

# The IAFOR Academic Review

Volume 1 | Issue 4

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'Home'**

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Belongings in the Borderlands:  
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University, Melbourne,  
Australia

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*Royal Engineers Soldier  
Serving with the United  
Nations*

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## The IAFOR Academic Review

Volume 1 | Issue 4

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# Editorial Committee Introduction

One of the central missions of The International Academic Forum or IAFOR is to provide avenues for academics and researchers to be international, intercultural and interdisciplinary. One of the ways in which we do this is through our in-house magazine *Eye*, our various conference proceedings, our Journals, and now beginning in 2015 are our special editions of the IAFOR International Academic Review. In this edition of the IAFOR International Academic Review we the editorial committee bring together a selection of the most interesting contributions from our Conferences with respect to the discussion of the Borderlands. The Borderlands incorporates a conscious rejection of the implied inevitability and racial hierarchy of Turner's concept of the frontier. It is the contested boundaries between colonial domains and transcends the geographic, metaphoric and the historiographic. The papers selected by the editorial committee for this special edition certainly reflect the international, intercultural and interdisciplinary approach that lies at the heart of both IAFOR and Cultural Studies.

## Contributor Profiles

**Sansanee Chanarnupap** from Thaksin University, Thailand advances the argument in her paper '*Crossing the Boundaries of Home*' that belonging, loyalty and sense of attachment are not parts of a zero-sum game based on a single place. Chanarnupap considers that 'Home' is not necessarily a singular place. Home may be lived in the tension between the given (where we were born) and the chosen (where we migrated), then and now, here and there. When examining and comparing the connections between young Thai skilled migrants in Australia and at home in Thailand Chanarnupap suggests that migrants continue to retain strong bonds of emotion, loyalty and affiliation with the homeland. Ties to their homeland have led these trans-migrants to live dual lives, speak two languages, and have homes in two countries. The paper considers that when migrants live their lives across national borders, they may challenge a long-held assumption about membership and belonging. The lived experiences of Thai Australians suggest that migrants will not simply cut their ties to

homeland, nor does it take away from migrants' ability to contribute to and be loyal to their host country. Chanarnupap argues that integration of Thai migrants into Australian society, while maintaining their Thai-ness and ties to Thailand are a salutary corrective to the calls for a 'one nation, one culture, one language, one state, one citizenship' that has been part of contemporary white Australian political discourse and that the perception of having two homelands does not arguably pose a category of risk or crisis for the country of new settlement.

**Kathleen Fairbanks Rubin**, in her personal auto-ethnography *Owning Multiple and Complex Belongings in the Borderlands* recounts the process of developing her own agency out of a borderland life-world formed amongst multiple geographic sites. Fairbanks Rubin uses self-reflection and research to make explicit a functional in-between to discover the space where she belongs. Through Gloria Anzaldúa's work, literature from border and cultural studies, identity formation and her own qualitative research, Fairbanks Rubin analyzes the complexities of this space. Her presented narratives illustrate a spectrum of belonging and of alienation, unpredictable and frequent mobility, and unrecognized loss. As a child she recalls crossing the border from the U.S. to Mexico daily to attend school, learning differing cultural rules and developing a tolerance for ambiguity and living in Mexico City at age nine, she fluctuated between being Mexican and an expat. At thirteen, and nearly a Mexican teen, Fairbanks Rubin moved to the U.S and for two years added a rural, Midwestern, US identity before returning to my birthplace in urban California. This early life experience of the borderlands manifested in her adulthood, a reflexive and sudden awareness of an encompassing image: an internal convivial borderland ambiance around and between my distinct cultural identities. Fairbanks Rubin considers that this holistic redefinition gave open access to her border person identity and mindset, making available a rich and ample resource for bridging political, social, organizational and individual boundaries in all aspects of her life. Fairbanks Rubin's story and its analysis offer's an alternative to categorical identity norms with a single belonging place. She concludes that by sharing these possibilities contributes to



understanding the knowledge base, abilities and skills available to other border people and to the increasing numbers of those with multipart cultural identities in a globalized world.

In his paper *Borderlands - Exploring Commonalities and Overcoming Challenges in Sarawak* **Holger Briel** reminds us that most national borders are different from natural borders. National borders are inherited borders, but always constructed - not given - under certain historic conditions and with specific agendas in mind - economic, political, or cultural and all of these are constituted by specific narratives, which hamper transit and crossings for many others. Briel gives us the example of the border between Sarawak and Kalimantan, a place where documentation is required for many a potential traveller. Using an oral history methodology to underpin his study, Briel points out places such as Sarawak and Kalimantan highlight the importance of oral heritage when there exists a cultural setting where much history and knowledge is traded down in oral form. His presentation focuses on their existing shared inherited border, one imposed on the people living along it by foreign powers, now long gone, who had specific colonial and economic agendas and how the narratives created and analysed create counter-narratives to repeated official histories expounded on both sides of its border.

*The Hostess at the Border: An Emergent Anachronism* by **Elena Knox** of The University of New South Wales writes on the Actroid range of robotic androids was launched in Japan. Elena Knox is a media/performance artist as well as researcher whose works propose and disrupt embodiments of gender, interrogating how women are performed and perform themselves in the varied media and contexts of our age. Knox writes that despite the 1970 Mori theory of the so-called Uncanny Valley, Actroids are designed to appear and behave as humanlike as possible so as to render them as familiar as possible, thus presaging a future of belonging, of an ethically viable sociocultural identity that is also a re-inscription of stereotypically gendered cultural narratives and attributes, of the machinic 'women.' Her paper posits that as a distilled marker of cosmopolitan hospitality, 'hostesses' are also gatekeepers at borders with respect to the locally and globally marginalized and argues that hospitality is the basis of all culture, but cannot exist. In this sense, paradoxically, they are 'human'. According to Knox the routinely gendered hostess figure, capable

only of a chronic and controlled performance and embodiment, is anachronistically emerging at the vanguard of futuristic design. She is being embedded in a new episteme, as our most advanced humanoid machines are shaped in her familiar image.

**Timothy Erik Ström** a doctoral student at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia contextualizes the Borderlands within his paper *Frontiers in Google Maps: Commodification and Territory in the Borderlands*. Strom sees Google Inc., the developer of Google Maps as a very powerful multinational corporation who can generate a vast majority of their profits from advertising. He considers that Google have commodified language by creating a global linguistic market which provides the revenue stream for their expanding array of products. For example Google Maps is a hugely influential website, with apparently has one billion unique users per month. Strom's paper examines the 'borderlands' of Google Maps in two respects; firstly by examining how the company depicts disputed borders and secondly by analysing their policy and using examples from Google Maps itself, his paper problematizes how Google presents different maps to different users. Strom argues that—despite the company's claims—Google Maps are not 'objective' and 'neutral', but rather their maps are fundamentally political. From this Strom considers the 'borderlands' in a more figurative sense. He reasons that with Google Maps pushing the frontier of cyberspace further into embodied space, the corporation is therefore leading the charge in terms of reterritorialising both space and cyberspace, and thus pulling them both into the circuits of capital accumulation.

# Crossing the Boundaries of 'Home'

SANSANEE CHANARNUPAP  
THAKSIN UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

## Introduction

This paper is based on an anthropological and sociological study of migration experience focusing on the transition period during which Thai overseas students become skilled migrants, as well as the way that Thai skilled migrants live in Australia. I employed two major qualitative research techniques in my fieldwork: participant observation and in-depth interviewing from the Year 2007 to 2009. Twenty-five Thai skilled migrants in Melbourne who initially came to Australia for further education and then applied for Australian permanent residence after graduating generated the core data for the study. Thai people in Australia constitute a mixture of students, working people, housewives, and various other smaller demographic groupings. I have found that general observation and social interaction with these groups can help to contribute a much greater understanding of migration experiences in the broader Thai community in Australia. In addition to the Australian-based research I also undertook interviews of seven families of key informants in Thailand to investigate the migration experience across the geographic range of this diasporic sociality.



Photo by David Burke (Creative Commons)

## Theoretical Orientation

My theoretical perspective is framed around the notion of 'transnationalism'. I view transnational activities as involving the flows of ideas, information, people and culture, which transcend one or more nation-states. The lives of many individuals in the contemporary world increasingly transcend single localities and single nations. International migration mostly takes place within transnational social networks that link families and communities across long distances (Faist, 2000).

In *Nations Unbound*, Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Blanc define transnationalism as the processes by which migrants "forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (1994, p. 7). Transnationalism emphasises the fact that many migrants today build social fields that cross-geographic, cultural, and political borders. Migrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious, and political – that span borders are called 'trans-migrants' (Basch *et al.*, 1994, p. 7). Trans-migrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states. However, Guarnizo and Smith (1998) have insisted on the continuing significance of nation-states in understanding transnationalism. Questioning the concept of trans-migrants as unbounded, free-floating social actors, Guarnizo and Smith suggest that we underline the boundedness of transnationalism by reference to the opportunities and constraints found in particular localities where transnational practices occur. Transnational practices cannot be construed as if they were free from the constraints and opportunities that contextuality imposes.

International migration trans-nationalises both sending and receiving societies by extending relevant forms of membership beyond the boundaries of territories. The concept of transnationalism points to a growing and ever more routinised recognition of a people's multiple attachments. The assumption that a person will live his or her life in one place, according to one set of national and cultural norms, in countries with impermeable national borders, no longer holds. When settling in a new city, many migrants rely on mutual links and sustain strong ethnic networks across borders, while establishing social and economic ties with their local community. Many migrants end up belonging simultaneously to two societies as 'trans-migrants'. In fact, ethnic and community networks represent one of the most innovative and interesting features of present-day international migration patterns. Transnational relationships between migrant communities and their homelands are seen as part of wider international networks (Levitt, 2004).

In sum, the transnational perspective used in this paper focuses on two issues. First, transnational processes need to be understood beyond the borders of a particular



nation-state and transnational activities involve the flows of ideas, information, people and culture that transcend one or more nation-states. Second, while transnational processes extend beyond the borders of a particular nation-state, these processes are shaped by the socio-cultural and institutional practices of a particular nation-state. Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are built within the confines of specific socio-cultural, economic, and political relations at historically determined times (Guarnizo & Smith, 1998).

## Background of the Australian-Thai Community

Thai people in Australia constitute a mixture of students, working people, housewives, and various other smaller demographic groupings. Generally, settler arrivals from Thailand are not recognized as refugees or asylum seekers. Rather they are most likely seen as people voluntarily seeking a better life. The 2011 Australian Census of Population and Housing counted 45 464 Thai-born people in Australia, compared to 30 554 in 2006 Census, 23 600 in 2001 Census, and 18 939 in 1996 Census. The Thai community in Australia has been increasing significantly.

I conceive of the Australian-Thai community as a dynamic meta-network which has many sub-networks interconnecting within it; ranging from interpersonal ties to social organizational ties, from virtual encounters to real-life interactions. Participants have Thai social networks that could be used to connect them with other Thais for various reasons at various times. They have used these networks since the time of their arrival to construct their own personal world and livelihood. Although networks might be concentrated on other Thais, participants also have external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society. The Thai community is neither a closed nor exclusive community.

Thai migrants are embedded in networks of relationships, which give their lives meaning, provide social support, and create opportunities. The advantage of being tied to multiple networks is that one could gain access to a wider range of resources. People tend to be satisfied when they believe that they can receive and give something of value. This is essential to the willingness to cooperate voluntarily and encourages behaviors that facilitate productive social interaction. It encourages Thai migrants to invest themselves in groups, networks and institutions.

While manipulating ethnic linkages overseas, participants also maintain regular contact to Thailand, across international borders and between different cultures and social systems. Through their connections to both Australian and Thai societies, Thai migrants have experienced cultural differences. As a consequence, they

need to select diverse strategies of action on a day-to-day and situation-by-situation basis, adapting to particular circumstances. As they are bilingual, speaking both Thai and English, they have to learn 'code-switching' in linguistics and cultural practices to speak and behave appropriately in a number of different arenas. The extensiveness, intensity and velocity of networked flows of information and resources between migrants and their homeland may alter the way people do things in local societies (Thai, Australian, and Australian-Thai societies). One major transformation, which could be described in this paper is the perception of having two homes.

## Where is home?

"Where are you from?" is a question frequently asked of the research participants. When they were asked this question most did not have a difficulty in giving a straightforward answer about their origins and affiliation. It can be argued that Thailand is culturally relevant to people who still call themselves Thai. But when participants were asked, "Where is home?" most replied that they, "have two homes". Participants held dual orientations: to Australia where most were citizens and in which all were residents, and to Thailand, where they maintained familial and social ties.

Almost all participants, no matter whether they were dual citizens or not, felt that in some sense they belonged to both Thailand and Australia, but they typically had a stronger sense of belonging to Thailand as they were born in Thailand, most had lived in Thailand longer than they had in Australia and their significant others (I.e. parents and siblings) were still living in Thailand. Their everyday life in Australia was also well integrated in Thai community networks. Their attitude toward Thailand as their primary home was therefore hard to change and Thailand remained, if you like, their 'eternal home'.

It was interesting when participants were going to Thailand. They always said in interviews, "I am going *baan* (home)". Likewise, when they asked other Thais whether or not they planned to visit Thailand they often said, "Are you going back *home* this year?" They tended to use the word "home" to refer to Thailand and they together understood that the term "home" used in their conversation signified Thailand.

Nevertheless, it does not necessarily follow that Australia was less important for them or they did not have a commitment to their place of settlement. Belonging, loyalty, and sense of attachment are not parts of a zero-sum game based on a single place. Australia was seen as a 'second home', a home of residence where they lived their lives independently. While participants have multiple attachments that modern technology has facilitated, such multiple attachments do not necessarily hamper integration in the country of settlement.

Participants revealed that when they were in their initial phase as international students in Australia, they mostly regarded Thailand as their only home. Understanding home for them at that time was less about where they are living and more about where they are from. However, after my participants have lived independently in Australia and become attached to it, they began to see Australia as more than just the place where they studied and worked.

For them, their Australian home has offered shelter, security, and a stable environment as well as the privacy to establish and control personal boundaries. Their Australian homes also provided a space for Thai culture to be presented in Australian multicultural society. By this time, participants had built an independent household outside their family dwelling. In Western contexts it is common that young people reach a point in their life when it is appropriate for them to leave their family home (Mallett, 2004). However, my participants continued to maintain strong ties and bonds to their birth family in Thailand. The argument for this is that home is not necessarily a singular place. Identifying a new place as a 'second home' beyond just a house one lives in takes time. Home may be lived in the tension between the given (where they were born) and the chosen (where they migrated), then and now, here and there.

It is worth noting that there were no instances in my research of participants discussing their home as a 'home of ancestors'. This finding differs from Somerville (1992) who argues that home is an ideological construct that is "not just a matter of feelings and lived experience but also of cognition and intellectual construction: people may have a sense of home even though they have no experience or memory of it" (p. 530). This was apparent when I visited or talked to some of my participants' families in Thailand that their ancestors were not Thai. For example, the ancestors of some participants were from China. Their family members in Thailand have practiced some of Chinese traditional ways in their daily lives. Many spoke Chinese at home. These participants tended to have no business or attachment to their ancestral homeland. Kin ties to the home of ancestors become less important after a number of generations (Chee-Beng, 2007).

In addition, participants appeared to think of themselves not only as citizens of a given nation-state (Thai, Australian or dual citizen) but also as global citizens. However, it did not follow that they were thinking of 'the globe as home' when the question of "Where is home?" was discussed. My research suggested that participants were conscious of being part of the global community but this does not necessarily mean that they will conceive of the world as home. The way most of my participants thought about home was appealing to fixed notions of society or culture.



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### Where will we live?

When asked my participants about their future plan, whether or not they planned to return to Thailand permanently at the time of their interview, most answered that they were not sure about their future, but for now they had no plans to move back to Thailand, they preferred to live in Australia as their new independent life was now very much valued. Some participants revealed that their lives were now settled and they did not want to restart their professional life in Thailand. Some have married, built a house and made their own families in Australia.

In some cases, my participants had been seriously tempted to return to Thailand permanently. For example:

When mother of Natwadee (Pseudonym, Female, Aged 33) was very sick, Natwadee was depressed. She went back to Thailand to nurse her mother where she had time to think about moving back to Thailand. After her mother passed away she finally decided to return to Australia and live her life there.

In another situation, a beloved niece of Somjit (Pseudonym, Female, Aged 33) was killed in a car accident in Thailand. Her parents and siblings deeply mourned the death of their child. Somjit was sad and felt guilty that she could not stay beside her family and comfort them. She mentioned to her Thai husband about moving back to Thailand permanently but her husband discouraged her from making a big decision when her emotions were not stable. Somjit and her husband are now still living in Australia.

Initially, almost all participants revealed at the time of interviews that they had no plans to return to Thailand permanently. Two participants, however, finally moved from Australia and went back to settle again in Thailand.



Sureeporn (Pseudonym, Female, Aged 30) returned to Thailand to assist her family business. Her parents came to Australia and talked to her seriously about her life and her future. At that time she had just resigned from her casual job and was looking for a new job. She reported that she could not convince her parents that she had a better life in Australia, so her parents persisted and eventually she decided to return to Thailand. She packed some of her belongings to go to Thailand, but left most of her stuff with her Thai housemate in Australia. She expected that if things in Thailand were not going well, she could come back to Australia again. After six months, she reported to me that her life in Thailand was satisfactory; her life in Thailand was neither perfect nor was it miserable. As a middle class person in Thailand she had access to considerable social and economic resources and could enjoy a high standard of living. However, in Australia she was able to enjoy a substantial degree of independence which most participants found to be a highly precious aspect of their Australian experience. Indeed, this participant was searching for an opportunity to set up her own business in Thailand; she was thinking of establishing an educational and tour agency to bring Thai tourists to Australia. It can be argued that seeking to have her own business rather than remaining within her family business shows her desire to retain the independence that she discovered while she was in Australia.

Another case was Pitak (Pseudonym, Male, Aged 32). He resigned from his fulltime job as a room manager in an Australian factory and then returned to Thailand with his non-Thai (Japanese) wife and a baby daughter. He stated that after having a baby he had changed his mind about staying in Australia and he expressed concern about his baby daughter's future. In Australia there were no other sources of support so his wife needed to resign from her job in order to take care of the baby. She took on almost all the responsibilities of the home single-handedly. He and his wife had to manage all their issues by themselves. Also, he believed that there were limited opportunities to become an entrepreneur in Australia. Meanwhile, in Thailand childrearing is shared among members of the extended family and others such as neighbours. His parents could support him and his family financially, emotionally and socially; he could have a healthy family life in Thailand. After moving back to Thailand, within six months he got a job as a senior staff member in a big international company in Thailand. His non-Thai wife also got a part-time job from her ethnic community networks in Thailand. From these (Japanese) community networks she was able to build up some new friendships in Thailand.

In both Sureeporn and Pitak's cases, they could enter to Australia at any time as they were also Australian citizens. However, their travels between Thailand and Australia, as well as their international telephone calls,

had greatly decreased. While they retained a right to enter Australia at any time, Australia was no longer seen as their actual country of residence. If **home is grounded less in the place but more in the activity that occurs in the place**, it can be assumed that in the near future Sureeporn and Pitak will not feel attached to Australia anymore. Also, Sureeporn and Pitak may no longer be trans-migrants, as they do not maintain multiple relations that span international borders.

For participants who still remained in Australia, almost all reported they were not sure about their future, whether or not they would stay in Australia for the rest of their lives. Such tentative ideas about the future only gradually resolved themselves in the lives of my participants, some returning to Thailand to live and some continuing to live in Australia. So long as they continue to retain strong bonds with their significant others in Thailand it seems highly probable that many of them will continue their transnational participation, **moving back-and-forth across the international borders** between Thailand and Australia.

## Discussion

The examination of the connections and relationships that continue between young Thai skilled migrants and their families in Thailand has suggested that migrants continue to retain strong bonds of emotion, loyalty and affiliation with the homeland. Ties to homeland have led these trans-migrants to live dual ways of life, speak two languages, and have homes in two countries. Thailand still remains an 'eternal home.' Meanwhile, Australia is seen as a 'second home', a home of residence where they live their lives independently.

When migrants live their lives across national borders, they may challenge a long-held assumption about membership and belonging. Some might ask; if people stay active in their homeland, how will these migrants contribute to the country where they settle? The lived experiences of Thai participants suggest that migrants will not simply cut their ties to their eternal home, nor does it take away from migrants' ability to contribute to and be loyal to their host country. Participants have multiple attachments that modern technology has facilitated. Rather than a problematic dual loyalty, this paper argues that multiple attachments tend to not hamper integration in the country of settlement.

Australian society appears to these Thai migrants as a collection of ethnic communities attempting to unite around a set of core values. Officially, it has no government-approved national identity and all cultures are described as equal. How these Thais show that they have integrated into Australian society is primarily to share some common values while not abandoning what differentiates one from others.

### **Australian multiculturalism means that:**

As a nation Australia recognises, accepts, respects and celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity. Australia accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian society. All Australians have a reciprocal obligation to respect the right of others to do the same. These overriding principles are the Constitution, parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language, the rule of law, tolerance, acceptance and equality including equality of the sexes.

(Source: DIAC, Fact Sheet 6: the evolution of Australia's multicultural policy)

These official government policy positions do not correspond to the sentiments of some sections of the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian population. However, the Australian Government is currently committed to ensuring that all Australians have the opportunity to be active and equal participants in Australian society, free to live their lives and maintain their cultural traditions. Immigrants are therefore not assimilating by force, but forming ethnic communities, in which the language and culture of origin can be maintained and transferred to the next generation.

Attachment to Thai-ness is to give participants the self-confidence to interact much more dynamically and creatively within an Australian multicultural society. Participants are also, for example, speaking English, wearing modern clothes, paying tax, obeying the law of the land, and respecting the elected parliamentary representatives, democratic political structures and traditional values of mutual tolerance and concern to integrate themselves to mainstream society.

Tanapoom (Pseudonym, Male, Aged 41) said,

Australia is a country of immigration. There are diverse ethnic groups in Australian society. Cultural diversity can be seen as central to Australian national identity. Bear in mind that this is positive and make Australia attractive. I have experienced and learned ways of life of the British, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and so on. This also influenced me to integrate myself into

the Thai community. It is a perfect combined sense of the familiar and the foreign. I feel I'm not lost in Australia. I found that attachment to Thai-ness helps guide me to know what to do and how to negotiate easily with others both Thais and non-Thais.

Indeed, the cultural expectations of the Australian-Thai community are negotiable, flexible and open to compromise. The individual or community assessment of whether or not actions are acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable is most likely negotiated in the space that is formed between Thai and Australian social values. In other words, under the pluralistic name of 'Australian multicultural society' the freedom of expression to be a Thai may need to be balanced against behaving in a way deemed acceptable to the others non-Thai Australians. When acting subjects are emplaced both 'here' and 'there' and the 'flexible' Thai identities participants practice depended on contingent circumstances in the different social spaces in which they are acting. These Thai migrants prefer to be seen as peaceful Australian citizens, as they believe that they are welcome in this pluralistic society.

To them, Australian multiculturalism did not lead to social fragmentation or segregation. Although networks of many Thais might be concentrated among other Thais, they also have external contacts that could connect them to broader Australian society. The Thai community in Australia is neither an overly closed nor exclusive community. The Thai community manages to put itself into the wider Australian society. The exposure to the broader Australian society can facilitate network building with non-Thai social sectors. Such interactive mechanisms thus elaborate how the Thai community is inextricably intertwined with the larger setting in which it exists.

Again, to them, Australian multiculturalism did not produce the mobilisation or a claim to group rights as if standing outside a common set of values (i.e. universal human rights and democratic concepts). They are not an example that defines group rights as sovereign rights. They are an example that recognises the unalterably multi-ethnic character of Australia and secures enough in its multicultural values.

The integration of Thai migrants into Australian society, while maintaining their Thai-ness and ties to Thailand, are a salutary corrective to the calls for a 'one nation, one culture, one language, one state, one citizenship'. These migrants do not arguably pose a category of risk or crisis for Australia.



## Suggestion

In the age of globalisation, the diversity driven by transnational migration and ongoing transnational ties are now coming to be regarded as unsurprising, commonplace, and unquestioned. As increasing numbers of migrants live parts of their lives across national boundaries, the question is no longer whether this is good or bad. Rather, the challenge is to look outside the nation-state box to figure out how individuals who live between two cultures can best be protected and represented and what the host society should expect from them in return (Vertovec, 2005; Levitt, 2004; Modood, 2006).

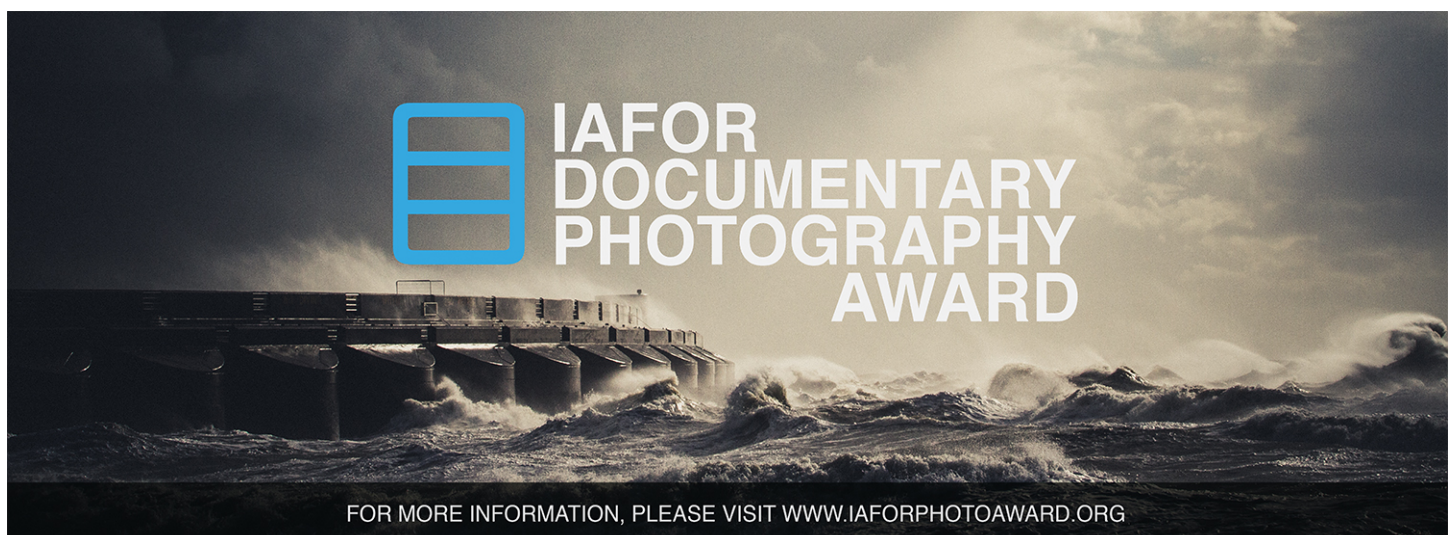
Integration is one of those concepts that most people desire but it is not easy to define. In this diverse society, the population have different traditions but also share a common space together. It is therefore necessary to have a 'shared' understanding of what 'integration' is or what it means to live in a society where people come from different backgrounds. If we agree that integration is not about assimilation into a single homogenous culture nor living in a society of separate enclaves, and then between those two extremes there is a great range and diversity of types of integration.

The Crick Report, *'The New and the Old: the report of the life in the United Kingdom'* (2003), indicated that integration means not simply mutual respect and

tolerance between different groups but continual interaction, engagement and civic participation. Accordingly, in the Australian context there must be commonalities, notably the English language, as well as the space within the concept of 'Australian-ness' for diverse Australians to express their cultural identities. Australian-ness may not be seen as a singular, but encompassing the collective contribution diverse communities make to the country. Australian-ness itself will be changed over time, not solely as a result of new immigration, but many other social forces such as the influence of mass media, cultural consumption, and cosmopolitanism. The culture of migrants is also changed as the forces of localisation and globalisation impose themselves.

In the politics of social integration, this paper suggests that Australia can continue to move towards more robust anti-discrimination policies, and develop policies that tend to see multiculturalism as a condition of social order and security. Calling for improving opportunity and greater interaction between people of different backgrounds as the strategy would lead us towards an Australia where our ethnic origin does not determine our destiny.

**Full references are found in the Table of References section.**



# Owning Multiple and Complex Belongings in the Borderlands: An Auto-ethnography

KATHLEEN FAIRBANKS RUBIN, USA

This auto-ethnographic journey recounts how discovering border personhood elucidates the satisfactions of owning multi-sited cultural belongings while learning to survive and thrive in borderlands. Auto-ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, C., Adams, T.E., & Bochner, P., 2011). “Reflective and engaging, focused on creation and making something happen, and providing means for movement and change, auto-ethnography is more than a method. [I]t is a way of living and of writing life honestly, complexly, and passionately” (Holman Jones, S., Adams, T.E., & Ellis, C., Eds., 2013).

Most people looking at me and listening to me talk English conclude I am a typical American. Light brown hair, now grey, blue eyes and the small freckles sprinkled over my easily sun-burned skin give no clues to what lies beneath. It has taken me years to unravel the depths of how I came to be different from most Americans. When I speak Spanish similar questions arise, however, there is a common word in Spanish, *fronteriza*, which communicates who I am. Naming myself a border person, in English, in 1988 and incorporating borderland living into life and work in organization development gives me words to describe my differences to people on the northern side of the US/Mexico border.

In early 1991 when I read Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), I knew I'd found a kindred spirit. Her accounts helped me feel less alone and more grounded in what, to heartlanders, is an unfathomable identity. Exhortations of inclusivity, mediating divides (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 85); defining mental nepantlism and cultural collisions and the need to be “healed so that we are on both shores at once” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78) supported my own feelings and ideas. In spite of our differences, her philosophy helped resolve confusion around my tolerance for ambiguity, identity and belonging.

Many of us have multipart cultural identifications, some call them identities. For us, just one identity doesn't work and a two part hyphenated alternative may not describe us either. Narratives of living in three different cultures

during childhood and multi-disciplinary analyses of the effects on belonging and identity provide clarity on behavioral responses. Next I describe how these experiences prepare me for adult reflexive action resulting in naming myself a border person, development of the concept of a border person mindset and borderland communication strategies. I show how this is analogous to the process Anzaldúa experienced as she moved toward a new mestiza consciousness and continued writing out paths for living life in the borderlands. Emphasis in her later work highlights the importance of transforming personal history into spiritual activism and is similar to an auto-ethnographic process. Anzaldúa's work lays the foundation for recommending continued research on alternatives to coercive assimilation, a practice which deracinates and silences cultural origins not conforming to the majority.

To the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz life-world means the world into which we are born, the one from which we receive assumptions about everyday life (Wagner, 1970). I expand his definition to include parts of additional life-worlds I acquired as a child.

I was born into my first life-world, in Santa Barbara, California to middle-class white Anglo Saxon protestant parents. I have no siblings. By the time I was five we lived in three different houses, in two cities and travelled by car across the deserts of California, Arizona and Texas, to arrive in El Paso, where my father began work for the U.S. government. Multiple moves continued until I returned to California to attend university.

## **Narrative I: Immersion in the Borderlands of El Paso/Juarez**

Too young by state law to enter first grade in El Paso, my mother finds a school for me across the border in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Every morning we board the street car that crosses the border into Juarez, get off, and walk several blocks to my school. My mother drops me off and doesn't return until five o'clock. I spend lunch and siesta time, from noon to three, with a classmate's family. I'm a five-year-old in a new culture, I don't know anyone. I don't speak Spanish. My mother and father are across the border. I spend much of the first



three months crying. To comfort and quiet me, the principal sits me up on her desk in front of the sixth grade class she teaches. She looks into my blue eyes, smiles and pinches my cheek with thumb and forefinger and says “¡ay, que chula!” (Oh, how cute!) and I cry even harder. Yet by the end of the school year, I speak, read, write and do math in Spanish, but not in English. And, I’ve had an indelible Mexican “home-stay” experience with the Iglesias family that took me into their home and life.

## **Analysis: What a Five Year Old Can Learn in the Borderlands**

Events themselves have their impacts, but as they occur within space and time and culture, they also occur within a developmental matrix of experience and capacity within an individual. To better understand what happened to me and my sense of belonging, I contextualize my early childhood experience within developmental psychological theories of attachment.

At age five, I was frightened and abandoned by my mother when she left me in a situation where the fledging underpinnings of my first life-world suddenly didn’t apply. I learned fragments of a new life-world and discovered alternate ways of eating, living, speaking, thinking, and of managing my feelings of fear and abandonment. Within a few months, I began to belong in a second life-world.

But my relationship with my mother changed. I lost trust in her and distanced myself from her, especially in Mexican settings where I felt she was the foreigner and I wasn’t. Teachers and an unfamiliar family offered refuge. I developed my sense of attachment not only to them, but to the culture, language, and customs in which I experienced a supportive and safe “holding environment” (Winnicott, 1960), a space necessary for child soothing and internal emotional regulation and the eventual ability of “connecting well” as an adult (Kegan, 2001). At the same time, I managed the hurt and anger of separation from my mother by cutting myself off from her emotionally and substituting an air of independence (Karen, 1990).

My father, from then on, endearingly, referred to me as a half-breed or mongrel because of my facility to move between cultures. Speaking two languages and functioning in two cultures served to help me develop agency. I felt strong and capable because of my skills. Adults asked me to interpret for them. As I managed novelty, fear and aloneness I formed an emotional defense template of appearing independent and self-sufficient.

## **Narrative II: Four Mex-Pat Years: Mexico City and Guadalajara**

Over the next three years I live in four new homes and go to four new schools as we move to Phoenix, Arizona, Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, Bakersfield and Redding, California.

When I am nine, we move to Mexico City. At first, being a Mex-Pat is like playing on a checkerboard with missing squares. Small town casual to cosmopolitan Mexico City, public transportation and taxis, new history to learn, excavations of the indigenous past to ponder, Catholic churches everywhere, a confluence of many cultures and an automatic change of social status.

As an employee of a joint Mexican-American government commission, my father is assigned a chauffeur-interpreter and a “red card,” a sort of get-out-of-jail-free card, to be shown in case of any difficulty with Mexican officials. Privileged white-skinned Americans in Mexico with government connections and economic capacity automatically moves us—me—into upper- middle-class society.

My formal education continues in three successive private schools, half day in English and at least a half day in Spanish, required by the government. My mother and I live in eight different rented houses and apartments in different sections of the city while my father works “out in the field” and comes to the city two days a month to report to headquarters. During school vacations, we travel by bus to spend time with him in outlying rural locations.

I have casual associations with expat children in Girl Scouts, YWCA and Episcopal Church activities. The one constant in this life of changing cultures, living spaces and schools is the Lopez family that we meet roller skating in Chapultepec Park. They and their two daughters my age are our connection to “normal” Mexican lower middle-class life, weekend excursions and holiday celebrations. When I leave the commercial street in an old part of the city and walk through huge wooden doors into their enclosed neighborhood I escape into welcome warmth, unconditional acceptance and lack of pretention, just like I did with the Iglesias family in Juarez. It’s a relief to leave the responsibilities of expat-ness for a while. Here I am just one of the kids playing tag on smooth stone slabs between rows of single story living units. We compete with radios playing popular tunes, women talking as they hang up laundry, dogs lazing in the sun and flowers blooming in pots outside doorways.

After three years, my father is transferred to the provincial city of Guadalajara. The three of us live in only two different houses. For the first time in Mexico I have a family home. The only Protestant American in a Catholic school, I continue the back and forth-ness, the fitting-in, between a new group of expats and Mexican

classmates. Sara Chavez and her sisters, daughters of a Mexican army general, and I ride a city bus to school every morning. Before we leave, Mrs. Chavez makes the sign of the cross over us and says a prayer to the Virgin of Guadalupe to keep us safe.

### **Analysis: Re-Thinking Mex-Pat Life**

Educational psychologists and sociologists offer insight into events that occurred during those years. Crossing social and language boundaries felt seamless, natural and satisfying. I flowed from one circumstance to another, in what La Framboise, Coleman, & Gerton (1993, p. 399) called alternation, which assumes it is possible to know and understand two different cultures and to alter behavior to fit particular social contexts.

Expats were exclusive, cliquish, preferred speaking English and seemed jealous that I had no American accent in Spanish. Or did that fact imply a lower status in their eyes? Mexicans were surprised and pleased that an American could and would sound so Mexican. Or was it the power of my privilege?

Buckingham (2008, p. 1) points out tensions I noted between an expat identity over which I had no choice and desire to be closer to middle-class Mexicans whom I assumed were similar to me in important ways and were the majority culture. I practiced border crossing between social, religious and cultural groups, even ones that conflicted (Canclini, 1992, p. 214) as if, like Giddens wrote, they were fluid, not fixed (Buckingham, 2008, p. 9).

I used power manipulations inherent in both expat and Mexican societal constructs that were bolstered by the confidence and protection I assumed my father's position afforded me. Spanish language itself supported internalizing class distinctions by mandating to whom was owed the deference of formal forms of address. When I spoke to the maid, for example, I would tell her what to do or not do using grammatical forms for what Mexican society deemed to be lower classes. I sensed that if I acted in a more egalitarian way I could be ignored. If I acted "too Mexican" with expats, I'd lose connection with them. If I was perceived by Mexicans to be a usual expat I wouldn't fit in with them. Zigmunt Bauman (2008, p. 8) might suggest that I was practicing lessons in "rational conduct," keeping options open rather than risk gaining an identity that fit so tightly, options would be given up in advance.

During this comparatively settled last year of living as a Mex-Pat in Guadalajara, my mother decided I was becoming "too Mexican" and we returned to the States, to Michigan, where my father was born and raised. It is two years before he leaves Mexico, retires and joins us in Michigan.

### **Narrative III: Birthright? Northern Michigan**

I start high school the next year in a small city three hours south of the Canadian border. For the first time I meet my father's brother and a young second cousin who, along with me and my mother, carry the family name of Fairbanks ancestors who were early settlers to that area. Soon after we arrive I am walking down the main street and a lady stops me, looks me in the eye. "You're a Fairbanks," she says. "You have the same eyes as your grandfather." I am astounded. At a family reunion I meet relatives that grew up with my father. I'm beginning to think I belong here.

However, for the next two years, I am as miserable and out of place as I was in first grade in Juarez, feelings exacerbated by missing my father's presence and support. I know nothing about being an American teenager. No one wants to know anything about me or Mexico and I have no past with them. After two years of outsider pain, I decide—against my mother's wishes—to change schools. Since we now live in the tiny burg close to the cherry orchard where my father was born, I choose a nearby high school and don't say a word about Mexico or my past life. I know the language now and how to dress. I am accepted by the smaller school's insiders almost immediately. During the next two years, I am a very happy, successful rural northern Michigan teenager: I play in the marching band, I am voted a cheerleader, editor of the yearbook, have a football star boyfriend, a job as a 'soda jerk' in the local drugstore and I get good grades. I work in our cherry orchard in the summers, and without mentioning it to classmates, I'm an interpreter for Mexican migrant workers. As soon as I graduate, I leave for Southern California.

### **Analysis: Re-Visiting a Teenage Mind**

To make sense of these four years, in other than adolescent memories, I looked for explanations. The first high school community was a tightly supervised and policed traditional community with restrictions on movement and change. Members were masters at keeping insiders from deviating from their norms and at excluding outsiders (Bauman, 2008b, p. 21). Mex-Pat privileged status of race and class opened no doors here. During the first three years we lived in rented housing that was seen as less desirable than owning your own home; a Mexican, one of the Mexico City Lopez sisters, lived with us. The only Mexicans the locals knew were migrant laborers that came in the summer and left when the cherries were picked. And, we were associated with a farming community rather than an urbanized area. I was marginalized and relegated to lower status. Unlike my Mexico experience, there was no possibility of alternation or escape to a more comfortable space. The apparent independence of demanding a change seems like a repetition of the survival response I used in first grade to

cover hurt. When a past identity didn't work, I took charge and substituted an air of independence for the relationships from which I was alienated.

Michigan was a completely new experience: a native father, early settler great-grandparents, family resemblance, and blood relationship to a number of locals. I had legitimate claims to birthright here. Using these facts, expertise in fitting-in and determination, I soon became a full-fledged member of a second closed community. I was ecstatic—for a while. What I didn't realize was that I had deceived myself. I was unaware then of what I had given up. To fit-in, to belong, to join, maybe even to win, I gave up some of my selves. At my fiftieth class reunion, I asked if any classmates knew I'd lived in Mexico. They didn't. I so tightly closeted my prior identifications that no one there knew the Mex-Pat, the border person, the South Westerner, or the Californian. I followed the community rules to achieve what I thought I wanted. At the same time I gave up the freedom of choice to show all of myself. I fit-in to the point that others, and I, too, believed I belonged. I even felt a twinge of guilt when I left what everyone else called "home."

Externally, I assimilated. Underneath, I longed for my Mexican self to be visible. I left for California, nearer Mexico, and friendlier to Spanish speakers. The choice I made at this crossroad, an Anzaldúan encrucijada (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80), was a major step to owning and accepting "multiple belongings," (Bauman, 2008b, p. 24) and a reflection of the effect on me of constant change and mobility.

## The First Time I Call Myself a Border Person

In California after graduate school and between careers, marriage into an orthodox Jewish family, children and traveling, questions of belonging continue. I notice the comfort of being in border areas on several continents and of living near and crossing the US/Mexico border often. In journal writing workshops, I continue efforts to make meaning out of my life experiences and examine feelings of belonging enough to imagine what real belonging might be like. I acknowledge the accumulated pain and disappointment of years of trying to fit in. I conclude that fitting in is not enough for me. Yet I'm still unwilling to pledge allegiance to any one group or culture.

I think about the cultures in which I was immersed as a child. I experience new cultures, notably African Americans, with whom I'm engaged at work and in our ethnically and racially mixed neighborhood. I consider my usual behaviors, both in business and socially. I picture how I keep expressions of each cultural identity separate from the others. I see myself vigilant, on guard,

protecting each one from exposure to possible harm or rejection. Like in a video, I watch myself keep my Mexican life-world responses from appearing in the midst of discussions with rural Michigan friends. I make sure my involvement with the Jewish community does not break norms in Anglo groups and that my early white Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) learnings and Mexican identifications don't alienate my Jewish in-laws or African-American neighbors and friends. And, while doing organizational consulting I interact credibly with diverse staff groups in community agencies, schools, prisons and industry.

Reflections on these complications and complexities in my journaling, results in a sudden awareness of an alternate encompassing image: a convivial internal borderland ambiance around and between sometimes conflicting identities. I visualize an open mindscape where more than a categorical, solitary identity is accepted. I see me, as a border person, living my life among and between cultural identities. I breathe a sigh of relief and smile with pleasure and record this event. In naming this belonging space, I feel integrated. "Completa." As Anzaldúa wrote after releasing *la Coatlicue* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 51).

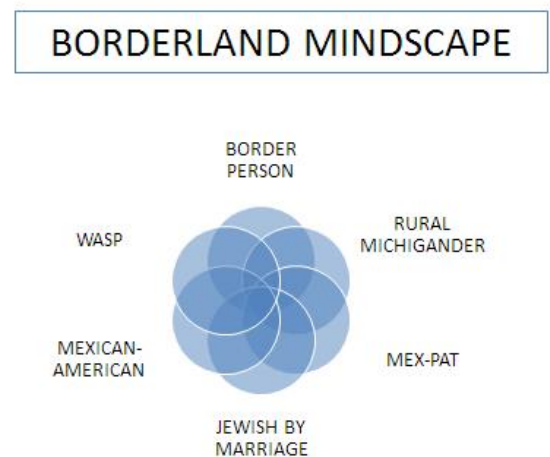


Fig. 1

For years prior to this epiphany, I suffered *Coatlicue* states (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 46-7). They were as wrenching as the images of *Coatlicue* herself. In place of her head, two rattlesnakes face each other, as if in combat. I'd argue with myself about who I really was because I was stuck in a categorical definition of identity that didn't hold all of my selves. *Coatlicue* wears a necklace of human hearts. My heart seemed to enclose hurts of so many people I had no power to help. I was sensitive to their pain and felt like I had no recourse to make a difference. *Coatlicue's* hands extend outward. I reached out my hands to the world around me, looking to connect, and found myself misunderstood. My fears of being alone and in the darkness of that fear felt like



certain death, like the skulls Coatlicue bears. Evil wriggles in Coatlicue's skirt of snakes like evil in the world. These states were also brought on by others' reactions to my chameleon-like behavior that confused them when they were unsure of where I stood. My long standing addiction to fitting-in everywhere and anywhere contributed to intermittent bouts of identity crises. Not belonging anywhere dragged me down into depressions without the reward of "crossing" into "knowing" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 48). On this occasion, out of the challenges I faced and what I learned from the process, I formed a new way of perceiving myself. I became what Anzaldúa would label a *nepantlera*, a person who, in spite of and because of the difficulties, learns to live inbetween to survive and then, thrive in the borderlands.

### Acting On the Vision

Becoming comfortable with this new self-concept, I continued to play openly with border ideas. Participating with the Association of Borderlands Studies and the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, I found kinship with border person scholars. These *nepantleros*, from several continents, include Anthony I. Asiwaju (Nigeria/Benin), Francisco Oda Angel (Spain/Gibraltar), Oscar J. Martinez and Jose Manuel Valenzuela (US/Mexico). I identified a border person mindset and communication competencies and developed an experiential learning exercise to teach bridging skills between departments within organizations (Rubin, 1992). I drew upon personal interviews and my own professional experiences, as well as Brent Ruben's work on communication theory (Ruben, 1976) and Martinez's detailed analysis of people living in the US/Mexico borderlands (Martinez, 1994).

This borderlands model is what Giddens might call a consciously built self-reflexive identity project (Buckingham, 2008, p. 9). A border mindset includes comfort with ambiguity, acceptance of multiple world views and a desire for synthesis, a predisposition to accept mingling rather than rejection. To communicate with clarity in the borderlands both an intergroup and interpersonal focus is important. It is paramount to show respect and empathy for each individual as a member of the group (gender, sexual orientation, work group, race or mixed race, etc.) with which they identify as well as for them as an individual human being. Interpersonally it is critical to be aware of and minimize assumptions, to balance interaction time, to be non-judgmental and know how to manage cultural accidents when they occur.

### A BORDER MINDSET INCLUDES

- Comfort with ambiguity
- Acceptance of multiple world views
  - Search for synthesis

### BORDERLAND COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES

#### INTERGROUP INTERPERSONAL

Demonstrate intergroup RESPECT - CHECK OUT meaning

Express intergroup EMPATHY - Balance INTERACTION & TIME

Build NETWORKS - ASCRIBING VALUE: non-judgmental

Plan for dealing with CULTURAL "ACCIDENTS"  
Fig. 2

### Anzaldúan Process

In order to live life as a border person, I went through a process analogous to what Anzaldúa describes in her work (Anzaldúa, 1987). The following demonstrates how her border theories generalize to my race, gender, ethnicities, sexual orientation and age.

I was birthed, as a border person through an *arrebato*, a precipitous snatching away of one life-world for another; being inbetween without knowing what that constitutes; experiencing psychological blocks and addictions; experiencing depressing Coatlicue states, eventually arriving in *nepantla*, the borderlands, tolerating ambiguity in this inbetween place that will be home; negotiating, understanding and living inbetween cultures; and, finding ways to resist societal pressures to assimilate, or to align myself exclusively with one group or belief system (Anzaldúa, 2003).

But just surviving and living in the borderlands is not enough. Anzaldúa uses the story of Coyolxauqui's dismemberment as a metaphor for the importance of transforming the past by re-membering. It is a process that requires courage to dust off memories, re-examine them, then reconstruct exiled emotions to reintegrate them. Excavating one's past prepares borderlanders to move into spiritual activism (Keating, 2006, p. 5-11).

Autoethnography promotes examination of fragmented life events and sequences them to create a coherent narrative. This gift of uncovering the raw materials from which we've made ourselves allows for the ultimate upgrade. It brings us into the present, ready for newly imagined and constructed futures.

## Conclusions

Issues common to border people, regardless of identifications or belongings, can only be addressed within a framework that legitimizes multi-part, concurrent identities and belonging.

Finding and promoting additional alternatives to assimilation and its disconfirming invisibility is crucial.

Further research using Anzaldúan theories can formulate more strategies for successfully navigating in-between spaces. An example of one such strategy is a science curriculum designed specifically for Chicano students (Aguilar-Valdez, LópezLeiva, Roberts-Harris, Torres-Velásquez, Lobo, & Westby, 2013).

Reconnecting life fragments through reflexive action to make meaning from life experience is essential to owning multi-sited cultural belongings. The use of autoethnography, metaphor, and the creation of a newly imagined personally coherent narrative promotes acceptance and facilitates learning how to be in the inbetween. These strategies are critical to becoming a person who reclaims and integrates an expansive capacity to experience a simultaneous sense of belonging to multiple cultural identities.

Full references to this article are found in the Table of References section.



# Place, Memory, Identity – Oral History in the Borderlands

HOLGER BRIEL, XI'AN JIAOTONG LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY, CHINA

## 1. Introduction

Today, there exist many ways to explore political borders including using such disciplines as geographical, economic and historical studies. But what is absent from many of these discourse, are the localised voices of those directly affected by these borders on a daily basis – the border dwellers. The oral or grassroots history movement, which had started in the 1960s and 70s in the US, tried to address this shortcoming and began, aided by cheap audio recording devices, to conduct interviews and assemble data libraries. Nowadays, one can observe an unprecedented intensification of media devices used to transmit one's own thoughts to the multimedia world. And the digital revolution has also had an important impact on oral history. Were previous recordings limited to aural archives, now additions to these archives were mostly in a visual format, thereby adding an extra layer of data to be explored.

The projects presented here make use of video interviews in order to gather data. The regions explored were chosen according to their easy comparability. Both Cyprus and Borneo are divided islands, their borders were decreed by colonial powers long gone and their present populations struggle with restless borders. And while the islands are geographically and also culturally worlds apart, the projects evidence that people's daily lives do have much in common and are in many ways controlled by their respective borders. Examples to prove this point are presented below.

## 2. Cyprus

The Cyprus project used data from an Oral History (henceforth OH) Project conducted from 2009 to 2012 in Cyprus and partly funded by the European Union. The so-called SHARP project (1) aimed at adding its voice(s) to the cultural conversations taking place across the island by making them public. Over 100 interviews were conducted on both sides of the Green Line, which since 1974 separates the northern Turkish Cypriot part from the southern Greek Cypriot one. Trouble between the two communities had been brewing even before Cyprus had gained its independence from Britain in 1960 and would still worsen afterwards.

Issues of identity, problematic relationships and differing historical accounts would continue to divide the two communities even today. And while not explicitly

discussed here due to space restraints, the overall SHARP project relates to such issues of memory, memorialisation and the search for identity by specifically analysing production settings, processes, the training of interviewers, the interviews themselves and the collective interpretation of this data via new media means and debriefing events.

Interviewees would typically be older members of both communities: the Turkish Cypriots in the north and the Greek Cypriots in the south. Additionally, a member of the Armenian minority living in Cyprus was also interviewed. Of particular interest in the interviews were questions about how individuals from the two Cypriot communities interacted with each other in the events leading up to the 1974 intervention/invasion of the island by Turkish troops and how these events shaped people's lives and attitudes afterwards.

### 2.1. Cyprus and the OH project

The two interviews selected and discussed below were conducted in the autumn of 2011 by one interviewer (the author) and a cameraman as pilots to be shared with the other interviewers. Interviewed were, George, a middle-aged Greek Cypriot media worker and Ali, a retired Turkish Cypriot contractor and now a second-hand bookshop owner. The interviewer and the cameraman were both non-Cypriots; the interviewer was of German origin and the cameraman had a Serbian background. As discussed in many ethnographic texts, the relationship between 'foreign' interviewers and local respondents is always fraught with difficulty. (3) At the same time, the foreignness of the researcher might also allow for answers not readily provided to locals. The other project interviews were conducted by Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Sometimes in English, sometimes in Greek and sometimes in Turkish. Most of the interviews with Greek Cypriots were, in fact, conducted in English, as were the interviews discussed below. Interestingly enough, English was none of the participants' native language. Also, these were the first or pilot interviews conducted for the OH project, and this explains why there were still sometimes awkward moments when the interviewers did not exactly know how to respond to a given interview situation.





Photo by Dean Read (Creative Commons)

## 2.2 *The first interview: George*

George is a seasoned Cypriot media worker in his early 50s. He grew up in Cyprus and then moved to the UK and the USA for study and work. He returned to Cyprus, working in the media industry and has numerous film production and director credits to his name. Among the films he has directed is one, which deals with the Cyprus crisis and the events of 1974. Right from the beginning of the interview, it becomes clear that he has an easy rapport with the camera, having worked in front of and behind the camera for many years. Judging by his gestures and occasional frowns, he seemed a bit tired, if not wary at first, but this turned into concentrated and willing collaboration with the interviewer. Indeed, one has the impression that he is relieved to tell his story (once again).

He begins his story with life in the early 1970s but then very quickly moves onto the traumatic events of 1974. He recounts his childhood memories of the war and of hearing enemy airplanes passing above. After the end of the war, the airport in Nicosia was closed for civil aviation and nowadays it is very rare to hear an airplane crossing the sky over Nicosia. George states that he had forgotten this episode until he went to London, and for the first time in a long while he was confronted by airplane noise.

His statement is an ample reminder that specific memories (autobiographical/traumatic) consist of both psychical and social elements, which are oftentimes combined, as in this case. In his answers, George dispels the myth that all the people were mostly afraid of the 'Turks'. For him the fear of EOKA B, a Greek Cypriot paramilitary shaped after EOKA A, which had fought the British in the Cypriot anti-colonial struggle, and which now exacted strikes against Turkish Cypriots, was the scarier enemy. But he also acknowledged that the belligerent events of 1974 had changed his life. However, he also stated that many use these tragic events to their own devices, oftentimes creating (ideological) barriers to innovation and social progress in society. He exemplifies this attitude when he tells the story of his return to Cyprus in the 1980s working for CNN World Report.

At one point, he wanted to cover another item, the breaking AIDS crisis. However, he was asked, 'Why do you want to cover this? We have the Cyprus problem which needs solving first!'

When responding to the last interview question about changes taking place in Cyprus for some kind of reunification of the two halves, George can be seen and heard letting out a long and deep sigh, which might be interpreted in two ways: a) as a sign of resignation, or b), a sign that not everything is lost, but that in Cyprus, things take longer than in other parts of the world.

## 2.3 *The Second Interview: Ali*

Ali, an amicable Turkish Cypriot in his early 70s, is a shop owner in the beautifully restored Büyük Han Market in the Turkish northern part of Nicosia. He has had many professions in his life – he worked as a carpenter and in construction, is a collector of books and stamps and he is a sportsman. After his retirement, he opened a second-hand book and curiosity store in the aforementioned Büyük Han. He is active in the community and whenever one walks by his shop, one can see many people inside it enjoying his hospitality.

It is clear from the start that, just like George, Ali is also comfortable in front of the camera. He jokes and laughs a lot and is clearly enjoying himself. He proudly mentions that he has been interviewed by foreigners many times over and relishes the memories and this present interview.

Very early on in the interview, Ali comments on the fact that he is fluent in English, Turkish and Greek and thus speaks all three of the island's languages. This allows him to position himself as an expert not just on his own Turkish Cypriot ethnic background, but also as an interlocutor for the two other official languages of the island. He grew up in Limassol but moved to Istanbul when he was 19 and then to Kyrenia (Greek: Κερύβεια, Turkish: Girne) and Nicosia after his retirement. His father and mother had remained in Limassol and then 'moved' to Kyrenia. This was directly after the 1974 war and their move was an enforced patriation (from what had become Greek-Cypriot 'territory' to Turkish-Cypriot 'territory'). It is not surprising Ali uses the hyperbolic and safe word 'moved', rather than 'flee' or something similar, as this is one of his ways of coping with the difficult political situation in Cyprus, then and now. He is also keen to stress that he had good relations with the Greek community. 'If I want to buy something [at a house/shop], I was invited to the house.' This in his eyes was a sign of inclusion in the Greek community.

Apart from being a gifted narrator and performer, Ali is also a master of evasion. Asked whether he sees the 'old days' of both communities living together peacefully returning again, he replies: 'This is a political question. I

keep away from that. ... I am a very good mathematician and am also good at hunting.' A while later he comes back to the subject, though: 'We pay politicians to do things for us. That's it. We do not need to be involved. A normal life is better.' This statement speaks very clearly to his politics, at least when talking to us. He stays away from them, even implying that politics are 'un-normal.' He also stresses the use of the word 'happy' when referring to himself, which appears time and again. And, lastly, he stresses that 'if you have so many problems in the past, you work on your body.' Besides that, according to his statements, you also withdraw further into your private matters. He is proud of his body and mentions that he has been a runner and still goes walking in Troodos, the highest mountain range and spanning both parts of Cyprus. This last element is again a hint that he does not see Cyprus as a divided entity.

## 2.4. Analysis of the interviews

When analysing the interviews, it becomes clear that all three individuals interviewed seemed to enjoy the telling of their stories. They are experienced narrators and have many elements of their stories readily available. They view their speaking as empowerment and also as a bridge between their professional and private selves.

Significantly, both stress that the old days were better, a sentiment shared by the majority of the people interviewed. This age group still remembers the 'old days' and they are aware of the fact that a common, shared life had been possible for both communities before, whereas this is not the case for the younger generation.

Retelling traumatic events has different implications for different informers: some individuals might go quiet, whereas others use the interview to cathartic effect in that pain is extra-territorialised (Dawson, 1999). In our sample the respondents acted in very different ways: George told a story about his fear of hearing airplanes, which is due to his experiences in the 1974 war, whereas Ali refused to recall any traumatic experiences. In George's case, this retelling might have a cathartic effect to help overcome any trauma by cladding the experience into a stock narrative and thus making it a manageable part of oneself's history. In Ali's case, any trauma associated with the events was downplayed and evaded, which is another, but perhaps not the healthiest, way of managing it.

For both interviewees, one might apply the theory of compartmentalisation of events into different modes. Portelli (1997: 24-27) stipulates that oral history narratives generally adopt three different modes: the institutional, the communal and the personal. In oral history narratives, each one of these is characterised by the usage of a different personal pronoun: the third person singular for the institutional, the first person plural 'we' for the communal and the first person singular 'I' for the personal. In our sample, all three modes appear,

although the personal memory dominates in two accounts, suggesting that agency is at a prime for both these interviewees, but an agency which is mostly reduced to personal and less to institutionalised interactions.

Both respondents were content with being interviewed at their respective places of work, George in his office, Ali in his shop and George in his office. George was able to tell a story right away! perhaps also because the airplane story was one he had recounted numerous times. Ali had so many stories that it was hard for him to concentrate on any one in particular. It is remarkable that all three of them were not keen to speak directly about politics, with George being more open than Ali. George stressed the fact that he did not leave Cyprus permanently, because for him it was worth fighting for a solution on the island itself and thus stay true to his roots. Ali did not explain why he moved back to Cyprus following his retirement, but his life on the island is ample proof that he considers it his home. However, Ali refrains from speaking about politics and sees his own body rather than the country of his residence as a construction site. In all three cases, the interviews revealed how much the Cyprus problem has intervened in their lives and altered their life choices and attitudes. All three of them made their choices accordingly: George came back to Cyprus and entered the media field to perhaps affect some changes in the thinking of the population in the south; Ali came back restricting himself to his own body and the book and tourism trade.

It is fair to say that without the events of 1974, their lives would have moved on different tracks but they have found coping mechanisms and coherence systems to deal with the ensuing changes: George in a more professional capacity, Ali in a more private one. In all three, composure appears to have been achieved through the retelling of their stories, be it politically, apolitically or artistically.



Photo by Jpatokal (Creative Commons)

## 2.4. Conclusions from the Cyprus study

The series of interviews undertaken aimed at providing an up-to-date snapshot of Cypriots and the interviewees' views on the past and its relevance for the present. From the two interviews discussed above, it became clear that all three individuals were and still are affected by the events of the 1960s and 1970s and that while individual composure has been achieved, closure on the other hand, individually, communally or bi-communally, has not. The remaining interviews speak to the same fact: all respondents agree that the status quo is untenable (unless one, like Ali, uses most of one's intellectual defences to expunge politics) and in need of change. The interviewers became better able to appreciate the fraught process of reconciliation when they were introduced to individualised life stories (Linde 1983; Frank 1995), not only from their own community but from the 'others' as well, thus creating a different perspective from the official records on both sides.

The interviews conducted during this project made it clear that much of the Cypriot memory and identity research work is still going on. All respondents were trying to make sense of their own identity vis-a-vis the general political situation in returning to individualised events in their pasts. As there are other ongoing projects scattered across the island, OH has of recent times, become an important tool in working through memories and collecting them. The next task will be to provide a more centralised way of accessing all these diverse interviews and thus making it easier for future researchers to access this much needed material. It is important to involve the next generations, as they will become the guardians of this knowledge and should be given as many narrations as possible to evaluate. Due to the technology available today, especially video equipment and easy storage facilities, this job is becoming easier as time goes by. Yet, more training, motivational discourse and institutional support are all still required in order to get projects such as the current ones off the ground, a task the EU, UN and national governmental and non-governmental institutions all need to work on together in order to provide the grounds for success.

## 3. Malaysia - Indonesia

Disclaimer: What follows are first heuristic steps into this project, which is still ongoing at the point of this writing.

The border between Malaysia and Indonesia in Borneo dates back to the time of the colonial conquests. It was here where Britain and Holland demarked their areas of influence. Borneo, together with Malaysia and Indonesia gained its independence from the colonial powers in the early second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the border remains to this day, and the voices of the border dwellers are routinely drowned out by the political wrangling over the

border. While Cyprus and Borneo might be described as 'cold borders', as there rarely are any incidents, they still inform people's life on a daily basis. The project set out to pave the way for collecting interviews from border dwellers.

In order to facilitate the project, in January and February 2014, workshops on oral history were conducted in Pontianak, West Kalimantan and in Kuching, Sarawak. In these workshops, participants were trained in questionnaire design, interviewee selection, interviewing techniques, camera work and post-production skills. A refresher will be held in January 2015 with the actual project undertaken in February 2015.

In order to validate the preliminary questionnaires, 4 sample interviews were conducted and which are transcribed in the Appendix. From the interviews, it became that, just as in Cyprus, people do not officially reflect on the border much, but that it rather insinuates itself into their daily lives in a creeping way ('Seeing logo of Republic of Indonesia'). People display little concern for the political issues of the border and focus on practicalities ('I bought Baju Kebaya and hat and others buy imitated bags, clothes etc. '; 'More advanced, cleaner, more organised'). And just like in Cyprus, people longed for a normalisation of border issues in order to facilitate their lives and for less political interference. It is expected that the full set of interviews will provide a more differentiated picture, but the overall tendencies, easier dealings with the other side and less politicising of the issues – would remain similar for both projects.

## 4. Conclusion

The results from the two projects are giving a diversified picture of border life, in Cyprus as well as in Borneo. People are intently aware of border issues, but their idea of resolution is clearly settled in the practicalities of the here and now. Perhaps a little less so in Cyprus, where the memories of both sides living together in mostly peaceful ways are still fresh, and an overall solution, either as a federation or as two separate states, is still sought after. In Borneo, views are somewhat less politicised and focus more on practical matters of daily life.

The projects also express the hope that these interviews will contribute to individuals' empowerment and their better understanding of the historic processes, which shaped and are continuing to shape their lives and their ethics in sharing an island. But both projects agree on two things: 1. The border poses a problem and a challenge that require a continuous struggle in order to minimise its impact; and 2. Politics are unhelpful in achieving a solution to 1.




## Notes

1. More information on the project and a sample of the interviews can be accessed at [www.sharpnetwork.eu](http://www.sharpnetwork.eu).
2. Alev Adil, performing on 5 March 2012 at ARTos Foundation, Nicosia.
3. As an example, consider Landolf Scherzer's 2005 *Der Grenzgänger* (The Border Rambler). In his reportage, the author wanders the length of the stretch of land that until 1989 used to be the German-German border. Through his low-key and conversational narrative, he is

able to understand and portray people living along this once impenetrable border. And he readily acknowledges that the willingness of his respondents was mostly due to the fact that they felt he was one of them.

Full references to this article are found in the Table of References section.



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# The Hostess at the Border: an emergent anachronism

ELENA KNOX  
THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

In 2003 the Actroid range of robotic androids was launched in Japan. Its creators and vendors imagine that the 'bots will integrate into society, taking on companionship, entertainment and hostessing duties. To date, Actroids are modelled after young females, with the exception of (near) exact copies of two male Professors from Japan and Denmark, and a 'brother' released in 2011. Despite the theory of the so-called uncanny valley (Mori 1970), Actroids are designed to appear and behave as humanlike as possible so as to render them as familiar as possible, presaging a future of belonging, of ethically viable sociocultural identity (Ishiguro 2007).

Actroids' familiarity is achieved via re-inscription of stereotypically gendered cultural narratives and attributes, as the machinic 'women' enact media campaigns and advocacies that are reactionary and ideologically superseded (Robertson 2010; Suchman 2007). The routinely gendered hostess figure, capable only of a chronic and controlled performance and embodiment, is anachronistically emerging at the vanguard of futuristic design. She is being embedded in a new episteme, as our most advanced humanoid machines are shaped in her familiar image.

As a distilled marker of institutional hospitality, 'hostesses' are also gatekeepers at borders with respect to the locally and globally marginalized (Rosello 2001). Derrida (2000) argues that hospitality is the basis of all culture but cannot exist. Actroids embody this political impasse in their robotic gesturing of hospitableness; the trope's endurance is symptomatic of a world in which empathic sensibilities shift slowly—and sometimes regressively—while technologies evolve quickly. In this sense, paradoxically, they are 'human'.

Conventional hospitality, defined in a Kantian sense, adheres to strict boundaries and relies on national structures for its propositions and protocols. In 'Pera Peras Poros: Longing for Spaces of Hospitality', Dikeç details the inclusive mode of hospitality sought by sociologists Beck (1998) and Barber (1998) but speaks of "an oppressive aspect beneath its welcoming surface" (2002: 228). Derrida (2000: 5) warns of the intrinsic conceptual impossibility of hospitality, of the impassive

experiential simultaneity of knowing and not-knowing the 'Other'.

This conceptualization is advanced despite him having stated elsewhere that "hospitality is culture itself" (2001: 16). Though Derrida and other poststructuralists problematize conventional hospitality, in indeterminately arguing for its effective impossibility the status quo of existing normative and oppressive power structures is preserved.

An inherent entitlement or 'appropriation' is at the basis of the conceptualization.

To dare say welcome is perhaps to insinuate that one is at home here, that one knows what it means to be at home, ...appropriating a space for oneself, a space to *welcome [accueillir]* the other... (Derrida 1999: 15; emphasis in original)

Appropriation without violence is typically only possible within a defined band of socially sanctioned privilege, and statements such as Derrida's elide and exclude the Other(s) of and for whom they speak, assuring that the status of the Other remains stable. This allows construction of Other, not as un-known or strange-er, as Derrida seems to be saying, but as already constructed, known-about and known-for. 'Daring' to welcome is framed as a masochistic, risky or altruistic and commendable act whereas the prior and/or concurrent act of appropriation is naturalized.

According to Rosello (2001: 17), a postcolonial politics of hospitality that revises these conventions *in practice* "might seek to limit the arrogance of the postcolonial host". In the context of this paper and its focus on the hostess, the colonial system has legitimized and canonized

a redistribution of roles in which Monsieur can afford to disappear (symbolically and physically) while Madame, who must pick up the task of domestic care in his absence (including the reception of guests), [ensures that] the servile aspects of hospitality can be delegated. (Rosello 2001: 133)

A self-declared host (Derrida's "oneself"), in performing but simultaneously outsourcing the welcoming gesture, rises above the polysemous dilemma of being at once master and slave in his own domain, responsible for and assessable on providing the conditions of well-being of another. In relying upon the extant politics of power within the established domain, the host delegates aspects of the servile, deferential task as necessary and

the work has to be done by a subaltern, who finds herself transformed into an excluded third by the hospitable pact. It thus happens that when the host welcomes you ... he has arranged for a system of hierarchical redoubling: the host remains in charge of the welcoming gesture, but he is no longer responsible for the work... (Rosello 2001: 123)

Embedded within colonial and also postcolonial discourse and praxis as ciphers of hospitality, 'hostesses' to whom the work of the hospitable gesture is delegated thus become representatively complicit in politics of inclusion/exclusion that infuse both the domestic and cosmopolitan spheres. The persistence of this outmoded version of 'welcome' in the public sphere is less related to welcoming than it is to cheerleading and team building, and therefore more aggressive in its ideology than might be assumed. The hostess performing 'welcome', a signified hospitality, a closed openness, is symptomatic of a lack of shift in the cosmopolitan sphere in terms of the ethical responsibility for and provision of hospitality.

The persistent embodiment of a limited repertoire of gestures, aesthetics and modes-of-being by certain women performing welcome in media, arts and futuristic design could be argued to derive at least in part from the persistence of an anachronistic division of labour in relation to the host/guest. This repertoire is passed on to android hostesses without rupture of the established performative tropes, and thus the restrictive formal aestheticization of this mode of labour is uncritically endorsed. Robertson, in 'Gendering Humanoid Robots: Robo-Sexism in Japan', maintains that

most roboticists reinforce in and through their humanoids, by default arising from indifference, quite unprogressive notions of gender dynamics and the sexual division of labour... (2010: 28)

Robertson (2010: 29) raises the interesting metaphor of 'degrees of freedom' in robot-building as a way of illustrating the division. Degrees of freedom are corporeal capabilities of motion along particular independent planes. According to Robertson's research the design of the female model of the Actroid (or geminoid) allowed for 42 degrees of freedom and the male model (an aesthetically-accurate copy-version of its lead creator) for 50 degrees of freedom. However, according to the

Hiroshi Ishiguro Laboratories (Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute International) website, the current iteration of the female Japanese geminoid, Geminoid-F (2011), whom Ishiguro hopes will become "common communication media for everyday life" (Burrows 2011; Ishiguro 2014), has 16 degrees of freedom in order that it be cheaper, more lightweight, and more easily applied to social environments and installations. Its possibilities of movement are thus delimited and likely to become as iconographically familiar as the airline hostess', the magician's assistant's, or the game show hostess', for example. Robertson describes this approach as characteristic of 'retro-tech': advanced technology in the service of traditionalism.

The focus here on Japan is not arbitrary in that the setting is well known as the "high temple of robot technology" (Ambo 2007), and global uptake of its innovations in the robo-tech arena is well documented. As outlined by Robertson (2010) and others, the Japanese central government's 2007 blueprint for revitalizing and repopulating Japanese society includes the official prime ministerial document *Innovation 25: Creating the Future*, which states that by 2025, as a core element of a robot-dependent society, every household should include a humanoid domestic robot<sup>i</sup>. The document's online précis illustrates the five key points of this decree with friendly-looking cartoons: one is a *Stepford Wives*-esque picture of a pink humanoid robot with a dress-shaped body, cooking, cleaning and caring for children. Ostensibly relieving the housewife/domestic subaltern from some of her 'duties' in the home, the government's professed ideal is that married women will benefit from their new degrees of freedom to regain an interest, flagging overall in Japanese society, in monogamous procreation. Another of these cartoons is of a large man being served by a slim, smiling airline hostess and communicating his wishes to her via prosthetic earpiece: this subsection of the decree promotes the use of robotic translators and the development of technological systems of virtuality whereby citizens will "realize the world without leaving home" (see Government of Japan 2007). There is ambivalence in the document toward globalization that attests to Japan's history with regard to nationalism and immigration; domestically, humanoid robots are

regarded by the public as preferable to foreign laborers, ostensibly for the reason that, unlike migrant and minority workers, robots have neither cultural differences nor, in the case of (especially) East Asians, unresolved historical (or wartime) memories to contend with. ...They carry no inconvenient historical baggage. (Robertson 2010: 9)



A focus on convenient, rather than inconvenient, historical baggage is perhaps typically and efficiently Japanese, though obviously not limited to this locale or set of histories. Unfortunately, though, current iterations of humanoid robots *do* carry inconvenient historical baggage for those who find themselves on the less privileged side of inscrutably integrated cultural borders (and ceilings). ‘Conveniently’ for suppressing discourse about these topics, some of these very citizens are ‘lending’ their image or persona to the perpetuation of the hostess trope. The gatekeeping of conventional wisdoms by proxies/surrogates, specifically conventionally attractive, young, female proxies and/or robots, is rife in Japan and despite ‘cultural differences’ can be seen to correspond to common images of hospitality all over the globe.

An android hostess obviously has a desirable capacity for almost continuous menial work. In the advertisement for Actroids that are ostensibly available for hire in a human-resources sense through animatronics company Kokoro (2014), there has been no promotion of male-gendered robots doing these same types of continuous welcoming, caring and menial roles.

[Machine] capacities for action are created out of sociomaterial arrangements that instantiate histories of labor and more and less reliable, always contingent, future re-enactments. (Suchman 2006: 653)

The fabricators and distributors of this commercial arm of the Actroid venture, which is otherwise framed as academic-scientific research into human presence and human-robot interaction (see Ishiguro 2007; 2014), is Kokoro, a branch of Sanrio— brand giant famous for the Hello Kitty franchise. Kokoro’s other significant line of robotics production is in animatronic dinosaurs for theme parks and exhibition displays. What company, then, better placed to corporealize an emergent anachronism such as the Actroid? ‘Female’ worker Actroids are *kawaii* (cute), novel, and antediluvian in the gendered labour codes they restate and reclaim. Publicized in their specific cultural context as “society heading in a natural direction” (Hasegawa and Collins 2010), they are presented in official discourse as an innovative, twenty-first century approach to fulfilment of a social utopian dream of a privileged class. But by aestheticizing and deploying Actroids uncritically and unprogressively in the hostess’

familiar role and image, one does not necessarily guarantee ethical treatment for the robots, their ‘gender’, or the workers they displace.

Public discussion of the societal assimilation of humanoid robots rarely occurs without reference to Masahiro Mori’s theory of the uncanny valley (1970). A literal translation of the German *das Unheimliche* being ‘unhomely’, uncanniness might also be directly linked to being ‘not like/at home’ and therefore to the experience of *inhospitality*. In English we have referred to a homely woman as one who is aesthetically inappropriate for society outside the home. To be *unhomely*, then, out of or inappropriate for the home, is also to be out of place, unwelcome or conditionally tolerated, and non-agentic in the public sphere. It is a liminal state that is becoming populated by a host(ess) of female Actroids.

The fourteenth Dalai Lama is said to have stated that compassion is the radicalism of our times. In ‘Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality’, Hamington (2010: 21) offers a vision of hospitality “that reflects a performative extension of care ethics by pursuing stronger social bonds, as well as fostering inclusive and non-hierarchical host/guest relations”. I suggest that this picture, which yet exists within a cosmopolitical system of laws, limits and defining signs, requires in addition to its dismantling of certain hierarchies an investigation of the complex and relatively disguised social bonds in which the fetishized female is substituted for the male ‘welcome’ and permission to participate in culture. If the hostess figure is a distilled marker of domestic hospitality in cultures both East and West, she can also be seen as a symptom of wider, persistent and treacherously transmissible disorder, for instance as a gatekeeper for constitutional reluctance to behave in an unconditionally hospitable way to refugees and the poor. The insidiousness of the persona, unhelpful to gender equality and unable to speak for herself, and her concurrent generic attractiveness, celebratory ‘aura’ and surface compassion, render her chronic and controlled performance of hospitality profoundly questionable as she is further developed at the very vanguard of humanoid simulation.

**Full references to this article are found in the Table of References section.**

# Frontiers in Google Maps: Commodification and Territory in the Borderlands

TIMOTHY ERIK STRÖM  
RMIT UNIVERSITY, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

From carving up empires to enclosing the commons, the maps have long been caught up in creating, legitimising and representing borders and territories. There now exists a body of work critiquing maps as cultural artefacts, scrutinising the role that values, social structures and power relations play in their formation of meaning (Cosgrove, 1999; Harley, 2001). Drawing from these studies, in combination with other cultural, social and political theories, I shall turn to the hugely powerful and notably understudied cartographic representation: Google Maps.

This paper draws from research that I am currently conducting as part of a PhD at RMIT Melbourne, Australia, in the school of Global Studies. My thesis is centrally concerned with Google Maps at the intersection of technology and ideology in the context of globalization and capitalism. As this paper has been prepared for the Asian Conference on Cultural Studies, which in 2014 had the theme ‘borderlands’, it focuses on Google’s portrayal of borders on their massively influential world map. In doing so, this paper sketches a brief overview of some key themes of my research, assembled with the hope of rising discussion.

There are three components to this paper: firstly, I shall begin by contextualising Google and explaining how they make their money. Then, I will follow a traditional concern of map makers and consider how Google Maps depicts disputed borders between nation-states. By giving a string of examples, this section will dispute Google’s continual claims of political neutrality. Lastly, I move onto consider borders in a more figurative sense and discuss how the frontier of cyberspace has been pushed into the embodied world.  
Google

Formed in 1998 in Silicon Valley, Google Inc. became one of the world’s fastest growing corporations. As of May 2014 Google’s market capitalization was \$382.47 billion (US), approximately the same as the UN estimate for the GDP of Venezuela. Forbes Magazine ranks Google as the world’s fifth most valuable brand, placing it below IBM and above McDonalds; and it gives Google the world’s third highest market value, sitting below Exxon Mobil and above Microsoft (2014). It is highly significant to note that at least 96% of Google’s money comes from advertising (Kim, 2011). The vast majority of their money is made by launching an automated global auction every time someone enters a word into Google’s search engine. Advertisers make bids on words that they want their brand to be associated with. Any word—‘security’, ‘sex’, ‘salad’ or ‘Schumpeter’—entered into Google’s search engine

can lead to a bid in this global linguistic market (Levy, 2011, pp.83-99).

As Frédéric Kaplan has noted, Google have managed to extend the domain of capitalism into language itself, making words into a commodity (2011). In doing so, they have found an incredibly profitable business model based on this linguistic speculation. In commodifying symbolic communication, Google have massively facilitated the global market’s push deeper into people’s everyday social relations and practices. This can be understood as part of the neoliberal project that, in David Harvey’s words, means, ‘in short, the financialization of everything’ (2005, p.33). All of Google’s projects—search, Gmail, YouTube, and Google Maps—can be analysed through this prism.

In 2012 Google Maps claimed to have one billion unique users per month (Google, 2012). The vastness of this number is worth reflecting on. To put it into some perspective, 200 years ago there was less than a billion people on Earth, and only a tiny proportion of them—princes, military elite, navigators and some capitalists—would have used maps. Given Google Maps unprecedented audience, I argue that how the multinational corporation represents the world is very significant, for it actively contributes to shaping the way an enormous number of people imagine the world and their place in it. Also, as a practical wayfinding device, Google Maps affects social practice with an enormous number of people regularly using the cyber-spatial representations to facilitate their physical movement through space.

## Depicting the Borderland

Like most contemporary world maps, political borders are a prominently featured on Google Maps. They are visible on the outmost level of zoom, where these frontiers between self-contained nation-states are depicted by solid black lines. This representation of global space is a rather conventional world map: a standard north-up, Mercator projection subdivided into a jigsaw of nation-states. From this outmost level of zoom, national borders are visible all the way down to the innermost level of zoom. Figure 1 depicts the apex of the ‘Golden Triangle’, the borders between Thailand, Laos and Myanmar at the maximum level of zoom.

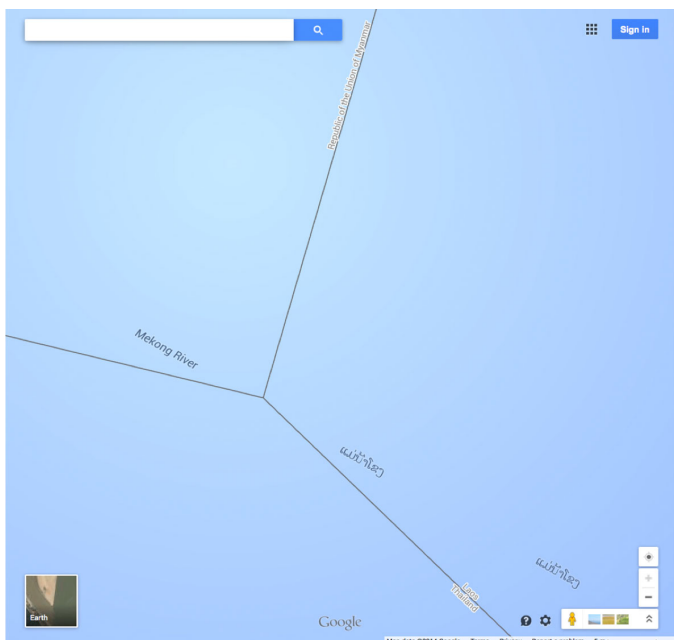


Figure 1. The apex of the 'Golden Triangle'. Captured 20/5/2014.

These straight lines meeting over the Mekong are a state imposition of order over the ever-changing flow of a river. This abstract geometry of power is reminiscent of Benedict Anderson's argument that maps function as a totalizing classificatory grid (2006, pp.170-8). While in some respects absurd, this example is again rather standard mapping discourse. Google Maps might pride itself on being 'innovative', digital and interactive but, as far as depicting the majesty of national borders go, it is rather conventional.

Google Map's depiction of frontiers becomes interesting when it represents disputed borders. These borderlands not only raise the stakes politically, but they also reveal Google's ideological claims and offer an insight into how this map constructs subjectivity. The corporation claims they 'follow a hierarchy of values' which 'inform our depictions of geopolitically sensitive regions' (Boorstin, 2009). Using this hierarchy, Google claim to have reached the 'optimal combination of neutrality, objectivity, and legitimacy' (McLaughlin, 2008). This string of value laden words are key to understanding Google. The corporation consistently frames itself as being able to transcend culture and politics.

The most concise example of this was captured by Marissa Mayer, Google's former vice president of search products and user experience, and a key spokesperson for the corporation. She claimed to an audience at Stanford University: 'Data is apolitical'. Mayer went on to explain that Google are 'able to scientifically and mathematically prove' which course of action to take, and can therefore avoid politics (2006). However—to rephrase George Orwell—the opinion that one's belief is apolitical is itself a political opinion (2004, pp.4-5). Rather than some form of cyber-positivism, Google's motives are inseparable from the dictates of profit maximization.

Google's director of public policy is Bob Boorstin, a man with noteworthy neoliberal credentials. He was formally President Clinton's national security speechwriter and the foreign policy adviser to Robert Rubin. Regarding Google Maps, Boorstin announced the first tier of Google's hierarchy of values:

In all cases we work to represent the "ground truth" as accurately and neutrally as we can, in consistency with Google's mission to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful (Boorstin).

In the latter half of this statement, Boorstin quotes Google's official mission statement. In my thesis I unpack this mission statement in detail, for I see it as an ideological statement par excellence. Every word of this totalizing statement is swollen and dripping with value judgements, political implications, and cultural beliefs. While fully unpacking Google's mission is beyond the scope of this paper, I want to draw attention to the fact that this mission is bound up with the sci-fi sounding goal of creating artificial intelligence. Since the very beginning Google's founders 'have been consistent in framing Google as an artificial intelligence company—one that gathers massive amounts of data and processes that information with learning algorithms to create a machinelike intelligence that augments the collective brain of humanity' (Levy, 2011, p.385). Furthermore, then seek to incorporate this learning machine into the circuits of capital accumulation and the commodification of everything.

The second tier of Google's hierarchy of values is 'authoritative references', to which the company seems to have a somewhat ambiguous relation. In a policy post, Google claim: 'While no single authority has all the answers, when deciding how to depict sensitive place names and borders we use guidance from data providers that most accurately describe borders in treaties and other authoritative standards bodies like the United Nations' (Boorstin, 2009). In another post, Google dismissively dubs the as UN a 'politicised organization'—as opposed to the corporations neutral, objective and legitimate pretensions—thus justifying their rejection of UN naming conventions or portrayal of national borders (McLaughlin, 2008).

Neither do Google follow the naming conventions of any single respected geographical society because they note that 'these organizations exist only in a handful of large, rich economies, and many believe they do not represent the views and values of other parts of the world' (ibid ). In this strikingly unreflective statement Google conveniently ignores the fact that they are a stupendously rich and powerful advertising corporation based in Silicon Valley, USA. Essentially, this 'authoritative references' tier is a loose attempt to justify Google's picking and choosing from various sources as they see fit while simultaneously holding itself superior.

The third tier 'local expectation' is perhaps the most curious part of Google's approach to representing borders. The interactive and global nature of Google Maps enables the company to tailor their map to reflect the assumed opinion of the user in question. They literally change the map depending who is looking at it. Google Maps makes generalizations about the supposed opinions of an individual, language group or nation-state and can change their map reflect this.

Liancourt Rocks is an illustrative and locally relevant example. Named after a French whaling ship that almost ran aground there in 1849, this small rocky outcrop is about 432km north-west of Osaka. These rocks, and the surrounding waters, are a disputed territory with both Japan and South Korea laying claim to the island. So the question is: on whose side of the

border does it fall? Google Maps responds by saying, it depends who is asking... Using Google.com, the 'global'—read American—version of Google, will deliver this result depicted in Figure 2.1. Using Google.co.kr, with the .kr being the country code for South Korea, a user will see the island labelled 'Dokdo' (Figure 2.2). Whereas using the Japanese Google.co.jp, a user will see the rocks labelled 'Takeshima' (Figure 2.3). What is more, the waters surrounding these islands are also contentious. Google Maps and Google Maps Japan agree that the body of water is called the 'Sea of Japan'. Whereas the Korean Google Maps labels it the 'East Sea'.

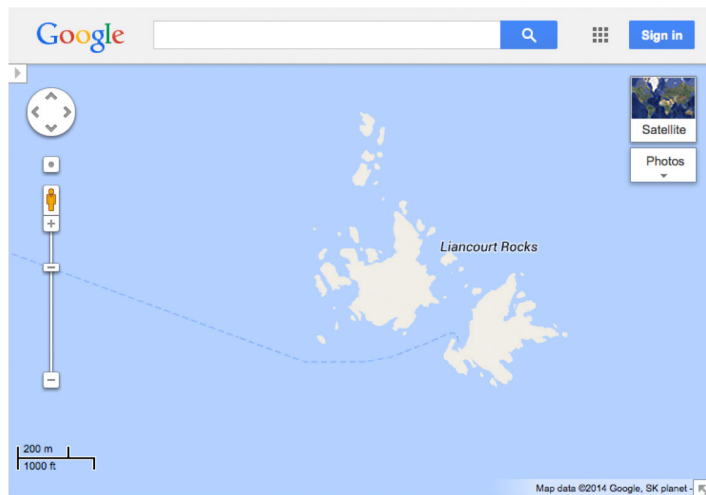


Figure 2.1 Google.com, 'Liancourt Rocks', Image captured 14/1/2014.



Figure 2.2 Google.co.kr, 'Dokdo' '독도' Captured 14/1/2014



Figure 2.3 Google.co.jp, 'Takeshima' 竹島, Captured 14/1/2014

Another example of the geopolitics of Google's 'local expectation' can be seen in a territory fought over in the 1962 Sino-India border dispute. Google.com depicts this disputed territory with dotted lines, but labels it with the Indian name Arunachal Pradesh, as opposed to its Chinese name, South Tibet (Figure 3.1). Compare this with the Figures 3.2 and 3.3 to see how Google portrays the border on its Chinese and Indian versions of Google Maps.

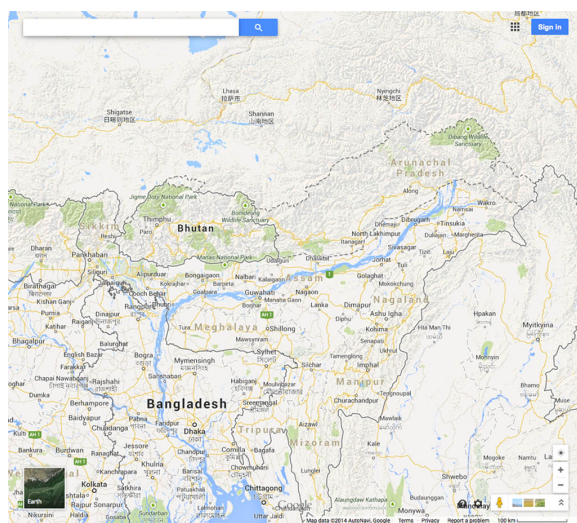


Figure 3.1 Google.com Sino Indian border, captured 15/5/2014



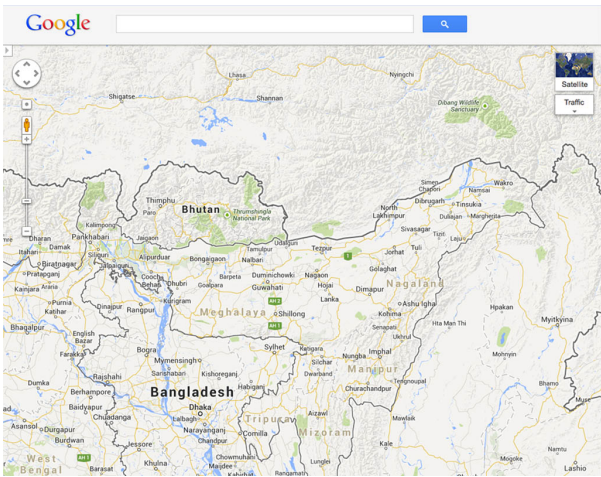


Figure 3.2 [ditu.google.cn/](http://ditu.google.cn/)  
South Tibet, captured 15/5/2014

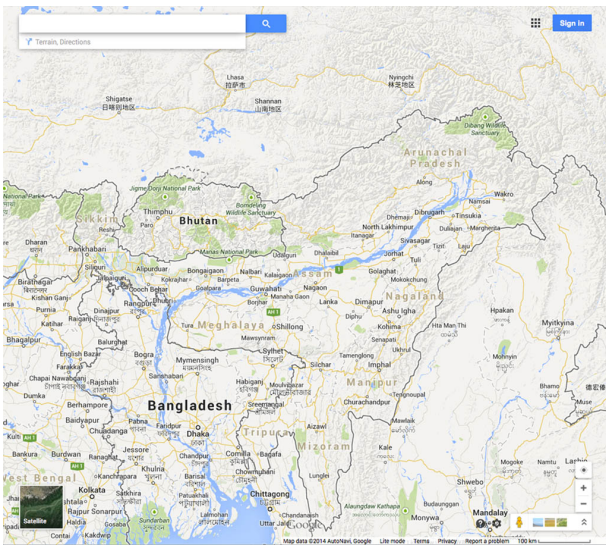


Figure 3.3 [google.co.in/maps](http://google.co.in/maps), Arunachal Pradesh,  
captured 15/5/2014

The recent situation on the Crimean Peninsular also features, with Google's .com version representing the new border with a dotted line (Figure 4). The line on the Russian Google Map is notably not dotted, leaving no ambiguity as to who controls the peninsular. Unfortunately, for the sake of this argument, Google do not have a Ukrainian version of their maps to compare.

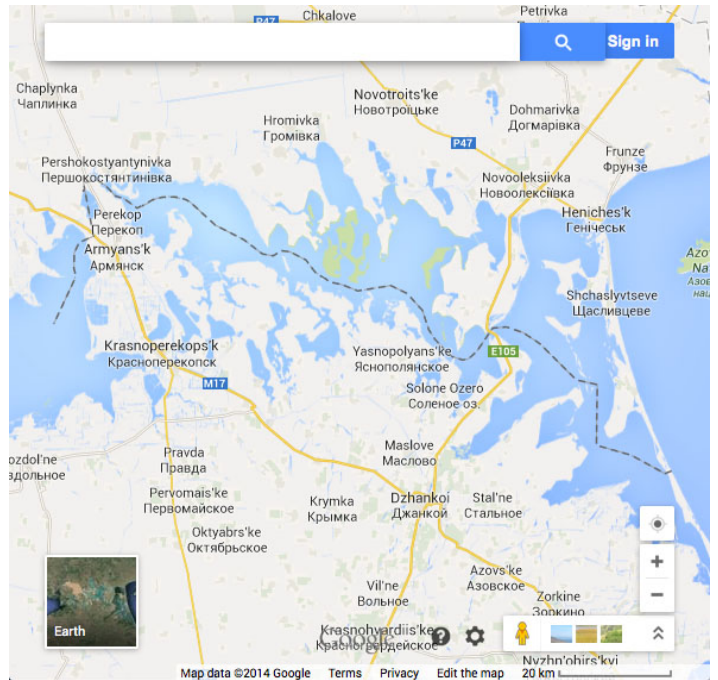


Figure 4(i): Google.com and Google.ru, the Crimean Peninsular, captured 21/5/2014

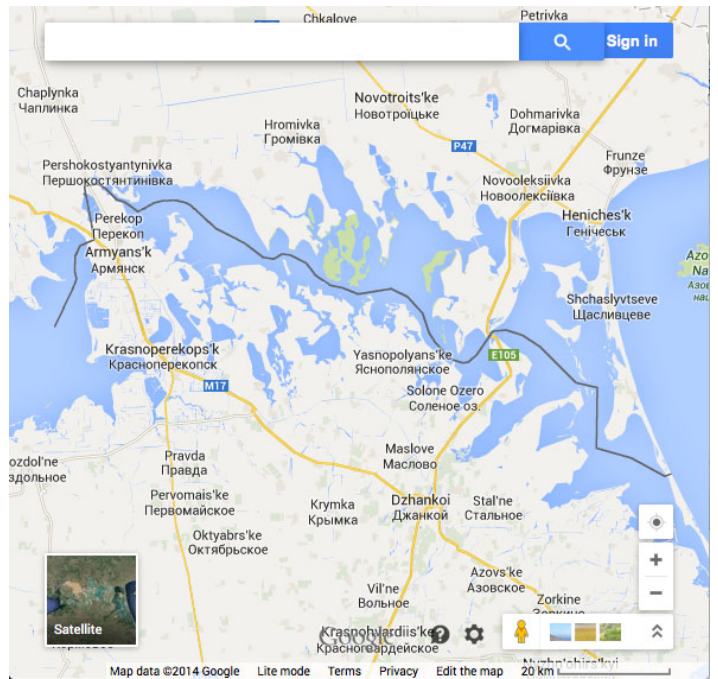


Figure 4(ii): Google.com and Google.ru, the Crimean Peninsular, captured 21/5/2014

Another example can be found in the South China Sea. According to Google Map's Chinese version, the contested sea is circled by line, which appears to denote the Middle Kingdom's unambiguous ownership of the sea.



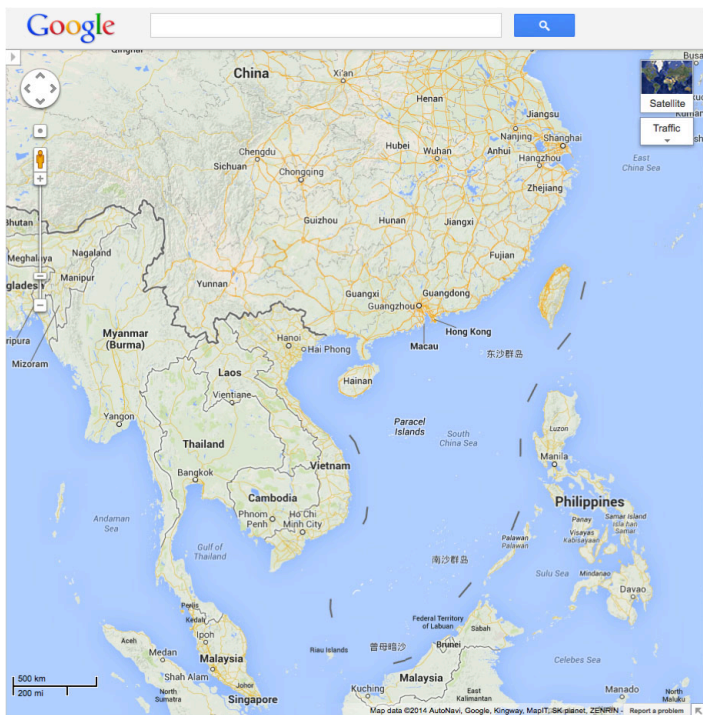


Figure 5: ditu.google.cn/ South China Sea, captured 15/5/2014

Moreover, this line also runs on the east of the Taiwan, which is notably not labelled as an independent country. In the case of Taiwan, Google Map's Chinese version even goes so far as to remove the labels of major state institutions, such as the Presidential Office in Taipei. Figure's 6.1 and 6.2 show the difference between Google's Taiwanese and Chinese services.

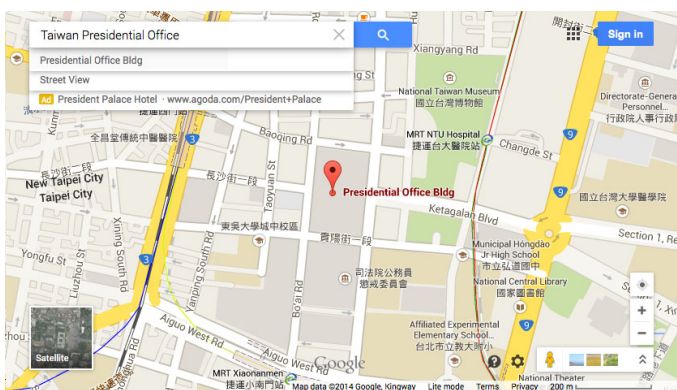


Figure 6.1: Google.com.tw, Presidential Office Building, captured 21/5/2014

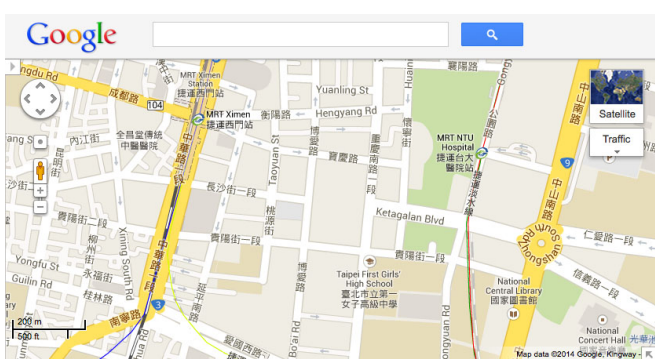


Figure 6.2: ditu.google.cn, Unlabelled structure, captured 21/5/2014

In 2012, the New York Times published an article with the provocative title: 'The First Google Maps War' (Jacobs, 2012). This article outlined a 2010 border dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. This dispute began when Google depicted the Nicaraguan border a few square miles further south than the usually accepted international frontier. Explicitly citing Google, a Nicaragua official took the opportunity to cross the mouth of Rio San Juan and land in Isla Portillos. His expedition was soon followed by another 50 soldiers. Costa Rica protested and responded by sending 70 police officers into the area. These tensions were not just the result of Google, the roots of this dispute go back to the mid-19th century (Jacobs, 2012). While negotiations prevented a further escalation, this episode captures the tangled histories and power relations that can make demarking borders on a map murky territory.

Another problematic aspect of Google's 'local expectation' approach is that it feeds into what Eli Pariser called the 'filter bubble'. He is concerned that 'personalization filters serve up a kind of invisible autopropaganda, indoctrinating us with our own ideas, amplifying our desire for things that are familiar and leaving us oblivious to the dangers lurking in the dark territory of the unknown' (cited in Bauman & Lyon, 2013, p.123).

Google claim that they 'work to provide as much discoverable information as possible so that users can make their own judgments about geopolitical disputes' (Boorstin, 2009). Google Earth does include some little notes that can be opened with a click. For instance, a button on Liancourt Rocks states: 'Administered by Korea as Dokdo, claimed by Japan as Takeshima'. Google Earth also depicts disputed borders in red, rather than yellow. However, the corporation's apparently lofty principle of providing enough 'neutral' information so people can make up their own minds does not appear to translate to the far-more-popular Google Maps.

## The Frontier of Cyberspace

The implications of Google 'local expectation' leads me to turn away from the map's representation of political borders and to consider the theme 'borderlands' in a somewhat more figurative manner. The later half of the 20th century saw the exponential rise of networked computers, which qualitatively intensified the globalization process. By evoking the term 'globalization', I am not implying it in a simplistic, economic sense. Our world is neither 'borderless' or 'flat'. Rather, I understand globalization as referring 'to the expansion and intensification of social relation and consciousness across world-time and world-space' (Steger, 2013, p.15). In this sense, globalization is a material and symbolic process that is fundamentally multidimensional and multiscalar. The spread of the Net had a hugely deterritorializing effect on cultures and social practices around the world, with symbols and objects circulating the globe at unprecedented levels. I argue that corporations like Google have reterritorialized cyberspace, orienting as much of it as possible toward capital accumulation.

As Lev Manovich has noted, space is a key metaphor in new media and networked computers (2001, pp.272-3). The term 'cyberspace', first used by sci-fi writer William Gibson, is illustrative (1984). 'Cyber' is derived from the Greek term for 'steersman', implying someone who navigates through space. Indeed, the persistent spatial metaphors permeate much of the

Web. Consider the names of some browsers—Netscape Navigator, Internet Explorer, and Safari—these examples are all framed in spatial terms, all conjure the image of an individual user navigating through an unknown territory.

In the same novel, Gibson also used the term ‘cyberspace cowboy’. Drawing on the American frontier myth, he used this to refer to elite high-tech hackers exploring the wilderness of the Web. To take this image further, as in the 19th century steam engines pushed the frontier of ‘civilization’ further into uncharted territory, so in the late 20th century, search engines pushed into the uncharted cyberspace, reterritorializing it along commercial lines. Manifest destiny has been replaced by a utopian, neoliberal technological determinism. Rouges, re-appropriators and revolutionaries still move through this landscape, but much of the terrain has been reorganized, with the cowboy days being largely replaced by a sprawling ranch economy.

This is where Google began, as the most successful search engine to penetrate cyberspace. It functioned as a hugely profitable tool for assisting people to navigate their way through the imagined territory of the Web. Then, in the mid-2000s, Google began to spill out into the offline world. Initially, Google made their money from selling ads based on what one was searching for. Then with the advent of the mobile Web, where one searches from is almost as important as what one is searching for (Madrigal, 2012). At the end of 2012, at least 20% of Google’s queries are now ‘location specific’, a number that is certainly much higher for mobile users (Rushe, 2013).

And this is big business. The emergent ‘geo-services’ industry currently estimated at generating up to US\$270 billion of revenue per year, according to a Google commissioned report (Oxera, 2013). ‘Geo services’ include electronic maps, satellite imagery, location based searches, GPS navigation and satellite receivers. To put the staggeringly number into some perspective, geo-services are worth at least six times as much as the global video games industry (\$25 billion) or up to half of the world airline industry (\$594billion) (ibid, p.iv). As the most popular online map, Google Maps is at the forefront of this industry, leading the corporation’s interweaving of cyberspace and physical space. In so doing, it has created a sort of borderland between the two.

I will now offer a solid, if hypothetical, example of a local manifestation of this process in order to tease out the complex, problematic and contradictory nature of this borderland and its reterritorialization. Imagine a person walking through the streets of Osaka on their way to the 2014 Asian Conference on Cultural Studies. Rather than asking somebody for directions, the person runs Google Maps on their ‘smart phone’. They navigate the Web to navigate the city, they access commercial cyberspace in order to move through embodied space. The person taps ‘Rihga Royal Hotel’ (the conference venue) into Google Maps. What follows usually occurs within the pseudo-magical realm of the technological ‘black box’.

The phone’s hardware and operating system translates the person’s finger strokes into digital information, interfacing it with the browser, and then emitting it wirelessly. This information then jumps across the Pacific—via transoceanic fibre-optic cables—to the US where it fires up between 700

and 1,000 computers in several of Google’s massive data-farms (Figure 7). Hundreds of algorithms groom over the search request, indexing and ranking it (Google, 2014a).

One crucial factor is where the person is searching from. Thanks to the Pentagon owned GPS system, Google locates them with great accuracy in Osaka. They thus decide that the person means this Rihga Royal Hotel, as opposed to the other five across Japan. It is their ‘local expectation’. The person’s search term and physical movements are recorded by Google and, in combination with their search history, they are profiled by the corporation’s pattern recognition algorithms and sold to Google’s advertisers in an attempt to manipulate the person’s consumer habits. This intricate surveillance mechanisms allows Google to efficiently launch contextual and targeted advertisements at their users. It also provides the data for Google’s machine learning algorithms to improve themselves as part of the company’s quest to create artificial intelligence.

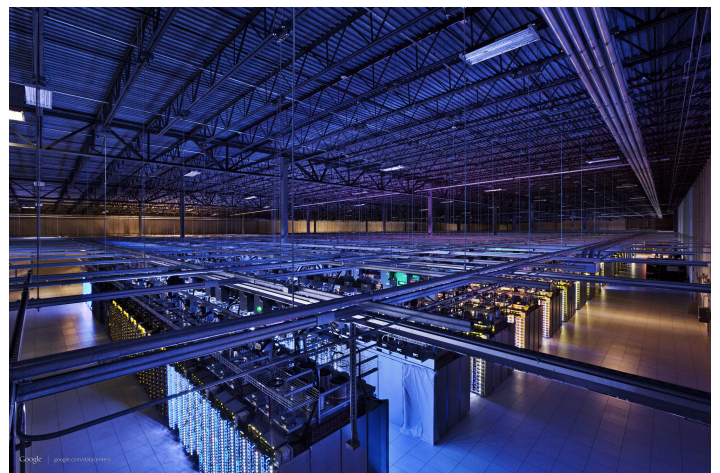


Figure 7: Inside a Google Data Centre, Council Bluff, Iowa, USA (Google, 2014c).

Then, the results are blasted back halfway around the world where the person’s mobile device translates the abstract code into a image that the person recognizes as a map (Figure 8). This whole process takes place at inhuman speeds and the results are delivered in less than a second. Google Maps directs the person to cross a bridge and then turn right. On route, they pass a 7-Eleven, which features as a corporate landmark. 7-Eleven is presumably a paid-up Google Maps advertiser with its logo featuring prominently on the map. I say ‘presumably’ as there is no way to tell, which businesses that feature on Google Maps are paid advertisers and which are not. This violates part of point one of Google’s self-proclaimed philosophy, which explicitly states that advertising must be clearly marketed (Google, 2014b). It seems this principle does not translate to Google Maps.



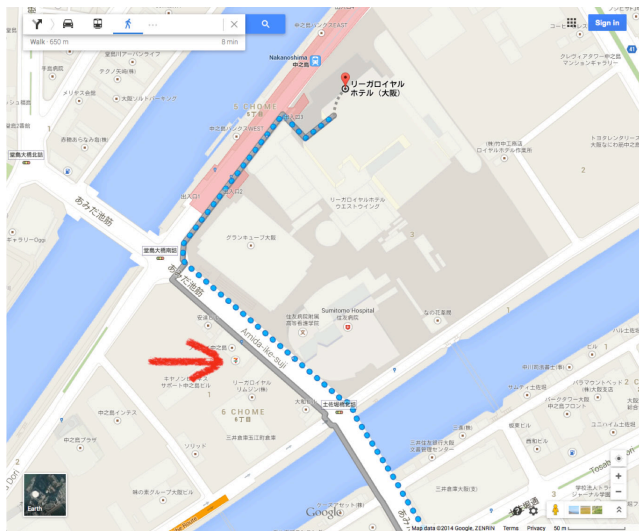


Figure 8: Google Maps to this Rihga Royal Hotel, via 7-Eleven (arrow added)

Wrapped up in this enterprise is a complex and cross-hatched tapestry of time and space which are woven together through the hypothetical person's use of Google Maps: social time and cyberspace; digital processing time and subjective sense of place; biological time and corporate 'geo-services'; global networks and local navigations. The everyday act of a person using Google Maps to navigate to this conference is a fascinating example of the multiscalar and multidimensional dynamics of globalization.

## Conclusion

While constantly claiming to have the 'optimal combination of neutrality, objectivity, and legitimacy', the issue of Google Map's depiction of disputed territories clearly demonstrates the farcical nature of Google claim for neutrality. Their map

cannot exist beyond politics because the map itself is an incarnation of politics. It is a visualization of a perspective of a contested historical process, one fundamentally connected with subjectivity, power relations and social formations.

While making these bold claims, Google are expanding their commercial power and profit margins. The corporation's influence and ambitions have spilt out from the Web and begun to reterritorialize the embodied world. This has created a sort of borderland between the formal realm of cyberspace—with its algorithms and axioms, conformity and code—and the place beyond software, our physical earth and social worlds; a place of infinite complexity and order that we inhabit and embody.

And it is this paradox, the ability to mix the formalised with the more messy—non-mathematical formalisms, linguistic, and visual objects and codes, events occurring at every scale from the ecological to the erotic and political—which gives computing its power effects, and which folds back into software in its existence as culture (Fuller, 2008, pp.5-6).

In the 19th century coal was thrown into the boilers of steam engines, providing the power for expansion at the frontiers of 'civilization'. In the 21st century, language is thrown into the boilers of Google automated linguistic market. This provides the power for the search engine to reorganize the web and to reterritorialize the space beyond it, dragging as much of it as possible into the circuits of capital accumulation. In this way, Google Maps facilitates the global markets push deeper into the social fabric of the embodied world.

Full references for this paper can be found in the Table of References section.

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