisation of the Writing Retreat 2010 in Wicklow. I am grateful to Professor Lisette Josephides and PhD candidate Paul McCreary of Queen’s University Belfast for both their kind assistance in linguistics and valuable comments and to the anonymous referees for their constructive comments which helped to improve this paper.

2 The endeavour had begun far before the 1950s. Jiang Ying Liang and other scholars had been sent to investigate different ethnic groups of frontier people by the Kuomingtang government. Even before them, officials or scholars had volunteered to collect materials and had written geographical and historical books in the late Qing Dynasty after the Opium Wars.

3 Gellner believes nationalism only appeared in the modern society which implies this kind of dualism. Also refer to the discussion about his dualism between agrarian society and modern society which provides the basis for his opinion about the relationship between nationalism and modernity.

4 Similarly, Shulman (2004) argues in the Ukraine case that national identities are embedded in a broader set of beliefs and policy preferences, forming ‘national identity complexes.’

5 Premier Zhou asked them to keep in mind that they should pay for Han Chauvinism in the past on behalf of all the Han people, so they should psychologically be ready to be treated with hostility due to the historical estrangement between the minorities and Han people and they should show their respect in return. (Refer to The United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee. 1984. Selection from Zhou Enlai on the United Front, Beijing: Renmin Publishing House)

6 ‘Yi (夷)’ in the west, together with ‘man (蛮)’ in
the south, ‘rong (戎)’ in the east and ‘di (狄)’ in the north, were referred to the so-called ‘uncivilized’ ethnic minorities living on the frontiers by the central regime.  

The ideology of the central civilisation was firstly established in Han Dynasty. The ruling status of Confucianism in education was first recognised by the ruler, although Taoism and other thoughts were integrated into the system of the central civilisation. This system has developed in different dynasties to strengthen their dominance with the help of the cultural measures.

‘Tianxia’ ideology is not equal to Han culture or the regime ruled by Han people. As discussed above, this ideology is higher than Han culture or Han regime, argued by Gu Yanwu. Rather it is a kind of value system, although in some cases, it was related to the identity to Han or Han culture, particularly when a Han regime was taken over by a new regime of other ethnic group, for example, Yuan Dynasty (Mongolian), Qing Dynasty (Manchu). In their governance, the ruler also adopted the central civilisation to carry out their cultural dominance. And among historians, the lasting debates about the Han culture and Manchu ruler have reflected the complexity (Refer to Yang 2010).

In other words, only when the rulers were Han people, what is Han was closely connected with this ideology as the central civilisation was viewed as Han culture. The central regime would recognise other ethnic groups as Han if they accepted the dominance of the central regime, were familiar with Confucianism, behaved according the etiquette and customs defined by the central regime and were willing to be Han.

In the daily life, the interaction between different groups normally led to Chinesization if those people lived in Han areas.

In history, the most famous case is the reform of North Wei Xiao Wu Emporer of Xianbei people, who voluntarily adopted Han customs.

In this way, Tusi became officials appointed by the imperial court ranking from level 6 as the lowest to level 3 as the highest. If a Tusi was too young, one of his uncles would be elected as ‘Dai Ban’ (literally ‘commission agent’ or regent) to run things until he came of age. Every Tusi and his family were forming the ruling class.

They were ten Tusi in present Dehong area: Mengmao Tusi, Manshi Tusi, Nandian Tusi, Ganya Tusi, Zhanda Tusi, Longchuan Tusi, Mengmao Tusi, Zhefang Tusi, Husa Tusi, Lasa Tusi, and Mengban Tusi, according to History of the Qing.

And the surname for each Tusi family is as follow: Fang for Mangshi Tusi, Duo for both Zhefang Tusi and Longchuan Tusi, Kan for Mengmao Tusi, Si for Lianshan Tusi, Dao (previous Xi) for Ganya Tusi, Diao (previously Gong) for Nandian Tusi, Meng for Zhanxi Tusi and Xian for Nuijiang Tusi (Zhao 2008).

9 This endeavour begins from Lin Zexu who launched an opium suppression campaign and his friend Wei Yuan. Later the elites mainly composed of officials and scholars launched a serious of movements or rebellions successively in different stages: Taiping Rebellion from 1850 to 1864; Self-Strengthening Movement or Yang Wu Movement in the period from 1861 to 1895; Wuxu Reform or the Hundred Days’ Reform to advocate constitutional monarchy in 1898; 1911 Revolution by Kuomingtang; May Fourth Movement; and then the WWII. Besides the officials and scholars, the grass-roots also launched many risings against imperialist invaders. So it is clear that due to the outside invasion, the whole society of China has been filled with strong sense of crisis.

10 Zhou Enlai played an important role in the diplomacy and the drawing of borders between China and some neighbouring countries. Refer to Records of Zhou Enlai Diplomacy (Fu 2003) for more backgrounds and relevant details.

11 ‘The Chinese Nation’ is a term including all Chinese people of different ethnic background in China and overseas. It was firstly proposed around 1902 by Liang Qichao, a famous scholar in China.

12 When ‘ethnic group’ was introduced to Chinese academia, a heated discussion about whether it could be translated into ‘minzu’ in Chinese was aroused (refer to Pan Jiao 1995, 2003; Nari 2000, Hao 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d, 2002e, etc.). At present, ‘ethnic group’ can be translated into ‘minzu’ or ‘zuqun’ depending on the context.

13 Ge (2002) compares foreign scholars’ works on China study to looking at the moon through a curtain, though they might be insightful.

14 Particularly in the case the official told the Dai visitors about the story of the King’s ghost, arousing a sympathetic feeling among them. This interpretation in local memory existed as a kind of hidden transcript (Scott 1990).

Figures and Tables:

The map is modified according to Dai Distribution Map http://www3.nccu.edu.tw/~g1259501/maps/map_Tai.htm (accessed in July 2011).

There are some groups of less population, such as Daisai(傣赛), Daika(傣卡) and Shan people in India, etc., omitted in this table which is made according to Jiang (1983), Xing (1989), Yang (2000), and Zhou (2001).

Table 1: Distribution of different sub categories of Dai people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
<th>Areas</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>傣泐</td>
<td>Daile</td>
<td>Xipshuangbanna ([Thailand])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>傣那</td>
<td>Daina</td>
<td>Dehong ([Myanmar])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>傣担</td>
<td>Daidan</td>
<td>Jinping ([Laos])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>傣绷</td>
<td>Daibeng</td>
<td>Ruili, Gengma, Lancang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>傣端</td>
<td>Daiduan</td>
<td>Jinping ([Laos, Vietnam, Thailand])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>傣雅</td>
<td>Daiya</td>
<td>Xinping, Yuanjiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>傣友</td>
<td>Daiyou</td>
<td>Yuanyang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beijing: SinoMaps Press.

Figure 1: Dai in China

Figure 2: Yunnan Province, with diagrammatic sketch of the location of Ruili
Wicklow Reflection

In June 2010, I had the pleasure of leading an ethnographic writing workshop (organized by Keith Egan and Fiona Murphy) in Co. Wicklow, Ireland. Over the course of two days, ten doctoral students from Queens University, Belfast, and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, workshopped papers that broached questions of how to write anthropology in ways that did justice to one’s interlocutors, satisfied academic protocols, and communicated ethnographic understandings to audiences both in and beyond the academy. That our conversations proved as edifying as they were enjoyable was partly because we had ample time to get acquainted with one another’s research and writing. But our depth of engagement was clearly facilitated by having time to get to know one another, sharing anecdotes about our lives and aspirations in the course of long walks in the surrounding countryside, excursions to the coast, and evening meals in the farmstead’s dining room. I have had similar experiences, teaching ethnographic writing workshops in the Scottish Highlands, and my experience in Wicklow confirmed the intellectual value of spending time with peers and students in places removed from seminar rooms and quotidian pressures. Not only is it beneficial to share one’s work-in-progress with others in a relaxed setting; it is therapeutic to do this in a landscape or on a farm, allowing the work of the mind to be affected by such things as a ruined abbey in a dark green valley, the coconut odour of flowering gorse, a shingle beach, or local talk of faeries and hauntings. Ireland gave me a strong sense of the inescapable and sometimes oppressive presence of the past, and reminded me of the changes that may be wreaked in us when we retreat from the world or draw back from the work that preoccupies our minds. In such spaces and at such times, we may get to know ourselves in a new way and become more mindful of those who have gone before – the ancestors, precursors, and path-breakers who created the conditions under which we, in our turn, hope to make some small gains in writing ethnographies that deepen our understanding of the complex histories, biographies, passions, faiths and worldviews that inform the lifeworlds around us, so that despite the difficulty at the end of the day in claiming any conclusive knowledge our endeavors have created a space of conviviality and affirmed our common clay.

Michael Jackson
October 2010
Book Reviews


*Anthropology Off the Shelf* is the product of a series of panels held at the annual American Anthropological Association conference between the years 1999 and 2005. The panels offered anthropologists a space to talk freely about desires, fears and inspirations arising during their writing processes. It was ultimately decided to produce the present text, based on the panel discussions. The book consists of a collection of individual essays addressing whether or not the models anthropologists use for ‘framing, illustrating and contextualising information facilitate or hinder the well informed general reader of non-fiction’ in their acquisition of knowledge (Vesperi and Waterson 2009: 2).

At its core *Anthropology Off the Shelf* aims to encourage anthropologists to positively invest in their work and to assert themselves as writers. The text, comprised of eighteen original articles, does this by examining the reasons why anthropologists write: to tell untold stories, to change policies, to forward their careers etc, whilst also revealing the inspirations, fears, desires and problems many face as both writers and anthropologists.

The wide range of topics including racism, poverty and sexism discussed in the text enables the reader to gain an understanding of both why and how anthropologists write: to tell untold stories, to change policies, to forward their careers etc, whilst also revealing the inspirations, fears, desires and problems many face as both writers and anthropologists.

The section entitled *Creation* concentrates on the importance of language when writing while simultaneously addressing problems and fears held by authors. The articles challenge the norms of academic writing by advocating that authors disregard academic language, encouraging writers to use their own voice and to write about areas of passionate interest. This section also addresses the fear of writing with ones own voice. Fordham explores this in her essay *Write-ous Indignation: Black Girls Dilemmas of Cultural Domination and the Struggle to Speak the Skin We Are In*. Here she describes her struggle to become comfortable with owning and developing her voice as ‘a black girl’ in her academic writing (Fordham 2009:91). In comparison Behar admits her fear and worry of her readers finding things that she didn’t know she had included. She comments ‘I worry about how it is that meanings, even meanings we approve of, get inscribed in our texts independently of our will as writers’ (Behar 2009: 110).

The last section, *Reception*, focuses on the politics of the audiences’ reaction while reminding anthropologists that in their role as writers, they hold the lives of real people in their words (McClaurin 2009). It addresses the importance of framing the stories that are to be told and using appropriate language in order to engage with the desired audience. The section also highlights the potential for negative receptions to certain works due to topics being too close to home, while also drawing attention to the problems created through negative opinions of anthropologists. Michael di Leonardo in his article *The Trope of the Pith Helmet: America’s Anthropology. Anthropology’s America*, elaborates on the latter issue while discussing the problem of typecasting the anthropologist. In contrast these negative impacts are however juxtaposed with the positive influences of activist research and publications with so-called cohort-based communities.

*Anthropology Off the Shelf* ultimately encourages the writer to write about ‘what sets their hearts aflame’ and to engage with accessible language rather than ‘academic dialect’ thereby creating a more
accessible anthropology (Nordstrom 2009). The text constantly reminds us of the potential power of publications to both positively and negatively impact thought processes and opinions. Unlike other works on writing, the text prompts anthropologists to use their own voice, show their emotional connection with their work and to reveal their inspirations, desires, worries and fears in their writings. In addition it challenges anthropologists to re-think how anthropological writing is taught within academic institutions.

In a text which itself encourages accessibility it is problematic to encounter a number of chapters which are highly jargonised. In some instances one is also left wondering what the point of an essay is within the wider context of the book’s supposed aim. All in all however Anthropology Off the Shelf is an invaluable text for anthropologists and ethnographers whose desire is not only to write but to reach a wider audience and achieve a greater social impact.

SARAH WALSH
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Peter Collins and Anselma Gallinat (eds),

The Ethnographic Self as Resource is an important contribution to debates on the nature and presence of the self, memory, and experience in ethnographic recall, fieldwork and writing. It is a rich, geographically diverse collection of essays which offers both a theoretically and empirically grounded analysis on the relationship between personal memories and experience in the professional life of the anthropologist. Hitherto many collections have addressed issues of auto ethnography, self reflexivity and anthropology at home, this text, however, travels beyond the limits of earlier debates, and comes highly recommended as a work which translates the personal concerns, stories, experiences, and emotions of anthropologists as they conduct fieldwork and write up their ethnographies. What is striking about this text is the profound appreciation for the layered context-dependent nature of fieldwork, a space where the professional and personal collide. Reminiscent and often calling upon the important work of Professor Michael Jackson, this text should be compulsory reading for every undergraduate, postgraduate and professional anthropologist. What is most impressive about this collection is the honesty with which its contributors write, allowing the reader a chance to experience the reflections, sometimes troubled, sometimes humourous, sometimes poignant of anthropologists as they wade through the often difficult waters of field encounters.

Divided into three sections which deal with the issue of anthropology at home, memory and temporality the book spans a number of fieldwork sites. The reader is brought to fieldsites in Germany, Croatia, rural England, Norway, Northern Ireland, and the US. All essays are well written and the book as a whole is laid out in an instructive manner. The authors speak about and practice ethnographic experimentation in their writing, showing the multi-relational construction of fieldwork, and bringing into sharp relief the troubled relationship between anthropology as academic discipline and the shifting, often conflicted role of the personal in the art of fieldwork.

The first section ‘Being Self and the Other: Anthropologists at Home’ posits some important questions. Anselma Gallinat asks if it is possible for the anthropologist to be one’s own informant, and opens the book with an important reflection on the journey of the native anthropologist. Following on from this the issue of positionality is interrogated by Lynette Sikic Micanovic, both of these issues are interwoven in Anne Larsen’s essay on her lifelong professional relationship to a fieldsite in rural Norway. Nigel Rapport in a memorable and often humourous piece ends this section with a reflection on the vagaries of fieldwork encounters and the question of ethics. Section two ‘Working on/with/through memory’ is critical to a number of debates, not least the question of collective and social memory. Essays develop important arguments on language (Alison Philips), bodily memory and dance (Jonathan Skinner), Identity and memory (Davis and Davis), Children’s sport (Dyck), and gardening (Jane Nadal Klein). The final section ‘Ethnographic Selves out in Time’ addresses the important relationship that anthropologists have to their fieldsite and research participants across time. Given the longitudinal nature of the ethnographic enterprise this section provides insight into the complexities and entanglements of the professional and personal life journeys of anthropologists and their research participants. Tamara Kohn neatly packages some critical issues into her lovely (and indeed, sometimes poignant) reflection on her earlier fieldwork. Serendipity is a key thread which runs through this and Vered Amits elegant reflection on migration and movement. Simon Coleman moves some of the debate into a reflection on the nature of fieldwork and recall when writing, positing teamwork as a way out of some of the difficulties created by the often subjective, intensely personal nature of field research. This section ends with Peter Collins
Ana Maria Forero Angel and Luca Simeone

I wish to extend my gratitude to Dr. Chiara Garattini, Dr. Mark Maguire, Anthony Kelly and Alex O’Connell for their stimulating conversation and invaluable insight which contributed to the writing of this review.

Beyond Ethnographic Writing (BEW) was compiled by social scientists concerned by the trajectory of ethnographic representation, and its implications for the discipline of anthropology, since the publication of Writing Culture (Clifford & Marcus 1986) and all that the book elicited. It celebrates the developments which came from the 1986 classic but also expresses concern for the resulting reification of the rhetorics of writing and its continuation into the present-day. BEW asserts that this fixation on the textual stagnates and constrains anthropology in dwelling too much on classical ethnographic writing and remaining blind to, or at worst dismissive of, alternative possibilities; ones arguably more apt in a world which is changing in how it represents itself.

The book addresses differing means of communication which the authors consider neglected by anthropology, such as various forms of visual art, installation art and performative art. It discusses the artistry inherent in writing itself and asks in what way other forms of representation are different, similar or even more appropriate in representing particular subject matter. BEW commends Design Anthropology for its development as a multi-disciplinary approach and fashioning for itself a response to the demands of industry and enquiry, whilst being mindful of the contemporary and conscious of the traditional. Curatorial Anthropology is described as a method by which art and academia come together in the crafting of ethnographies by careful selection of pieces created by those whom they represent. Yet another commentary asserts the importance of exposing students to alternative research methods, such as those which incorporate digital and hybrid medias, during university training in order to instil early awareness and practice. Essentially, the book argues that by not moving beyond the sole pursuit of writing in its expression, anthropology continues with a notion of society which is too historical and no longer appropriate to the quotidian and transitive nature of current dimensions of identity, culture and subjectivity (Canevacci 2010: no page numbers). ‘Writing Culture concludes a cycle rather than opening a new one.’ (ibid.) and the authors wish to speak of the possibilities of what’s to come.

BEW is intended to push the limits of ethnographic representation and stimulate thought around alternative means of effective communication. It addresses the genesis of habit as well as offering other ways of elucidating ethnographic insight. Worthy of note is that all of the authors have a background in art and visual communication as well as in social science and the effect of these influences on their orientations is brought to mind. The written word has occupied a central position within cultures of knowledge-production/communication since long before the publication of Writing Culture, and visual forms of representation such as kinship trees, museum displays and photographs have been present throughout the life-time of anthropology. Hence, the attention to text may not be entirely a deliberate dismissal of the visual or performative, but instead, a phenomenon of natural makings, not least in part to academia’s obsession with the written.

BEW offers important points for reflection and endeavours such as The Center for Ethnography at University of California, Irvine, and the Anthropological Research of the Contemporary (ARC) initiative, albeit still revolving around writing, have made advances in thinking in this direction. Where do the limits lie? P.J. Harvey and her album Let England Shake (2011) provides food for thought and touches upon BEW and its push for anthropologists to break out of the confines of the self-made baroque pearl form (Marcus 2007) which contains anthropology, ethnography and expression.

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References:

Notes:
1 See http://www.socsci.uci.edu/~ethnog/theme4.htm
2 See http://anthropos-lab.net/
3 See http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/apr/24/pj-harvey-england-shake-interview, and for an online video of an interview, see http://www.nme.com/nme-video/pj-harvey-video-interview-part-two/761306408001
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