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Black Country, White Wilderness: Conservation, Colonialism, and Conflict in Tasmania

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Abstract

In 2015, Tasmania's land management plan for the expansive Wilderness World Heritage Area, covering around a fifth of the entire island of south and central Tasmania, was dramatically revised. The new plan expanded dual management of the area with Aboriginal Tasmanians and the Tasmanian state through the creation of an Aboriginal Cultural Business Unit that would generate financial management opportunities for Aboriginals. However, Aboriginal perspectives on the meaning of land often conflicted with white conservationists' wilderness values of remoteness and isolation. In this article, I argue that the reactions from white conservationists to the new plan are illustrative of a wilderness ideology that attempts to limit interactions with nature and consequently marginalizes Aboriginals. Reflexivity is an important aspect of this paper as these critiques of conservation are also critiques of my own beliefs and identity, and my reactions to what I encountered in this research add a layer that would have been absent otherwise. Through reflexive analysis of interviews and participant observation with individuals from environmental organizations, the Tasmanian government, the timber industry, tourism, and an Aboriginal corporation, along with printed materials and websites connected to the Wilderness World Heritage Area, I show that conservationists in Tasmania perpetuate colonial desires and white privilege at the expense of Tasmanian Aboriginals through the racialized ideology of wilderness.

The Awkward Interview

Thankfully, out of the thirteen interviews I did in Hobart, only one of them had to be done on the phone. Cramped in my hostel room that was slightly larger than a closet, I tried to get comfortable on my bed before I made the phone call that would change the entire course of my project. The person I was calling was Emma Lee, a senior *Palawa* (Tasmanian) woman who has been fighting for Aboriginal rights for most of her life in Tasmania, first at the local level and eventually globally. I was calling to see what she thought about the white conservationist backlash against the newly proposed wilderness management plan for Tasmania that she had helped create. It was a plan my conservationist interviewees had told me was problematic, nefarious, or simply as the Green's Member of Parliament Nick McKim informed me, "shit." I went in with my guard up, ready to hear out the "non-conservationist." Unlike my fellow white conservationists with whom I had empathized, this time it felt different: to me, Emma was the "other."

The interview had a somewhat rocky start, thanks to some amateurish mistakes on my part, but mistakes that speak to the points I make in this paper. Like all of my interviews prior to this one, I began by asking the basic questions on my script: "So, how long have you lived in Tasmania? Were you born here?" I had never before realized how accusatory that question sounded, especially when considering how often Tasmanian Aboriginal authenticity is interrogated by white

Tasmanians. In fact, out of all people I interviewed, Emma was the only Tasmanian Aboriginal who agreed to speak with me. This could have been for any number of reasons, but many others may have refused because throughout Australia there is a legacy of white researchers using Aboriginal words and knowledge for their own benefit. Emma gave me a chance, though, and we soon arrived at the fraught topic of wilderness.

To Emma, the idea of wilderness was a charade, a convoluted term that separates humanity from nature and restricts people's access to it for the sake of maintaining the chimera of pristine wilderness. This was a stance I had learned about from a few articles in a class I had taken the year before. However, when I undertook this research project, the wide range of beliefs and perspectives on nature I had read about evolved from words on sterile pages to a variety of stories and lives of individuals willing to share them with me. Emma was one such person. When I asked her what her personal relationship was like with the land that whites call wilderness, she told me about the Aboriginal concept of Country : "It's more than just a personal connection – it's a kinship connection. It's generational, it's ancestral. That Country is the home to our creation place, for us as *Palawa* people. One of our stories of creation is from there. That has radiated out across 40,000 years from then to now, but beyond that in our time, it is endless." In another Aboriginal researcher's words, "for Australian Indigenous people, culture is

interwoven into country like a network and it has patterns and rhythms that interconnect within the expression of their identity" (Barbour and Schlesinger 2012, 39). Emma's recounting of this powerful spiritual and generational connection introduced me to this fundamental Indigenous paradigm of Country that sounded and felt quite different from wilderness.

A compelling place to critically examine wilderness in the commonwealth of Australia (of which Tasmania is a state) is Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area, the legal name for a place that is also part of Country. While wilderness is a conceptual term or a way of categorizing land, a World Heritage area is a place listed specifically by the United Nations for being of cultural or natural significance to humanity at large. Sprawling out across 1,580,000 hectares that cover over a fifth of the entire island state of Tasmania, the TWWHA (Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, pronounced "twah") is a significant place to white Tasmanians who treasure it for recreation and rely on it for their livelihood through tourism, to the Indigenous Tasmanians who have been connected to it for millennia, and to the world at large, who flock to it as part of the growing Tasmanian tourism industry (Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service 2015).

The history of human interaction with the land now called the TWWHA begins 40,000 years ago with the ancient Tasmanian Aboriginals (Pardoe 1991). It is a history marked by violence from the moment Europeans set foot on this island. When the English began to colonize Tasmania in the early 1800's, conflict with the Aboriginals soon led to an intense period of violence known as the "Black War" (Clements 2014). As white settlers died in the conflict, the governor of Van Diemen's Land (now called Tasmania), Sir George Arthur, decided that the best way to remove this "Aboriginal problem" once and for all was to declare martial law and allow British soldiers to attack Aboriginals on sight. Furthermore, he encouraged and incentivized civilians to organize into hunting parties to kill Aboriginals (Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania 2015). In effect the British government authorized genocide. In the aftermath, only around one hundred Aboriginals remained out of a population that was once in the thousands (Reynolds 2004). Most of these survivors were then exiled to cultural re-education internment camps on Flinders' Island, where they were forced to learn European customs and punished for following Aboriginal ones (Reynolds 2004). Many of these people died from disease and poor housing conditions.

The Aboriginal survivors on Flinder's Island were moved from camp to camp as the years turned to decades, with many Aboriginal women marrying European men during this time and having children who grew up in colonial Tasmanian society. According to British documentation, by 1874 the "last" Tasmanian Aboriginal man and woman had died, despite the very-much-alive descendants of Aboriginals from the Flinder's Island group that

spread out across Tasmania from then onward (Lawson 2014). The myth of the elimination of Aboriginals that started in 1874 continued throughout the twentieth century, but the efforts of Aboriginal Tasmanian activists gained more attention in the 1970s as they began to challenge this myth of "extinction" they had been living with for the last century (Banks 2013; Lawson 2014). Since Aboriginal women had been married off to European men, some of their contemporary descendants have white British phenotypes such as light skin or blue/green eyes (Banks 2013; Flanagan 2002). This lack of Tasmanian Aboriginals who have no European phenotypes is a foundation for the extinction myth. The *Palawa* are the descendants of these couples, and they are intimately familiar with this myth. They trace their ancestry from the Aboriginals who were moved to the Flinder's Island camp and the camps that followed it, and thus most have European individuals in their family ancestry. Over a century after the genocide, the dispossession of land, rights, and resources from Aboriginals has created inequity that lasts to this day (Moorcroft and Adams 2014).

After colonization, land in Tasmania was used primarily to extract the valuable timber and minerals in the forests. The birth of the conservation movement in the mid-twentieth century, combined with the growing shift in the Tasmanian economy from resource extraction to tourism, altered perceptions of land for the settlers' descendants. In the 1970s, the Australian Conservation Foundation began a campaign to list a large land area in Tasmania that Aboriginals once lived in as a world heritage area due to its outstanding geological heritage, Indigenous heritage, historical heritage, flora, fauna, and recreational value (Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife 2016). In 1982 they succeeded, and this land was given a new name: the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. Ever since then, the land has been managed by the government of Tasmania through the creation of an extensive policy plan.

Recently, an eclectic team including Tasmanian Aboriginal stakeholders tackled the task of updating the fifteen-year old plan. When it was released for the public to comment on it, several changes elicited rebuttal by white conservationists. Proposals to increase ease of access to "develop" and/or extract resources from the TWWHA have incensed conservationists. They advocate upholding wilderness values at the expense of the preferences of many contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginals who want access to protected areas they hold sacred and the ability to run their own tourism operations. These Indigenous-led programs allow them to share their stories and connection to Country with others, along with offering opportunities to generate income for Aboriginals (Jaeger and Sand 2015, 18; Moorcroft 2016, 609). The focus from conservationists was on wilderness, and they often downplayed or ignored the importance of Aboriginal involvement in the creation and management of this plan along with the social injustice issues

the plan raised. When it comes to land access, rights, and management, conflict between conservationists and Aboriginal people is common in Australia as a whole (Adams 2004; Atchison 1994; Barbour and Schlesinger 2012; Bayet 1994; Moorcroft and Adams 2014; Muller 2003; Rose 2004) and the world at large (Braun 2002; Clapperton 2013; Cronon 1995; Dove 2006; Hathaway 2010; Sundberg 2004; West et al 2006).

In this paper, I will first explain my methods interwoven with my own positionality in this project before delving into my experiences and observations on the construction of wilderness and how it marginalizes Tasmanian Aboriginals, with relevant literature being included throughout. I argue that the prevailing wilderness logic in Tasmania perpetuates colonial paradigms of race and environment; it is constructed by whites in a system of racism that limits or erases Aboriginal people.

Interviews, Observations, And A Brooding Undergraduate

To gather the data that informed my analysis in this ethnography, I used interviews as my primary research method and to a lesser extent participant observation. I conducted interviews with thirteen people from a variety of organizations and backgrounds in Tasmania including people who currently work for (or used to work for) tourism companies, specialty timber companies, universities, government, and non-governmental or-

ganizations. I chose these industries and organizations as my primary method of selecting people to interview because my initial project goal was simply to gather a variety of contrasting opinions about the proposed TWWHA plan. However, things grew more complicated as the people I spoke with challenged my views. I conducted participant observation at a panel on tourism and wilderness at the University of Tasmania, at a weekly volunteer meeting with The Wilderness Society in Hobart, and occasionally even in the hostel I was living in.

My interviews followed a semi-structured script, and I would add or remove questions depending on whom I was speaking with. My main focus was on big changes in the TWWHA plan and the values or ideas behind them. However, after multiple interviews, I started to let myself deviate from the script and let the interviews become more informal and conversational in nature. I did this in order to give the people I spoke with some control of the direction of the interview. All of the people I interviewed lived in Tasmania, with the majority of them having spent most of their lives there. They were all conducted in Hobart during April or May of 2015, with the exception of my second interview with Emma over a year later. Each interview was recorded after the interviewee gave me permission. I use vignettes from interviews to illustrate both the people I worked with and learned from, and my reactions to these people and their stories. The original purpose of my project was to fulfill my

study abroad program's required Independent Study Project (ISP). The program was run by the School for International Training, an American academic organization that offers study abroad programs across the globe for American students. I was enrolled in one of their more popular programs, "Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action." It was on this program that I first heard of the

is one exchange from an interview with a conservationist that illustrates my acceptance into "the greenies" (slang referring to environmentalists). Senator Christine Milne of the Green Party was one of the people I interviewed. When we met, she gave me a printed photo book collection of shots taken in the TWWHA, published by the national environmental organization, The Wilderness Society. She had

"I was one of them, a young initiate, part of the clan, and this made me uneasy when writing this paper."

controversy over the TWWHA plan, and eventually I decided to undertake my ISP there. A year later, back at my home university, I used the data from Tasmania to write my senior ethnographic capstone paper for my Anthropology degree. Most of the names I use in this paper are real because participants gave written consent to their names being used. The exceptions are Bernard, Dave, Michael, Sarah and Will, which are pseudonyms.

My own positionality affected my research and what I was writing about. Most of my interviewees were white conservationists, and they all accepted me as a fellow white conservationist, especially given the nature of my study abroad program. It was an important part of my identity, and this connection facilitated my contact with many of them. I had dinner in some of their homes, I was invited on hiking trips, and one person even tried to help me find housing. I was treated with kindness and respect. There

signed it before I arrived, addressed it to me, and wrote "enjoy our wilderness and work to protect it." I was one of them, a young initiate, part of the clan, and this made me uneasy when writing this paper. At times, it felt like I was betraying many of them, using their words as critiques of an ideology to which many of them have dedicated their lives.

My discomfort with criticizing or possibly insulting them was a symptom of a larger conflict: my own identity as a conservationist was being challenged through the people I listened to and learned from in a way that reading articles could not have done so deeply for me. And the further I got in my project, the more problems with wilderness I encountered. By the time I left Tasmania and turned in my first draft of this paper, a report in which I attempted to take an impartial stance on the TWWHA plan, I felt dissatisfied. In my aim to be 'objective,' I had censored my position in this re-

search project; I had left out my personal stake in what I was discussing. When debating this role of an engaged, involved anthropologist, Nancy Scheper-Hughes asks "what makes anthropology and anthropologists exempt from the human responsibility to take an ethical (and even a political) stand on the working out of historical events as we are privileged to witness them?" (1995, 411). Writing this paper as a reflexive ethnography let me express my own humanity, emphasize the meaningful experiences I had with people like Emma, and ultimately allowed me take a stance against the racism and oppression I encountered in Tasmania. Emma, despite the awkwardness of our initial interview, inspired me with her genuine and passionate words to shift the goal of my paper from a policy analysis to an investigation of the wilderness ideology. I have also written it with accessibility in mind with the hope that it might be useful to the people with whom I worked.

The Ideology of Wilderness

In every day parlance in Tasmania, as much as in the US, "wilderness" is imagined as a concrete, physical place. It is something we can touch, something we can visit, something we can be in. Wilderness is constructed as natural, separate from the world of humanity, civilization, and culture. Yet, scholars rightly note that "wilderness" is better understood as a symbolic, rather than a physical place. The central feature of this symbolic location is its separation from human

presence. (Atchison 1998; Baldwin 2009; Braun 2002; Cronon 1995). Other dimensions of the symbolic meaning of wilderness have shifted over time in Western thought. For example, in 18th century American colonial society, wilderness was seen negatively, as a dangerous domain associated with Satan in a biblical context (Cronon 1995), whereas today it is seen as fragile and in need of protection. "Wilderness" is a dynamic, conceptual framework rather than a static, physical place. Today, arguably, a critical aspect of that framework is its intrinsic colonialism (Thomas 1994).

When I met with Senator Milne, she told me a personal story about why she is a conservationist – a story I empathized with – that illustrated the way wilderness is constructed as a place devoid of human activity. Senator Milne was at this time the leader of the Australian Green party. The party has a strong base in Tasmania, given that some of its founders were Tasmanian conservationists. I knew it was a long shot when I requested an interview with her, but I was pleasantly surprised to find myself in her office a couple of weeks later ready to spend some time learning about how she sees the world.

I was nervous as I began my walk to her office. Here I was, a lowly undergraduate, about to interview one of the most well-known politicians in Tasmania. Usually I never felt the need to dress up for an interview, given that the typical setting was an informal meeting in a coffee shop on an interviewee's day off. This time though, I had dressed formally

without even thinking twice about it. Her office was in downtown Hobart, on a pier overlooking the Tasman Sea, easily the most visually arresting and probably the most expensive property I had visited in Hobart. This only underscored just how different this interview felt in terms of the wealth and power of the person I was interviewing. I entered her building and, before seeing anything else, was greeted by a huge wall filled with dozens upon dozens of pamphlets from the Green Party, Nature Conservancy, Wilderness Society, and many other conservation organizations: save the reef, save the rainforest, save the TWWHA, save the planet! I spent a few minutes observing the wall before I entered the main room where I spoke with Milne's secretary to check in for my appointment with the Senator.

Her office was spacious, well furnished, and had a huge window offering a beautiful view. Senator Milne exuded an aura of confidence that reflected her position and experience, yet she was also friendly and enthusiastic to speak with me. Unlike for most of the other people I spoke with, interviewing was a regular part of the Senator's career. Her responses to most of my questions were focused less on her personal opinions and more on broader assertions of issues she wanted to discuss, which was unsurprising given her profession. When I got to the question about her own personal connection to the TWWHA, the Senator shifted from our discussion of politics and policy into a rare vignette from her life revolving around a landmark environmental bat-

tle in Tasmania. Until this point she had been speaking in third person as "we, the Green party", but here she switched to the first person:

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I have never been to Lake Pedder.
I won't go back until we drain
it. That'll happen one day, we
will restore the lake. In fact,
that sand up there in that little
bottle is sand from the beach at
the lake. That little stone on top
is what's called a Pedder penny.
The little old lady who collect-
ed that, just before the lake was
flooded, asked me to take it back
when we drained the lake and put
it back on the beach, such is the
level of faith that the conserva-
tion movement will one day secure
the restoration of Lake Pedder.
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Rosaldo's concept of "imperialist nostalgia" helps to shed light on the emotions that conservationists feel when they think about wilderness: "my concern resides with a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed… Imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox: A person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim" (Rosaldo 1993, 69). This mourning is a powerful, emotional undercurrent of wilderness that I encountered in multiple interviews. A critical aspect of wilderness is that it is perceived today as faded and weakened when compared to pre-colonial times, and that this is something to be mourned. However, this mourning exists detached from the reality of a post-colonial society: "the flight from history that is very nearly the core of wilderness represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility, the illusion

that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world" (Cronon 1995, 11). Entertaining fantasies of a Tasmania that was not colonized ironically reinforces the colonial project in that it erases the presence of Indigenous people and the reality they have dealt with since colonization.

Two questions I made sure to ask everyone I spoke with for this project were what they valued in the TWWHA and how they personally defined "wilderness." The most recurring quality was the "pristineness" and separation from Western civilization the TWWHA supposedly provides. Greg, the owner of a backpacker-oriented tourism company that operates near the TWWHA, provid-

ed a good summary of this idea, when he told me that "we've changed the world so much beyond what it was originally, it's a place that you go and experience it the way people did thousands of years ago." Green Party Senator Milne described wilderness to me as "remote, wild... removed from modern points of access." Geoff, a veteran Tasmanian conservationist campaign organizer, defined wilderness as "wild country, which is a reminder of how the world was before humanity started exploiting it and changing the face of the planet." Michael, who makes a living crafting products from special timbers in Tasmania, described it as "areas untouched by man, and there's not many left." Sarah, who as a government employee focused on tourism knew quite a bit about marketing the TWWHA, respond-

ed similarly, telling me that wilderness is: "attractive, unspoiled, natural landscape which is mostly unchanged by the intrusion of human activity." Murray, a career forestry employee, defined it likewise as "areas with little development, fairly remote from any developed road or access." MP (Member of Parliament) Nick McKim for the Tasmanian Green party reminisced in our interview that when he used to be a tour guide in the TWWHA, his clients would often get upset at the sight of a helicopter, claiming it diminished the "wilderness experience."

To all of these interviewees, wilderness can only exist either in the past "before humans" or today without human presence. In either case, it is imagined by these conservationists to be like it was before European colonization. This is a paradox in that this place they yearn for cannot exist as long as they are there (Braun 2002). Most of the people I interviewed expressed these ideals, yet their perspectives on the importance of wilderness to the TWWHA varied considerably. Bernard, a Tasmanian government employee involved in land management, acknowledged the fluid nature of wilderness when responding with this: "It's complicated. You can be in parts that don't feel wild or remote, but there's no doubt that at its core, the value, what I like about it anyway, is that you can be somewhere and you can look out and not really see anything other than nature." Michael, the timber crafter, took it a step further, asserting that because in the TWWHA "we have hydro infrastructure, road infrastructure, power poles, water

pipe lines, forestry areas... it's not wilderness." Michael then told me an anecdote about a man who managed to walk across the entire country of Australia but who consistently encountered – even when in the desolate and scorching outback – signs of human habitation. He was trying to make a point to me that wilderness is nearly non-existent because humans have interacted with so much of the planet. Despite the reality of human presence and involvement with land, the construction of wilderness as pristine and devoid of humanity is at the heart of conservationist thinking in Tasmania, as it is in Canada, the United States and elsewhere.

Tasmanian Aboriginal Greg Lehman challenges this notion of a pristine untouched landscape, writing that "it is essential to recognise the reality of our island's history: that it was not an empty land, but home to an actively managed cultural system" (Lehman 2016). This critique is one reiterated by researchers around the world who study conservation and land ethics (Atchison 1994; Baldwin 2009; Bayet 1994; Braun 2002; Cronon 1995; Muller 2003; Rose 2004). Braun sums it up by asserting that "in the environmental movement, there are only two binary poles: nature spoiled or nature saved" (2002, 237). In order to protect this pristineness, conservationist organizers like Geoff run campaigns to protect the land from activities they perceive as harmful to this pure wild nature, from mining and logging to tourism. As Geoff keenly explained to me, "wilderness is not just something static – it's not just sit-

ting there for people to enjoy, it's actually being destroyed."

To Geoff and Senator Milne, working in conservation was a constant battle against the forces of government and industry in order to protect something sacred. This mentality of "us versus them" between wilderness and industry was iterated by several of my interviewees. MP McKim gave a similarly passionate response to the Senator's, when he vowed to me that "I will fight for the rest of my life to defend wilderness wherever it exists." On the other end of this "fight", Michael vented to me about how frustrated he was at being othered as a "rainforest logger." Murray expanded on this critique, gruffly telling me that "unfortunately, wilderness has been used here so many times when it suits the conservation movement, wilderness becomes anything they want to protect. Anything they want to block activities in, often ignoring what would really be done or what development would happen there." Murray and Michael's description of the "conservation movement" as its own entity ("they") illustrate the extent to which factions are constructed and very real to those involved. This was also my reasoning when referring to "the conservationists" as a distinct collective.

In exploring why wilderness advocates engage in the fight for a pristine TWWHA, there were also more practical reasons for keeping the TWWHA "remote" and inaccessible: the protection of endangered species and the preservation of Aboriginal heritage sites. A conservationist professor of the University

of Tasmania in Geography, Dr. Jamie Kirkpatrick, when discussing critiques of wilderness, explained that "there's good reasons for not wanting to call things wilderness, but remoteness is critical for conservation and for the things that make the World Heritage area the World Heritage Area... having a distance away from mechanized access is critically important for conserving things that have world heritage value, including the cultural values." Geoff agreed with him, asserting that "wilderness is also something important to protect cultural heritage. It is the remoteness of some of these Aboriginal sites that has allowed them to persist without being obliterated by road building or damming or logging activities or mining or pilfering or arson or vandalism." Rather than analyzing the effectiveness of remoteness as a tool for protecting sites, I wanted to focus on why remoteness is both desired as the primary protective measure for both cultural heritage and wilderness. Part of the answer I found was that the value placed on preserving wilderness and pre-colonial Aboriginal heritage is part of a colonial ideology that upholds white power over land while maintaining the nostalgic elements in wilderness and the noble savage stereotype. Cronon wrote that "as we gaze into the mirror [wilderness] holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires" (1995, 69). These "unexamined longings", this "imperialist nostalgia" in Tasmania is for this remoteness,

a separation of humans from the natural world that conservationists yearn for, which stands in contrast to the proposed plan that allows for more construction of low-impact accommodation shelters and more permits for helicopters and jet skis in the TWWHA to make it more accessible and consequently less remote.

Another change in the plan allows for more tourism ventures in the TWWHA, which some of my interviewees who worked in conservationist organizations strongly objected to. This colonial desire for untouched remoteness comes at the cost of accessibility. When I asked Greg, the tourism business owner about accessibility, he said that everyone should be able to visit the TWWHA, not just young backpackers (such as myself) to whom his and many other tourism companies cater. The tourism industry for the TWWHA creates advertisements focused on "getting away", on visiting an exotic "lost wilderness." These advertisements appealed to me and countless other mostly white vacationers in Tasmania, and they indicated yet another way I was part of the conservationist clan.

The Marginalizing of Aboriginal Tasmanians

My interviews with white Tasmanians (not just the conservationists) revealed patterns in how Tasmanian Aboriginals were being marginalized by whites and consequently excluded from land management. In multiple ways, the Aboriginals were discredited and ignored by whites across all of the professions I

encountered. The first pattern I noticed was how many of my white interviewees outright rejected the possibility that contemporary Aboriginals exist entirely, in a continuation of the myth that Tasmanian Aboriginals went extinct in the late 1800s. The most detailed manifestation of this idea while I was in Hobart occurred not during an official interview, but rather in a conversation with a friend at the bar of the hostel where I was staying.

It was a late night, probably a Friday, and I was enjoying my time off the ethnographer clock. As was our weekend routine, my friends and I were all gathered around the bar, and my friend Will asked me how my project was going. I had known Will, a British expat, for a couple of weeks by this time. When he asked me this, it was already late into the night, and both he and I had had a couple of beers. Thankfully this memory has not escaped me. I began to tell Will about how my interests had changed from when I first started, and I explained that my original goal of surveying opinions on the new wilderness management plan had transformed into an exploration of the relationships between conservationists, the government, and Tasmanian Aboriginals. At the mention of "Tasmanian Aboriginals", I saw Will's face darken.

"Don't you know? They died off ages ago." I asked him what he meant, and he began his explanation that went something like this.

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They were all killed by whites
during colonization. The last real
Tasmanian Aboriginal died decades
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ago. The ones you're talking about now are more European than any—thing else. Their modern culture and language is actually com—pletely based off of what they've learned from Western historians, linguists, and archeologists.

I heard parts of this skepticism about "real" Aboriginals repeated several times by white Tasmanians I spoke with. One of my white interviewees who worked in forestry remarked to me that because the last "full-blooded" Aboriginal died a long time ago, contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginals are "as Aboriginal as you or I." To further his point, he told me a short anecdote about Aboriginals from Tasmania who went to visit Aboriginals on the mainland and how they looked like a van filled with white tourists in comparison to the often darker-skinned, more "traditional" Aboriginals of the mainland. His implication was that mainland Aboriginals were "real" and that Tasmanian ones were not. Paul, a former forestry employee, gave similar responses that emphasized that Tasmanian Aboriginals are only a tiny fraction of the population of Tasmania and asserted that their culture is more European than Aboriginal. Dave, a conservationist who worked in parks and wildlife, told me something comparable to what Will said, that "current Tasmanian Aboriginals have little [sic] aboriginal genes and have lost their connection to their land. It's different from other parts of Australia where Aboriginals have lived on their own land for the entirety of white occupation; knowledge of Aboriginal history comes from white

archaeologists. So many of them have been totally obliterated."

This narrative of a defeated people, stripped of their culture, served to marginalize contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginals and it gave white people the power to define Aboriginality and what constitutes a "connection to land." These statements reflect Tom Lawson's argument that the genocide of Tasmanian Aboriginals and subsequent mourning of the "extinct" Aboriginal serve to strengthen whiteness and its dominance in Tasmania (2014). When white conservationists and foresters deny the existence of contemporary Aboriginals, they help maintain the current of paradigm of wilderness versus human civilization, or nature versus culture, a paradigm where contemporary Aboriginals do not exist. When I spoke to Emma about this, she sharply condemned the idea, telling me that "they [white conservationists] created this platform using the myth of our extinction. They took that nostalgia, the mourning of those they killed, and used it against us to say that 'well, you know, given that you cannot speak, we will'. It's a self-appointed position that doesn't allow for the multiplicity of voices, and that to me is a power. Where's the democracy in wilderness?" This particular racialization of Tasmanian Aboriginals that denies Aboriginality to light-skinned, blue-eyed people in Hobart and other cities – despite their ties to Country and their heritage through generations – serves to expand whiteness while marginalizing Aboriginals.

Another pattern that works in tandem with the longing for untouched wilderness, one that is also bound up with colonial thinking and "imperialist nostalgia," is a focus on the pre-colonial Tasmanian Aboriginal. This idea can be found throughout the conservation arena (Bayet 1994; Braun 2002; Clapperton 2013; Muller 2003). Indigenous peoples are marginalized by being simultaneously restricted to a static, romantic identity of a "native other" that exists separate from civilization (Bayet 1994; Clapperton 2012; Lehman 2016) and excluded from land management (Adams 2004; Barbour and Schlesinger 2012; Muller 2003). In the current management plan for the TWWHA, most of the writing about Tasmanian Aboriginals focuses on their heritage. Discussion of contemporary Aboriginals is limited to allowing them to perform "traditional" activities on protected land, including hunting, gathering, and fishing (Tasmanian Government 1999, 101). The meaning here is clear: Aboriginals must act in these imagined pre-colonial ways in the TWWHA as ecologically noble savages, or else they are not Aboriginal. Baldwin sums up this construction excellently in his article on a similar phenomenon relating to Indigenous people in Canada and the boreal forests: "Racial rule... is no longer about forcibly purifying aboriginal bodies of their primitivism. Rather, it is about purging them of their modernity" (Baldwin 2009, 247). This precolonial focus, which is established in white-dominated spaces, creates and upholds a nostalgic and mournful narrative of colonization

that in reality marginalizes Aboriginals while securing and upholding white power over land. When white conservationists set the rules of what can and cannot be Indigenous, they also establish the idea that being white means being modern and the ultimate controller of the land.

Emma noted that another way whites marginalize Tasmanian Aboriginals is by characterizing her people as "those poor buggers." In the realm of Tasmanian politics, the government administration worked to "open up" the TWWHA by making the new wilderness management plan allow for more activities, access, and resource extraction. A number of the conservationists I interviewed speculated that the new emphasis on joint management with Aboriginal people was really just an elaborate ruse from the government to use Aboriginals as an excuse to open up the protected areas for development. MP McKim told me that "the government is trying to set up a conflict between the environmental movement and the Aboriginal movement in Tasmania." Similarly, Senator Milne explained to me that "this is a group of people in parliament who want to now use Aboriginal people and Aboriginal connection to Country as an excuse for destroying the very thing Aboriginal people value." Dr. Kirkpatrick shared a similar sentiment, speculating that "it was a great opportunity to put a wedge between the indigenous community and the green community." Sarah, most likely because of her position as a government employee, requested an anonymous interview in or-

der to confess that she, too, thought this was the case.

This story of conflict sounded compelling to me when I first heard it. But when I spoke to Emma, she was incensed at this line of argument. For Emma, the people claiming that Aboriginals are being duped by the government to support the new management plan have a limited and patronizing idea of who Aboriginals are:

```
Oh, for God's sake. So our agen-
cy and our rights are now reduced
to 'Oh, look at those poor bug-
gers, they don't even understand.'
How offensive is that in terms of
them trying to retain their pow-
er, that myself as a PhD student
couldn't have the intelligence to
knock together an argument or the
networks to actually understand
what the plan is. It's offensive…
My goodness, in my family group,
we have professors, doctors, a
pro-vice-chancellor, we have prac-
titioners and specialists. Not for
one moment do I think that they
don't have good grounding and
conceptual understanding and are
talking with people that are actu-
ally putting this plan together to
make those decisions.
```

Here Emma pulls back the shroud of racism behind the idea that Aboriginal Tasmanians could not be active agents in the creation of the management plan, but rather clueless, pitiful pawns of white politicians: "those poor buggers." By perpetuating this idea, conservationists erased the Aboriginals who helped create the new plan and pushed them into the distant background of the battle between conservation and industry. This echoes findings in Latin America, where only

white people are seen as having the real capacity to rationally manage conservation projects (Sundberg 2004).

The current management plan for the TWWHA itself contains undercurrents of this rhetoric. In the plan, a significant cultural value of the TWWHA was that it served as "an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement which is representative of a culture and which has

in the TWWHA and acknowledgement of past Aboriginal management of it through controlled fire burnings. Tasmania's Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage Matthew Groom, who has the power to approve the TWWHA plan itself, agreed with Michael's sentiment by noting that historically, both major political parties were guilty of ignoring both Aboriginal interests and the cul-

"If Aboriginals appeared at all, they were constructed in very limited ways—either entrapped in the past as ecologically noble savages, or as unsophisticated pawns in white people's political dramas."

become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change" (Tasmanian Government 1999, 22). While the writers also include an additional paragraph after this sentence that acknowledges the existence of a contemporary Aboriginal community, the sentence quoted above nonetheless underscores the dominant narrative of Tasmanian Aboriginals as "vulnerable" and powerless.

Emma was not the only person I spoke with who was critical of this way of constructing Indigenous Tasmanians. Michael had grown rather sick of this rhetoric that erases them too. When we were talking about his thoughts about the new management plan, he told me that "there's been a lack of recognition of indigenous ownership and their involvement in the history." Michael was referring to the lack of both co-management

tural value of places like the TWWHA. Groom supported greater Aboriginal Involvement in the TWWHA, telling me that "one of the things that make [sic] this area extraordinary is the fact that there's an Aboriginal connection to the area that dates back as much as 40,000 years, and in a global context that is extraordinary."

In every article, conversation, press release, speech, presentation, interview, campaign goal, public policy, and social media page I encountered, the message of keeping the TWWHA remote and inaccessible so that it could forever be pristine wilderness was consistently repeated by the conservationists. If Aboriginals appeared at all, they were constructed in very limited ways—either entrapped in the past as ecologically noble savages, or as unsophisticated pawns in white people's political dramas. Each of these

moments, interactions, publications, and websites reinforced whiteness and particular constructions of Aboriginals/ wilderness for the conservationists as dominant. They racialized Aboriginals in particular ways, which in turn served to bolster a particular set of associations of whiteness with conservation. Interestingly, conservation scientists from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) who came to Tasmania to review the state of the World Heritage Area noted this exclusion: "It is widely accepted that the cultural heritage of the TWWHA has been playing second fiddle to the natural heritage at all times since inscription despite status as a mixed World Heritage property" (Jaeger and Sand 2015, 31). Given that this "natural heritage" of wilderness is based on white colonial desires for the pristine, it is white people who benefit from the management of TWWHA while Aboriginal peoples have been historically left out.

When I showed Emma my draft of this paper in our follow-up interview, I asked her to respond to the idea of a power disparity between the conservation movement and Tasmanian Aboriginals. Her reply adds a personal depth to this reality that I, as a non-Indigenous person, could not add:

> It speaks to the power of others to have a public media space. If you think of it in terms of a zero sum game, for [the conservationists] to have their space means that we don't have ours. There's a real battle in that there's only so much space and attention to go around. And those with power have it, and those without don't. It's no accident that I'm here, that I've had to bare knuckle fight my way to be here. It speaks to the silencing of us through wilderness narratives… We are not mute. We are only muted by the powers of others to silence us, and the weapon of their choice is wilderness. There is no place for us in wilderness. They treat our heritage as things, and deny our people the right to participate in conserving those things that are important to us.

Many Tasmanian Aboriginals have resisted the limited identities and ideologies being forced upon them. Emma has consistently been writing opinion editorials that critique conservation for the largest Tasmanian newspaper, *The Mercury*. She and other members of the *melythina tiakana warrana* (Heart of Country) Aboriginal Corporation have participated extensively in the creation of the new TWWHA management plan and have worked with the Tasmanian government to give Aboriginals greater agency in the TWWHA. The Aboriginal Cultural Business unit proposed in the plan aims to give more agency to Tasmanian Aboriginals, bringing them further into the fold of land management as a dynamic group of people. Bernard, the government employee, gave a thorough defense for this approach when I asked him about dual management and Aboriginal involvement in our interview:

> I think you can take an approach to wilderness that acknowledges not just that there was occupation but that there should be potential occupation, and certainly greater involvement of Aboriginal people so cultural practices

can continue. That might be a
pointy issue in the future, be-
cause Aboriginal people would be
the ones to decide what they want
their culture to evolve into in
the future, and it might resem-
ble things that are contrary to
what many people would like to
see. It might come close to mir-
roring the developments people
are so worried about. Because why
should Aboriginal people be able
to return to the area, for cultur-
al purposes, and sit under some
traditional shelter? Maybe they'd
like to stay in something more
comfortable, and that's perfect-
ly appropriate in my view because
when Europeans came, Aboriginals
were very quick to pick up tech-
nology they found useful, so they
started using glass… that sort of
thing. They took on dogs really
quickly because they saw the use-
fulness of them. There's nothing
to suggest their culture should
remain static.

This move towards co-management is critical for social justice for Tasmanian Aboriginals: "If the right of people to decide for themselves is not fully accept-ed, then it is not truly collaborative work and the process becomes disempowering, and can undermine Indigenous people's rights to self-determination" (Barbo-ur and Schlesinger 2012, 39). This dual management proposal is following trends in the rest of Australia toward increas-ing Indigenous involvement and agency in protected land management (Adams 2004, Moorcroft 2016, 591).

However, to insinuate that there is a singular opinion in the Tasmanian Aboriginal community on these issues is problematic (Cameron 2015; Lehman 2015). Firstly, there are Tasmanian Ab-

originals who have adopted the ideals of wilderness and allied with conservation-ists, such as the *weetapoona* (The Moon is Risen) Aboriginal corporation and the non-profit Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, which supports keeping the TWWHA categorized as wilderness. For them, wilderness is essential to protecting their Aboriginal heritage (DPIPWE 2016, 8). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, by collapsing the variety of voices, view-points, and organizations of Tasmanian Aboriginals into a false singularity, Ab-originals are marginalized further by letting white conservationists and politi-cians pick and choose which Tasmanian Aboriginal group or viewpoint they agree with while ignoring the rest. This was certainly something I saw in my inter-views. Supporters of the new manage-ment plan that allowed for more accessi-bility and development would claim they had *the* Aboriginal backing, citing Emma and her organization. Critics of this plan, who advocated for the TWWHA to remain an inaccessible and protected area of wilderness, claimed they had *the* Aboriginal support, citing the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. In both cases, the multiplicity of Aboriginal voices and peo-ple are censored to fit an agenda.

A first step forward in the relation-ship between conservation, government, and Aboriginals would be for the first two to listen to the major points and ideas from Aboriginals who *do not* agree with them. Tasmanian Aboriginal Aunty Patsy Cameron eloquently describes the impor-tance of this in one of her articles: "What

I hold dear to my heart is the right of all Tasmanian Aboriginal people to have a voice and be engaged in the care of their regional lands. We do not need to agree on all things, as any other group of people, but we do need to know we are heard and our ideas considered, and in a safe environment" (Cameron 2015).

Decolonizing wilderness

In this paper, I have argued that the prevailing wilderness paradigm in Tasmanian conservation perpetuates colonial constructs of race and environment, privileging white settler desires of "imperialist nostalgia" while simultaneously marginalizing Indigenous Tasmanians. White conservationists use multiple techniques to erase or minimize Aboriginals. The paradigm of conservation focuses on the Aboriginals who existed before Europeans arrived, while neglecting contemporary Aboriginals who present an ideological dilemma to conservationists because many of them do not believe in the wilderness paradigm. All of these moves serve to bolster and whiten conservation, while disempowering Aboriginal peoples who might not adhere to the wilderness paradigm.

Tasmanian Aboriginal activists, alongside Indigenous activists around the world, challenge the Western conservationist logic built on a wilderness paradigm that rests on human/nature separation, despite nearly 30 years of ongoing criticism. I asked Emma about this struggle and how she personally dealt with getting rejected or attacked for her views on wilderness:

```
I don't have to subscribe to any
kind of stereotype anymore. I can
care for Country in whichever way
it suits me; whichever way that
it suits you! And that's the beau-
ty with what we've tried to do
with this plan. Everyone cares for
it and they do it in their own
way, within their own knowledge,
within their own experience and
their own worldviews. Who are we
to deny that? Who are we to cast
aside other people's experiences
on the basis that it's not ours?
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Put in twenty-first century terms, Indigenous activism calls for the decolonizing of the wilderness paradigm; conservation must be thought about in connection to Indigenous social justice (Moorcroft 2016). Decolonization involves a set of processes which identify and challenge the aspects of colonialism that persist in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and in the construction of Australia's identity and social institutions (Howitt 1998, 33). In the context of conservation, this means granting greater control to Indigenous peoples over land stolen from them and valuing Indigenous land management philosophy (Muller 2003, 31).

After I finished my independent study project in Hobart, I returned to New South Wales to reunite with my classmates and teachers for our final presentations and completion of the program. As I was eating lunch, my phone started to ring. I looked at the caller ID to see that it Emma who was calling me, and I immediately began to worry. *Did I write something about her she didn't like? Was*

my writing on Tasmanian Aboriginality accurate? What did you mess up, Dan? As it turned out, Emma called to tell me how thrilled she was with my paper, and that it even brought a tear to her eye. She admitted that "it had been some time since a white fella has surprised me." I didn't know what to say, other than "thank you." Months later, I asked Emma why she had reacted that way to reading my paper, and she gave me a heartfelt answer:

> I exist with a tenseness. This holding together of myself against the face of wilderness and conservation arguments… Reading your paper actually let me breathe. It gave me hope that our people's message for Country as its own active agency is working! For so long, our people, culture, Country, and history have been someone else's story. It gave me a freedom, democracy, to tell my own story, without qualifications, without asking me to justify that. You let us tell our own story in our own way, and it's significant because this is a beautiful story, because that story is that you have your place within our Country and we don't require anything of you. That's the thing; there is no quid pro quo in having been talking. I never expected anything, let alone to have our voice seen and as legitimate. You gave us a legitimacy that we can't give ourselves. That we are trying to give ourselves.

If my own paper – which only *begins* to explore the realities lived by contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginals and the role of conservation in their oppression – was such a surprise to Emma, what does that say about the state of Tasmania? What Emma's own story reveals is that the struggles of contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginals are clearly not being discussed enough. They have endured the combination of being ignored, restricted, and even challenged about their Aboriginal roots, injustices which conservation has unwittingly aided. Stories like Emma's need to be shared and given the attention they deserve. When discussing the relationship between Indigenous people and conservation, Rose wrote: "Nature for us is history, conquest, and damage; by our own ethical presence Nature may become for us resilience, reconciliation, and love" (2004, 212). Everyone I listened to had a deep connection to the land of Tasmania, despite the many walls they constructed around each other. But it was from Emma that I learned of the oldest and most sacred kinship connection: Country. It was her people and their connection that many conservationists and other non-Indigenous people in Tasmania so often questioned or denied. When non-Indigenous conservationists' love of nature manifests in the wilderness paradigm, it is a reinforcement of the privileges granted to us by the horrific actions of our colonial ancestors. And if we are to pursue a more just and equitable society in the daunting wake of colonialism, we must be able to change.

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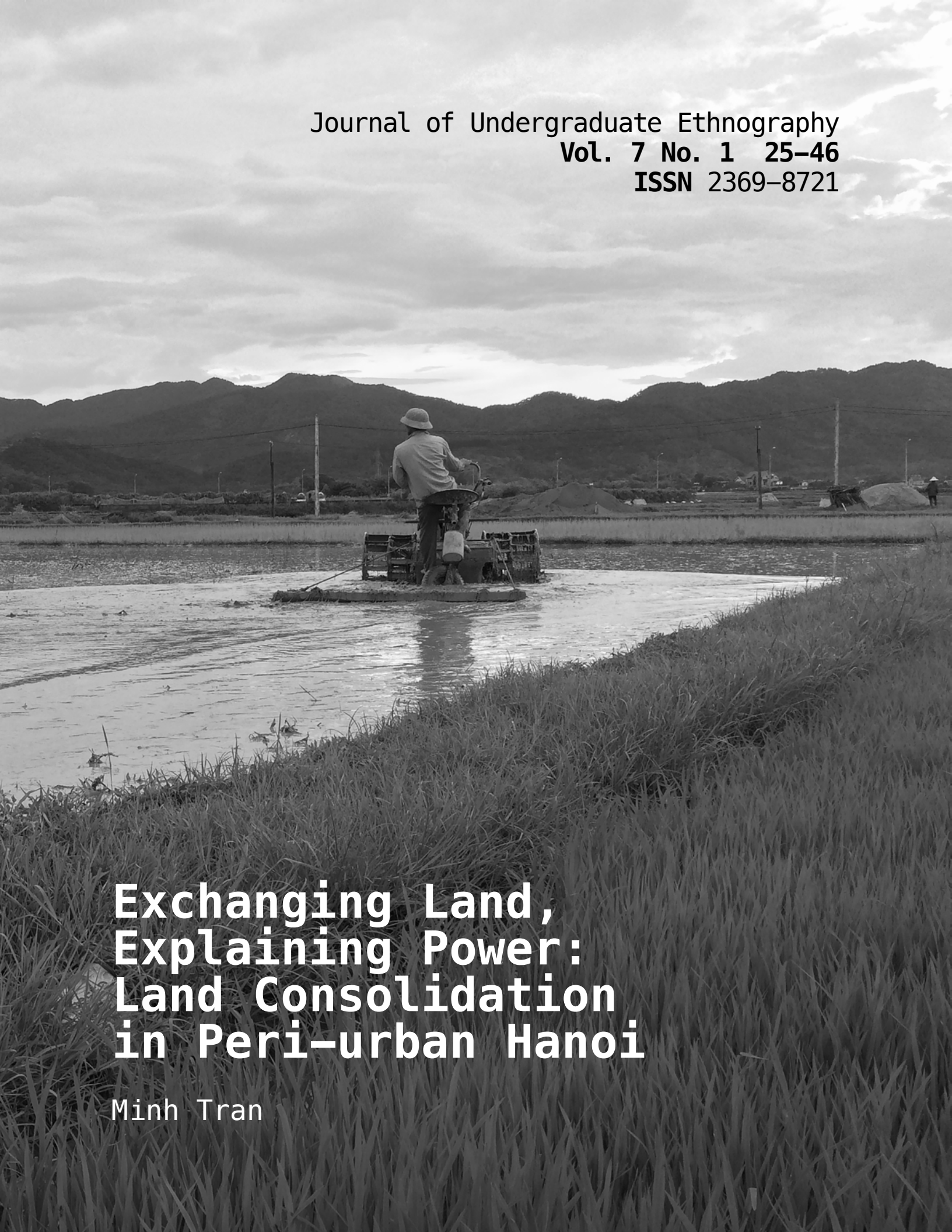
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[1] The Aboriginal term "Country" is often capitalized to differentiate it from the noun "country" and to emphasize that it is a significant cultural and spiritual phenomenon, along with being environmental.

[2] The United Nations defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (1948). Despite this, I often heard white Tasmanians use the word to mean the complete destruction of Tasmanian Aboriginals. I want to iterate that when I write this, I am following this international definition and am not trying to imply that the Tasmanian Aboriginals were eradicated, but rather emphasize the severity of violence inflicted on Aboriginals during the colonization of Tasmania.

[3] Nearly two years after conducting this research, in November 2016, the proposed TWWHA plan was put into law. The final plan had changed in several ways from the prototype plan I discuss in this article, including the removal of the "Aboriginal Cultural Business Unit" concept (Tasmanian Government 2016). While I think it would be fascinating for future researchers to examine responses to the new plan or the reasons why the final plan changed, I do not believe their analysis would dramatically change any of my findings or arguments in this paper. The proposed plan was the vehicle I used to explore the racialization of wilderness, and analysis of the reactions and responses to the plan comprise the core of this article.

Exchanging Land, Explaining Power: Land Consolidation in Peri–urban Hanoi

Minh Tran

Abstract

How do economic growth and the spread of housing and facilities affect cities' peri-urban land and peoples? In many cases around the world, agricultural land is being converted and repurposed rapidly for urban uses through the process of land consolidation. However, how does land consolidation actually affect farmers and communities? What role do they have in the process? How do they evaluate results? Using participant observation and semi-structured interviews with thirteen local farmers in Soc Son, a peri-urban district of Vietnam undergoing land consolidation in 2010, this article illuminates four major conflicts that affect the outcome of land consolidation. These conflicts are (1) between the state's strategy of decentralization and the disparate human resources on the ground, (2) between the ideology of equity and the efficiency of land redistribution, (3) between the promise of mechanization and unequal access to machines, and (4) between infrastructural improvements and actual needs. I argue that the failure of policymakers to account for existing inequalities and local context in Soc Son villages has led to unfulfilled promises of land consolidation and further stratification within the farmer community.

The Contested Nature Of Land Consolidation

Land consolidation, the rearrangement of small plots of land into larger holdings, is a highly contested issue worldwide. Existing literature on the topic underscores both negative and positive impacts on local agriculture. One school of thought claims that land consolidation contributes to better agricultural production because it mitigates fragmentation and encourages intensification and mechanization (Carter 1984, Bonner 1987, Markussen et al. 2012, Monke, Avillez, and Ferro 1992). Another school of thought, however, argues that land consolidation leads to a loss of farmland, promoting livelihood trajectories away from agriculture to non-agricultural activities and thus reducing production and productive households (Deng et al. 2006 and Fazal 2001). At the same time, studies of land consolidation often focus on quantitative large-scale agricultural impacts of land consolidation as a more abstract process. Less research has been done about how farmers experience land consolidation on the ground.

This article contributes to the on-going debate over land consolidation by analyzing the consolidation process from the viewpoints of policymakers, local leaders and farmers in Soc Son, a district on the outskirts of Hanoi, Vietnam. Reviewing land consolidation in Soc Son, a report suggests that by 2012, 9,000 hectares of farmland in Soc Son had been consolidated and the average number of parcels of land per household had de-creased from 10 to 2.5 (Dao 2015). Two years later, the 2014 census indicated an associated increase of 3.48% in Soc Son's agricultural production (ibid.). However, news articles on the media have reported cases of resistance to land consolidation in the form of protests by many farmers against the changes in and loss of farmland. In one case, farmers in Tri Thuy village, Phu Xuyen, refused to cooperate with higher authorities and abandoned fields for extended periods in order to protest against land consolidation (Minh Tuan and Thuy Linh 2014). Thus, while production outcome may show better productivity and higher yields, the decreased area of farmland has adverse meanings to farmers. Linking such impacts to the observed benefits speaks to the contested nature of land consolidation.

Using government documents, ethnographic observation and interview data, I focus on land consolidation as a process. The paper starts with an overview of theories and literature, which is followed by a description of my data and methodology, including an introduction to my case study. Then, I will juxtapose official documents regarding land consolidation to the narratives of villagers themselves to identify four major conflicts in leadership, ideology, resource and infrastructure. I argue that the failure of policymakers to account for existing inequalities and local context in Soc Son villages left promises of land consolidation unrealized, both in its ideology as a decentralized, democratic and equity-driven program and in its goal of improving farm infrastructures.

In fact, land consolidation magnified existing inequalities in both human and financial capital within the farmer community.

Theory and Methods: A Qualitative Study

Adverse impacts of land consolidation worldwide have been noted in many quantitative studies on decreased ownership and access to land as well as the consequent loss of a stable source of income. First, land consolidation often has resulted in the loss of productive arable farmland for agriculture. In a study of different drivers of land consolidation across three country groups – less developed, developing and developed – Azadi, Ho and Hasfiati (2011) found that productive agricultural land is more likely to be converted to urban uses than to less productive land. Azadi points out that well-drained, flat land close to water sources and urban amenities is desirable for both agricultural production and urban development. In a case study of land consolidation in West Java, Indonesia, Firman (1997) concludes that lands that are flat and well-drained, usually close to a city and major highways, are more attractive for housing development. As such, these studies show that the tension between urban development and farming activities on the same type of land has led to the loss of farmland around the world.

Second, the loss of fertile agricultural land to urban expansion has resulted in disruption of farming activities and farmers' traditional livelihoods. In Viet-nam, agricultural land use rights have always been important assets for farmers. Since a major economic reform in 1986, however, the Vietnamese land tenure system has not recognized an adequate level of private property in relation to land. Agricultural land conversion has therefore often disrupted farmers' traditional livelihoods (Nguyen 2009). In Hung Yen, a province in Northern Vietnam, for example, land consolidation had clear negative impacts on former peasant households: state and market interventions usually benefited rich farmers who were able to expand production; and the bulk of farmers were excluded from their previous agricultural livelihood, becoming increasingly dependent on wage labor and forced into survival strategies of the rural poor (Nguyen, Ton and Lebailly 2011). Similarly, in an ethnographic study of Phu Dien village in Hai Duong, a large portion of farmers had fewer stable jobs after consolidation (Nguyen 2009). While some farmers enjoyed temporarily higher standards of living by leasing the commercial land they received as compensation or engaging in informal retailing and selling basic foodstuffs, household goods and services, many other farmers had no work to do after their land was appropriated.

Nonetheless, despite its sometimes negative impact on land accessibility and agricultural employment, land consolidation has proven effective in several aspects of crop production. One quantitative study of 227 Chinese households' crop production after land consolidation

identified an increase in productivity, raising total output and proving the policy cost-effective (Wu, Liu and Davis 2005). Other research has looked at whether land consolidation can reduce farm fragmentation – a constraint to agricultural production in many developing countries. Smaller lots of land are generally inefficient due to an inverse relationship between farm size and productivity (Carter 1984); in Vietnam, the smallest farm requires five times the labor input of the largest. This implies that there is inefficiency in agricultural labor use, and that land consolidation can help release significant amounts of labor. In addition, consolidation also facilitates mechanization and intensification of cultivation, which can increase productivity and output (Markussen 2012). Again, these studies draw their conclusion on the benefits of land consolidation from a quantitative analysis of agricultural production in the context of general land reform, yet questions remain regarding how farmers perceive and experience such apparently positive outcomes.

Moreover, effective impacts of land consolidation also manifest themselves in the connection between land consolidation and poverty. A micro-econometric analysis of household surveys (Tran 2013) finds no negative correlation between land loss and income/expenditure per capita. The study points out an indirect positive impact on household welfare, via its positive impact on the choice of non-farm based-livelihoods. Another study points out that rising landlessness in Vietnam is a positive factor in the process of poverty reduction, as members of farm households take up new opportunities, notably in the labor market (Ravallion 2008). This study shows how land consolidation leads to increasing diversification away from farming and farming intensification. However, it does not examine the choices, values and experiences of farmers in such contexts and leaves out farmers who continue farming after consolidation.

Overall, most studies use quantitative methods to analyze the agricultural outcome of land consolidation in different cities and countries, creating a large-scale picture of peri-urban agriculture. Less research has examined the issue from an ethnographic perspective and elucidated the meaning of land consolidation that farmers perceive and experience. Even such qualitative research, moreover, tends to focus on the group of farmers who has moved away from agriculture toward non-agricultural livelihoods. It leaves out farmers who have been affected by land consolidation yet still remain engaged in agricultural production. Theoretically, my research is informed by works of James Scott, a political scientist and anthropologist. In The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia (1976), Scott demonstrates ways in which peasants resist authority via the moral economy, and in Weapons of the Weak (1985) he discusses forms of everyday resistance that explain the rarity of open revolts in the context of the peasant economy. Scott's works suggest that many

of the arguments about the positive and negative impacts of land consolidation are products of the state's top-down interventions and people's bottom-up responses. Yet, I also aim to go beyond this bifurcation and examine the microprocesses involved in the process of land consolidation, and the multiplicity of actors and factors involved.

This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate about land consolidation by emphasizing the complexity of the reform and its perceived results. It identifies multiple agents and layers of meanings that would not otherwise be addressed by a quantitative approach. Specifically, it draws on primary data from participant observation, semi-structured interviews and follow-ups with thirteen local farmers in Nam Son village, Dong Ha commune, Soc Son, over a period of two months between June and July 2015. I recruited interviewees through a snowball sample starting with Bloom Microventures, a Hanoi-based NGO focusing on microcredit for poor female farmers in rural Vietnam. While this was a small pool of interviewees within a limited social network, I gained diverse perspectives on land consolidation that were built upon varying experiences, ranging from those who are entitled to highly fertile and productive farmland to those with land loss and/or low quality land. All interviewees are semi-subsistence farmers who practice wet rice cultivation[1] both for family consumption and commercial purposes, and also grow other crops and raise livestock. My interview questions focused on processes and stages of consolidating and redistributing farmland, land holdings, production, choice of crops, and land and water usage before and after land consolidation. Interviews lasted 45 to 75 minutes and were conducted in Vietnamese. For participant observation, I worked on the field with some of the farmers I interviewed to transplant rice and harvest other crops and at their homes to help with household chores and livestock tending. Farmers also took me on "tours" to their fields and explained the spatial and structural differences that land consolidation created.

Being a Vietnamese native allowed me to communicate easily with local farmers without any language barrier and little cultural difference. Yet my background growing up in the city and educated in the U.S. could have influenced how local farmers perceived and interacted with me as a researcher. Indeed, in multiple cases, informants asked why I chose land consolidation as a research topic, or why I cared about agriculture and the peasant community, after having studied in such a developed country as the U.S. I took that as an opportunity to express my personal passion and to partially mediate our different social backgrounds.

Another source of primary data for this study was official government documents, from both the state and local levels, on land consolidation in the Vietnamese language. These documents are official instructions for and reports on processes of land consolidation in Hanoi in general and Soc Son in particular. They

shape my understanding of the goals and policies of land consolidation as a government reform, and my comparative understanding of farmers' experiences.

Soc Son as Case Study

Situated 60 km from the center of Hanoi, Soc Son is the district furthest from the city center and has the most complex topography. Located between the plain of the urban core and the mountains of the rural area, it has a complex mountainous landscape and consequently a wide range of soil types. Soc Son covers an area with low-lying, flat valleys and hilly land (figure 1). Terraces and slopes therefore characterize its paddy fields (figure 2). While a river that runs through the district provides the area with alluvial soil, many of the plots, especially those closer to the mountains, have acrisol soil with

Figure 2 Terraces on the field. Photo by author.

poor fertility and a high percentage of rock material. In this area, low-lying land is lower in productivity since it is prone to flooding (Anh et al. 2004, 5).

Soc Son's complex topographic condition creates a high level of land fragmentation. Over 40% of Soc Son's natural land is arable land dedicated to agriculture - 13,200 hectares in total. However, this was fragmented into many small plots. The village head and members of the leadership team confirmed that the

Figure 1 Map showing mountainous terrain. Retrieved from: https://maps.google.com

average number of plots per household ranged from 10 to 18.[2] According to one informant, Mr. Linh, this fragmentation, in addition to the distance from the center city, had been impeding agricultural production and economic growth in the district for many years.[3] While Soc Son has a significant area of arable land, its agricultural productivity is the lowest in Hanoi.

Land consolidation is a way to address fragmentation. Land consolidation is defined in this paper as the rearrangement of land among holders on one paddy field. In Vietnamese, the phrase "dồn điền, đổi thửa" or "land consolidation", literally translates to "exchanging plots, accumulating field". This reflects the central idea of land consolidation, emphasizing the rearrangement of the small plots of land so that each family retains approximately the same amount of land but in a more concentrated area. This article primarily deals with the 2010 land consolidation program in Soc Son, which emerged as a part of Hanoi's New Rural Development, a national target program to improve the economy and living standards of Vietnam's rural areas and develop infrastructures to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization. It was followed by the construction of new irrigation and transportation systems (Decision No.03/2010/NQ-HDND). With this foundation, let me turn to the conflicts that arose in and after consolidation in terms of leadership, ideology, mechanization and infrastructure.

Leadership Conflict: Decentralization Vs. Lack Of Capacity

Official documents, including plans and instructions for land consolidation from the national and municipal governments, showed that land consolidation in 2010 was a top-down intervention implemented in a decentralized fashion. The People's Committee (PC) of Hanoi, which is an equivalent of a cabinet and as such the executive arm of a provincial government, took charge of the program with the support of the departments of Agriculture and Rural Development Department, Resources and Environment, and Finance as well as PCs at the District and Commune levels. These departments were responsible for providing structural guidelines and financial support while the PC at the Commune level directly planned and implemented land consolidation in their communes under the District PC's supervision. Units of implementation were the PCs of communes, villages, households and individuals. Specifically, each commune was required to form a land consolidation leadership team, comprised of the commune's and villages' leaders as well as locally nominated people. The leadership team was responsible for proposing a plan for consolidating farmland according to the local context and implementing it (Instruction 68/KH-UBND). The division of responsibility among different levels of administration with a central control from the municipality embodies the government's decentralized approach to consolidating land.

As these instructions indicate, land consolidation was hierarchical. Yet it was also decentralized and loosely structured at the municipal level. The top-down guidelines set a framework of tasks and requirements, yet they did not specify any detail or method to achieve these tasks. There were few details about the tasks for which each level of administration was responsible. This decentralized approach to programming and implementation allowed communes and villages to come up with strategies to consolidate land that best fit their local context.

Yet when villagers formed a land consolidation team at the commune level, local leaders proved lacking. Local villagers nominated and voted among the chiefs of villages and trustworthy local intellectuals to choose fifteen people for the leadership team. While this appeared to be a democratic process, the outcome was constrained by limited options. Villagers indicated that the implementation of land consolidation and redistribution involved reading and making maps as well as measuring and calculating land; not many people in Soc Son were thus literate enough to qualify. Indeed, according to Mr. Linh, a member of the leadership team, only two out of fifteen members, including himself, were actually capable of the entire job and were thus in charge of the whole process. The remaining members, Mr. Linh said, including village chiefs, lacked the skills and knowledge to perform the tasks. They were not actively engaged during the processes of measurement and redistribution. Mr. Linh saw

the rest of the leadership team as incapable and unhelpful, confirming the villagers' view that there was a lack of human capital in the process.

While villagers acknowledged their own lack of capacity, they also expressed doubts and distrust toward their leaders. Farmers expressed doubts about the process of measurement and calculation precisely because only two people of the leadership team could understand their work. The rest of the residents thus had no means to make sure these "experts" did not manipulate their position. Several informants said that they had had no choice but accepting whatever Mr. Linh said, mingling distrust with a lack of alternatives.

This lack of human capital embodied and magnified existing inequalities within the peasant community. Villagers with adequate training and skills were the only ones capable of performing and understanding the jobs of the leadership team. As such, the rest of the community had no choice but to vote for very few people, whom they could not completely trust. Inequalities in training and skills thus became a source of complaint and subsequent tension.

Decentralization in land consolidation could have given local leaders the autonomy to take into account local context and adapt state and municipal guidelines to fit their villages. Yet, the case of Soc Son shows that the failure of the higher-level government to take into account the capacities of lower levels had weakened such potential checks. Existing

inequality in knowledge and skills within the community came to the forefront as control and power over the consolidation and redistribution of land rested in the hands of a few. As a consequence, non-elites developed doubts and distrust, yet remained powerless.

Ideological Conflict: Equity Vs. Efficiency

Government documents regarding land consolidation in Hanoi and Soc Son also emphasize equity as an ideology. They repeat, especially in the Implementation Requirement section, that the process of consolidating land was to be "just, democratic, transparent and in accordance with citizens' agreement" (Instruction 68/KH-UBND, Instruction 171/KH-UBND). Under French colonization, French colonizers and Vietnamese supporters of the French government held the bulk of the farmland, while the majority of local people did not have enough land to support their families. Given this history of extreme inequalities in land distribution during the colonial period, both the government and the people sought to ensure economic, social and political stability of the country through equity.

In practice, such an ideology translated to equality in both quality and quantity of farmland. Anyone who was a resident in the village was entitled to two units of farmland of 360 square meters each. Ten units of land made up a block. Land was allocated on a household basis, adding up the total units according to a family's head count. In terms of quality,

each household would receive land of all different levels of productivity. Moreover, to account for the complex topography of the region and the diversity of land types, for each unit of more productive land, three square meters were deducted. Likewise, three square meters were added to each unit of the less-productive land.

While the equity-driven approach to land distribution ensured that every household had the same access to land for production, it worked against the market system that had been established since the 1993 Land Law. Until 1993, land had always been under the ownership of the central government. According to that law, farmers became legal holders with titles that could be exchanged and inherited, even though land still technically belonged to the state. The issuance of land use certificates and land titles marked a turning point; as a consequence, the exchange of land had already led to inequalities on the basis of labor, luck and other means. Yet, following land consolidation, the amount of land that household would receive depended only on the size of the family at that time. This process disregarded any exchange that had taken place prior to consolidation.

An equal distribution of land without factoring in the functions of the market in the exchange and trade of land use rights led to a sense of loss for several households. One exemplary case was the family of Mr. An. In 2003, in an effort to expand production, Mr. An's family purchased two extra units of land from the neighboring field. They were farming on

a total of seven units before land consolidation took place. However, as Soc Son carried out land consolidation, all land regardless of title was to be given in for reallocation. Mr. An and his family thus relinquished all of the seven units in order to be assigned new ones. As it turned out, by the end of land consolidation, the family of three was allocated only six units. To them, land consolidation caused a loss of land that they had purchased with their own money. Their sense of the policy's inefficiency was exacerbated by the fact that the previously seven units of land were divided into four plots, while their post-consolidation units also covered a total of four fragmented plots. Land consolidation, in the view of Mr. An and his family, caused more problems than it solved.

Moreover, the wish to divide land equally in both quantity and quality constrained the outcomes of land consolidation. The top-down processes of land consolidation took into account the complex local topographic condition yet sought to achieve equity in an inefficient way. The leaders wanted every household to have a share of all types of land, because of their wish to provide equal access to production. Since farmland in the area varied in quality, for everyone to have a share of all levels of land meant new fragmentation of ownership.

While the goal of land consolidation, as stated in the municipal instruction document, was for each household to have two consolidated plots of land at most, this aim was not met for anyone except for one family in Soc Son. My informants reported owning from four to seven plots of land after land consolidation. While this may signify a decrease from the original average of ten to eleven plots, it demonstrates the constraints of the equity-driven approach to land distribution.

As an outcome, land consolidation driven by equity not only failed to end the spatial dispersal of land plots but also led to internal fragmentation, or the fragmentation of land caused by terraces within one plot. During our conversations, all informants mentioned that while their land plots were closer to each other after consolidation instead of being spatially dispersed, not all attached units of land could be considered a single plot due to uneven terraces (figure 3). Ms. Nhan, a farmer whose number of land plots decreased from twelve to four, said that the uneven terraces made it harder to move up and down the fields when she had to carry plants or tools. As such, internal fragmentation continued to pose difficulties on the farmers as they made their way from one plot to another.
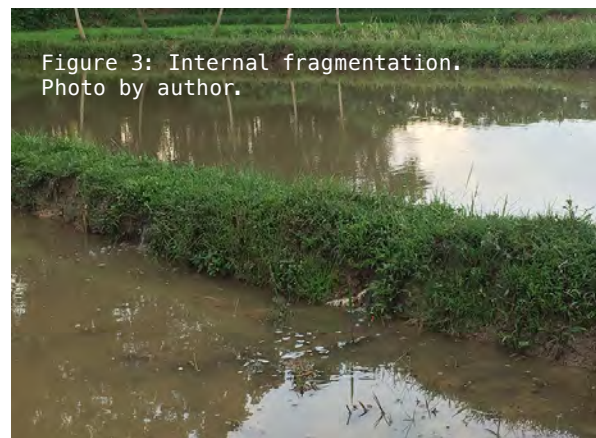

Figure 3: Internal fragmentation. Photo by author.

Mechanization Conflict: Promise Vs. Access

Industrializing and commercializing agricultural production have been at the center of the agrarian question in many societies, including Vietnam, especially in the wake of urbanization when the ever-rising pressures on land for the ever-growing urban population became critical. In this context, land consolidation promised increasing automatization and mechanization of farm work, introducing machineries into this traditionally labor-heavy sector and increasing productivity and production.

Instruction documents from the government themselves suggested mechanization as a rationale for land consolidation. The consolidation of land was supposed to reduce farm fragmentation, increase the size of land plots and thus allow the application of technological advances, decrease labor intensity and reduce production input (Instruction 68/KH-UBND, Instruction 171/KH-UBND). This promise of mechanization was explained to the residents during the very first village meetings, when the leadership team announced the consolidation work plan and its benefits.

In practice, farmers did find that the use of machineries could help release the demanding labor involved in rice farming. They agreed that farming became much easier thanks to harvesters, tillers and tractors that replaced buffalos and manual labor. Ms Hoa said:

Nowadays we can hire someone to till our land before a crop and harvest at the end of the season with a machine thanks to land consolidation. Before, the plots were not only spread out but also so small and in such weird shapes and sizes that no machine could really work. A machine cannot turn when the width of the plot is barely its size.

Other interviewees also shared the same comments on machine usage in rice cultivation. Specifically, Ms. Lai, who started hiring machines following consolidation to till and harvest on her consolidated fields, noted:

We used to use machines for tilling on one of our paddy fields before land consolidation took place. However, bringing the tilling machine to the field was always a struggle. The path leading to our plot was so small that we had to ride the machine through others' fields, which was also only possible when they had not planted yet. Farm work was hard because we depended so much on others before land consolidation. Now it is much more convenient thanks to the big fields. Harvesting with a machine takes one tenth of the time it used to. It is so good!

These cases demonstrate how land consolidation has encouraged automatization of farm work and reduced the burden of heavy labor on farming households. My conversations with these farmers have made me realize that automatization really is the future of farm work. Not only does it promise higher efficiency than manual labor but it also stabilizes farm income by helping farmers cope with the fluctuating and unpredictable weather condition.

Figure 4: Large land plot enabling the use of tiller. Photo by author.

Despite the appeal of mechanizing farm work, many farmers could not benefit from this promise of land consolidation, due to their lack of access to machinery. First, in order to automatize farm work and take advantage of harvesters and tillers, internal fragmentation would need to be solved. A common way to solve internal fragmentation was to flatten farmland using a tractor. Families that could afford to pay for the flattening service or buy a tractor could make this investment and have terraces flattened into one. However, there were families who could afford neither the machine nor the service.

Moreover, even though flattening realized the potentials of mechanization, it cost more than just paying for someone to drive a tractor. Explaining why her family hesitated to flatten their units of land across three terraces, Ms. Hoa said that farmland flattening involved removing soil on the surface of the higher terrace and evening it out on the lower terrace. In this process, the soil lost its nutrition and richness. Farmers who had their land flattened would have to make up for this loss by applying a larger quantity of fertilizer than normal. Depending on the quality of the soil below the surface, different land plots needed different amount of care after flattening. Extra expenses needed to go into tilling the land after flattening as well as after fertilizing to ensure that it was ready for the next crop. Similarly, Ms. Nhan indicated that she had found flattening land to be costly and inefficient because of the care that was required to

achieve the desired outcome. Therefore, internal fragmentation and the high costs associated with addressing internal fragmentation constrained the goal of land consolidation in terms of automatization. Unless a family could afford a tractor to flatten land or flattening service from other providers as well as subsequent care, that family could not use any machine on their fragmented fields.

Second, even in the cases where land had been flattened and made ready for cultivation, machines such as tillers and harvesters were not always within a farmer's reach and therefore did not therefore benefit every household. Indeed, in Dong Ha village, there was only one tiller and in Nam Son commune, there were only three harvesters. Such machines were not accessible to many farmers due to high prices. On average, a household earns 500,000 Vietnamese Dong (approximately $25 US) per crop per unit of land, which is the result of three months of hard labor. A tiller or harvester, on average, costs approximately forty million Vietnamese Dong ($2000 US). Talking about this gap, Ms. Lai joked to me at the end of our interview: "When you graduate and earn money, give me a loan to buy a harvester and we will pay you in rice."

Due to the high costs of machines, farmers in this village hired machines or used services provided by people from a neighboring village, if they preferred to pay for the service instead of doing the labor. Of my thirteen informants, ten used the service for all their fields, two people used the service for half of their

fields to save some money and one specifically indicated that the price was too high for the family. Yet even among the ten service users, there were complaints that the high costs of automatizing farm work decreased farm income to a significant extent.

Nonetheless, households that could afford a machine would benefit in the long term. In the wake of land consolidation, Ms. Khoa's family decided to purchase a tiller at the price of forty million VND, or approximately US$2000, with a business plan in mind. At the beginning of each crop, her husband stayed at home to run the tiller, both on her farm and for others. Since he was the only one in the village to own a tiller, everyone else who wanted to automatize had to rely on his service. Tilling with the machine took much less time than with a buffalo, thus Mr. Trung was able to till for many families. Three crop cycles after investing in the tiller, the family started making a profit. They were considering buying another tiller so that their son could help out and earn extra income for the family.

The farmers' experiences of automatization spoke to a false promise of both mechanization and equity. While farmers recognized the meaning of machinery and desired to automatize farm work, the reality of poverty and unequal access to machines brought the constraints of land consolidation to the fore. The promise of automatization remained unfulfilled for many households who could afford neither a machine nor service providers. As such, whether a household could really

benefit from the technological advances supposedly afforded by land consolidation depended not only on concentrated and enlarged plots of land but also, and more critically, on the availability of machinery. Land consolidation thus amplified capital inequalities within the village. Land consolidation brought out the differences in access to machines among households of different levels of capital.

Infrastructure Conflict: Governmental Initiative Vs. Local Needs

Land consolidation promised not only mechanization in farm work but also improvement in infrastructures. This included the construction of new road and irrigation systems in the fields to improve farm productivity and farmers' working conditions. Official documents emphasized the importance of following the master plan of the city and national land laws and gaining the approval of higher-level PCs. Local leadership teams were to work out a proposal that included a plan of implementation as well as a design proposal for new transportation and irrigation systems. Many details, including the name and purpose of project, its location, technical scope, timeline, investment sources, funding methods, design, renderings and budget, were required (Instruction 68/KH-UBND, Instruction 171/KH-UBND and Instruction 4791/STC-NSQH).

In Soc Son, after every household had given in their land plots, the land consolidation leadership team came up with a

plan to redesign the irrigation and transportation systems. Their design included enlarged and asphalted roads as well as a system of concrete irrigation channels, which connected every land plot in the field to the main road and the water source. After the commune's PC had approved the plan, the PC sent a team of workers to the village to implement the constructions accordingly. Villagers, however, indicated that they were not consulted and as a result the goal of improving infrastructures was not fully satisfied, as the following paragraphs explain.

The changes in farm infrastructures that followed land consolidation received mixed reviews. On one hand, all farmers showed satisfaction with the new irrigation channels (figure 5). They no longer had to manually fetch or release water, since the channels provided water to

every field. In our conversation, Ms. Nhan said that prior to land consolidation, getting water to flood their fragmented plots of land had been highly labor-intensive. It involved manually fetching water from the irrigation channel that flowed far from her plots through other people's fields before finally reaching hers. Thanks to the new irrigation system, water was directly channeled to her field, and she could independently decide when to flood her field without relying on the surrounding plots. Apparently, the newly built irrigation system relieved a significant amount of labor from farm work and improved the farmers' experience in the field. Similarly, farmers also found the asphalted and enlarged road system (figure 6) to be convenient and beneficial. The renovated roads made transporting production materials and harvests much

easier than the old small and muddy paths. Moreover, the increase in road size within the field allowed farmers to dry harvested rice on the field before transporting it home, reducing the weight and consequently the difficulty of the transportation.

On the other hand, the newly improved infrastructures did not meet all the needs of local villagers due to a perceived lack of communication. While bigger roads and irrigation channels helped farmers travel and irrigate with ease, some claimed that these roads and channels were unnecessarily large. Mr. An, Ms. Nhan and Ms. Hoa shared this view as they indicated that irrigation channels became three times bigger and roads up to seven times bigger. "Big roads are good, but not really when they eat up arable farmland. There are still house-holds that have not yet received all the land they are entitled to," said Ms. Hoa. In agreement, Mr. An complained, "they did not consult us when they built, and they built such big irrigation channels that it has now become harder for us to cross with buffalos and machines." As such, it appears that while the newly built systems of transportation and irrigation improved farmers' work, they also limited it. In the farmers' view, the limitations of land consolidation in the end were the result of a lack of meaningful and effective communication between the people and the leaders. Specific needs of local villagers were neither communicated nor addressed during land consolidation.

Moreover, not only did the new constructions seem unnecessarily large, they also lacked desirable features. Regarding irrigation, the promise of concrete chan-

nels remains unfulfilled, as Mr. An said:

Those channels are great as they provide water directly and consistently, but they are not stable at all. The land consolidation team said in public meetings that they would build concrete channels, but concrete is nowhere to be found yet. All irrigation channels were built of dirt, and remain dirt until now. Unlike neighboring communes, where concrete channels look much more stable, ours are leaking water. The first few crops after land consolidation, everything was fine. But starting last year, some parts are cracking already. Unless they reinforce these channels with concrete, they will soon be useless.

"The failure of land consolidation to fully meet its goals created a vacuum where unequal educational levels and access to capital and goods among the villagers came to the forefront."

Ms. Hoa also believed that the size of irrigation channels received too much attention before basic infrastructural needs were met. What should have come with irrigation channels, according to her, were overpasses on which people and buffalo could cross to get to work on the fields. Unfortunately, after constructing these channels with dirt, neither the leadership team nor the local government has built an overpass.

Farmers' views of the new transportations and irrigation systems illustrate the perception of misalignment between the needs of local constituents and the actual implementation of land consol-

idation. The government called for the construction of new farm infrastructures to help farmers improve their working condition, yet still imposed further constraints, causing concerns in the end. Roads were too big while arable land was lacking; irrigation channels were unstable and passes were missing. This points towards the inability of land consolidation in Soc Son to meet and adapt to the local conditions.

Yet, it would be incomplete to view the outcomes of infrastructural changes solely from the perspective of non-elite farmers. Land consolidation leaders spoke of their efforts to abide by instructions from above. They perceived that the limited capacities and abilities of the people to participate brought the ideology of being "democratic, transparent and in accordance with citizens' agreement" into question. Mr. Linh indicated that villagers were ill-equipped to make judgments and decisions regarding land consolidation planning. According to him, the design proposal that the leaders came up with, after having been approved by the whole leadership team, was presented publicly for consultation with villagers. While the team was open to comments from villagers, the proposal passed "quickly and easily". On one hand, the absence of any public feedback or comment from the people was due to social norms and a lack of knowledge. After centuries of living under the top-down

central government, it had become a norm that people followed the command and guidance of the authority without question; to raise a question or a different opinion had rarely been a possibility. On the other hand, illiterate and uneducated villagers were not knowledgeable and critical enough to foresee the limitations of the infrastructural changes based on the design proposal only.

Underlying the gap of promise and reality are, again, the existing inequalities that have permeated many aspects of life in Soc Son. Inequalities in education and knowledge influenced the communication between leaders and villagers during the design and construction of farm infrastructures. The same farmers who indicated that they could not comprehend technical procedures also attributed the constraints of land consolidation to a lack of consultation with the locals. Moreover, as a consequence of these limitations, inequalities in capital became augmented. Better-off households could mobilize their resources to mitigate the inconvenience of the new infrastructures, such as by building their own overpasses. Unfortunately, this left out those who were not as well-to-do.

As such, the promise of improved infrastructure through land consolidation remained unrealized due to the authority's failure to take into account existing inequalities within the peasant community. Unequal levels of education and training prevented local farmers to have a say in the designing of road and irrigation systems, thus reducing the efficiency of the decentralized approach to land consolidation. As farmers channeled their own resources to respond accordingly to the constraints of the new systems, existing inequalities were broadened and the have-nots became excluded from the potential benefits of land consolidation. The outcome of land consolidation, as anyone visiting Soc Son villages can see, is an embodiment of unequal social, physical and human capital that has been further materialized through a policy that sought to achieve equity through equality.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined land consolidation from the political position of reformers and from the perspective of the peasant community. I have also identified four main conflicts that permeated the processes of land consolidation: between the state's strategy of decentralization and the lack of human resources on the ground, between the ideology of equity and the efficiency of distribution, between the promise of mechanization and a lack of access to machines, and between infrastructural improvements and actual needs. These conflicts illustrate the wish of the state to identify with the peasantry and improve agricultural production at the same time as they show the failure of a top-down intervention that does not a effectively account for local context. The failure of land consolidation to fully meet its goals created a vacuum where unequal educational levels and access to capital and goods among the villagers came to the forefront.

Land consolidation did have promises that were appealing to the farmers. The use of machines on the field, the enlargement of roads and irrigation channels and a sense of equality among the people were perceived as beneficial and important by local villagers. Yet the top-down approach to achieving such goals without practical knowledge of local needs and conditions ultimately constrained success. Furthermore, the need to flatten land, to pay for the cost of a machine or a service provider, as well as to construct the missing features of irrigation that resulted from the limitations of land consolidation differentiated people within the community. In order to make full advantage of and benefit from land consolidation, each household would have to mobilize their own resources to fill in the vacuum. The limitations of land consolidation thus became a source of exclusion. The gap in capital and goods denied the promises of land consolidation to a number of families who could not afford machineries and new construction. Yet exclusion is also a double-edged sword. Not only were some people excluded but the gap also continued to grow as those who benefited did so in the long term. Having access to a harvester, for example, increased the income of a household in each crop, contributing to the growth of their wealth and capital.

Guided by the works of James Scott on the peasantry, this paper frames land consolidation by the interaction of forces from top down and responses from bottom up. However, by looking at land consolidation from the perspectives of the people who were directly involved in and influenced by the reform, the thesis also goes beyond this distinct bifurcation of power. I have examined land consolidation from three perspectives: one of a decentralizing top-down government, from the political position of reformers, and from the perspective of the peasant community. The paper examines micro-processes in which the people, both elites and non-elites, were neither motivated by a single economic or political rationale nor equal in terms of physical, social and financial capital. From the bottom up, farmers at different socio-economic positions had varying responses to the forces from the top down. Future land policies and processes should address such complexity by empowering and engaging the peasant community including both local leaders and non-elites.

In order for reformers to carry out changes in the most efficient way, taking into account local context and constituents, leaders need to be trained properly and comprehensively. As land consolidation in Soc Son has shown, the lack of trained personnel to carry out land consolidation not only impeded the quality of the process but also brought about tension and distrust within the community. Higher levels of government should work to increase local educational level and provide public workshops and technical assistance to local communities so that both leaders and non-elites have a thorough understanding of policies and procedures. More importantly, taking local context into account involves more

community engagement and participation in the planning process from the outset. Leaders and farmers should develop and maintain consistent two-way communication so that local knowledge is fully utilized and concerns are addressed in time.

Furthermore, the goals of land consolidation to improve agricultural production and reduce its labor intensity can only be achieved when the reform goes beyond redistribution of land. Inequality in physical and financial capital prevents a certain population of the peasant community from benefitting from land consolidation and thus needs to be addressed. Appropriate legislation and programs can increase access to machines and incentivize the adoption of mechanization.

While this research sought to understand land consolidation from the viewpoint of people on the ground (or in the fields), it is also important to note that it was conducted only after the land consolidation and therefore is based more on people's accounts of the process than on observation of how it unfolded. It would be useful to better understand the relationship between narratives and reality, or between what actually happened and what people say happened. Future research could probe this by examining in more depth how land was reallocated and whether the claims of local leaders and villagers reflect the reality of land consolidation. Spatial analysis of land ownership before and after land consolidation would provide an important dimension to

the understanding of land consolidation as a process, shedding light on residents' values and cultures that would not otherwise be expressed in narratives. Furthermore, the reality of land consolidation should also be considered against the background of Vietnam as a late socialist country and the characteristics of local governance in a historical continuum.

[1]The method of rice cultivation, in which the rice paddy field is flooded throughout the crop to kill pests, is the most widely adopted practice in Vietnam.

[2]There are multiple causes of fragmentation, including both the natural topographic setting and social processes during Vietnamese history.

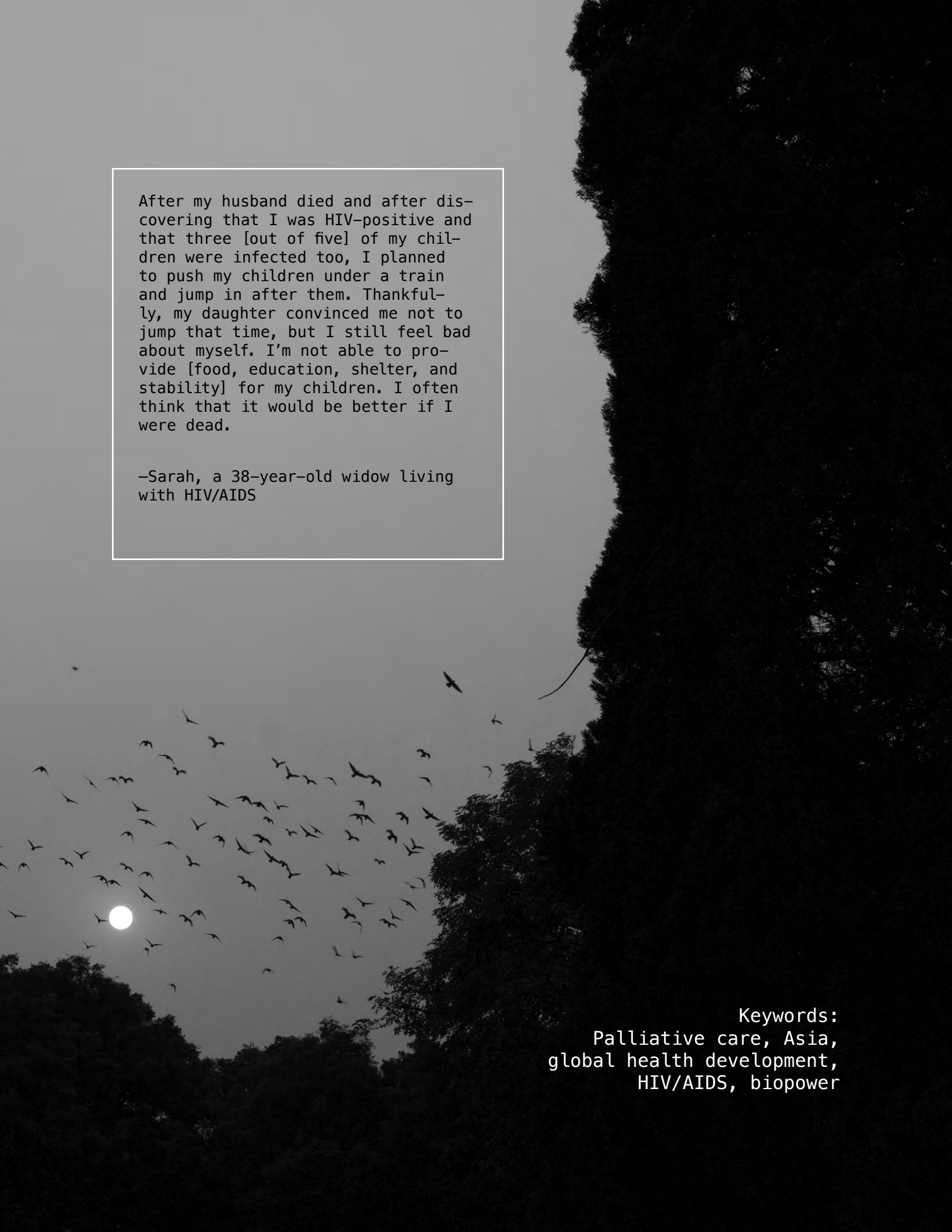[3]All names of interviewees have been changed to ensure anonymity.

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The Politics of Palliative Care in Resource-Limited Settings

Kalei Richard James Hosaka

After my husband died and after discovering that I was HIV-positive and that three [out of five] of my children were infected too, I planned to push my children under a train and jump in after them. Thankfully, my daughter convinced me not to jump that time, but I still feel bad about myself. I'm not able to provide [food, education, shelter, and stability] for my children. I often think that it would be better if I were dead.

—Sarah, a 38-year-old widow living with HIV/AIDS

Keywords:
Palliative care, Asia,
global health development,
HIV/AIDS, biopower

Abstract

Whose lives are valuable? Whose lives are worth living? This essay examines these questions by investigating the ways in which global health development programs deal with palliative care, specifically care for people living with HIV, in resource-limited settings. Through interviews and participant observation, I explore the concept of worth as expressed by a particular funding agency and the Central Hospital Network's (CHN) palliative care staff in an Asian country (not specified due to ethical considerations). Based on six months of ethnographic investigation conducted during an internship from February through August 2015 in a palliative care hospital and organization associated with CHN focused on caring for the poor living with HIV/AIDS, I argue that decisions regarding funding for people with incurable diseases are inseparably tied to understandings of whose lives are more valuable than others. I argue that palliative care that seeks to improve the quality of life for persons with life-threatening illness—especially in resource-limited settings—will continue to face barriers to its development as long as it is judged by utilitarian, neoliberal development standards.

Whose lives are valuable? Whose lives are worth living? These questions have been central to debates in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, economics, and other fields. Whether in Agamben's (1998) explanation of bios and zoe or Foucault's (1979) articulation of biopower, we find that worth is almost always indelibly inscribed on bodies. In a world of asymmetrical power relationships, globalization, and growing inequality, the question of the worth of human lives is increasingly important.

Is peace in living with life-threatening illness a right for all or a privilege for the wealthy? This paper explores the question *'whose lives are worth living?'* by investigating the ways in which global health development programs deal with palliative care in resource-limited settings. The field of palliative care — specialized medical care that seeks to holistically improve the quality of life for people and their families living with life-threatening illnesses such as various cancers and HIV—has gained traction in the U.S. and Europe in both medical and academic circles, due in part to aging populations. Yet discussion of the realities of palliative care in resource-limited settings is rarer. In contexts of scarce resources, how can the terminally ill be worth caring for? While nursing homes and hospice care institutions in rich countries are being reformed, palliative care teams (including those working with cancer and HIV) in poorer places are struggling to stay afloat. In the case of the site for this investigation, situated in

a county in Asia that I leave unnamed to protect the identities of the organizations and individuals involved, there are at least a couple of reasons for this: first, the central government has significantly cut its health care budget in recent years, and the effects of decreased funding are most felt in specialties like HIV care. Second, as one of my informants told me, with an increasing middle class, international donors and transnational agencies "have decided to contribute less [financially] to health care programs."

This article analyzes the question, "Who decides if care for the terminally ill is worthwhile in resource-limited settings?" by investigating how decision-makers understand the concept of the worth of persons living with terminal and/or life-limiting illnesses in poverty in resource-constrained settings. This analysis is grounded in two experiences: (1) participant-observation during six months as an intern with *Life Centre* from February through August 2015, a palliative care unit of the Central Hospital Network (CHN); and (2) an ethnography of interaction between CHN's palliative care practitioners in rural areas and a neoliberal funding agency (RFM[1]) which was conducted when these two groups met during a three-day proposal-writing meeting and workshop to discuss funding for CHN's palliative care program. In exploring these two experiences, I describe the dissonance that palliative care practitioners in resource-poor rural parts of the country feel in articulating the worth of caring for people at the end of their lives

to the funders of programs for health and development.

Broadly speaking, I make the case that contemporary global health development based on neoliberal principles of limited government and objectivity allows global health funders to distance themselves from moral and ethical considerations (see Rottenberg 2009; Ferguson 2006). On an applied level, I argue that palliative care and any kind of healthcare that seeks to improve the quality of life for persons at the end of life—especially in resource-limited settings—will continue to face barriers to its development as long as it is judged by utilitarian, neoliberal development standards that see health care in terms of a cost-benefit framework. Because the terminally ill and those living with HIV/AIDS or other life-threatening illnesses have less worth in the global health discussion, where every dollar spent is expected to produce a return, palliative care cannot and should not be "sold" as a development initiative. Instead, palliative care must be engaged culturally in the sense that it must be articulated both at the local level and to the international aid community as the product of an understanding of humanity where people are valuable regardless of their economic contribution to society.

*   *   *

As with any ethnography that "studies up" (in this case, writing about the interactions between staff members of CHN and RFM), ethical representation poses an enormous challenge. My intent is not to investigate the actions of specific organizations but instead to explore the topic of palliative care in resource-limited settings. Thus, some details throughout the narrative have been changed to protect the privacy of the people I met, balancing anonymous characterizations with the integrity of important ethnographic details. In any case, my goal is to critique not individuals but sociopolitical systems and widespread narratives of development.

I support this paper's central arguments by describing one particular narrative of how decision-makers interact with the development of palliative care in resource-limited settings that draws from ethnographic experiences from my fieldwork. Acknowledging that the main argument in this paper—namely, that palliative care does not fit into mainstream "development" ethos—is based on a subjective interpretation of the ethnographic data, I organize this paper to allow the reader to understand the rationale behind my interpretations. For this reason, I intentionally place ethnographic descriptions prior to theoretical considerations and my own interpretations.

I begin by introducing Life Centre, the site of my primary fieldwork, and briefly discuss palliative care generally. I then describe the interaction between a Western funding agency, which I call

'RFM', and CHN in a three-day meeting, and present the experiences one palliative doctor, with whom I had a close rapport throughout my stay, had of that meeting. Next, after exploring theoretical frameworks of global health and development, I provide an ethnographic narrative that counters RFM's approach to global health funding. In the final section, I consider the implications of some of the paper's central themes.

Palliative Care At Life Centre

I spent six months with my college's development studies program as an intern with Life Centre, a palliative care unit primarily focused on HIV/AIDS, based in the Central Hospital Network (CHN). My time with Life Centre was focused on building relationships with people living with HIV/AIDS or other terminal illnesses in situations of poverty, as well as with local professionals trying to ameliorate living conditions for those living with the illnesses. I spent the majority of my days traversing the city to visit families affected by HIV and cancer as a part of Life Centre's home-based care team, working on projects with staff, and conversing with patients in the HIV ward.

The six months that I spent living and working with staff at Life Centre provided ample opportunities for understanding palliative care in the country, particularly from the perspective of indigenous palliative care practitioners. In addition to attending a meeting on the future of CHN's palliative care funding

between the head of a European funding agency and CHN's palliative care staff from across the countryside, I also participated in a nationally certified course on palliative care, as well as an "End of Life Care Workshop" run by the palliative care directors of a large cancer hospital. Aside from informal conversations and participant-observation, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with roughly fifteen staff members and patients who were a part of Life Centre's home-based care program.

For the duration of my internship, Dr. Joseph, director of Life Centre and later the director of CHN's palliative care program provided a room for me to stay with his family in their apartment located twenty minutes from Life Centre's clinic. Given our shared interests in palliative care, we quickly formed a strong mentor-mentee relationship, and he treated me as a student and a son. In addition to our shared professional interests, coincidentally, I look like one of his wife's relatives; which allowed me to fit in as a part of his extended family. On many occasions, he would give me lectures on topics such as the socioeconomic struggles his patients go through in living with HIV/AIDS, clinical tips on pain management for people with late-stage cancer, the difficulties of raising support and awareness for palliative care, and the joy of raising a family in an urban setting.

*   *   *

Palliative care has been the subject of growing global discussion. The global inequalities in access to palliative care are stark, and most of those with the privilege to access palliative care are living in high-income countries. A 2014 UN Health report stated that "only 1 in 10 people who need medical care to relieve the pain, symptoms and stress of serious illness is currently receiving it" (UN 2014, n.p.). Somewhat skeptically, as if to suggest that there is little hope for palliative care's development globally in the near future, one of the main authors of the report explained:

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Our efforts to expand palliative
care need to focus on bringing
relief of suffering and the ben-
efits of palliative care to those
with the least resources... will
take courage and creativity as
we learn from each other how to
integrate palliative care into
existing but very limited health-
care systems.
```

Megacities in Asia offer a unique vantage point from which to view palliative care development at both local and global levels. With large-scale rural-to-urban migration, where world-class malls are built adjacent to sprawling slums and packed 1940s-style military jeeps drive past BMWs, social inequality is palpable. For the bottom half of the socioeconomic ladder, high quality healthcare is a rarity. For an observer, it seems as though the city's sheer population size and its surrounding areas render adequate healthcare for the non-elite majority nearly impossible. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, Mark—a 20-year-old man

HIV-positive from birth—often expressed to me his feelings of discontent with government-funded Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) centers:

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The counselor will just ask about
my [antiretroviral] medicine—how
many tablets I have left. If the
patients say that they have some
problem, the doctor or counsel-
or will say: 'It happens.' If you
talk too long about the problems
with HIV/AIDS, they'll interrupt
you and say 'Please leave now!'
The lines are long, and there are
too many people.
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With the city's population rapidly increasing and the central government cutting back on its health care budget, adequate health care for the masses continues to prove difficult. As one of the physicians at Life Centre related to me, "I don't know how my friends do it in the government hospitals. They see patient after patient every single day." In a context of scarce health care resources—including capital, workforce and infrastructure— where does palliative care fit into the picture? In the next section, I outline a brief history of palliative care and how it is understood in the country where this study was conducted.

Contextualizing Palliative Care

The origins of the contemporary palliative care movement are often traced back to physician Cicely Saunders' pioneering hospice care in the United Kingdom in the mid-1900s. At a time in medicine when patients diagnosed with incurable disease were left to die, Saunders sought

to improve the quality of life of her patients, regardless of how many days they had left to live. From its beginnings, palliative care has often been synonymous with 'end of life' or 'hospice' care. Because of this, palliative care has widely been viewed as the medical option of last resort, the antithesis of curative care. I argue that this understanding of palliative care affects how health care workers, government officials, and aid organizations understand the worth of palliative care.

Most palliative care practitioners today see palliative care as a medical approach integrated with curative care, which improves quality of life for people with life-threatening illness. Harding (2008) articulates that palliative care has always been demonstrably effective alongside curative treatment. Improving the quality of life for patients and their families is a matter that deeply depends on social and interpersonal engagement. This line of thought runs throughout physician-anthropologist Paul Farmer's writings on HIV/AIDS, in which he argues that patients living in poverty with HIV/AIDS need accompaniment—home-based therapy, social and psychological support, and everyday help—as much or more than antiretroviral treatment and symptom control (Farmer et al. 2013). The ethos of the modern palliative care physician or nurse is summed up in Atul Gawande's Being Mortal (2014, p. 259): "We think our [doctors'] job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable well-being."

According to a recent UK "Quality of Death" report, the Asian country where this study was conducted is nowhere near one of the best countries in the world in which to die (Economist Intelligence Unit 2015). While the history of palliative care services in this country goes back to the mid-1980s, a number of factors have limited its reach to and development in the general population, especially in rural areas. In many places throughout Asia, "population density, poverty, geographical diversity, restrictive policies regarding opioid prescription, [and] workforce development at base level" as important limiting factors affecting the development of palliative care services (Khosla et al. 2012).[2] Where palliative care exists, it exists in small niches. As cited in organizational literature, CHN palliative care practitioners operate under the World Health Organization's (WHO) current definition of palliative care (2016):

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Palliative care is an approach
that improves the quality of life
of patients and their families
facing the problem associated with
life–threatening illness, through
the prevention and relief of suf–
fering by means of early identifi–
cation and impeccable assessment
and treatment of pain and other
problems, physical, psychosocial
and spiritual.
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In many ways, palliative care is the practical postmodern response to modern medical practice. By acknowledge the inevitability of death, palliative care practitioners confront the limits and consequences of the best scientific practice. Palliative care strives to cope with

the limits of modern medicine while holistically seeking to improve the well-being of patients, unlike most medical specialties, which seek to push as much as possible against the constraints of our biology to make patients better (Gawande 2014). While palliative care practitioners understand the great importance of palliative care for patients suffering from life-threatening illnesses, they are deeply aware of the financial limitations that affect the kinds of services they can provide. How might palliative care providers in places with limited resources access funding, and what sorts of strategies can be employed to access global health funding for improving palliative care services? In the section that follows, I address these questions by describing the interactions between CHN's palliative care practitioners and a Western funding agency in the summer of 2015.

A Case Study—What To Do With The Terminally Ill

In late July, Dr. Joseph took me with him to a three-day proposal-writing meeting and workshop that would also discuss the next steps for CHN's palliative care program. A funding agency (RFM) from a Western country intended to continue its partnership with CHN in providing financial support for its palliative care program, and Christopher, the head of RFM, attended the meeting, along with fifteen CHN staff, including several physicians, two nurses, the CHN director for palliative care, and a CHN secretary. Christopher flew in the day before the

meeting convened. Raised in the West and having lived there for almost all of his professional life, Christopher is an expert in strategic planning and proposal writing with years of experience working in the world of development funding. RFM had been a major contributor since CHN's palliative care services began in 2010, funding roughly thirty percent of the overall budget.

Earlier that year, RFM had helped CHN to pilot a large, multi-site study on the impact of palliative care on household poverty, which showed that in general, adequate palliative care reduces household poverty: the logic was that palliative care could prevent households from exhausting savings on unnecessary treatment, and could allow family members who would otherwise accompany their sick loved one to go back to work. An Asia-based public health researcher with ties to an American university had been tasked with carrying out this study, the goal of which was essentially to investigate the link between palliative care and reduced poverty. Following the study, all parties agreed that this link does in fact exist. The argument was this: suppose a farmer discovers he has late-stage lung cancer in a rural area. Not knowing his chances of recovery, he spends all of his savings on treatment and medication, which are almost always futile, and his children or grandchildren may even leave their jobs to care for him. A palliative care program could prevent this by providing medical care and helping the farmer's family cope with the loss.

Most in attendance at the three-day workshop understood that the meeting would focus on future funding options for CHN's palliative care programs. RFM provided the financial support for the meeting so that the directors and a staff member from each of CHN's palliative care programs could attend. Christopher, the representative from RFM, led nearly all of the discussions; when he did so, he sat on a chair facing the rest of the group as if he were a lecturer in a small classroom. Behind him was a hotel-supplied projector screen. The rest of the group sat on chairs facing the front of the room around five separate tables.

Dr. Angela, central director for CHN's palliative care programs, opened the meeting, emphasizing the value of palliative care and highlighting the good work that CHN is doing. "We value people over programs and we strive to maintain dignity ... We realize that most who access our services have lost dignity and hope." Dr. Angela reiterated that CHN's palliative care brings visibility to the cause of caring for the terminally ill in the country, promoting or providing holistic care for the poor, high quality end-of-life care in resource-limited villages, and awareness of terminal disease. She maintained that the meeting would address the question: "how can we improve the social impact of our services?" Dr. Joseph then followed with a brief summary of the main conclusions of the CHN-RFM collaborative study on palliative care and reduced household poverty. He articulated the ways in which CHN's palliative

care programs have the potential to improve quality of life for poor terminally ill patients and their families, in ways many of the staff members had not considered:

```
Most of our patients are dai-
ly wage earners, a quarter of
patients lost their livelihood
following illness, only a tenth
receive government benefits, and
most of our patients do not plan
for inheritances . . . CHN has
helped 85% of patients to cut
spending on medicine and travel,
provided livelihood support in
some of its locations, and in-
creased education and awareness
of life-limiting diseases in fami-
lies and community leaders.
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After Dr. Angela and Dr. Joseph opened the discussion, Christopher took the "stage," and from that point on, it became clear that he would facilitate the rest of the three-day meeting. Christopher revealed his plan to apply for a prestigious multi-year grant from the Global Synergy International Fund (GSIF) —a development fund supported by various government and private sources in the US and UK. To the surprise of many, Christopher intended the meeting to be centered on gathering details to apply for this grant.

Christopher presented himself as able to re-present CHN's palliative care program into one attractive for donors. He made it clear: "Donors in the UK want to improve the economy and improve companies.... Organizations in London and others like USAID are becoming more rightwing and neoliberal." In line with GSIF's institutional culture of neoliberalism, Christopher explained that the pro-

posal for the grant must be "innovative, have the potential to impact, and able to be scale up," and the three-day meeting about "finances" became a three-day group proposal-writing workshop. Logistically, the workshop aimed to create a "log-frame," an extremely important component of GSIF applications, which consisted of four sections: "objectives," "specific objectives," "results," and "activities."

Christopher's plan for getting funding from these increasingly "right-wing" funding agencies was simply to sell palliative care as a poverty-reduction strategy, which would: (1) make the palliative care programs economically sustainable by investing in medical specialties (i.e. cardiology, surgery, anesthesiology) whose income could support palliative care, and (2) convince other hospitals that this work is important in reducing poverty, and in doing so, (3) increase the number of palliative care programs across the country. By doing this, Christopher argued, "we [could] get governments on board" and show them that providing palliative care is a core part of running a country. The argument was that such palliative care activities would lead to reduced household poverty in the country, as expressed in an early draft of the "goals" section of the log-frame: "By 2021, fewer people are living below the Below Poverty Line (BPL) OR fewer people living on $2/day or less."

Although the CHN staff members understood the substantial sums they could receive through this grant, they questioned the feasibility of Christopher's vi-

sion at every turn: how could they truthfully say that their palliative care services would be financially sustainable and scalable? Indeed, conflict ensued from the moment Christopher presented the plan to apply for the GSIF grant. As one CHN staff member asked incredulously, "Can we reasonably reach millions with palliative care?" While some were more outspoken than others, over the course of the three-day meeting, nearly every CHN staff member present argued that it is not really possible to convince other hospitals of the value of palliative care when most other health care workers in the country view the terminally ill with less dignity than the CHN staff do. Nor, they argued, is it possible to make palliative care services sustainable when specialty doctors like anesthetists and cardiologists, who would perform operations that could generate hospital income to support palliative care, would not want to work in rural or poor urban areas. (This relates, in a sense, to the point made earlier that palliative care is a kind of antithesis to medical specialization.) Moreover, they maintained, it would not be possible to scale up palliative care services with so few physicians willing to engage in this kind of work. The staff kept returning to the fact that they work in palliative care primarily because they seek to improve the quality of life of the patients they serve, not necessarily to reduce poverty on a nationwide scale. For instance, one of the physicians, Dr. George, reminded Christopher: "We are in places where there are no other places around," point-

ing to the fact that they first and foremost want to serve communities' needs. Another physician chimed in: ""We're serving in desperately poor areas. Every time there's a salary rise, it's going to affect the patient. We've made a decision to choose to work with low salaries to work among the poor."

In response, Christopher continually pressed upon CHN staff members his conviction that their programs must be scalable or financially sustainable in order to be worthwhile. He claimed that CHN was too thinly spread, and that if they wanted to continue with palliative care, they must either cut back on their palliative care services (concentrating palliative care in a couple of hospitals) or increase the investment for it to be worth doing. On more than one occasion, feeling the weight of the pushback, he reminded CHN that he is an expert at strategic planning and proposal writing. He continued that "the days of our organization just investing is in the past," and that CHN must model its programs to fit what donors have in mind.

As in much of the post-1990s literature on donor-driven development, Christopher as the representative of a particular funding agency alternates between pushing an agenda onto "passive" recipients of foreign aid and "empowering" local NGOs to identify and address problems they see (see Rauh 2010, Rottenburg 2009). To sum up the meeting, while both sides agreed that palliative care is valuable and has the potential to reduce household poverty, they diverge

in their perceptions of which programs are worthwhile. Christopher argued that palliative care is worthwhile only if the programs are self-sustaining economically and if similar services can be scaled up so that all who need palliative care can be served. In other words, palliative care programs must be modeled into something that today's donors want to fund. On the other hand, CHN's palliative care practitioners saw palliative care as worthwhile even if it is neither self-sustaining nor scalable. Their commitment to the dignity of the patients they serve—especially at the end of life—outweighs their commitment to donor organizations' "common sense."

It is clear that CHN operates under a very different understanding and definition of worth than funders who want to see a return on investment. Furthermore, the ways in which both parties articulate the worth of palliative care in turn sheds light on how they arrive at an account of whose lives are worthwhile and valuable. For CHN's practitioners, the practice of palliative care in resource-limited settings is also a symbolic statement about human value: for them, healthcare and "health investment" should not be just for those who can afford it or for those who can contribute economically to a society but for all.

Conceptualizing Worth

From the moment we left the meeting and stepped out of the hotel, I could tell that Dr. Joseph was enraged with how things had gone. This became especially

apparent when we were returning home from the second day of the proposal-writing workshop. As the head representative of RFM, Christopher had, shockingly, spent the afternoon berating CHN for the way that it handled its resources and physicians. In Christopher's view, palliative care should be based on rational cost-benefit analyses, not some kind of moral commitment to human dignity. That afternoon, he had made his position quite clear:

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Your ethos is that doctors get
little pay. In other places, doc-
tors are given much better con-
ditions, which includes pay…. You
people never listen to us. It's
your decision if you want your
people to work out of a particular
ethos.
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Christopher's systematic belittling of the desire of CHN doctors to serve the poor through medicine was indicative of the stark contrast in ethos (to use Christopher's word) between funder and recipient. For Christopher, the motivation for doctors to use their resources to serve the poor was keeping them back from running sustainable programs. His argument was that if doctors' salaries were increased, CHN could attract more specialty physicians (such as anesthesiologists and cardiologists) whose work could in turn help fund the palliative care programs. What Christopher could not understand was the extent to which the physicians felt that the quality of care they were able to give to their impoverished patients necessitated a modest lifestyle.

On that second day, Dr. Joseph and I took three city trains before we reached home. It was rush hour; even though the trains ran every few minutes, each one that came was packed beyond capacity. Knowing my interest in long-term palliative care work in resource-limited settings, Dr. Joseph often sought opportunities to teach me while we were in transit. Despite the crowding on the trains and hectic streets, the noise around us gave our conversations a sense of privacy.

My conversation with Dr. Joseph on that rainy afternoon was much different than usual. The topic was donor-driven funding; he specifically wanted me to understand what it felt like for him as a palliative care physician to interact with foreign funders like Christopher. While much of what Christopher said deeply offended Dr. Joseph, what insulted him most was Christopher's demeaning attitude towards CHN doctors who pass up jobs with lucrative salaries in order to serve the poor. He said:

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CHN doctors should get equal [pay]
to others? Doctors in CHN should
work because we want to serve the
poor. What other doctors get is
deeply unjust. Should we follow
that unjust system? Is this what
donor-driven policies look like?
They should live among the poor,
then they would understand. Be-
cause you studied more, that's why
you deserve a higher salary? Your
studies are meant to serve the
need; and salaries push you away
from the need.
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Salaries push you away from the need. Dr. Joseph's words swirled around

in my mind as we flowed out of the first train onto the platform and briskly walked toward the North-South line platform at Central station. Outside of the disembodied and rational approach to funding embodied by Christopher and the sterile hotel environment, we passed by scores of people—largely from the bottom half of the socioeconomic ladder—engaged in their day-to-day endeavors to make ends meet.

Once we got to the next leg of our

and catering to the wishes of customers. Christopher sat across from me. In response to hearing me talk about Life Centre's work among the HIV-positive population in poverty, he shared his deep disdain for the country's cultural and socioeconomic hierarchy. Blaming poverty on broad generalizations about the country's culture and society, Christopher explained that if he had all of the money and power in the world, his next project would be to eradicate this hierarchy from

"Global health funding agencies [who] deal with palliative care in resource—limited settings... are committed to narratives of economic sustainability and profitability"

commute, Dr. Joseph elaborated on what he had meant earlier. He explained that Christopher's criticism of the deeply personal commitment to serving the poor revealed a misunderstanding. For Dr. Joseph, practicing palliative care among the poor has implications for his own lifestyle. "I can't help but question how much *heart* there is for the people we serve [in Christopher's talk]. Imitating Christopher, he went on to parody his condescending attitude: "'You stubborn CHN doctors'.... For him, it is all 'rotten' and he needs to teach us how to run things. I hate that kind of patronizing attitude."

The day before, I happened to be sitting with Christopher during the lunch break at the hotel—a typical hotel buffet combining local and Western food. Waiters with filtered water jugs in hand moved from table to table, taking orders

existence.

A few days later, I asked Dr. Joseph about his motivation for working with Life Centre and practicing palliative care among persons living with HIV/AIDS. I wondered what kept him going in spite of tight finances and tremendous obstacles to wellbeing for his patients. He replied:

```
I want to share love in a place
of so much brokenness, among
our patients who feel that their
lives are worthless. What keeps
me going is the extent of human
suffering, and the fact that you
can't move away from that and you
share what they're going through.
I want to work towards their res-
toration and healing.
```

Perhaps the reason why Dr. Joseph feels that Christopher could not understand is simply that Christopher does not experience first-hand the extent of human suffering and the barriers to flourishing

that Dr. Joseph sees every day. To Christopher's ears, these words probably would have seemed like naïve clichés. Yet I am convinced that Dr. Joseph's response to Christopher, "[He] should have lived among the poor," is his way of expressing that Christopher's insistence on cost-benefit analysis in palliative care does not get at the true experience of suffering that the terminally ill endure. Could Dr. Joseph adequately provide care for patients in the depths of poverty yet live in wealth himself? Perhaps. But Dr. Joseph's preferred answer to this question gives us a clue to interpreting the difference between his and Christopher's approaches to funding palliative care.

Discourses in Global Health Funding

I have tried above to demonstrate that palliative care fundamentally concerns questions of human worth. Is it morally right to dedicate "unsustainable" or "unprofitable" resources to care for the dying? And if so, why? In the search for objective principles for creating the best care institutions, the morals and ethics that shape these principles are not always explicit. Here, I make the case that neoliberalism and cost-benefit economics are one outcome of a specific type of moral commitment. Farmer et al. (2013) argue that the global health apparatus operates in a Weberian "iron cage", in which rational economic calculations "trump human decency and common sense." In Farmer et al.'s view, the global health bureaucracy wields significant influence because of the immense *biopower* it holds, having the power to define whose lives are worthy of treatment. They conclude that biopower is present "any time a quantification of life leads to a categorization of life."

Farmer et al.'s understanding of the "iron cage" wielding *biopower* is helpful in understanding how global health funding agencies deal with palliative care in resource-limited settings. They are committed to narratives of economic sustainability and profitability. This commitment becomes controversial when funders refuse to acknowledge that their economic approach is rooted in moral positions. The global health funding apparatus in which RFM finds itself is committed to a neoliberal model of development and is part of a particular institutional culture detached from the contexts of the people they hope to help. This analysis is consistent with Ferguson's (2006) conclusion that scientific capitalism is morally loaded even as its proponents insist it is impartial. Moreover, the institutional culture of global health development gives its members a sense of infinite power to reform, as when Christopher supposed that he could simply eradicate the country's cultural and socioeconomic hierarchy.

Global health funding discourse appears to blend a kind of utilitarian logic with themes of 'survival of the fittest' in discussions surrounding funding for programs like palliative care in resource-limited settings. Rooted in the work of Darwin, survival of the fittest is a concept biologists use to describe the matter-of-fact ways in which life oper-

ates: species (including humans) survive because of their ability to adapt to local conditions and thrive with success, securing dominion or providing offspring. These fundamentally biological ideas were arguably first systematically applied to social policies in the West at the turn of the 20th century with the rise of the eugenics movement, which focused on promoting better breeding and preventing the risk of inferior offspring, and continued throughout the 20th century even after the fall of Nazism (Stern 2005; Sussman 2014). Although the agenda of the eugenics movement is now largely renounced as unscientific and ethnocentric, some of the ideas of social Darwinism are embedded in our post-colonial world of perceived limited resources.

The institutional culture of global health development seems to broadly perpetuate a self-serving philosophy of social Darwinism and utilitarianism in resource-limited settings. Many theorists and development professionals assert that utilitarianism is a central tenet of development practice (Sen 2000). Because the role of modern medicine has historically been to cater to those who will benefit the most from its interventions (Gawande 2014), utilitarian logic is also ingrained in modern medicine. According to the utilitarian approach, palliative care would be distributed according to likely return on investment: resources would be diverted away from people who likely will not produce a positive return, toward those who would. Christopher's emphasis on the questionable worth of palliative care

for households in resource-limited settings implicitly goes along with the utilitarian narrative that tends to reinforce social and economic hierarchies with the language of natural inevitability. I argue that such narratives are not impartial but deeply moral.

In this vein, Blinderman (2009) argues that health priorities in resource-poor settings are, at their core, based on particular moral commitments. The worth of palliative care, therefore, implies particular understandings of what is right. Yet the picture Blinderman paints of moral commitments in resource-limited settings misses a nuanced understanding of how decision-makers conceptualize resource availability or scarcity. In regions like the ones where CHN's palliative care practitioners work, these moral commitments have everything to do with the perceived and actual reality of scarce resources. For Christopher, the priority of reducing household poverty led him to relentlessly articulate the worth of palliative care as economically sustainable and important for creating an economically productive environment.

Delivery models of palliative care can and should be explained and understood in terms of their moral and philosophical commitments (Adinolfi 2012). For Christopher, palliative care would only be viable if it were able to fit in with the GSIF's goals for poverty eradication: reduced household poverty, scaled-up services, and economic sustainability. The moral commitment of the CHN staff

to quality of life must also be examined. The quality of life of the patients and of the CHN staff members is intertwined (as seen in their voluntary choice of a modest lifestyle), and their lives are linked in a close relationship. The difficulty of quantifying "quality of life" makes it difficult for palliative care to get recognition, and because of this, many argue that the phrase should be reformed to make it more understandable in the larger universe of international development (Nantais and Kuczewski 2004). Regardless, CHN's palliative care nurses and physicians bear substantially different moral and philosophical commitments than Christopher, underlying the disparities in their approaches to articulating the worth of palliative care. Furthermore, the power difference and physical distance established in the meeting allowed Christopher to remove himself from his moral commitments in a way the CHN staff members could not.

The Application Of Palliative Care Principles: An Ethos For Health Care

Many of the CHN staff members with whom I spoke saw palliative care not so much as a medical specialty but as a medical approach. From the numerous conversations and lectures I attended with CHN staff members, it became clear that they take the WHO's definition of palliative care as improving the quality of life seriously, seeking to address all barriers to quality of life that their pa-

tients encounter. As one of the doctors in the meeting mentioned, "palliative care is more of a heart issue." For the CHN physicians, palliative care is a lens through which they come to see the holistic needs of the patients they serve. What Christopher misses in his commitment to addressing palliative care through macro-scale improvements in economy and health services delivery is the holistic expression of care for patients' self-worth at the heart of the palliative care approach that CHN staff members strive to embody.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I spent many days at Life Centre's "livelihood program," a pilot program that seeks to improve the quality of life of women in poverty affected by HIV/AIDS. This is the kind of whole-society economic improvement that Christopher would seek, except that Life's work in this arena is not about money but self-worth. Understanding that work and providing for one's family are important aspects of quality of life for women affected by HIV/AIDS, the livelihood group provides a space for women who are HIV-positive to regain a sense of the worth of their lives. Below are my fieldnotes from an August day, written while sitting on the steps outside of the livelihood program's main location:

With a white fabric in her hands, Sarah stops her work and gazes across the room. It is a Thursday afternoon; the sun filters through the window behind her.

The blue-painted door to Life Centre's newly launched "livelihood initiative" is cracked open, allowing air to flow into the room. The women earn the equivalent of 3 USD per day in local currency; they are part of a pilot livelihood program that Life Centre has recently started, hoping to provide a stable source of income and social support for women affected by HIV/AIDS. For these women, the cost of one pair of sandals would be roughly 1 USD; a round-trip bus ticket, 0.5 USD; average rent for a tiny room, 40 USD/ month; adequate food for one's family, another 40 USD/month. The numbers don't seem add up financially, and I wonder how they make ends meet.

It is an overcast afternoon in mid August; the day this picture is taken [Figure 1], there are five pairs of footwear sprawled near the doorstep. There are fewer participants today than usual. Two of the slippers are the staff members', while the other three are the program participants'. The city dust visibly collects on the surface of the footwear, forming foot-like imprints on the rubber.

From the women's physical appearance, one would never be able to tell that the women in the group are in any way different, that a disease as dreaded as HIV affects them. Indicators like height, skin-color, and clothing-type are ways that the local population distinguishes between the rich and poor; yet footwear choice almost never conveys one's socio-economic status (much less HIV status). Yet while footwear choice does not tell us much about these women's background, these slippers point us to life-experiences, stories of trauma, grief, loss, and occasionally, hope, all invisible to all but a few trusted individuals in whom these women confide their stories. The everyday struggles of fear, insecurity, hunger, sickness, and financial security are inscribed in the dust on the surface of the footwear, just as the toll of HIV-infection is inscribed in the bodies and minds of the women and their families. And yet slippers also represent movement, reminding the observer that life continues for these women in the midst of seemingly unbearable conditions. Slippers bear witness to everyday activities of cooking, working, running errands and spending time with friends. Slippers tell stories of pain, but they also provide glimpses of hope.

With the money earned from the group, perhaps Sarah can begin to provide adequate food for her children; and maybe one day soon, a new pair of slippers.
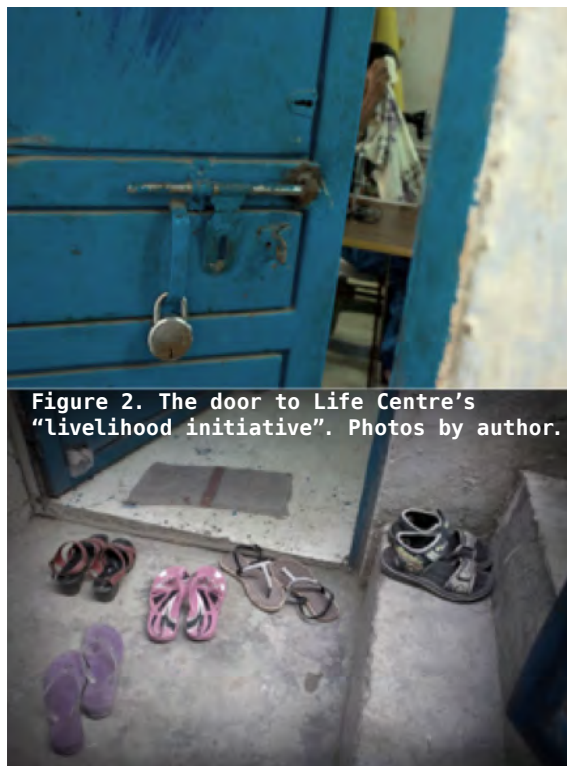

Figure 2. The door to Life Centre's "livelihood initiative". Photos by author.

Sarah and the other women enrolled in the program have faced innumerable and scarcely believable challenges, and yet these are the kinds of people for whom CHN's palliative care practitioners holistically care—namely, those who continue to experience the hardship of living in poverty with a life-threatening illness like HIV. Even beyond the WHO's conception of palliative care, CHN's palliative care staff understand it as more than a medical program for the terminally ill and see it as a call to care deeply about the quality of life of their patients. For CHN staff, palliative care represents an ethos that seeks to care about the wellbeing of patients at the margins of society, whoever they may be. Palliative care is an extension of their understanding that patients with life-threatening illnesses are inherently worth caring for.

Reimagining Worth

Is Sarah's life valuable? Is her life worth living? The answers to these questions depend on whom we ask. I have shown above that the various decision-makers attempting to articulate the importance of caring for persons with life-threatening illnesses in resource-limited settings operate with fundamentally different conceptions about how value is calculated. The question at hand is not whether poverty a good thing to address; instead, the conversation is about the different ways that decision makers articulate what palliative care should be, and indeed the impetus for its very existence. This discussion highlights how sustainability is a constant goal in development initiatives, yet how the definition of sustainability often implies ideas of limited resources and efficiency. CHN's palliative care practitioners differ from their funders in their deep commitment to maintaining the dignity of human life above all else—whether or not this life is "sustainable" or generates "sustainability". The interaction between RFM and CHN in mid-2015 reveals the ways in which global health funding agencies often prioritize economic sustainability over human worth. Moreover, this ethnographic work as a whole illuminates the concept of biopower, particularly regarding its cultural and ethical commitments in resource-limited settings.

Palliative care cannot and should not be "sold" as a development initiative in resource-limited settings. There is an urgent need to create a new paradigm for health funding in palliative care that provides care on the basis of human dignity even in situations of life-long and terminal illness. Anthropologists are uniquely positioned to articulate the ways in which narratives about human worth in settings of development inform understandings of moral practice. If the terminally ill are to be accorded the dignity that they deserve, such that peace at the end of life for people of all economic levels becomes a reality, then we must offer a new paradigm that counters the global health development narratives of cost-efficiency and sustainability that is pervasive in the contemporary world.
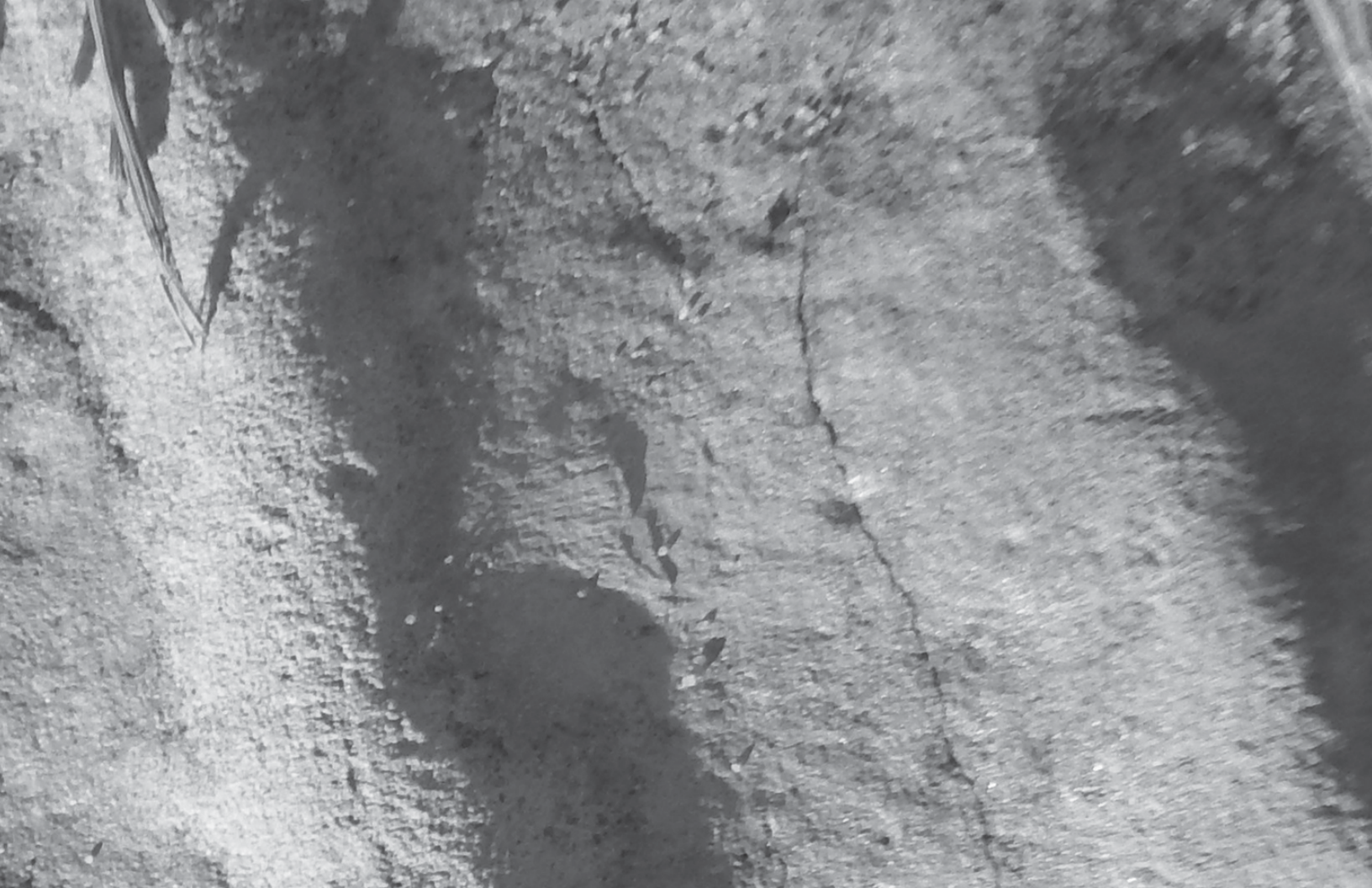
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[1] All names of individuals and organizations and some other details have been changed in order to protect participants' privacy.

[2] Khosla et al.'s research was National Institute of Health (NIH) funded and can be seen on the NIH website, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3573467/, accessed January 31, 2016.

Office Places, Work Spaces: An Ethnographic Engagement with the Spatial Dimensions of Work

Robert L. Ordelheide

Abstract

Have you ever been curious to know more about how
people engage with their place of work? This article
explores the spaces and places of a scientist's aca-
demic office. It draws on four weeks of in-depth par-
ticipant observation, interviews and visual analysis
at the University of Cape Town to create an in-depth
understanding on how the office, as a thing, shapes
behaviour. Theoretically, this paper draws on phenom-
enological thought, Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory on
the social production of space, and Tim Ingold's (2000)
ideas on the 'taskscape' to analyse the spatial compo-
nents of work within and beyond the academic office.
It argues that the office is far more intricate than just
the site of non-manual labour. Indeed, there appears
to be a unique way in which the performance of one's
academic discipline disciplines space.

In reaching the conclusion of my under-graduate career, I have come to realize that a strong understanding of space is critical to most ethnographic engage-ments. Anthropology has taught me that space is complex. Space is more than just a three dimensional plane, as often con-ceptualized in Euclidean thought. Moving towards a nuanced understanding drawn from Pierre Bourdieu (1989), I have learnt that space is a system of relations. Space is the invisible and complex milieu that binds people, things and places together. As one moves through the world, one will inevitably move through a multitude of spaces: the space of one's home, the space of one's neighbourhood or city, one's per-sonal space, one's intellectual or learning space, or one's workspace. Though these spaces may correspond to specific tangi-ble points on the landscape, all are social-ly constructed.

The spatial dimensions of the place of one's work are of particular interest in this article. Contemporary workspaces come in a multitude of styles, shapes, sizes and locations. In the present era of hyper-connectivity, e-commerce and computer-aided record-keeping, most readers will be familiar with the office as the quasi- ubiquitous location of work. Within the air-conditioned warrens of current office environments, ritualized non-manual labour is ordinarily done on computers, people are connected to vast quantities of information via the internet, and smart phones and tablets synchro-nize with computers to make work trans-portable. From this context, one can view the office as a space ordinarily reserved for a person whose job requires the use of the mind, to think, rather than the use of their hands or physical strength (Wall-man, 1979).

An ethnographic engagement with the office is an important endeavour for two reasons. Firstly, drawing inspiration from Nikil Saval (2015), I suggest that 'work' is a deeply cultural phenomenon – and therefore so is the office. 'Culture' is the performance and practice of everyday life which produces meaning for individ-uals, or groups (Garuba and Raditlhalo 2008). What sort of routine and ritual-ized behaviour might one find within the spaces and places of work? Secondly, drawing from Christopher Baldry (1997), an analysis of the office can illuminate the broader hierarchical and organiza-tional structure of one's place of employ-ment. Where one sits, how big one's office is, and what sort of objects are present within one's office all speak volumes on how people organize themselves across space.

Background and Research Methods

In 2015, driven by this interest in the spatial dimension of work, I embarked on a month of ethnographic fieldwork as a basis for an analysis of office spaces on my own campus at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. This univer-sity was originally founded in 1829 as the South African College, and is South Africa's oldest higher learning institution (Phillips 1993). The university's origi-

nal benefactors envisioned an academic institution that reflected a version of their own alma maters, the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge universities. Well into the twenty-first century, the University of Cape Town's 'Oxbridge' characteristics remain firmly imprinted on much of the visual and spatial culture of the academy (Schmahmann 2011). Being the archetypal 'English' academy at the foot of Africa creates a highly paradoxical and sometimes tumultuous environment for staff and students to navigate.

Over the course of this fieldwork, I followed the daily routines of two academic staff members and one senior PhD student located in three different faculties of the university. In total, I spent approximately a week and a half with each interlocutor. While two of my interlocutors were based in the South African College of Music and the School of Language respectively, this essay details my experience with my third interlocutor, named 'Jason' (a pseudonym), who is a plant scientist and PhD candidate in the School for Biological Sciences.

In order to operationalize this research, I drew upon the standard suite of ethnographic research methods (e.g. participant observation, photography, mapping, interviews and journal keeping) to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena I encountered in the field. The benefit of using a multi-method approach is that I had the opportunity to tailor my techniques to suit the ever-changing dynamics in the field.

With regards to participant obser-vation, I first spent a period developing rapport with my interlocutors. From there, I inhabited the academic office space alongside my interlocutors, observing and interacting with them during the normal courses of their daily routines. I kept a fieldwork notebook on my observations which was used as an analytical tool to identify the recurring themes, patterns and disjunctures found in the field. Within the fieldwork journal, I kept a close record of times of office use, patterns and purposes of use, visitors, consultations, and times working alone. I also made special notations for open and closed doors, seating arrangements, corridor conversations, drop-ins versus appointments, and any other valuable social interactions when and where they occurred. I tried to sit in on as many instances of office use as possible, but sometimes the ebb and flow of my interlocutor's daily work routine required him to do some work outside the confines of the office.

One of the strengths of participant observation is the ability to bear witness to spontaneous events which may occur in an interlocutor's everyday life. That said, one of the weaknesses that I encountered with participant observation is that my presence in the room changed the behaviour of my interlocutors. I would walk into the office with my notepad and pen with the intention of observing the work routines and happenings within the office space. My interlocutors' natural reaction was to give me their full undivided attention. This attention was excellent for interviewing, but problematic for other

observational work. I was never fully able to circumnavigate the problems my presence in the field created for me.

Interviews are another method I used in my analysis of the space of work. I made use of both unstructured and semi-structured interviews. For unstructured interviews, I gave my informants the latitude to discuss what is important to them in their relationship to their working space. The very point of unstructured interviews is that there is no structure or control; just the interlocutor and I talking about whatever came to mind. I would then transcribe keywords,

strength of the interview method lay in its ability to garner rich first-hand descriptions and narrative directly from an interlocutor. That said, the weakness of the interview technique is in the potential for an interlocutor to provide unreliable information. It is also very time-consuming.

Finally, I made use of the visual research techniques of photography and maps to document my fieldwork experience. I used a digital camera to capture the space, artefacts and architecture in photographs. Moreover, I also made hand-drawn maps to reconstruct the field

"This research represents an attempt to force the ethnographic gaze back upon the academy; to make the familiar surrounds of the academy unfamiliar; and to analyse the privileged position that academics hold as the central cog in the university knowledge production machine."

thoughts and ideas at the end of the day for use in a more structured interview. For semi-structured interviews, I designed my questions in advance but also left these questions open-ended so I could probe where needed. I audio-recorded interviews so I could refer back to transcripts, and also typed these up shortly after the interviews had concluded. Finally, as interviews include more than just the words spoken, I kept a journal to note voice range, expressions and gestures in the natural flow of the dialogue. The

spaces in my notes. One of the weaknesses in using visual research techniques, and fieldnotes for that matter, is that photographs, fieldwork journals and maps are artefacts in their own right. They are created, or fashioned, by the researcher. As such, they feature the researcher's perspective and selective interpretation of what really happened. One of the advantages of using these methods is that they provide a visual artefact as a point of reference to remember and reflect upon, and offer an additional analytical tool for

the development of a thick description account of events in the field. Several of the photographs have been included in this article. Finally, it must also be noted here that this research was conducted with strict adherence to the ethical guidelines established by Anthropology Southern Africa (2005). As a result, I sought informed consent from my interlocutors at every step of the research process and was mindful to ensure that no harm came from this research process.

Beyond my interest in the spatial dimensions of work, my motivation to write on this seemingly mundane topic was drawn from concern about how my academic discipline had been negatively leveraged by previous practitioners. The ongoing critique post-colonial thinkers have waged against African anthropology is that its practitioners have often been far too quick to study the lives of Africa's marginal and disempowered peoples without being fully cognizant of just how exploitative and disempowering the research process can be (Nyamnjoh 2012). As a student in the final stages of my undergraduate career, I felt uncomfortable with my privileged position and the prospect of going out into the city and placing some unknown person under my ethnographic gaze. Rather, drawing inspiration from Nyamnjoh (2012, 70), I wanted to practice a mindful, responsible and transformed anthropology that would be bold enough to "study up" and ethnographically analyse power and privilege. After all, "all people today are equal in their right to the burden of being studied

by some or other anthropologist" (Miller 2010, 10). This research represents an attempt to force the ethnographic gaze back upon the academy; to make the familiar surrounds of the academy unfamiliar; and to analyse the privileged position that academics hold as the central cog in the university knowledge production machine.

Mindful of the context above, and inspired by Bourdieu's (1989) idea that space is a system of relations, this research seeks to examine how space, place and people interweave in the context of an academic office. Through ethnographic inquiry into the use of an office, and employing an array of literature and theory, this article explores the daily work life of a plant scientist, university inhabitant and office dweller. In the first part, I will discuss Lefebvre's (1991) ideas on space and then call upon Edward Casey's (1997) argument in favour of place to set the scene. In the second part of this essay, I call upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2007) and other phenomenological thinkers to articulate how one might perceive and embody the physical environment which, in turn, informs human behaviour. In the third section, I will draw upon Tim Ingold's (2000) notion of the 'taskscape' to illustrate how space, place and embodiment are intrinsically linked in the process we know as 'work'. In the fourth section, I present ethnographic descriptions of the eight days spent in the office (e.g. the field) with Jason, the interlocutor. In the fifth and final section of this essay, I tie all the aforementioned information

together to argue in favour of an understanding that space is indeed a social construction that mediates one's behaviour and one's relation to place. However, I critique the Lefebvrian understanding of space by arguing that one must not fetishize space at the expense of place. As argued below, place is an equally important construct that deserves recognition in theory and ethnographic practice. I conclude with thoughts on how one might be able to build upon this research project in the future.

Theoretical Framework

Space and Place

First, this research draws on Lefebvre's (1991) seminal work The Production of Space. Lefebvre was deeply influenced by Marxist theory; as a result, one sees a heavy emphasis on the idea of 'production'. Lefebvre (1991, 26) writes, "(social) space is a (social) product". By this, Lefebvre means that "space is permeated with social relations; it is not only supported by social relations, but it also is producing and produced by social relations" (2009, 186).

Lefebvre suggests that there are an "indefinite multitude of spaces, each one piled upon, or perhaps contained within the next: geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, commercial, national, continental, and global. Not to mention nature's (physical) space, the space of (energy) flows, and so on" (1991, 81). With Lefebvre's notion of space, one sees that space cannot be divided by physical barriers or walls. "Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things which have mutually limiting boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia" (Lefebvre 1991, 87). An example of this would be the space of an office contained within four walls. Although physical barriers exist in the form of walls, the space of the office may extend beyond the walls into the adjacent corridors or other offices in a building. In essence, social space is fluid, able to circumnavigate the physical boundaries that lie in its path.

Also, according to Lefebvre (1991), space is neither passive nor a vacuous container. Two points follow from this statement. Firstly, space always embodies social meaning. The very notion of an empty space later to be filled with social life is a social construct itself – or a representation of space (Lefebvre 1991). According to Lefebvre, space is simply never empty. Secondly, space should be seen as organic and alive, "[space is] an 'active moment' in social reality, something produced before it is reproduced, created according to definite laws, conditioned by a definite stage of social development" (Merrifield 1996, 107). In my reading of Lefebvre (1991), I interpret his notion of space as a social performance or system of relations which completely encircles humanity and is filled to the brim with meaning. Space simultaneously produces humanity, and is critical in producing human perception and behaviour. In my

view, space is critical to the analysis of the office.

What is problematic with Lefebvre's (1991) understanding of space is that he appears to avoid the notion of 'place', or one's geographical location within the milieu of space. As Casey (1997) argues, one of the greatest scandals of Western philosophical thought since Rene Descartes has been to relegate the notion of 'place' to the intellectual dustbin. In Casey's (1997, 295, emphasis in original) line of argument,

```
space forms a twosome, an uneven
doublet, with place, its odd and
incongruous other. The twoness is
not that of two things, or even
of two of a kind, but instead
that of two quite variant kinds —
which nevertheless coexist in all
their disparity and cannot seem
to do otherwise.
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This indicates that as well as drawing on Lefebvre, one also needs to make allowance for the notion of 'place' – 'place' being a concrete position within the shapeshifting social landscape mentioned above. The necessity of both 'space' and 'place' appears to be corroborated by Ingold (2000, 192) who states:

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a place in the landscape is not
'cut out' from the whole, either
on the plane of ideas or on that
of material substance. Rather,
each place embodies the whole at
a particular nexus within it, and
in this respect is different from
every other.
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Edward Relph (1976, 3) similarly argues that "a place is not just the 'where' of something; it is the location, plus everything else that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenom-enon".

In my own interpretation, I argue in favour of both concepts of 'space' and 'place'. Using the example of the University of Cape Town, an office, the lecture theatre, the library, and the bookshop are all places. They are all points on the landscape where one can be physically emplaced. Yet, these places are also spaces in that they produce, and are produced by, social behaviour, and are not necessarily fixed, but form part of the larger fluid social body of the university. One may dwell within a building on campus, but one is not necessarily contained by a building. I see Lefebvre's (1991) space as the glue that holds a constellation of places together. I show through my experience in the field that offices are places, but the process of 'work' has a spatial component which extends far beyond the confines of the office.

Being-in-the-office: The phenomenological approach

Building on Lefebvre's (1991) ideas on space, and Casey's (1997) arguments in favour of place, are the concepts of phenomenology and embodiment. Phenomenological theory is based upon the central thesis of the 'primacy of perception'. According to Merleau-Ponty (2007), perception is consciousness: people perceive social and material occurrences through their bodies, then instantaneously and continually reflect on and analyse these perceptions to inform their embodied selves. Thomas Csordas (2002, 61) clarifies this position by pointing to the fact

that perception begins in one's body and ends in the objects one perceives. Merleau-Ponty "wants us to step backward from the object and start with the body in the world" (Csordas 2002, 61). Phenomenological theory, in its essence, lays the groundwork for an understanding of a body that is ambiguously positioned as both an object and a subject. Human perception starting from the body is our main method for analysing and engaging with the world around us.

Stemming from the phenomenological foundation that Merleau-Ponty (2007) and Csordas (2002) provide, Miles Richardson (2012) presents the idea of being-in-the-world – a phenomenological account of the intersubjective relationship between the individual and the material world. Richardson points to symbolic interactionism, a sociological concept, which "argues that people respond to objects on the basis of what those objects mean and that the meaning of those objects arises out of the negotiated experience of social interaction (Richardson 2012, 75; also see Low 2003). He argues that material culture, for instance, that of an academic office with all of its contents, becomes a "series of collapsed acts, the signs of what would happen if the acts were carried to completion – with the ability to make artefacts, we can fix our experience much in the same manner that text fixes discourse" (Richardson 2012, 75).

Understanding that material culture is the physical expression of the world one lives in, Richardson hypothesizes that there are three analytically distinct steps to being-in-the-world. First, one would assess the material component of one's surroundings through sensory perception. "In this, material settings resemble a series of semantic domains, as people enter them; provide a preliminary understanding of the interaction going on around them" (Richardson 2012, 78). The second step is the interaction component. In this step, as people interact with the material world and with each other, their behaviour becomes meaningful "to the extent that it incorporates or challenges their initial understanding of what is happening around them" (Richardson 2012, 80).

The third step is the image component, which incorporates the material culture, the acts, the gestures, and the interactions happening within this space, and objectifies the image of all these components as representative of what ought to happen in this specific social setting. It is the "transfer of the '*what*' of the ongoing social experience onto the '*where*' of the material setting" (Richardson 2012, 85, emphasis in original). In essence, the social situation becomes physically fixed in a material place. Being-in-the-world is dependent on one's ability to read one's surroundings and place this information within a milieu of social and material understandings. Thus, being-in-the-world is the subconscious process that informs embodied social behaviour.

In short, through the process of perceiving, a person will embody the socially constructed meanings imbued in their

surrounding place or environment. They reflect the materiality of place through their actions, behaviours, and attitudes. Drawing inspiration from Richardson's (2012) work on phenomenology and space, the term I will use for embodying space is being-in-the-office. In the ethnographic section of this article, I show that Jason has a very specific way of being-in-the-office.

Taskscapes

Tying space and place together with the phenomenological approach of being-in-the-world is Ingold's (2000) notion of 'taskscapes'. Of the human behaviours I witnessed while watching my interlocutors' being-in-the-office, the most obvious behaviour is 'work'." By work, I mean "making things and performing services which are of value to oneself, as well as to others" (Applebaum 1992, x). However, 'work' is a catch-all term and the series of actions and behaviours underpinning work requires further analysis.

One way to understand the complexity of work is by viewing 'work' as a series of 'tasks'. According to Ingold (2000 195, emphasis in original), a task can be defined as:

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any practical operation, carried
out by a skilled agent in an en-
vironment, as part of his or her
normal business of life. In other
words, tasks are the constitutive
acts of dwelling. No more than
features of the landscape, howev-
er, are tasks suspended in a vacu-
um. Every task takes its meaning
from its position within an ensem-
ble of tasks, performed in se-
ries or in parallel… It is to this
entire ensemble of tasks… that I
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refer by the concept of taskscape.
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A pertinent aspect of Ingold's (2000) idea of taskscape is the interdependent relationship between task and place. I interpret Ingold's argument as suggesting that a task, in an ensemble of tasks, may vary depending on the features of the landscape. Ingold (2000 198, emphasis in original) writes:

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Human beings do not, in their
movements, inscribe their life
histories upon the surface of na-
ture as do writers upon the page;
rather, these histories are wo-
ven, along with the life-cycles of
plants and animals, into the tex-
ture of the surface itself. Thus
the forms of the landscape arise
alongside those of the taskscape,
within the same current of activ-
ity.
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A practical example of the relationship between task and place that will be highlighted below is that an individual may carry out the task of computer-based work in an office, but will engage in an entirely different set of tasks in the laboratory, or out on the mountain while they conduct their field research. In essence, I argue that the taskscape is the phenomenologically based spatial component of 'work' described in the previous section.

Another pertinent point of Ingold's (2000) is that tasks are indicative of a person's social identity. "The tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks *makes* you the person who you are" (Ingold 2000, 325, emphasis in original). Furthermore, these tasks are never performed in isolation, but exist within

the context of the taskscape, that is, "the totality of tasks making up the pattern of activity of a community" (Ingold 2000, 325). When observing a person engaging in a set of tasks which forms part of his or her taskscape, one should take note of whether this task is emplaced within a certain physical location, and whether any other individuals are aiding, engaging, or participating in the task at hand. In light of this understanding, and in relation to this case study, one should question what tasks are exclusive to the office. Are there any tasks found outside the office in the workplace landscape? Are any of these tasks done in solitude, or shared with peers? Having outlined this theoretical framework, I will now delve into ethnographic description of Jason and his office.

Ethnographic Case Study: The Office of a Plant Scientist

It was a clear, windy and unusually crisp Cape Town morning. It was the 24th of June, 2015, and I had an appointment to meet with one of my interlocutors at his office on campus. Jason was a PhD student in the Department of Biological Sciences and had been studying at the University of Cape Town for roughly thirteen

Figure 1. The exterior of the H.W. Pearson building as seen from the sidewalk along University Avenue. Date captured: 3 July, 2015.

years. I parked my car on the road that runs above the university rugby fields and walked up the grand staircase towards Jameson Hall, the dominant architectural icon and central axis of the University of Cape Town upper campus.

I turned right down University Avenue, heading towards the H.W. Pearson Building, otherwise known as the 'old botany building'. According to Howard Phillips (1993), the H.W. Pearson building has been the home to the biological sciences faculty since they relocated to the university's upper campus in 1929. At street level, the H.W. Pearson building looks like a modest two-story facility, with a third level added to the north and south turrets (figure 1). The exterior of the building matches many of the other buildings on campus: red tiled roofs, stucco-plastered walls, red metal win-

Figure 2. An image of Jason's work cubicle. Date captured: 4 August, 2015

dows, and dark wooden doors – much of the exterior covered by decades of growth of ivy. H.W. Pearson, like many of the other buildings on upper campus, was built on a slope – as a result, there is an additional floor beneath the level of University Avenue that houses laboratories, storage space, offices, and a thoroughfare to the glasshouse that is often used for plant experiments.

On this morning, I entered H.W. Pearson and was immediately struck by the artwork lining the beige-plastered hallways – botanical illustrations in thick black picture frames (for example, hand-drawn artworks depicting an anatomically correct plant specimen). Jason stated on another afternoon in July that these illustrations were all hand drawn by undergraduate students in the department. Each year the best botanical illustration is chosen by the department and displayed in the hallway for everyone to enjoy. From the small foyer, I turned the corner and made my way down a corridor that was flanked by a light-well on one side and a row of closed office doors on the other. The office doors were solid with polished brass fittings, all shut as to protect their occupants from the goings-on outside. I eventually managed to find the door with a name tag bearing Jason's name, as well as four other names I did not know. I knocked, and let myself in.

Jason works in a shared office space with four other senior postgraduate students. Two walls of this office are flanked with cubicle work stations. The far wall contains a desk-height countertop and

a shared printer which is backed by two very large windows that look upon the passing foot traffic on University Avenue. Sitting abreast to the wall with the office door is a large filing cabinet and a shared office refrigerator. The room itself is slightly larger than fifteen square meters. Each office occupant has their own cubicle of approximately three square metres. Each cubicle is divided from the next by wooden panels with green fabric bulletin board. Jason's cubicle is in the back corner of the room adjacent to the printer and windows, with Jason's computer facing the interior of the room, while he faces the wall (figure 2).

I found Jason in more or less the same spot every time I entered this office – hidden behind the big wooden cubicle partition working at his computer. I would describe him as 'zoned-in' to his research, projects, emails, or thesis writing, oblivious to the goings-on outside the big wooden door. His office companions would come and go at various times, but Jason was fairly consistently in the office, arriving at half-past seven in the morning and departing around six in the afternoon. Above his computer were three bookshelves stacked on top of each other. The top shelf, which held two lever-arch files, was barely used; the middle shelf supported a large stack of papers held in manila folders and a red tray full of mini test tubes containing soil samples; and the bottom shelf held many of Jason's most frequently used work-related possessions and his most treasured academic books.

Looking through some of the books on Jason's bookshelf, one would see biology and chemistry textbooks, a thesaurus, a science dictionary, and a whole host of botanical and zoological field guides representing South African plant biomes, and a variety of foreign plant biomes that Jason has encountered in his travels around the world. Jason also has a whole host of non-academic books sitting in large brown boxes beneath his desk. As we were conversing one day, Jason told me that there was an unofficial and unspoken competition happening between him and one of his office mates. The objective of this clandestine competition was to amass the most impressive book collection at one's desk. On one occasion, Jason indicated spontaneously that he takes great pride in his book collection, saying that one could "get a sense of who he was by what he was reading".

In my fieldnotes, I recorded a rather peculiar utterance from Jason referring to his office space as his 'officialdom'. On one of the days Jason and I spent together, through casual conversation I interrogated the idea of 'officialdom' and discovered that this word represented the level of respect he perceived himself to have within the academy and beyond as a result of having a dedicated working space. As a PhD student in the biological sciences, an office on campus was 'expected'. Furthermore, it was a space to be valued – symbolizing the fact that the hard work invested in becoming an academic had paid dividends.

The most important item on his desk

was his computer – which was surrounded by blue paper trays, stacks of papers, and any other equipment or reference items he was using at the time. During much of my fieldwork spent with Jason in his office space, he would be hard at work on his computer. Rather than sitting and intrusively looking over his shoulder the whole time, I would sit and work on my laptop as well, occasionally glancing up to see if anything new or interesting had happened. One Tuesday morning in July, Jason and I were taking a momentary work break and bantering about important workplace possessions; I cheekily asked: "if your office was on fire, and you could only save one item… what would it be?" Jason replied:

```
It would be my computer, without
a doubt… because the data on that
computer [is being used] towards
my PhD, and it means more to me
than any of my books would. I
couldn't replace that data… it's
my life's work and would be a tre-
mendous set-back.
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The atmosphere in the shared office space was described by Jason as "convivial" – Jason and his office mates had good working relations. He often recollected instances where he had consulted with his colleagues on research matters, imparting advice or insight. However, barring the odd joke or inquiry about weekend activities, I did not witness such collaboration. By and large, I would describe Jason's shared office arrangement as having both sociopetal and sociofugal elements. Sociopetal describes an intentional arrangement of people so that they can see and interact with other people,

while a sociofugal arrangement of people allows each to maintain some privacy from the others (Hall 2012). Each workstation is positioned so that the person sitting at the desk is facing the wall and is separated from the next person by a large wooden cubicle partition. On the one hand, these workstations foster a social arrangement that is individualistic. On the other hand, the shared office space also fosters a degree of comradery and collegiality between the office occupants. Jason valued this aspect of the shared office.

On occasion, someone would knock at the door needing to speak with one of the postgraduate students sitting inside the office. The reasons for the drop-ins included an academic supervisor needing to speak to a student about their latest draft submission; friends from across campus dropping in to say 'hello'; undergraduate students seeking advice for upcoming assignments; or fellow students requiring access to the laboratory at the end of the hallway. Jason would often be the first to pop his head around the cubicle partition, greet the visitor, and assist with their query, or to answer the office telephone which rang on the odd occasion. Based on my observations, the reason Jason attended to these enquiries more than his peers might be due to the fact that he was most often present. When Jason's office cohabitants were at hand, sometimes the question being asked by the visitor required an answer from someone who knew the University system intimately. Jason, having spent thirteen

Figure 3. The interior of the Bolus Herbarium Library. Date captured: 2 July, 2015.

years of his life at the academy, often had the answer (or knew how to find it). One morning, I learnt to my amusement that the published telephone number for the University of Cape Town legal aid clinic was incorrect, and that many phone calls seeking legal advice were being directed to the shared telephone in this office. This was a source of great annoyance for Jason, who had tried on many occasions to rectify this error without success.

Late in the morning of the 2nd of July, Jason invited me to join him on a walking tour of the H.W. Pearson building to show me many of the other spaces where he worked, or had done work in the past. Jason and I climbed the stairs to Bolus Herbarium Library, a botanical library collection that the University of Cape Town acquired through special bequest after the death of local businessman Harry Bolus in 1911. As we approached the double-doors at the entrance of the library, Jason scanned his student card to gain access to this space.

Figure 4. Inside the Bolus Herbarium. Many of the specimens on this table are preserved in formaldehyde and displayed alongside scientifically correct botanical illustrations. Date captured: 2 July,2015.

Although in principle all University of Cape Town students have access to this library, only the Science Faculty students have security card access to this space. Students from other faculties require the assistance of the librarian to gain admission to this facility. Once Jason and I were inside the Bolus library, Jason presented some of the rare books that made this library unique and stated that on occasion he used this library as a point of reference for his own research (figure 3).

After the Bolus library, Jason and I wandered down the hallways to the Bolus Herbarium. The entrance to this facility is a set of wooden and glass double doors that are unlocked and open for any individual to enter. Immediately in front of these double doors is a desk with a collections curator ready to sign in people to gain access to the herbarium. Jason greeted the gentleman behind the desk and indicated that he was giving me a tour of the facilities in H.W. Pearson. We were granted admission to the herbarium by the curator without signing in. This was obviously Jason's 'officialdom' hard at work.

This fascinating place contains approximately 350,000 unique plant specimens – many of them flattened and pressed onto a stiff white piece of paper or preserved in formaldehyde (figure 4). Jason took me to a room in the adjacent Guthrie Herbarium and opened the nearest unlocked cabinet to exhibit some of the herbarium's botanical collection (figure 5). I asked how often he worked in this facility and Jason replied that at

that moment he was not using the herbarium frequently, but had done so in the past. What workplace facilities he used was entirely dependent on where he was in the research process. As Jason and I were heading back to his office, Jason mentioned that he had also sometimes used the experimental glasshouse situated behind the H.W. Pearson building, and the laboratory space that occupied two large rooms at the end of the hallway outside his office. By the end of the tour, it became abundantly clear that Jason had access to a range of locations to conduct his academic endeavours.

To bring home this idea of the plurality of work places, on the 10th of July, 2015, I joined Jason and his two undergraduate companions on a fieldwork expedition to Orangekloof in the Table
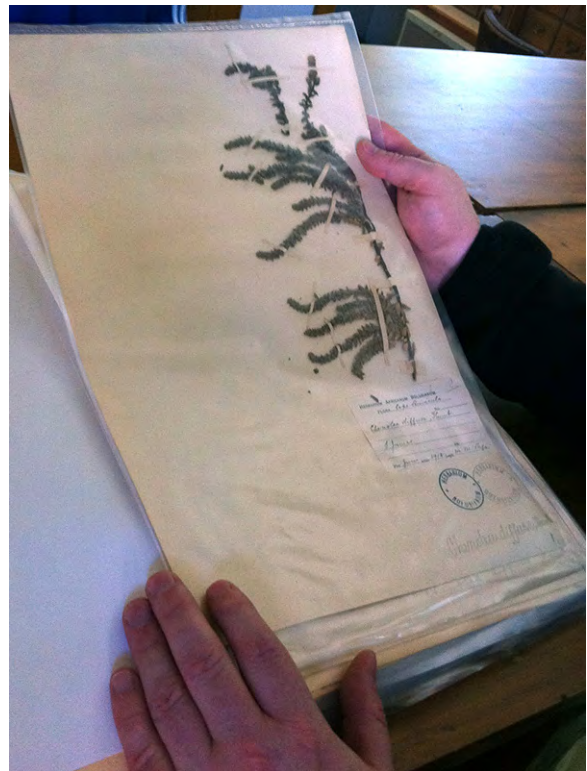

Figure 5. Jason exhibiting one of the botanical collections in the Guthrie Herbarium. Date captured: 2 July, 2015.

Mountain National Park. The four of us met on campus at eight in the morning, loaded our 'bakkie' (a South African word for pick-up truck) with our gear, and drove for half an hour to the field site in a deep canyon on the southerly flanks of Table Mountain. Orangekloof is a unique site in the Table Mountain National Park, as it contains vast tracks of fire-sensitive Afromontane forests and is largely closed to the tourists, hikers and mountain climbers known to throng to the other sides of the mountain range. Our research group had access to this portion of the national park as a result of Jason's research permit. On another occasion, Jason explained that because it was per-

tinent to his research and as a result of his rank at the University of Cape Town, the parks board granted him a permit to conduct field research within this highly sensitive portion of the national park.

Jason parked the bakkie and then the four of us took our equipment and ascended the mountain to the first of the three field sites. The fieldwork endeavour consisted of two distinct activities, which would be repeated at each of the three sites being analysed. First, Jason and his colleagues had used satellite imagery to choose three different sites on the side of the mountain to do a 'percentage of cover' analysis. The three sites were 'forest', 'fynbos', and a 'transitional zone', which

intersected both forest and fynbos. ('Fynbos' is a Dutch word signifying a type of shrub land endemic to the Western Cape region of South Africa.) 'Percentage of cover' analysis usually started by using a measuring tape to cordon off twenty square meters of hillside to create a sample site. Once the borders of the site had been established, the biologists would start collecting 'eco scraps', or samples of plant foliage, from every visible plant specimen within this space, labelling each 'eco scrap' with masking tape and marker, and generating a list of plant species being recorded (figure 6).

After the first hour our little group settled into a routine. By this stage, I was also assisting Jason and his team by labelling 'eco scraps' and counting specimens for the percentage of cover analysis (figure 7). The four of us then tried to tally the population of each plant species we could visibly see within the sample site, in order to establish an estimated 'percentage of cover'. In a way, the percentage of cover analysis is like a population census for plants. This was no easy task as some of the hillside we were traversing was unstable and had a steep forty-five degree descent into the river valley below. Afterwards, the 'eco scraps' would be taken back to the laboratory where they would

Figure 7.
I even participated in some of the fieldwork. These are some of the 'eco scraps' we collected from the 'transitional zone' between fynbos and forest. Date captured: 10 July, 2015.

be formally identified using field guides and the herbarium as a point of reference.

Secondly, Jason and his fellow biologists used a handheld auger to collect soil samples from each of the three established field sites. These soil samples would be taken back to the laboratory and analysed for traces of charcoal. The researchers were doing this analysis to look for recent signs of fire in the Orangekloof valley. Their hypothesis was that the vast tracts of Afromontane forests in the valley had flourished as a result of the deliberate attempt by the national parks board to prevent fire in the area for the past several decades. Once the four of us were finished collecting the samples, we packed up our camp, headed back down the hill, and Jason drove the bakkie back to the University of Cape Town. On route, we described our plans for the upcoming weekend.

August 4th was my last day of field research with Jason. I walked into the office and found him working away at his computer as I had witnessed many times over the prior weeks. I set up my laptop and began working. A few minutes later, Jason turned around and the pair of us began conversing about the fieldwork experience we shared a few weeks before. Jason indicated that he had spent many more days in the field since the day I joined him and his colleagues. At first, he was under the impression he was only involved in an advisory role, but after several discussions with his supervisor, he found ways to incorporate this fieldwork into his PhD research question. A

few minutes later, Jason and I got up to go for a walk and made our way to the laboratory at the end of the hallway. This laboratory is a dedicated space for Jason, his colleagues, and his supervisor to use for their research – Jason gained access to this space using a key that he specifically had been given by his supervisor. Within this laboratory, one of Jason's undergraduate fieldwork companions was busy working with the soil samples taken from the Orangekloof field sites.

Several glass beakers were lined up in rows on the laboratory counter, filled with a concoction of water and soil. On the floor sat giant plastic buckets of muddy water. While in the laboratory, Jason and his colleague collaborated for the best part of forty-five minutes establishing the best way to extract charcoal from the soil samples being analysed. It became clear from the tone of this conversation that Jason was embodying his role as a senior PhD student and providing guidance when and where he could. Shortly thereafter, Jason and I made our way back to the office; I packed my bags, and left Jason working at his computer.

Analysis

As an anthropology student, I could not have asked for a more exciting fieldwork experience – exciting because it afforded me my first opportunity to conduct independent ethnographic research. From this, I learnt how to bridge the gap between designing research and implementing, then adapting, one's methods and techniques to the fluid nature of the field.

Similarly, this experience was exciting because I had the opportunity to work alongside colleagues in other faculties, and even join them on their own research endeavours.

At the beginning of this article, I referred to Bourdieu's (1989) idea that space is a system of relations. A more in-depth research engagement would be required to uncover the full network of relations embedded in space. However, a preliminary reading of the data presented in this ethnography allows one to appreciate how space mediates one's behaviour, and how

that location that render a specific locale meaningful. As I have illustrated above, the activities of Jason's work occurs in a variety of places that extend far beyond the office place.

On the face of things, the material environment of Jason's office is bounded by four walls. It is a distinct place. In my field research, I found that no two offices are exactly alike. All occupants have agency to choose their own possessions. All occupants dwell in their office in their own unique way. Furthermore, all occupants have their own logic underpinning

> **"Whereas place refers to the physical environment, space refers to the shapeshifting social landscape that is intertwined with, and performed in, the physical environment."**

space informs one's relation to place. By observing Jason's office places and work spaces, and interpreting these observations through the theoretical lenses presented earlier in this essay, I can begin to show how space, place and people interweave in the context of an academic office.

The first theoretical lens I use to analyse my experience in the field is an amalgamation of Lefebvre's (1991) notions on space, and Casey's (1997) arguments in favour of place. I contend that space is the glue that holds a constellation of places together. Moreover, a place can be seen as the material environment plus the socially constructed spaces that occupy

how they organise their possessions. This was clear in Jason's shared office in that each of his office-mates had his/her own distinct office cubicle – personalised, occupied, and used in different ways and at different times. These places and possessions aid in the everyday social process of work. As indicated at the beginning of this article, Jason regards his office as his base and point of consolidation. Jason perceives that all of his work stems from this geographic position.

Whereas the office is a place, the social activity of work has a far more space-oriented character. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is permeated with social relations; it is active, ever-chang-

ing, and infused with a multitude of other spaces. Whereas place refers to the physical environment, space refers to the shapeshifting social landscape that is intertwined with, and performed in, the physical environment. In this sense, I argue that the scientific disciplinary workspace enabled Jason to unlock a whole host of other places beyond his office. I had the opportunity to witness Jason working in his office, in the laboratory, and in the field at Orangekloof. Furthermore, Jason indicated that he may work from time to time in the library, the glasshouse or the Herbarium. In essence, work as a spatial activity brings this collection of places into focus.

Going back to my second point regarding the phenomenological notion of embodiment and Miles Richardson's (2012) ideas of being-in-the-world; Jason embodies place in two immediately recognizable ways. The most salient way Jason embodied his office place was through the idea of 'officialdom'. I interpret Jason's 'officialdom' as the embodiment of the office as a status symbol, the reification and realization of his hard work and dedication to his studies over the thirteen years he has been at the University of Cape Town, and perhaps his idea of the way the university body values and recognizes his research contribution. To Jason, the office is a critical fixture in his everyday work experience. The office is part of who Jason is, it validates his status, and authorises him.

The second way Jason embodies the material world of the office landscape is closely linked to Miles Richardson's (2012) theory of being-in-the-world. As Jason moves from place to place while working, he perceives and embodies the material culture in his immediate geographic place, and this informs his embodied behaviour. Referring back to the introduction of this essay, the idea of the office is culturally ubiquitous – most people learn throughout their lives more-or-less what an office consists of. A bookshelf, books, a chair, a computer, a printer, a place to keep your important possessions, and a place to work – the office is reflected through material culture and in turn when a person experiences this place, one perceives and reacts in a socially appropriate manner. Behaviour then becomes routinized and deemed appropriate for that place.

Likewise, the same scenario may be true for the ensemble of other places Jason goes to throughout his work day, such as the Bolus Library, the Bolus Herbarium, the laboratory, or the field. Here, I am not arguing that being-in-the-office is the same for all people. Sometimes people may react slightly differently, or so differently that their behaviour may be considered out-of-place. The point is, on a subconscious level – all people, including Jason, perceive and embody their workspace.

To refine this office place vis-à-vis work space relationship even further, our third theoretical lens draws inspiration from Ingold's (2000) idea of the taskscape. As stated previously, 'work' is a catch-all term that needs to be analysed

more deeply. Being-in-the-office for Jason involves an ensemble of tasks which are inherently related to his geographic position in the office landscape. For instance, much of my time spent in the field with Jason was spent watching him work at his computer – writing his doctoral dissertation, journal articles, and working on presentations. Writing is a very specific task, situated in a very specific spot in Jason's office landscape. Likewise, the task of research may be situated in the laboratory, the library, and the field.

Being-in-the-office in the Orangekloof field site presents a whole host of other tasks related to scientific analysis – measuring, observing, and collecting samples. Likewise, being-in-the-office in the laboratory requires the tasks of experimentation, analysis, and amalgamation of data. The library, the herbarium and the glasshouse can be incorporated into the taskscape as well; again, each place in Jason's office landscape presents its own unique set of tasks. Lastly, many of these tasks make up part of Jason's unique identity as a scientist within the university community – one would be hard-pressed to find an academic from the law faculty undertaking environmental field research in Orangekloof or working in the glasshouse. This taskscape is unique to the biological sciences.

As much as Jason might want to think that academia is a lonely life, his taskscape forms part of the fluid and dynamic social space that is the University of Cape Town. There are a multitude of other agents across the academic com-

munity engaging in similar patterns of activity. Refer back to some of Jason's colleagues in his shared office – all of his office mates are senior postgraduate students conducting their own research to complete their respective degrees. They all have their own respective taskscapes which coincide with their respective research topics. In some instances their ensemble of tasks may intertwine with Jason's, and in some instances may diverge from it. In essence, my experience in the field corroborates Ingold's (2000, 325) argument that "tasks [make] up the pattern of activity of a community". From this understanding, the office place then becomes the point where this ensemble of tasks is consolidated, through writing, to form a piece of research. The end result will be that Jason's research will become the output required to complete his PhD and subsequent academic publications.

Conclusion

As an overarching theoretical framework, phenomenology is a fruitful and flexible approach for analysing people's interactions with place and space, including their everyday office places and work spaces.

Using the first theoretical lens, I draw on Lefebvre's (1991) construct of space, and Casey's (1997) argument in favour of place – and I argue in favour of both ideas. Through my experience with Jason, I show how both place and space are useful concepts. In essence, I argue that work is the performance of space that consolidates a variety of office places in a

meaningful way. Concomitantly, place is the physical manifestation of built form and landscape given meaning by an array of social spaces present in any given context. In short, my research corroborates Casey's (1997) argument that 'space' and 'place' are equally important constructs.

In the second theoretical lens, I draw on ideas of phenomenological embodiment and Richardson's (2012) ideas of being-in-the-world to analyse how Jason embodies and reacts to the material culture and physical environment he is emplaced within at any given point in time. In the process of moving through his environment, Jason perceives and embodies the architecture and material culture around him. This process enables Jason to read his surroundings and informs his behaviour accordingly.

The third theoretical lens draws on Ingold's (2000) notions of the taskscape. I argue that the taskscape is the thread that strings all my data and literature together. Through my experience with Jason, I describe work as an ensemble of tasks. Jason walks from his office to the other places in his work landscape. In each new place he engages in a different task. Each task, or set of tasks, is am embodiment of place. As such, work, as a spatial activity, is interwoven into the office landscape.

Stemming from this discussion, one can start to understand that there is a specific way in which one's academic discipline disciplines space and shapes place; and that moving across spaces/between places is akin to operationalising the discipline within the university. From this vantage point, movement across space becomes part of one's methodology. I have shown this process in action as Jason migrates from the office, to the laboratory, to the herbarium, and to the mountainside.

The key component to operationalising the academic discipline within the university is the office. The office is the central place from which one's taskscape flows. The office, the laboratory, the herbarium, and the mountainside all present the plant scientist with a unique set of tasks required to conduct scientific inquiry. Also, the academic office enables one to have easy access to one's disciplinary archive.

From this project, I have come to appreciate how powerful space is in mediating the performance and practice of everyday life, including that of 'work'. As a first point of departure for future research, I would like to revisit Bourdieu's (1989) idea pertaining to space as a system of relations. With a more in-depth investigation, might it be possible to map the full network of relations embedded within the space of an academic office?

As a second point of departure for future research, there is an aspect of the being-in-the-office that appears to elude the taskscape. The office is a critically important feature of the taskscape as it affords one a quiet place to cogitate, but at the same time the office can be a place for interacting with others. From this understanding, my question is this: is 'thinking' a task on an academic taskscape?

For an academic dwelling in their office, there could be some aspects of thought that may be inherently task-like. However, there also appears to be an abstract component to sitting at one's desk and thinking that transcends the taskscape. Conversely, might the spaces of academic work be more complex when one includes the moments spent day-dreaming about research in the shower, or stressing about a submission deadline while commuting to work, or having that 'ah-ha' moment about how to word an essay while running on the treadmill at gym? One's relation to the spaces of work may not stop at the office door or at the conclusion of the working day. For some, the space of work may be a continual engagement that can be at least partially, or unintentionally, detached from place. I hope to carry on with ethnographic engagement with the space of work to further explore these ideas.

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[1] About the Bolus Herbarium Library: http://www.bolus.lib.uct.ac.za/bol/about-bolus-herbarium-library.

[2] For more information, see http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/bolus/.