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Rupture and Exile: Permanent Liminality in Spaces for Movement and Abandonmen

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Rupture and Exile: Permanent Liminality in Spaces for Movement and Abandonment

By Harmony Siganporia and Frank G. Karioris

The historical materialist cannot do without the concept of a present which is not a transition, in which time originates and has come to a standstill. For this concept defines precisely the present in which he writes history for his person. Historicism depicts the 'eternal' picture of the past; the historical materialist, an experience with it, which stands alone. He leaves it to others to give themselves to the whore called 'Once upon a time' in the bordello of historicism. He remains master of his powers: man enough, to explode the continuum of history. (Walter Benjamin, quoted in Virno 2015: 3)

The 20th and 21st Centuries have borne witness to several waves of movement across the globe, both within and across borders, owing either to a sometimes violent re-drawing of them, or because of transnational flows which may or may not be read as a fall-out of what is known in short-hand as globalization. With these changes, we have seen notions of statehood and nationhood challenged, pushing down – in many cases – on the ability for one to be stateless in a world where the power of the state is increasing dramatically. In addition, this period has witnessed a major trans-formation of individual subjectivities and the ways that people work with, through, contest, and exist in relation to elements of tradition, culture, and each other. Forms of relationality – in the strict sense of connections between individuals and between one's self and facets of identity and belonging – have found new ground and holds, while simultaneously facing challenges to the sovereignty of individuals to define their subjectivity. This thematic section attempts to reflect on some of these changes through looking at the space and place of liminality within cultures and peoples, at the extension of liminality towards permanence, and the ways in which permanence is managed, obtained, and addressed. Through this series of articles, the section hopes to contribute to our understandings of liminality, rupture and exile, as well as providing new thinking on the topic through what we believe is unique and orig-inal research.

Various thinkers who have developed the concept of liminality – expanding on the initial anthropological writings by Arnold van Gennep (1960) linked almost ex-clusively to rites of passage, and later Victor Turner (1969) – have taken the notion, and expanded it to include a greater variety of ambiguous situations, epochs, and spaces that might be read as liminal. As Turner outlines, liminality can be applied to someone going through a transition, being neither this nor that, and therefore simultaneously being both and neither. In his conception, liminal entities are ones who are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned

and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (Turner 1969: 95). These entities are therefore outside prior 'classifications', but not outside the need (or requirement) for classification anew. Liminality is therefore construed as a midpoint – similar to Michel de Certeau's (1988) concept of the 'bridge', widely perceived as a temporary state which must end with the 'initiate's' reincorporation into the social structure.

Arpad Szakolczai, building on this idea, suggests that one is also able to become trapped in a form of 'permanent liminality', which he says comes in three stages, mirroring the phases demarcated in and for rites of passage. He holds that "liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence (separation, liminality, and re-aggregation) becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame" (Szakolczai 2000: 220). In such a liminal situation, as BjørnThomassen warns us, liminality is "pure danger" (2012: 30). What Szakolczai calls 'separation' – the first stage in a rite of passage – is what contributors to this section explore in the idea of rupture; a breach, or even a clean break from the orientations and grand narratives which undergird societies. A number of pieces in this section grapple with outlining reasons for (and analysing the nature of) contextually located ruptures with prior epistemes which force communities or groups into liminality. These pieces read various manifestations of rupture as markers which indicate whether liminality may, indeed, become permanent or 'dangerous', and whether the final stage of re-aggregation is therefore a possibility for the groups in question at all. In other words, rupture as treated in this section is both closely allied to liminality, as well as indicative of the kind of liminality that groups occupy/traverse.

Overview of the Thematic Section

It is the 'danger' of liminality that Paul D'Souza's 'Life-as-Lived Today: Perpetual (Undesired) Liminality of Half-widows of Kashmir'sets out to delineate, in the particular context of the liminal characters known as the 'half-widows' of Kashmir. The disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir in northern India has been wracked with violence for decades, to the point that what started out as the dispute 'of' Kashmir (because both Pakistan as well as India lay claim to it) has led to crippling conflicts 'in' Kashmir. By the early1990s, the deployment of ground troops on the streets of Kashmir, aimed to curb the armed insurgency which had arisen in the area, and militarized the entire region. 'Half-widow' is the term used to refer to women whose husbands have gone 'missing'. The legal position of their status is yet to be clarified both by clergy and law, rendering this figure a personification of one form of what it means to be permanently liminal. D'Souza writes, "By conservative estimates, there are 1,500 women who are identified as half-widows 'whose husbands are assumed dead but there is no proof to show they actually are'... They occupy a liminal space that denies them both the status of a wife and the dignity of a widow". More broadly, the article explores what it means to live in an 'undesired' liminal state,

and questions whether there is a possibility that these women will be able to move towards a space where half-widows can participate as full citizens of a polity, and members of their respective communities.

Following this, Aija Lulle's 'Revitalising Borders: Memory, Mobility and Materiality in a Latvian-Russian Border Region' explores the ramifications of acts of rupture premised on the re/drawing and enforcing of physical (and political) borders in the region between Latvia and Russia. Lulle proposes that the concept of 'rupture' bespeaks political as well as embodied change, pertaining to individual and social upheaval. She holds that rupture is also an important concept with which to study the shifting conceptualisations in border studies, applicable to natural, geopolitical and socially constructed barriers alike. "By placing an emphasis on rupture, the main question becomes as follows: *how do ruptures emerge; how are they produced and experienced by people in a borderland?*" she explores in her article, which sets out to establish how the idea of the border is revitalised in routine political rhetoric and discourses dealing with threat and the 'securitisation' of nation-states. Drawing on fieldwork, the author shows how lived reality can appear in sharp contrast to the political revitalisation of the border. It is within symbolic and cultural realms that this article locates memories of mobility as residing. These memories afforded by (and in) 'Soviet times' are embedded in discourses of youth and vitality, corresponding to the respondents' own youth and working lives, in terms of time-lines. This is juxtaposed against the lexicon of empty dreariness which has come to be associated with perceived immobility in the present, made concrete in the words of respondents who describe it as "abandonment, decay" and the desire to move away from where they find themselves.

Thinking about 'moving away from' opens up the discursive field which yields what Foucault identifies as the trace residue left over after a paradigm-altering rupture occurs. This thematic section reads rupture as discontinuity, or what Foucault explains as being a moment of transition that forces a "redistribution of the [prior] episteme" (Foucault 1970: 345). Speaking to this notion of memory (residue) and rupture as a redistribution of prior epistemes coded in embodied practices which manifest in lexicon and acts of naming, Harmony Siganporia's 'Seeking Dhasa; Finding Lhasa: Liminality and Narrative in the Tibetan Refugee Capital of Dharamsala' explores the role of narrative and narrativity as processes which seek to stabilise identities in exile, read here as a means of fending off what Thomassen identifies as the 'danger' inherent to liminality. The article is contextually located in the capital of Tibetan exile, the north Indian town of Dharamsala. It attempts to decode the narratives which allow the town to cohere and correspond with Lhasa, the erstwhile capital of free Tibet. The article explores how the act of narrativising is a demonstration of the fact that it is in indeterminacy – in liminality – that structuration becomes possible anew. Following Thomassen (2009) and Szakolczai (2009), liminality is here treated as a concept applicable to time as well as place; individuals as well as communities, and social 'events' or changes of magnitude. It

is this form of liminality that Siganporia proposes "has to be a central concept in any exploration of exile groups which...live in the spaces between the shorn identity markers of the past – rooted as these must be in a lost homeland – and the present, where they must be iterated or manufactured anew". In response to Thomassen's question about who, in times of 'social drama', the carriers of the new world-view which will eventually come to be institutionalised must be, particularly if there appears to be no end-point to the liminal condition in sight (2009: 19), Siganporia proposes that this question should be modified by adding 'where' (to index site or location) and 'what' (a scanning of cultural artefacts and practices emergent in exile) to the 'who' it seeks to locate as the carriers in question.

Following this, Line Richter's 'On the Edge of Existence: Malian Migrants in the Maghreb' considers liminality in the context of the lived reality of Sub-Saharan migrants from the Maghreb en route to Europe. In her piece, Richter discusses how several studies on the region have outlined the marginalised and multiply precarious positions these migrants on the edge of Europe hold, in the light of the turn that liminality studies have taken after Victor Turner. Her own fieldwork looks at the way Malian migrants in Algeria and Morocco live out and experience this trope, in their day-to-day lives in the transit camps and localities which dot their passage to Europe. Treating the Maghreb as a place of 'in-between-ness', she argues that its location provides the setting for a kind of permanent liminality. She explores this theme in three ways: by analyzing the underlying motivations for migrant crossings; by exploring the 'mimicking' of social and political structures which mark and orient migrant localities and transit camps in meaningful ways; and by examining the ruptures with humanity which several of her respondents identify as constitutive of their experiences in this space/time. The article argues that "the concept of limbo, from the Latin *limbus*, which means *edge* or *border*, can...guide our attention to the fixity and dead-ended-ness of migrant life on the move," suggesting that in this instance, it might prove a more interesting lens through which to explore journeying migrants than liminality itself.

'Temporally Adrift and Permanently Liminal: Relations, Dystalgia and a U.S. University as Site of Transition and Frontier' by Frank G. Karioris provides the bookend to the thematic section and explores time in the context of liminality through a study of homosocial relations in Regan Hall (an all-male hall of residence) at the University of St Jerome in the American Midwest. In this piece, Karioris reads the experiences of his respondents in the hall "as a transition phase which one is liable to get stuck in," whilst seeking to uncover "what this specific iteration of perception might suggest about these men, their place in society, their age, gender, race, class, and desires". He analyzes how these students situate themselves within a temporal frame which locates their experiences within framework that he calls "a nostalgia for the present," through which process the 'good-old days' are, in fact, the ones being lived through in the present moment. Building on de Certeau's ideas of the bridge and frontier, Karioris holds that both concepts act as

spaces of connection because they do not foreclose points of contact. The liminal space that is the bridge, in his study, is one which is "always connected and yet always outside of," thus charging it with the possibility of danger and/or failure.

Conclusion

Each piece in this thematic section is a musing and contribution to the applicability of the concept of liminality – both as traditionally defined as well as extending into what we now think of as 'permanent' – to places, times, movements and communities around the world. The present moment is one which is seeing larger and larger worker and student uprisings in India, South Africa, Brazil and countless other post-colonies, not to mention the onset of the largest refugee crisis since World War II in Europe. It is clearly a moment in which the worth of a concept like liminality, which allows us an entry point into discourses of precarity, vulnerability, and the simultaneous erasure (rupture) and re-creation of modalities of classification, is vital. The articles that make up the section attempt to extend the questions one is able to ask of the concept of permanent liminality, even as they try to explore the ramifications of what it means to actually live it. We believe that these articles strongly contribute to our understandings of these critical concepts, and build on extant literature. We hope that they provide a further opening point for scholarship and allow for these prescient conceptual tools to be applied beyond these particular contexts, locales, and spatio-temporal boundaries.

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Life-as-Lived Today: Perpetual (Undesired) Liminality of the Half-widows of Kashmir

By Paul D'Souza

Abstract

According to Victor Turner, all liminality must eventually dissolve, for it is a state of great intensity that cannot exist very long without some sort of structure to stabilize it. This paper takes his lead and attempts to describe the liminal status of those women, the whereabouts of whose husbands are not known (they are locally referred to as 'half-widows') in the conflict zone of Kashmir, India. The article examines the concept of liminality based on life as lived today by these half-widows and shows how the effects of liminality operate in their day to day life, making them extremely vulnerable victims. In this, it is an attempt to expand upon the concept of liminality, originally linked almost exclusively to rites of passage. Furthermore, this paper reflects on the idea of permanent liminality that has been elaborated by sociologist Arpad Szakolczai. The narratives of the half-widows of Kashmir provide an example of how they are trapped in a form of "permanent liminality" far beyond what was initially defined as a "temporal state".

Conflict: the Context of Liminality

Kashmir, over the past sixty years, has remained a contested terrain and has experienced political, social, economic and cultural turmoil. It is what Tariq Ali (2002: 233) calls "the unfinished business of partition", and Kashmir has remained a bone of contention between Pakistan and India since the Independence/creation of both countries in 1947. The accession of Kashmir to the Union of India has dominated the historical relationship between India and Pakistan, where India asserts that Kashmir is an integral part of its territory, and Pakistan claims that as a predominantly Muslim territory, Kashmirs rightful place is in the Muslim majority state of Pakistan. The dispute over Kashmir has led to three full-scale wars in 1947, 1965 and 1971, and a limited war in Kargil in 1999 (Butalia 2002: xi). On the other hand, over the years, the erosion of Kashmir's autonomy and its integration within the Indian Union has caused resentment among a large section of people in Kashmir. The widespread frustration among Kashmiri Muslims about the policies pursued by New Delhi and some of their elected leaders has erupted into a freedom movement with strong secessionist overtones.

This state of alienation set the stage for armed militancy in the late 1980s, led by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). When the armed rebellion first began in 1989, most Kashmiris believed it would be a short struggle. Kashmiris were out in the streets in the tens of thousands, calling for '*azadi*' or independence (Human Rights Watch 2006: 8). Ordinary Kashmiris never thought that it would be such a long and violent battle which would lead to so much suffering in their homeland. The Kashmir Valley witnessed a series of civil curfews, strikes and numerous demonstrations that often turned violent. The conflict "of" Kashmir (a dispute between India and Pakistan) gave way to conflict "in" Kashmir (a conflict within the territorial space in India) (Dasgupta 2001:4).

By 1990, Kashmir fell under the shadow of militarily backed central rule. The deployment of troops on the streets of Kashmir to curb armed insurgency swiftly militarized the Valley. Ever since then, this geographic space has remained not just theoretically but also practically a "liminal space". Kashmir, even today, is on the "threshold and the people of Kashmir are resisting liminality in many and varied ways including violence. The region is continuously passing through the struggle of what one may call the *narrative of rupture*" (Shiv 2013).

Disappearances: the Reason for Liminal Half-widows

Since the beginning of the insurgency, thousands of Kashmiris have gone missing. According to the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP)1, there have been an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 disappearances in Kashmir (APDP 2011). When people disappear, there are two kinds of victims: the individuals themselves who have gone missing, and their families, torn between despair and hope, living

with uncertainty and pain, waiting for news, sometimes for decades (ICRC 2014). In a sense, it is not merely the abducted person who is held hostage; the family and relatives too are held hostage until the person returns. The family of the "missing person" faces socio-economic hardships, physical suffering and psychological trauma. In that context, the phenomenon of enforced disappearance has become a severe scourge due to the fears it generates, anxieties it breeds, fatigue it inflicts, and the psychological strain it imposes on the relatives of the disappeared (Zahir 2012).

Whatever be the reason and nature of the disappearances, the disappeared persons, largely men in conflict-affected areas, have left behind wives and families. The wives of such disappeared men are now known locally as 'half-widows', the whereabouts of whose husbands are not known (Rashid 2011). This phenomenon, new to Kashmir, has brought different interpretations and views. The term is referred to women whose husbands are "missing" and the legal position of their status is yet to be clarified both by the clergy and the law (Dewan 2002: 151). By conservative estimates, there are 1,500 women who are identified as half-widows "whose husbands are assumed dead but there is no proof to show they actually are" (Butalia 2002: xii). Disappearances seem, in fact, more gruesome than death because in the case of death, the wife accepts the fact that her husband is no more and she is a widow. The irony of the half-widows is the lingering hope that their husbands might be alive and may return one day. This is the reason why, in popular media, these women are also known as "waiting women".

After the disappearance of the husband, women are placed on the threshold between waiting and living; of knowing and not knowing what comes next. They occupy a liminal space that denies them both the status of a wife and the dignity of a widow (Omar 2014). As their husbands are missing, they are in a dilemma as to whether they are still married, or widowed. Their status thus becomes liminal. In the patriarchal and hierarchical socio-cultural ethos of Kashmir, being a single woman with 'liminal' status, the half-widow is placed in a very precarious position. It is in this context that the paper examines the haunting questions of half-widows derived from her strange and unknown socio-cultrual locality.

Liminality and Liminal Half-widows

In anthropology, liminality is derived from the Latin "limen", which means "threshold" – that is, the part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a house. It is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, when participants no longer hold their pre-ritual status but have not yet transitioned to the status they will hold when the ritual is complete. The theory of liminality in social contexts originally emerged with anthropologist Arnold van

Gennep's analysis of *rites de passages* (1960[1909]). In particular, van Gennep described ceremonies marking transitional events like funerals and weddings as possessing three major phases: separation, transition, and incorporation.

Victor Turner elaborated on van Gennep's *rites de passage* to describe this state of transitioning as a "liminal period", which is an unstructured in-between phase of rituals where participants transit from one social status to another. Turner used the phrase "Betwixt and between" to capture the essence of his theory of "liminality," to analyze rites of passage within tribal, socio-cultural systems. He defined liminal individuals or entities as neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions and at the same time being both (Turner 1967). Turner sees the "structural invisibility of the liminal person [as having] a twofold character". They are at once "no longer classified" and "not yet classified" (Hong 2012). Yet liminality is a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point, and as such it is a temporary state that ends when the initiate is reincorporated into the social structure (La Shure 2005).

This paper intends to move further on two counts that are prominently expressed in Turner's liminality, i.e. there is a defined time for transition and that the liminal stage has positive connotation.

'According to Turner, all liminality must eventually dissolve, for it is a state of great intensity that cannot exist very long without some sort of structure to stabilize it' (Homas 1979). However, when the concept is applied beyond ritual to modern societies, questions are being raised about the temporary state of liminal status. When the reintegration process in which the person is recognized as a part of the social order and is welcomed into that order with a new role does not take place, liminality becomes permanent. This idea of permanent liminality has been elaborated on extensively in numerous works by sociologist Arpad Szakolczai. In his book *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, Szakolczai (2000) argues that there are three types of permanent liminality, each closely related to one of the phases of the rites of passage. He acknowledges that "liminality becomes a permanent condition when any of the phases in this sequence becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame" (Szakolczai 2000: 220).

Secondly, Turner attributed a rather univocally positive connotation to liminal situations, as ways of renewal. However, Agnes Horvath (2013) argues that liminal situations can be, and in actual fact in modern era, rather quite different: periods of uncertainly, anguish, even existential fear: a facing of the abyss in void. Van Gennep (1960) describes this experience as a boundless, marginalized one often accompanied by isolation and the suspension of social status. In liminal situations, the persons often live outside their normal environment where they come to feel nameless, spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured (Thomassen 2006). A more permanent period in this stage can also become very dangerous and destructive. In modern societies such state can bring social exclusion, making person live at the margin for rest of their lives.

The example of half-widows of Kashmir caught in conflict zone shows that, the women are kept on the "threshold" for a time period which is not defined. Over the last two and half decades, the half-widows are "waiting" in their liminal status and seem to provide glimpses into what permanent liminality could mean. Thus, going beyond a ritual base, this article examines the social locality in modern times in which the half-widows are faced with situations of ambiguities and dilemmas, in what appears to be a liminal phase that has become 'fixed'. Further, with the help of the concept of liminality, this article analyses life as lived by the half-widows of Kashmir, and its in-between status that is not positive. Being almost perpetually frozen in this state, the half-widows are confronted with vulnerabilities and negative existential questions with no answers. Finally, while describing the impacts of living in such an 'undesired' liminal state, it explores whether there are possibilities of 'crossing over' to a state in which half-widows can participate as members and citizens of their community or country, or continue to struggle with their present ambivalence.

Data Collection Process

The issue of the half-widow is an off-shoot of the Kashmir conflict, a complex and vast struggle. The present study was undertaken to examine in-depth the socio-economic vulnerabilities of half-widows and how these vulnerabilities affect them in the context of the larger conflict in the region. The field investigation, undertaken from July 2013, lasted for over a year and was done in different phases, i.e. establishing initial rapport, mapping and identifying stakeholders, implementing interview schedules and conducting case studies. The focus of the study demanded that the identification of primary stakeholders i.e. half-widows should be done from among those who have been the victims of conflict in Kashmir since 1990 till date. This had serious implications not only for the identification of half-widows, but also to capture 'historical' details. Many of the identified women with their present unfavourable social, economic, psychological and physical conditions, were unable to recollect the happenings chronologically and in exact detail. Further, field investigations in conflict regions have additional complexities; at times it became extremely difficult, dangerous and delicate to undertake this study.

However, help in locating half-widows came from unexpected quarters: local officials, NGO personnel, a doctor, driver, businessmen and shopkeepers. There were immense difficulties in locating the women in far-flung areas as there were absolutely no leads. At times approaching a nearby police station to get some clue regarding half-widows created serious difficulties. The suspicion and fear that continue to permeate the Kashmir Valley in general in the context of conflict and political instability has brought a 'trust deficit' that curtails freedom in investigation to a great extent.

Often, women were reluctant to let researchers in, suspecting them to be associates of either side i.e. military or militants. At some places, the doors were closed on arrival and the researcher was told to leave immediately. Only after confirming identities was one granted entry. The fact that most of the field investigators were locals from Kashmir helped in proving one's credentials. Access to half-widows was also difficult due to the presence of others around her, especially other family members. The local socio-cultural context – where a woman (half-widow) lived continuously under community pressures, expectations, bound by traditions and unwritten laws – restricted her interactions with an outsider. Many times, even women who had been disowned by their own families and by their in-laws were not able to talk freely.

The health of the respondent was another adverse factor in talking freely or having interactions of longer duration, as a significant number of women were not in good health. Over the years, many of them have suffered from physical and mental illnesses. Language was another barrier, as some far-flung areas were dominated by *Gujjars* who spoke only *Gojri* or *Dogri,* the local dialect. As the research team only spoke Kashmiri and Hindi, they had to rely upon local interpreters for translation.

The women did not wish to talk much about traumatic experiences. Their weariness of shedding tears and sharing the same stories without any satisfactory responses was visible. In a few cases, women refused outright to let investigators in, as they had already been interviewed by numerous "visitors" and "report writers" earlier. The extremely painful and very different nature of cases had to be dealt with sensitivity in order to bring out the intricacies of each woman's narrative, without hurting or offending them.

There was a constant fear and insecurity of hostile forces around (militants, military personnel, separatists etc). The environment of fear and insecurity described in the Human Rights Watch (2006) report *Everyone lives in fear*, was often a real experience during this field investigation. However, the team, consisting of both male and female investigators, was able to establish a very good rapport with the half-widows, after the initial ice-breaking. Some of the investigators were local Kashmiris, and this helped respondents to locate them as their 'own'. This helped in creating a comfort zone for deeper sharing. In order to maintain confidentiality, names have deliberately been changed and sensitive details have been omitted.

The methods adopted for the empirical investigations were both qualitative and quantitative. A structured interview schedule was implemented among 150 households of half-widows identified through snowballing method, geographically spread across nearly 140 villages[2] and towns in eight districts of the Kashmir Valley and the Poonch district of Jammu region. Based on the detailed household information drawn through structured interviews, more in-depth qualitative narratives capturing the experience of vulnerability were collected from half-widows through case studies and Focus Group Discussions. A similar exercise was undertaken

among other stakeholders from different walks of life, i.e. advocates, State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) personnel, health personnel, academicians, government officials, civil society group, journalists, and community leaders. Thus, the data collection process though difficult, led the investigators to gain 'insider's view' and the deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in issues of half-widow in the region.

Undesired Liminality and Questions of Half-widows

In any society there are vulnerable individuals and groups who have little power over events that affect them. The women of Jammu and Kashmir are such a group whose well-being is affected in a major way due to the ongoing conflict in Kashmir and the larger social context in which they are located add to their vulnerability immensely. The women of Kashmir are more vulnerable as traditional patriarchy prevails strongly in Kashmiri society. Both Kazi (2009) and Shekhawat (2014) strongly argue that:

> in Kashmir, patriarchy did not cease to exist even momentarily during the conflict period. The escalation of conflict made women the most vulnerable object, of both, the patriarchal and traditional Islamic society and militarized state. Even in a woman's victimization, patriarchal values played crucial role. Women confronted discrimination from 'all men' surrounding them, whether militants, or security forces, or their own families. (Shekhawat 2014: 155)

The harsh and repressive gender relations that emerged during last three decades have victimized the women of Kashmir sexually, mentally, emotionally and physically. The societal control over women's public and private lives has increased many folds with the reinforcement of patriarchy, i.e. restricted lifestyle, wearing of the veil, etc. In addition to the hierarchic and patriarchic set up the women were deprived of space and courage to voice their opinion or opt for choices. Thus, the domain of decision making and speaking out was kept afar from women. That women are generally not allowed to speak in public forums showed in the meetings the research team conducted in Bandipora and Baramulla, there were 13 women present and only three men, but the women were not allowed to speak. Instead, a son, uncle or other relative were speaking on their behalf.

It is in this context, the absence of men in their families adds to their vulnerabilities immensely. The roles assumed by women after the death or disappearance of male family members, often confused her as to how to respond to news situations. The woman had no choice what role to play in society as it came to her unexpectedly. When the things turned ugly women had to take charge of their lives and responsibility of their families. They began to shoulder the economic responsibilities, to educate their children and drive the cart of daily life. They began to visit various jails, torture and detention centres and travelled to alien places; they began to follow

their legal suits (see Mushtaq 2012). It was difficult for women to come out of home, yet the conditions of conflict forced them to come out. 'Absence of men pushed many women into the public sphere to negotiate with both the state and society for their survival as well as of their families on an almost daily basis' (Shekhawat 2014: 90). Thus, emotional trauma and economic insecurity are the most immediate outcomes of widowhood or half-widowhood, and the women had to do the balancing act in a gender biased social context.

To accept the fact that one's husband has disappeared for many years and may not come back during one's lifetime is an emotional decision. No one can tell a woman to close the chapter and say that her husband is gone, he is dead, and it is best to accept this. It is her decision to choose to live with that hope. However, this "lingering hope" and the unending "waiting at the threshold" make half-widows different than other widows. We encountered a widow named *Rashida* in a village of Kashmir whose husband was killed by some unknown people. She insisted on knowing who killed her husband. After some time, another person disappeared from the same locality. *Rashida* went to the disappeared person's wife, *Salma,* who was pursuing the search for her husband in forests, hospitals, army camps and wherever she could afford to go. After witnessing the struggles of *Salma* the widow exclaimed that "I am better off than you; at least I am aware that my husband has been killed but you'll have to endure pain and live in a state of uncertainty for God knows how long".

This ambiguous status of half-widows, of course undesired, seems to have come to stay for a long time, without concrete responses as to its logical, political and social solutions. The disappearances of men were the cause of the liminality of half-widows. This period – starting from the disappearance of the husband, till knowing his definitive whereabouts – may be described as the "liminal period" for half-widows. The present study uncovered that as many as 37% of the half-widows interviewed have been in a liminal phase for 20 years or more, ever since their husbands disappeared. Little over 52% of them have been in this transition phase for 11 to 19 years, and 11% have been living without their husbands less than 10 years.

'Is he alive or dead?' is the recurring question, in the beginning when the disappearance took place, and even now, after the long and tiring search processes are, in some cases, over. It is difficult to accept, yet some half-widows live in hope. *Hafiza* from Baramulla raises the question:

> He was taken in front of me. Tell me whether he is alive or is martyred. If he is martyred, I will go to the graveyard and that will give me peace of mind. If I come to know that my husband is at the remotest corner of the border, I will go there even if I have to beg. I admit that my husband was guilty, but why did he disappear? I will tell him to stay in jail but will at least meet him.

From this one prime question, other questions follow that express the deep sense of ambiguity and dilemmas faced by half-widows. This phenomenon is remarkably

captured by the "to be or not to be" syndrome drawn from *Hamlet*, which serves to explain the predicament and uncertainty in life-as-lived by the women within this 'liminal stage'.

1. To search or not to search?
2. To declare or not to declare the death of the husband?
3. To remarry or not to remarry?
4. To fight or not to fight the battle for justice?
5. Do I belong anywhere?
6. But what do I do now?

1) To search or not to search?

After her husband who had left home did not return, the obvious step for a woman was to make an inquiry and search for him. However, there were two haunting questions that needed to be answered: whether to search or not, and if yes, where to search? Nearly 9% of the women indicated that they did not search for their missing husbands. This negative response seems surprising, but it provides glimpses into the depth of vulnerabilities that some of the women must have faced at the time when their husbands went missing. In some cases, these women were not educated. Not knowing the procedures, and devoid of any proper guidance, they remained at home, waiting. The young age and inexperience of some half-widows made it difficult to handle the complex situations of searching for their husbands and negotiating arduous follow-ups. On the other hand, there were also external factors that played an important role in blocking the search processes.

Sakina from Bandipora had a brother-in-law who was an army informer; thus fear of militants was the reason behind the reluctance of the family and neighbourhood to search for her husband. A further inquiry into this reveals that the socio-political elements involved in the "missing or disappearance" episodes are sensitive and risky if one shows any association or closeness with state or non-state forces. Searching for a person who had connections either with militant groups or state forces created fear and insecurity for women and their households.

However, as many as 91% of women made efforts to locate their lost husbands. They were haunted by another question: where was one to search for them? Accessing information on disappeared persons remains one of the biggest challenges for the relatives of the disappeared. The way in which the entire abduction is carried out makes it nearly impossible to obtain reliable information on the whereabouts of disappeared persons and their fate. When the location of the disappeared person is not known, it is impossible to initiate concrete searches or legal action (APDP 2011). In Kashmir, where a large number of men have disappeared, leaving behind their wives and children, family and relatives have gone from place to place, searching for their missing men. They have gone to police stations, jails, hospitals, army camps and far-off villages, but with no results.

2) To declare or not to declare the death of the husband?

Every half-widow lives with hope, and is waiting for her husband to return home. However, over a period of time, there is a natural acceptance of the husband not coming back. Thus, some of the women accept that he will not return, and they decide to move on. But this 'natural acceptance' is not the case with everyone. Many women live life of struggle, fighting for survival without economic and social support. At times, she is compelled to undertake the process of declaring the death of the husband. In both cases, it is the woman who is the sufferer because in case the husband returns, it is the woman who would be made to feel guilty about choosing to declear him dead.

Another important reason is economic: the government of Jammu and Kashmir has issued two government orders where people killed in 'militancy-related' incidents, but not themselves 'involved in militant activities' are entitled to an ex-gratia payment of Rs 100,000 (1 lakh) and are entitled to a government job for the next of kin on compassionate grounds. Ex-gratia can be received only when the husband is declared to be dead, and since their husbands have not been declared dead officially, the half-widow is not entitled to ex-gratia payment by the state.

The declaration of the death of the missing husband changes the legal status of the woman to a widow and not a half-widow. Despite this, there are among those who have received compensation after declaring the death of their husband, women who are still waiting for them to return. The legal declaration does not end their liminal status. The dilemma continues to haunt the women; for them compensation is only a means to meet the economic crisis in the household. There are many instances when the woman refused any ex-gratia compensation, demanding to see the face of the husband whether dead or alive.

3) To remarry or not to remarry?

The half-widows are mostly Muslim, and under the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act 1939, a woman married under Muslim law is entitled to obtain a decree for the dissolution of marriage if the whereabouts of her husband have not been known for a period of four years. However, there are differences of opinion and confusion about the remarriage of half-widows and the acceptable waiting period for the same. Since the concept of the half-widow is not mentioned in the Quran, there is no clear guideline as to how to proceed with remarriage. This issue is clearly related to law and religion.

There is no consensus in Islamic law (*Sharia*) on their remarriage. All major schools of thoughts have differing views on this matter. There is also an opinion that if the husband remains missing, without informing about his whereabouts even after proper investigation, the marriage is considered dissolved. Opinions also differ on the validity of a second marriage, should the first husband return.

In this light, a three-part consultation with Ulema (religious scholars) on the issues of half-widows in Kashmir came out with a consensus decision in December 2013, paving the way for half-widows to remarry four years after their husbands' disappearance. This was the first such initiative by civil society groups in Kashmir in the past 23 years of conflict, but it was too late for most of the half-widows who continue to suffer psychologically and physically; especially the half-widows who were very young when their husband disappeared.

The remarriage of a half-widow, on the other hand, is more than just a question of law and governance, and needs to be located in the cultural milieu and family conditions. There was no clarity on the issue among half-widows themselves. Nearly 35% of half-widows felt that they should not re-marry and 20% felt they should. However, a little over 45% of them were confused as they are not sure what they should do. The women have also expressed a divided opinion over whether or not the community encourages them to remarry. As many as 45% women feel that the community does encourage half-widows to remarry. On the other hand, 43% are of the opinion that the community does not encourage such practices.

In many cases the remarriage of half-widows who have children from the missing husband is a difficult proposition. Often the price that they have to pay for re-marrying is separation from their children as their new families refuse to accept the children borne of first husband. In such cases, the children are put in extremely vulnerable conditions and are a burden to already ailing grandparents. In some cases the children of the half-widows of the first husband suffer the most, as they do not see the second husband of their mother as their father. Often children become victims of differential treatment from the second husband. Therefore, many women refused to remarry. *Saleema* from Poonch district was very clear that the women whose husbands have disappeared should not remarry because they have to look after their children. She herself did not agree to remarry as she has two daughters and she needs to take care of them. For her now the marriage does not remain at the level of a man and a woman but her children become part of her decision-making.

4) To fight or not to fight the battle for justice?

Only 44% of half-widows have ever been to court to access legal recourse regarding the disappearance of their husbands. This clearly indicates that a large number of women have not gone to the judiciary to pursue justice. In a state where on-going conflict has brought to focus issues of large-scale violations of human rights, it is indeed surprising that only 28% of the respondents are aware of the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC). A large majority of the respondents who had lost someone close in the family did not feel the need to know about state bodies like the State Human Rights Commission. This once again points to how people perceive justice mechanisms in the state.

On the other hand, there are other difficulties of dealing with the phenomenon of disappearance; the first is the anonymity of the group which had caused the disappearance, particularly when disappeared men were civilians and not affiliated to any group. As the men were picked up when they were out of the house or at work places etc., family members and relatives are not sure who the perpetrators are. When the identity of the kidnappers is not known, families do not know what to do to get their men released. More than 61% of half-widows were not aware of the perpetrator/agency responsible for their husband's disappearance. As many as 39% women said that they know the perpetrators responsible for the disappearance of their husbands. However, naming the agency/group/forces responsible for disappearance is not that easy, and the question of one's affiliations to either group would be inviting trouble. Often the perpetrators' political influence or money power prevents families from raising their voice. The majority of the women confirmed that their husbands were *not* affiliated to any group and if they were, the women were not aware of it. Hence, with whom and against whom do they fight the battle for justice?

This has left many women silent, unable to voice the pain and anger as they were not able to prove their case in the court of law. Some women have expressed their situation as 'caught between the devil and the deep sea'.

5) Do I belong anywhere?

In spite of facing numerous difficulties and being in a very vulnerable state, many of the women cannot or do not want to go back to their maternal homes. In Kashmiri society the marriage practices are patrilocal, and it is considered the duty of the parents to marry their daughter and take her to the in-laws' house where she and her husband will live. The society is by and large patriarchal, and believes that the rightful place of a woman, once she is married, is with her in-laws, and she is not welcome in her maternal home. Here, the critical issue after the disappearance of the husband is the status of the woman in the family. Her claim over the family property depends entirely on the status she holds. Many women have been deprived of their share in the property, increasing their social and economic vulnerabilities. One of the respondents, *Naseema* from Baramulla explains:

> I was at my in-laws. I didn't know where my husband went. I had a six-month old baby at that time. My in-laws evicted me saying I don't belong there. Since then I stay with my paternal family. My daughter has attained a marriageable age. My father-in-law gave me no share of property. He and my mother-in-law are dead. I have two brothers-in-law. I sought help from many people to get my daughter's share in the property but everyone told me that because her grandfather has not given anything to her, she can't be given her share. My brother-in-laws said they had no third brother, and so my daughter has no share in their property.

Many young half-widows continue to live with their parents-in-law, in houses which they do not own. Not being the owner of the house means that they are dependent on people who are the owners of the house. Various attempts are made by many half-widows to ask for their right to property like house, land etc. which are denied to them by their parents-in-law. The problem of their own rights in property; particularly immoveable property like land and houses owned by the families of their husbands, have not been settled.

In some cases it has also been noted that half-widows do not want to live with their in-laws as they are treated more as domestic help than as members of the family. Many of them want to leave these houses, but where do they go from there? Many of them wish to live in their parents' homes, but cannot. They carry on with a life of dilemmas, facing hard and stressful times, with a sense of not belonging anywhere.

6) But what do I do now?

The armed conflict has imposed new and alien roles on the women of Kashmir. Half-widows are forced to take up different roles and responsibilities unfamiliar to them, like being a woman without her spouse, and becoming the head of the household, caring and bringing up children, managing family matters, connecting with social networks, etc. However, in a traditional patriarchal society, women, especially half-widows, are subdued in many ways. Being without an earning member in the family means that women are forced to go and seek work, but the moment she steps out of the home, or stays away from it, family members would accuse her of being a woman of 'bad character'. Within this hostile environment, vulnerable half-widows who hope their husbands will return have to deal with the existential question: but what do I do now?

This tragic incidence mentioned by a young mother, *Sayeeda* shows the struggle of a woman who even today, many years after her husband's disappearance, is alone and lonely:

> My child was the tender age of 2 years when his father disappeared. Now he is 6 years old. His friends at school asked him about his father. I don't know how to make him understand reality because I had told him that he has gone out of Kashmir for work. I didn't want him to experience the trauma I was experiencing. I wanted him to get some more time before he knew. But now we don't know how to deal with the situation. I know his father is not proved dead, but has disappeared. Should we disclose the truth or keep the child in darkness, saying his father has gone for work? My son then will live with this for his whole life. And what if someone else tells him? He will not trust his mother who has been closest to him. He will develop mistrust.

Economic and cultural conditions confront half-widows with yet other sets of questions that are beyond their control. The family composition of the households shows that nearly 47% of the surveyed half-widows have children below the age of 21,

and many of them are daughters. One could easily presume that the responsibility of bringing up these young and growing children would fall on their mothers. Having a daughter of marriageable age in the house is a 'psychological burden' and makes the woman more vulnerable in the absence of her husband. In socio-cultural context of Kashmir one needs to understand why it is a 'psychological burden'. Firstly, making financial arrangements for marriage – many of the half-widows live in poor economic conditions and find it extremely difficult to mobilise the huge resources necessary to meet the expenses of social customs at marriage. Secondly, due to numerous deaths and disappearances of young men, in the past three decades, matches for young women are difficult to find. 'Late marriages', due to not finding proper matches for young girls, is a growing phenomenon in Kashmir. In a conflict situation and in the context of numerous rapes and sexual assaults on women, having a young daughter at home is also seen as a threat. In their present situation many of the half-widows are finding themselves in a difficult position.

Culture of Conflict and Conditions of Women

The women of Kashmir have been direct and indirect targets of violence and their sufferings are severe. Yet over the last two and a half decades, despite multiple dimensions of vulnerability, some of these women seek to challenge the discourse that sees them only as victims. Despite their vulnerability, their ability to cope with and confront risk has managed to keep them from becoming victims. They have not remained 'passive', or led entirely subdued lives (Qutab 2012: 274). Some half-widows have attempted to transcend victimhood to ensure better lives for their household, especially their children. Thus, the identity of a woman as a vulnerable victim in the conflict situation of Kashmir is critically challenged by stories of women who have travelled from vulnerability to finding power within (Aaliya 2011; Shekhawat 2014).

However, what haunts Kashmir today is that the half-widows *are* a significant part of Kashmiri society: they serve as a continuous reminder of the largely unaddressed pain and anguish of women caught in conflict. There is a deep sense of victimhood present in some of the narratives presented by women as they live today, silently saying, "who cares when we cry". As individuals, these women are trapped in undesired situations from which they wait to emerge. A victim is a survivor who waits for justice. Victimhood is a state of being, a liminal identity comprising waiting. A victim is a person suspended between an old normalcy from which she is disembedded, and to which she is waiting to return, and in this, it is "an unhappy state between personhood and citizenship" (Shiv 2013). Women of Kashmir have assumed new identities like 'rape victims', 'abducted women', 'widows', 'half-widows' and so on. Women have borne the truth of brutalization (Kazi 2009; Shekhawat 2014).

The questions that come along with the liminal status have impacted the half-widows of Kashmir in many and varied ways. The marginalization of women in the broader culture of conflict in Kashmir is painful, but an accepted reality in the region. Ordinary people, especially women living in the patriarchal set-up in Kashmir, have limited space to express themselves. Since trust is the first casualty in conflict-affected regions, many women do not share or reveal the stories that caused them trauma. Hence, they are stuck in and with their trauma for years.

A large number of half-widows have become economically vulnerable, finding it extremely difficult to manage the economic affairs of the family. Additionally, some are physically and psychologically not in a position to undertake productive economic activities. Nearly 51% of the half-widows surveyed suffer from physical ailments and over 35% suffer from mental disorders which have made their lives difficult. In many cases, women are not able to access quality medical treatment for serious ailments due to poor financial conditions. A substantial number of half-widows have been denied their right to property by parents-in-law. In the absence of any consensus among religious and community leaders regarding their right to property, there is little possibility of conditions improving any time soon.

The conflict in the State of Jammu and Kashmir has given rise to many human rights violations. A large number of women are either unaware of actual protocol or are not in a position to comply with complicated procedures which prevent them from accessing justice. The study shows that very few half-widows were able to reach or access free legal aid after the disappearance of their husband. Many of them were not even able to register an FIR (First Information Report) or proceed with registering a case in the court. The judiciary is the hope of the vulnerable women of Kashmir. When other doors are closed for many women, it is only the judiciary that could potentially bring hope to these women in distress. However, the lack of much-needed assistance from judiciary and human rights institutions in the state has left many without justice, thus waiting in prolonged liminality without any closure.

The challenges posed by "disappearances" are indeed threats to any democratic society and those affected by it. While the people of Kashmir expect a political solution to the existing conflict, for family members, the disappearance of close relatives is an issue that is beyond the politics of freedom. The state will have to answer its people, not with armed forces and military might, but in a transparent way, as to who is responsible for these disappearances and where the missing men are. The first task of the state is to transform the victim into a citizen. In that direction, the central government should give serious thought for withdrawal or repealing of laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. Thus, in the larger context of the culture of conflict in Kashmir, all forms of gendered violence need to be addressed to end the liminality of half-widows.

Is Transition Possible from the Threshold?

On 21 December 2010, the UN General Assembly decided to declare a special day to draw the attention of the world to the fate of individuals who have disappeared. The International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances is observed annually on 30 August. While carrying out silent protests and monthly sit-ins, the affected family members under the aegis of APDP (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons) have been demanding to put an end to enforced disappearances and to provide them with the whereabouts of their dear ones who have been missing for years. The relatives and half-widows no longer wish to remain in this "undesired" state of liminality. The struggle to move out of liminality is visible in their continuous resistance on the streets of Srinagar and in national and international forums.

Liminality and the questions that come along with it will not end till justice is provided to the victims of conflict. The vulnerabilities of half-widows have been caused by multiple dimensions and therefore the mitigation of these vulnerabilities can happen only if multiple stakeholders like state actors, non-state actors and communities intervene positively in creating a "normal culture". Till then the half-widows – the 'waiting women' of Kashmir – will not cross the "threshold". If they do not, then the expanded meaning of liminality i.e., something which is no longer a temporary phase but a permanent one, finds an appropriate example in the life-as-lived by the women in this conflict zone.

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Notes

[1] The APDP was founded in 1994, when a large number of parents used to visit the high court to file or pursue Habeas Corpus petitions. The relatives used to take individual efforts in a disorganized manner. Finally, the founder of this organisation, a practising lawyer and a human rights activist named Parvez Imroze, with the help of the Chairperson (herself a victim of enforced disappearances), put together a collective forum for collective efforts. The APDP is technically not a human rights group but an association of sufferers wronged by the functioning of the state, campaigning to know the whereabouts of their missing relatives. Any victim of disappearances could be a member of the association. The association has no political affiliations or political positions. It is an independent group seeking justice from the state. See http://www.apdpkashmir. blogspot.in/ for more details.

[2] Our observation that most disappearances have occurred in rural areas is also confirmed by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (2011).

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Revitalising Borders: Memory, Mobility and Materiality in a Latvian-Russian Border Region

By Aija Lulle

Abstract

In this paper I investigate how an international border is 'revitalised' in political discourses as opposed to lived experiences. Based on narratives I have collected from border dwellers on both sides of the current border between Latvia and Russia and placing them into a broader context of current border debates, I analyse how geographical and social mobility is remembered from Soviet times and reworked in current contexts. I argue that while politically the border is revitalised through abandoning and forgetting the Soviet past and through the idea of constant threats in the future, locally it is revitalised through giving a life to the abandoned: memories of 'vigorous times' in life-courses and material things. People who dwell at the border did not move themselves: the international border moved several times in one century leaving border dwellers' memories and significant places on the 'other' side. I focus on how these borders were crossed in the past, how they are (not) crossed now, and the social meanings assigned to these circumstances. In the current context I follow diverse paths of reasoning that describe how the uneven flow of goods and people through the Latvian-Russian border shapes the power dynamic against which the people living in the border area used to reconstruct imaginaries of 'Soviet times' versus 'Europe' and 'vigorous times' versus decline.

Vignette: 'Times Can Change'

On 1 May 2004, Latvia joined the European Union (EU), the same year it had already joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In Pededze, as in other state and municipal centres in Latvia, the EU flag was to be raised on that day to wave permanently side by side with the Latvian maroon-white-maroon. The village of Pededze is located only two kilometres from the Russian border. In the mid-2000s there were just under 1000 inhabitants in Pededze, and numbers continue to decline year by year. But just before the public celebration, something rather awkward occurred.

The municipality representatives had been looking for a person who could climb up and tie the flag to the pole, since it did not have an automatic mechanism to do the job. A young local man agreed to carry out this honourable duty, but early on the morning of May 1, he changed his mind. Since he had a family and children, he decided he could not risk their futures. 'Who knows how the times might change, and what the changes might bring', he sid, implying that the membership in the EU may not be for long and reunion with Russia may follow. He apologised, but was staunch in his decision. Nevertheless, the EU flag was raised that day; another person agreed to be the flagman.

In the language of numbers, Pededze's journey to EU membership seemed like a 50/50 chance: in the 2003 referendum on joining the EU, the local voters were divided almost equally, symbolically favouring the EU by a single vote: 203 citizens of Pededze voted for accession, while 202 were against it.

Two territories are at the centre of this investigation into the current state of the Latvia-Russian border. In addition to Pededze on the Latvian side of the border, I will also focus on the the village of Lavry in Russia, with just below 2500 inhabitants. Lavry is located seven kilometres from the Latvian border, in the Pechory district, and was a part of independent Estonia during the interwar period between 1918-1940. There is a Latvian minority living in Lavry, people who consider themselves to be Latvian, even though they do not always speak the language.

During several years of research in this area,[1] I have been on the lookout for what is significant for the people of Pededze, dwelling here at the Latvian-Russian border. The borders between the different Soviet Republics were administrative; there were no border controls or posts, just road signs marking the border to another Soviet Republic. What was once just an administrative line on Soviet maps between two socialist republics has now become a strictly guarded border. To cross it involves official documents, time, and money (Assmuth, 2003). For some, the Latvian-Russian border, has been redefined as a geopolitical barrier as this border is the easternmost edge of the European Union and NATO borders that face Russia.

Figure 1. Latvian and EU flags at Pededze municipal building. 2004. Photo: Aija Lulle

Russia is the direct legatee of Soviet power, the power that occupied the Baltic states during WWII and annexed the small country to the USSR for almost half of the 20th century. However, the shifting order in this region is even more complicated. At the beginning of the 20th century, the territories that are now the sovereign states of Latvia, Estonia, and Russia, were all united under the Tsarist Russian Empire (Berg 1998). The new order at the border interferes with people's lives in explicit ways, but even so, in many cases the current reality is seen as a throwback to the pre-WWII period. For the people living there, it is significant that for almost half a century these places in the Soviet Republic of Latvia and Soviet Republic of Russia were fully inhabited and freely accessible to one another. In a political perspective, disseminated from the power centres, the political border between the EU, NATO, and Latvia on the one hand and Russia on the other, the importance of the border is constantly revitalised through discourses of threat and resulting securitisation responses. Moreover, the political discourse on futurity, understood as an affective orientation to the future (Anderson 2010), is about abandoning and pushing out of memory all that relates to the Soviet past, privileging instead 'futurity' of a secure and prosperous life in the EU and NATO. This resonates with Paul Gilroy's (2005) writings on Europe's unresolved relationship with its colonial histories, where an inability to mourn results in a political condition of historical amnesia. Local lives appear in sharp contrast to this political revitalisation of the border:

the local revitalisation of the border is a praxis of remembering, co-referencing in time and space, and about the physical materiality of the border.

The main aim of this paper, therefore, is to trace how the significance of the border manifests itself in conflicts between a political discourse of the border and the reality of a lived life, with memories of the borderland.

Conceptualising Time B/orders: Memory, Mobility, Materiality

A political discourse with its ubiquitous emphasis on possible threat, securitisation and a need to invest more in the tightening of the border carries youthful energy traits and a construction of 'futurity'. But what is striking here is the ageing and declining reality at the border, both in terms of life-courses and material infrastructure. This reality is almost completely forgotten in political discourse. In order to probe deeper into this paradox, I propose to use the concept of 'rupture,' as it is understood from a geographical perspective (Hörschelmann 2011). By rupture, I mean sudden political changes, embodied changes as well as individual and social changes, when life can no longer be organised as it was before. Rupture is also an important concept throughout shifting conceptualisations of the 'border' in border studies – from geological, natural entities, to geopolitical and cognitive, socially constructed borders. By placing an emphasis on rupture, the main question becomes as follows: *how do ruptures emerge; how are they produced and experienced by people in a borderland?* I argue that revitalising a sense of rupture symbolically as well as revitalising memories and materiality of life at the borderland becomes a crucial practice which makes the border come alive in disparate ways.

The first rupture occurs between political discourse and lived reality. Not surprisingly, a border that has been established politically can seem strongly fixed from positions of power, be they representations on political maps or included in discursive ideologies disseminated from the centre. A border space can seem absolute, and mathematically measurable. As soon as it is ideologically represented, however, it becomes a social space (van Houtum et al 2005). A border, first of all, is a belief, a mental thing that shapes social reality (Paasi 1996). As such, border areas are always produced through social praxis (Werlen 2005). Differences emerge between the social praxis of political discourse on the one hand, and praxis on the ground, in everyday life in border areas, on the other. At a political level, b/ordering – a concept that combines drawing of boundaries, managing borders and ordering social life as a strategic fabrication – constitutes a reality of affective orientations, thereby expressing the desire for protective distance from the outside world (van Houtum and Naerssen 2002). The nature of the relation between 'order and orientation', manifested by physical constraints such as border marks, walls or fences can be found in all societies in all times and imposes a normative order on earth (Minca and Vaughan-Williams 2012: 757).

Borders select and prioritise social relations, and b/ordering creates and represents exclusive knowledge. Through b/ordering, actors decide what is to be included and excluded, and what the border wishes to communicate (ibid 125-126). The excluded in the dominant perspective and unequal power relations of a competitive memory (Reading 2011) are the locals, those, who actually dwell at the border. Through the focus on the 'everyday' we can see how bordering practices are carried out by state and international actors as well as by local inhabitants. The latter too need to abide by certain orders at the borderland, such as carrying with them permissions or other documents stating that they can be present in the border area (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012). However, my informants' Soviet memories are effectively silenced, in other words, they are seen as the past, which should be forgotten.

Second, it is impossible to understand local concerns about 'how the times can change,' and to make sense of their current mobilities into and away from this place, without understanding the mobility patterns that were common here during Soviet times. Soviet memories are the best possible data source for tracing lived experiences and representations about time-space as most informants, and, indeed, most of the inhabitants of the village of Pededze are ageing, or their parents lived in this place in Soviet times and generations before. Through everyday mobilities, people routinely draw paths and co-opt their places through embedded practices. Transformations that shifting borders and new regimes bring into people's lives 'change times'. Symbolic and cultural boundaries are more fluid than political borders and rarely coincide (Wilson and Donnan 1998; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Verdery 1998). The new orders and embedded praxis rub against each other in conflict. The question is what the references are, according to which life in Soviet times was remembered and continuously compared to the present order of things: how is this space currently being shaped in response to these references?

Frames of reference, according to which a space is b/ordered, constitute an important conceptual tool for the structuration of the interrelations between material realities and meanings that people attach to the border (Werlen 2005: 53). In turn, meanings attributed to material things and geographical mobilities depend on the experiences people have, the knowledge they carry, and what roles these things and mobilities played within the life-course and history of individuals and families. Werlen emphasises the symbolic appropriation of material things as the key dimension of everyday geography-making. According to this conceptualisation, b/ordering space is primarily a selective appropriation of the world (Werlen 2005: 55-56).

The main axes around which these spatial frames are constructed locally are mobilities related to agriculture production in the collective farms (kolkhozes) or state farms (sovkhozes), visiting markets and shops, and cultural, educational and religious activities, such as excursions and religious ceremonies. It is important to highlight that the mobilities afforded during Soviet times are re-embedded through a

corporeal frame of reference: these times are often referred to as *spēka gadi* (vigorous years) or *mani gadi* (my years), evoking the youth and working lives of the informants themselves, their relations, their neighbours, and their friends. Lynch argued that 'timeplace' is a continuum of the mind, a social and cognitive process, in other words. The presence of the past occurs through recalling, and learning past is linked to imagined future (Lynch 1972). The interplay of politically unrestricted movement in the area together with the memory of physically youthful movement and activities during Soviet times was often expressed by mobility reflected in verbs, such as *going* (for e.g. goods), *biking, driving, roaming around, running, flying* (moving freely, fast, unrestrictedly, in a metaphoric sense), while current immobilities are expressed with words like emptiness, abandonment, decay, cut off (from the other side of the border), and moving away (to more central places in Latvia and emigrating to other European countries.)

In the remainder of the paper I will trace how ruptures emerge, are produced and experienced in the following political and everyday contexts: changes of the political border and names of collective farms, revitalising praxis of memories of a 'radiant past' (Paxson 2005) and the 'vigorous years' during the Soviet era, followed by narrations of decay and abandonment in the borderland nowadays. In order to give a voice to those who are silenced in political discourse, I prioritise the focus on how societal change is experienced and interpreted by border dwellers themselves in their life histories (Chamberlayne et al 2000). In the last analytical section, the paper will come back to the political revitalising of the border through the securitisation discourse.

Changing Borders and Place Names

While reviewing fieldwork transcripts and interviews, I paid special attention to the words and notions that my informants used to refer to Soviet times. This made it possible to excavate specific markers: *times* were distinguished politically and like Päts' times[2] or Ulmanis'[3] times, or, according to the ogranisation of agricultural production during Soviet times (kolkhoz times).

During the 20th century, three major legal-political border shifts occurred in the research area. In 1918, when both Latvia and Estonia declared their independence from the defeated Tsarist empire, Pededze officially became a part of Latvia, while Lavry (in Latvian Lauri, in Estonian Laura) was a part of Estonia, although, with a considerable minority of ethnic Latvians who returned from emigration in other parts of Russia. All three languages were taught in Pededze school during the interwar period, while Russian and Estonian were taught in Lavry school, with Latvian only partially used, but the language praxis remained strong in Latvian families and everyday encounters. This situation lasted until 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic states, followed in quick succession by the German occupation in 1942, and then the Soviet Union returned in 1945 to fortify its borders after the

victory in WWII. However, according to new administrative borders, the territory where Lavry is located was annexed to the Soviet Republic of Russia. After collapse of the Soviet Union when the Baltic states re-claimed their independence, the Soviet administrative borders were not changed, and Lavry remained a part of Russia.

These border shifts are important for understanding the seemingly paradoxical nature of what the informants verbalised as important time-frames in their memory narratives, and what remained unsaid. On the Russian side, people most often emphasised the pre-war period, saying things like "We Latvians lived here in Estonian times". For those who were born in the 1920s and 1930s, the greatest emphasis is on their early memories of visiting Latvia:

> I remember Riga castle, wait a second, and were the Freedom monument and the honour guards at the monument in Riga or elsewhere? I remember Sigulda and a restaurant there; we were given a glass of milk. A very beautiful place. I remember, I was there during Ulmanis' time, on a school excursion. (Ludvig, 80s, Lavry)

As a whole, the Latvian roots and the Latvian history of the Lavry village are acknowledged and appreciated, also by local Russians. Moreover, local Russians tended to distinguish themselves from Russian-speakers of different nationalities from the other republics of the former Soviet Union. 'Local versus Soviet' boundaries on the current Russian side are more strongly emphasised than on the Latvian one. Estonians, Latvians and Russians, who had lived in Lavry for generations, were regarded as true locals, while those who came later were labelled 'Soviet people' by locals.

> The people who lived here until 1918 were locals, but those who came later were Soviets. People remember, this is inscribed in the memory. For example, a woman who came here by marriage, she is a Soviet until this very day. See this old *babka*, she maybe cannot walk well anymore and her memory fails, but we remember that she is not a local, she is a Soviet. (Antonina, 60s, Russia)

The discursive drawing of socio-ethnic boundaries, tracing back for almost a century, still was there in the border area to some extent. However, on an everyday basis, remaining in the border areas was not so much influenced by ethnicity as by a familial preference to continue living in the rural area that had been cultivated by one's ancestors, and by the choice, often collectively made, to engage in agricultural production.

> I wanted to go to work in a factory after the war, but my parents were already old and they said: "Where will you go, our little son? Better stay where you were born." So I joined the sovkhoz. The work was hard, not like in the factories, but I worked as a smith for fifty-two years. (Ludvig, 80s, Russia)

In the quote above, pay attention to the advice given by Ludvig's parents. This local mentality to stay put despite changing borders, is expressed in the proverb "you should remain where you were born,"[4] a popular saying on both sides of the border. Ageing people declined to make complicated requests for visas and other documents due to declining health. They would rather accept the tighter borders as an

inescapable reality where local voices do not matter in unequal power relations, overlapping with their own slower pace of life in old age.

After the war, when collectivisation started, the kolkhozes were named after Lenin and Stalin, but the names were changed when the totalitarian regime was relaxed, when Nikita Khrushchev came to power in Moscow. So, the new ideological names of the kolkhozes were *Rassvet* ('dawn', 'flourishing' in Russian) and, similarly, *Zarya* ('morning light', 'dawn' in Russian). One kolkhoz, where comparatively more Latvians worked (although, still in a minority), was named after the village, *Pededze*. In an everyday language, my older informants still b/ordered local places according to names of the kolkhozes.

It is important to stress that changing borders and place names are reflected upon in one breath with reflections of informants' youth, of post-Soviet decay and EU expansion. Memories are constructed side by side through bodily and life-course changes along with political changes. This should be taken into account especially when people emphasise the 'radiant past' (Paxson 2005) of Soviet times. In sum, the construction of this 'radiant past' is intrinsic to stories of people's own youth, and a more positive sense of the places where they lived. In the meantime, if the positive value of individual and collective memories related to life-courses is denied in political discourse in the name of 'national security', and the dominant trope of the Soviet past as something to be simply forgotten in the name of a better future, the human ability to create multidirectional memories is also constrained.

Radiant Past, 'My Vigorous Years'

The Soviet times, those, which the official memory rather pushes aside, were the 'radiant past' (Paxson 2005) for my informants, who were young and strong in their 'vigorous years' from the 1950s-1980s. Ideological time thus clearly entwines with embodied time. On the Russian side, there were state farms, which were remembered by inhabitants from both sides of the border as being rich and flourishing. It is often highlighted that the sovkhozes in Lavry were among the five best in the Pskov region of Soviet Russia. This was particularly remembered with regret in the 1990s, when almost everything of material value had been either stolen or demolished in the abandoned farms. The active flow of life in the area was directly related to the high volume of agricultural production. This was something that the people tried to maintain in the early 1990s, when the new cooperatives were established. However, the closer the country came to the joining the EU, the more agricultural production in Pededze was abandoned as a non-profitable activity.

In memories of daily life, roaming freely around the countryside was particularly mentioned. Sovkhoz workers from the Russian side came to Pededze, and vice versa. "It was my village! Seven kolkhozes and sovkhozes together, we lived together in such friendship," Anton from Pededze, in his 60s, told me with a youthful sparkle in his eyes, showing belongingness, a symbolic 'ownership' of space and

time in his youth and middle age. Similarly, joyful memories are remembered by others, as in the quote below by Elisaveta:

> We were roaming, running back and forth. It was interesting, often on bikes, somebody was sitting on a luggage carrier, all the way down. I spent my youth cheerfully, I went everywhere. My years have gone now but then I managed everything – work, coming back home, flying around here and there, and the celebrations! – kolkhoz or singing excursions with the choir. It was fun. […] Now that house is empty, one old woman lives in the other house. Every second house is empty. (Elisaveta, 70s, Pededze)

Like in all other places in Latvia, people from Pededze were deported to Siberia in 1941 and 1949, especially from the more affluent farms. Contrary to the meta-discourse of Soviet atrocities however, those who were deported from Pededze and returned did not express bitterness in their memories. Like Alida, whose family properties were confiscated and collectivised. She returned from Siberia in the late 1950s. "Actually, I would have so much wanted to see those places again, how it is there now. But it is not possible any more [due to her age]. Common people were not guilty for what happened here. And we did not live badly there; the local Siberians helped us a lot," she said. Similarly, she expressed positive memories of the life she and her family led during Soviet times.

> We went to Leningrad in a cargo car, covered by a tarpaulin canvas. Two of the women were pregnant. It was during the *Rassvet* times. We saw Peter's palace, what a beauty! I love fountains. It is so beautiful there. People were laughing about us – poor *kolkhozniki*, arrived in such a car, but we were happy that we made it. Those were such good years. […] And when I was in Riga the last time? It was also during the *Rassvet* times. But usually we went for excursions to Russia, all around in Estonia, we worked diligently in the production units and the *kolhoz* granted excursions to the South [of the Soviet Union]. (Alida, 70s, Pededze).

Excursions to the Caucasus and Central Asian republics, or sometimes to other friendly socialist countries such as Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, were given as rewards for good work in collective and state farms. Such travel opportunities were seen as extended mobility into the vastness of the Soviet Union and even farther into the more alluring socialist states. Since salaries were similar in most collective farms, and education and health services were free, however poor the quality might have been, people were able to live in relative comfort with their families in the countryside.

Materiality and Mobility at the Border

Revitalising the border in everyday life was also prominent in memories of acquiring material goods during Soviet times. A *need to be mobile* to acquire better quality daily goods was a prerequisite in the Soviet type of economy of scarcity, and the geographical positioning between three Soviet republics provided a certain mobility advantage. People would go where the sausages, milk or curd were better, and look

for opportunities to escape the pervasive deficit of material goods. Shops and out-door markets were situated across three republics within easy reach of one another on foot, by bicycle or by horse. Similar cross-border practices can be traced nowa-days across Europe (see e.g. Spierings and Velde 2013; Velde and Spierings 2010) but in different political and economic settings under the Soviet Union. Due to their proximity to the border, border dwellers were in a privileged situation to engage in everyday commercial mobilities and trade goods from various places (Borén 2009)[5].

Apart from everyday work and leisure-related mobility in the border areas, it was possible to improve the quality of life beyond the means that earnings in a kolkhoz or state position could afford. Since most shops were often empty, lacking even such basic items as bread, soap, and footwear, much of the time that was free from obligatory work was spent on small private farms that generated extra income and home-produced food. Most of the rest of a person's free time was devoted to travelling around and searching for cheaper, better goods, or anything that was available. The Pskov market, close to both Lavry and Pededze willages, was an especially active exchange place. Most of the inhabitants of Pededze bought and sold goods there: pork, piglets, wool.

> In Soviet times we bought piglets there [on the Russian side], it was cheaper to get footwear, some services – to make a dress, for example. It is just five-seven kilome-tres, closer than Pededze village's centre and besides, in Pededze there were no ser-vices. So, we did day work, harnessed a horse, and went to Lavry. (Zelma, 70s, Pededze).

Most remember going to nearby Estonian villages for sausages since throughout the 1960s-80s, the territory of Latvia was poorly provided with processed meat prod-ucts, while the situation was better in neighbouring Estonia.

> There were times when it was difficult to get soap, queues for bread were long, and the last ones in the line did not get anything. Kolkhoz workers could shop in mobile busses, [they] could get bed linens and crimplene clothes, but not us. So, we went to Estonia to buy these things. Goods from the other side always attracted attention alt-hough money-wise it was similar. (Elvira, 80s, Pededze)

In the late 1990s, people from the Latvian side still went shopping to Pskov, the closest regional centre on the Russian side. Although permission to cross the border was officially given only as far as the neighbouring village of Lavry, border guards allowed some people to go further. There was a very good currency exchange rate for Latvian lats to dollars, and dollars to roubles. People bought clothing and home textiles, which otherwise would have been difficult to afford in Latvia.

And those from the Russian side still went to Aluksne, the closest Latvian re-gional centre, appreciating not only better prices for selected products, but the fast improving service culture in Latvian shops:

> Milk, curd, and sour cream were very cheap, but the best thing was the service, so polite. Going shopping in Aluksne was a way to calm your nerves, like psychotherapy. (Valentina, 60s, Lavry)

Lavry inhabitants, however, most often went shopping to Estonia due to their historical ties with the Estonian state. Not unimportantly, some Lavrians held Estonian passports as 'locals' of the pre-war Lavry village, and took advantage of being recognised as belonging to independent Estonia again.

The Soviet experience that my informants described also carries positive connotations. Informants recognised and talked about forced mobility, the deficit of goods, and the oddities of centralised distribution of goods under the Soviet system, but they also positively emphasised specific forms of belonging to the Soviet space. Living at the border put them in a privileged position compared to those living further away from administrative check-points. Border dwellers had shorter distances to travel to access certain good in other republics, and could do it even on an everyday basis, filling their cupboards with milk and meat products.

Figure 2. 'Revitalising confusion times'. The border sign that was in use in 1990s and early 2000s was replaced by a new one, exhibiting the European Union's symbol. The latter (in photo here) was abandoned as useless but was given a new, practical function in one of my informant's sheds, protecting logs from rain and snow. Photo Lena Malm

The practice of acquiring goods manifested later as well, during independent Latvia and Russian Federation years, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, but already in more specific contexts of a border which was difficult to cross. Alcoholic drinks and petrol were the prime commodities border dwellers from the Latvian side bought in Russia and sold in nearby villages through informal social networks. The 'confusion times' as locals called the 1990s and 2000s, with shifting border crossings, were increasingly more b/ordered towards Latvia's joining the EU and NATO, and the subsequent tightening of border crossing regimes.

Decay, an Empty Space and Direction Europe

As mentioned earlier in the article, Independence and its attendant curtailed opportunities for mobility in this Russian-Latvian-Estonian triangle coincided with the ageing of most of my informants. If younger people could move away to search for work elsewhere, the older awaited their pension and maintained the wisdom they trusted to, namely "you better stay where you were born." In the 1990s and early 2000s, when Latvian authorities were striving to join NATO and the EU, portraying their country as increasingly progressive, the 'times' in Pededze went backwards. Sinking into economic, and indeed psychological, depression was the leitmotif for framing of everyday time in the 1990s:

> In the 1990s it sometimes seemed that life was passing us by. Everything was happening far away and without us. There was a sense that we were living in a swamp and sinking ever deeper. People no longer knew what day it was. (Gaida, 50s, Pededze)

On the Russian side, the poverty was even deeper and was related to the dismantling of state farms, which caused unemployment and lack of income. Cash in salary was insecure for those still working in agricultural production. Roads to the regional centre of Aluksne deteriorated over the years. They were mainly dirt roads with some patches that had been asphalted [as a special favour to someone] during the kolkhoz times. Those who lived close to the road could not open their windows due to the heavy dust. During the years just after independence, no roads leading toward Pededze were maintained, and some parts were impassable during the spring and autumn rains.

Pededze had just one simple border control point, which does not have a customs officer. While unemployment stood at 20 %, men from Pededze went to Russia on regular basis and were bringing in petrol, sugar, and alcohol in the small amounts that individuals were allowed to carry across the borders. However, this practice required strong physical and mental health since the border-crossers often had to wait for days to fill their tanks in Lavry, or to buy 10 kilos of sugar, 10 packs of cigarettes, and two bottles of spirits. Upon returning home, the tanks were emptied into petrol cans, and the men immediately rushed back to the border again.

The closer the dates for joining the EU and NATO came, the more diminished the prospects appeared for most locals. This sense of shrinking was not only psychological, but literal as well – their properties shrank. Their land was taken away metre by metre, like in the case of the local man whose house was located at the furthest point of the Latvian border, next to Russia.

> I did not want that European Union, I was against it, nothing is better now, because of that. The authorities [in the centres] have distributed money, but do not want to pay a peasant. […] The border zone was initially six metres, then my toilet was still three meters on the Latvian side. But now [in 2004] Latvia needs twelve meters to separate it from Russia, because it is Russia, and because of joining the EU and NATO. I had planted spruce trees on the north side. They [the border makers, the state] cut those down. I had apple trees, hazels, and red currants; they tore them out because of the border. (Arvids, 60s, Pededze)

As the border regime tightened, the locals increasingly became the subjects of control, not the owners and operators or authors of the daily paths they had been drawing or years. Exceptional cases – sad or joyful – to locals, were not reason for exceptions for state power. Let us hear the memories of a tragic event in the following excerpt:

> I just went to see my neighbour, see there on the corner some fifty metres away. He was harvesting cabbages. I went to him and said that my son had just died. I just wanted to talk, to ask, when to bury him, where to bury him. So, I walked back and the boys [the border guards] stopped me. I asked, why, and they knew that I am a local, where I live, I pushed them two aside, but they are four, and put hand-lockers. Well, I will go, do not break my arms, I said. "You are going to sit down now [in the detention room]," they said. They changed their minds three times about whether to fine me or not, and finally they fined me. (..) [My son was] buried on the Latvian side, despite the fact that my whole family is [buried] on the Russian side. (..) I don't know where I will be buried, maybe just at the border column [laughing]. I will simply remain where I was born. I will die here. (Adolfs, 60s, Pededze)

On the Russian side too, for some there were regrets, like for Konstantin: "During the *juku laiki* [the 'confusion times' in 1990s] I would have wanted to move to Latvia since I am Latvian. I still regret not going. It would have been easy when borders were still open. But now it is no longer possible anymore." Like some of the others from the Russian side, Konstantin went to church services in Aluksne in the 1990s. Although it was not entirely legal, again, the border guards allowed it, admonishing the transgressors to return to Russia by evening.

The decline of agricultural production and subsequently, the liveliness of the place, are reinterpreted through today's neoliberal discourses where individuals are blamed for the decline, not the structural changes that took place on national and global scales. See the informant's critique of cutting out forests to earn money, and her negative memories of the laziness of kolkhoz workers:

> Agricultural production should be encouraged...Fields are covered with bushes, it is a disaster. Forests are being cut down, cars are bought in for the money earned from timber, but soon there won't be anything left. When my grandparents came here, there was a forest. They put a bundle of their belongings on a stick, and started to clear woodland for tilling. Now this place is overgrown with bushes again. During the kolkhoz times there were wide tillages, but oh, how those kolkhoz workers went on breaks! The drunkards were just sitting in the ditches until midday when the brigade leader came back to check. They did not have a serious attitude, a sense of responsibility that their own work would come to fruition. (Alida, 70s, Pededze)

The main factors delaying development are undeveloped business activities – even the grain grown in the agricultural cooperative is sold to locals rather than being marketed further on – long distances to town centres, and poor infrastructure, especially the roads, which make the relatively short distance to Aluksne (25 kilometres from the centre of Pededze village) seem great. As Zaiga, in her 30s, put it: 'Pededze is like an empty space that you travel through to get to Russia.'

Figure 3 Block houses at the centre of Lavry. 2004. Photo: Aija Lulle

Since Latvia joined the EU and especially since the late 2000s, border dwellers in their prime, who wish for a better future for their children, have new values and a new understanding of how a better life can be achieved:

> My grandmother said that the land is the most important...I would not say so now. I hope that my children will go to the *gymnasium* [the best secondary school in a regional centre], and then to Riga or elsewhere. Education is the most important thing. I do not want them to stay here and waste their lives. (Zaiga, 30s, Pededze)

The memories of mobility during Soviet times were gradually replaced by overwhelming emigration from the whole country, including at least ten percent of the working population from Pededze village in the late 2000s.

> I would never change those [Soviet] times for these. My grandson studies for his Master's degree in Manchester! Of course, we all have to work hard to support him. Including me, I was working all the summer. And I hope that the younger grandchild would also study abroad. […] [But I myself] will not move anywhere, I cannot adapt to a new environment easily. I will not move anywhere. When I die, I will remain here forever. (Alida, 70s, Pededze)

'This is a Time': Securitisation of the Border

In early 2015, when the conflict in Eastern Ukraine continued to escalate, spreading fear and anxiety elsewhere in the post-Soviet region, the speaker of the Latvian Parliament, Inara Murniece visited the Latvian-Russian border, emphasising in her speech:

> This is a time when Latvia should act decisively and effectively in order to strengthen the state security. The internal state security is crucial and we have to work in order to further improve the state borders. We have to strengthen our armed forces and National Guard. […] However, the strongest defence line goes through people's hearts and minds. (Saeima 2015)

By referencing 'hearts and minds', the speaker of the Latvian Parliament was drawing special attention towards the necessity of strengthening the state's ideology among border populations, and ensuring loyalty to the independent state of Latvia. As Pfoser (2015) who has researched the securitisation of the Russian-Estonian border has pointed out, local 'demands and grievances' can be politicized in turbulent times. However, in the case of rural areas with ageing populations and dismantled infrastructures, local border voices in Latvia remain effectively excluded and silenced.

The state continued using references to 'outer threats' and by the end of August 2015, there was already a lack of space in Daugavpils State Border Guard Administration for detained foreigners and asylum seekers: 28 people had to be placed in a State Police temporary detention isolator (Border Guard 2015a). Due to the global crisis of asylum seekers, the emphasis was changed from regional to global threats. Again, just as it had been throughout the years I have researched the border region, the quest for local meanings and what unites people in border regions was absent from this securitisation discourse. This was brightly summarised by one of my informants in Pededze as early as in 2004:

> Sometimes we [locals] joke: if the Russian army will enter from the Pskov side, they will not even notice us and will just pass by. We have never had any ethnic tensions here; our grandparents and great grandparents have said the same. None of us feel that we live like Russians with Latvians. We live like neighbours with neighbours, a human with a human. If somebody made a fuss, then he or she made a fuss with Anna, it was not a Russian falling out with a Latvian. (..) Still during those times, when I freely travelled to that side of the border, I could see that they are very heart-warming people, something so familiar, a part of us. (Gita, 40s, Pededze)

The lack of commitment to improve lives for border dwellers translates into broader frictions between Eastern Europe and other EU member states regarding the movements of people in the asylum/refugee crisis in 2015. Namely, the debate on asylum seekers was not about how to help them but rather – how to strengthen borders against any incomers. Baltic and several other post-socialist states were worried about the security of their borders and primarily saw asylum seekers as a threat. Politicians in Western Europe (although not all), on the other hand, saw the situation

as a humanitarian crisis where human lives and possibilities to help people were at the centre of the debate.

In order to stop the flow of people across the border, the Minister of the Interior Rihards Kozlovskis has estimated that 17 to 19 million Euros are necessary to strengthen the Latvian-Russian border (MoI, 2015). He has argued that this would be a more efficient long-term solution to the issue of trespassers as, for instance, it costs approximately 2000-2500 Euros to transport one Vietnamese person who has trespassed the Latvian border back to Vietnam (Border Guard 2015b). The need to cut out forests, increase the border width of the border line and to build a fence are emphasised, while the needs of locals who have to and want to live at the borderland, remain absent.

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have reflected on how border dwellers, especially the ageing population in the borderlands, are basically politically abandoned when it comes to the discourse of securitisation. The state emphasises the importance of the political border, and the border is actually becoming more and more concrete rather than abstract in their everyday lives. The actual border is revitalised by state discourses of the possibility of military and global migration 'threats'.

The political discourse privileges 'futurity', and the older generation is here overlooked as being a future-less one. However, insights into the reality of political loyalty and political decisions reflect that sudden political changes and long rupturing processes occur at differing paces, locally. Memories of Soviet times and changing political situations are passed on to other generations too, and magnified by lived reality in the borderland, where a border is primarily a constraint in one's day-to-day life. The new borders and orders have opened up the whole post-socialist space to the world, but a concrete border shapes and limits local lives even more. Therefore, a specific value of the 'border' as an analytical concept was applied here to probe deeper into empirical findings. Political redrawing of borders can happen fast, but local placemaking? practices and adapting to new regimes requires much longer. Personal narratives of life-course and a sense of limited time left for an individual life span reveal these temporal modalities in sharp relief.

We should take into account that remembering always takes place in contemporary contexts. However, for the local people, the border emerges through the frames of reference of what was lost through political and life-course ruptures. The frame of reference of Soviet times, corresponding to informants' youthful years, here serves as a memory resource to revitalise the border and give meaning to ordinary people's lives. Memories of places and b/ordering are constructed through life-paths, from youth to ageing, and from Soviet times, to post-Soviet decay and EU expansion, as parallel processes that feed into each other. This also helps to explain

why the trauma of the Soviet regime, with high immigration from other Soviet republics and forced migration (deportations), were remembered as traumatic but also mitigated thanks to the resilience of youth. In the meantime, the futuristic anxiety that is enforced presently in the name of state security is translated in contemporary understanding as a metaphor for 'decay', not only due to local realities of constrained life at a strictly guarded border, but also due to limited bodily mobility in old age.

The flow of everyday life, a practical life, is first and foremost about mobility and the material world that we can see in specific places: access to services and goods and local infrastructure. The plea to the local people to be loyal to the state feeds further the discourse and praxis of competitive memory (Reading 2011) and historical amnesia (Gilroy 2005), where local lives do not matter.

The counterpoint therefore would be to bring in the local voices and seriously engage with local needs as the way out from thinking of the border as a constant constraint in everyday lives. In a practical policy, this positivity of cross-border shopping can be taken up on a more positive note to revitalise current EU outer borders like the one presented in this paper. In memory work, it means engaging in dialogue and negotiating memories, and instead of making the border space increasingly less liveable, to turn it into a productive space and practice where memory orientations 'cut across and bind together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites' (Rothberg 2009: 11). Last but not least, in national and international post-socialist political discourses, it means bringing in the value of human life into conversation with the b/ordered world.

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Notes

[1]The fieldwork data presented here I collected in 2004-2009, and I have kept in touch with a few key informants also in the following years. The first fieldwork in 2004 was a part of a larger project, funded by the Academy of Finland and led by Prof. Laura Assmuth. A Russian ethnologist, Dr. Jeanne Kormina, and I were working on the Latvian and Russian borders. The methods were participant observation, life-story and thematic interviews and group interviews at the both sides of Latvian and Russian border. In 2006, Assmuth and I returned for a fieldwork in Pededze and in 2009 I again returned to the Latvian side of the border, this time as a local organiser of the COST IS0813 border fieldwork visits, with the aim of collecting visual data on everyday lives on the borders and revisiting my key informants. Interview quotes presented in this paper are from interviews carried out by me, in Russian and Latvian.

[2] Konstantin Päts, the most influential Estonian politician in interwar period, Estonian Prime minister 1932-1937, President –Regent 1937-1938 and the State President of Estonia 1938-1940.

[3] Kārlis Ulmanis was similarly the most influential Latvian politician in interwar period became the State President of Latvia 1934-1940.

[4] In Russian: "Где родился, там и пригодился"

[5] In Soviet and post-soviet landscape, shops were *in place*, while people had to be mobile to obtain needed goods. See more in the concept of 'stiff landscapes' by Thomas Borén (2009).

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Seeking Dhasa; Finding Lhasa: Liminality and Narrative in the Tibetan Refugee Capital of Dharamsala

By Harmony Siganporia

Abstract

This article explores the role of narrative and narrativity in stabilising identity in an exile setting, read here as a way to avert what Bjørn Thomassen calls the 'danger' inherent to liminality. It does this by analysing the shape and visualscape of the little Himalayan town of Dharamsala, which serves as the secular and religious 'capital' of Tibetan exile. It attempts to decode the narratives which allow 'Dhasa', as Dharamsala is colloquially known, to cohere and correspond to its metonymically aspirational other – Lhasa, the capital of old Tibet. There can be read in this act of assonant naming the beginnings of a narrative geared towards generating nostalgia for a lost homeland, alluding to the possibility of its reclamation and restitution in exile. This article explores how this narrative is evidence of the fact that it is in indeterminacy; in liminality in other words, that the 'structuration' that Thomassen proposes, becomes possible at all. Even as it alludes to the impossibility of transplanting cultures whole, the article also examines closely the Foucauldian notion of 'trace residue' inherent to ruptures in prior epistemes, treating this idea as central to creating new-'old' orientations for this refugee community in exile. Following Thomassen and Szakolczai, liminality is here treated as a concept applicable to time as well as place; individuals as well as communities, and social 'events' or changes of immense magnitude. It is this notion of liminality that the article proposes has to be a central concept in any exploration of exile groups which have to live in the spaces between the shorn identity markers of the past – rooted as these must be in a lost homeland – and the present, where they must be iterated or manufactured anew.

Keywords: Tibet, Exile, Identity, Permanent Liminality, Narrative, Structuration

Campaigns Director, SFT-India, Jyotsna Sara George. Dharamsala, 2015. Photo: Harmony Siganporia

Following the Oxford Dictionary, Students for a Free Tibet (SFT)[1] merchandise tells us that 'Dharamsala', which comes from the Sanskrit roots for Dharma (virtue) and 'Shala/Sala' (house/abode of) means "a building devoted to religious or charitable purposes; a rest house for travelers". More pertinent to this exploration is the second meaning proffered by my 'source', that ubiquitous artefact of late-capitalism we know as the 'T-shirt', here held on display by the Campaigns Director of SFT India, Tibet activist Jyotsna Sara George: Dharamsala is a "hill town in Himachal Pradesh, India, now home to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile community." This paper seeks to locate Dharamsala within the wider geography – sacred and secular – of Tibetan exile, and read the community it is home to using the lens of liminality, making a case for the centrality of this concept in any

exploration of exile groups which, by definition, (seek to or) live in the spaces between the shorn identity markers of the past – rooted as these must be in a lost homeland – and the present, where they must be iterated anew.

This article, following Victor Turner, BjørnThomassen and Arpad Szakolczai[2], reads liminality as a concept applicable to time as well as place; individuals as well as communities, and social 'events' or changes of immense magnitude, such as the move from a society premised on theocracy to democracy, for example. As Szakolczai holds, the concept of liminality served to invoke a situation in which, in order to facilitate a "passing through" during a rite of passage, "ritually and temporarily all limits were removed. As a consequence, the very structure of society was temporarily suspended" (Szakolczai 2009:1-2). But what happens if 'passing through' becomes the end-point, for the rite of passage is not resolved in the form of a concrete conclusion to the process which has begun? Thomassen develops and extends the work of Van Gennep and Turner, and attempts to apply it to the understanding of entire communities and societies in states of transition, suggesting that it is "in the hyper-reality of…liminality, (that) structuration takes place," (Thomassen 2009: 1); that it is in and from the 'in-between' or threshold that the possibility of structure and meaning-making arises anew. I read Thomassen's idea of 'structuration' as alluding to the set of possibilities which become available in and through liminality, which will determine the shape of things to come, for it is precisely in this moment of suspension of epistemes past, that present and future tenses, identities and societies may begin to be constituted. This article proposes that one of the ways in which this process becomes possible is through collective acts of narrativising, and engaging with narrativity. In this, it approaches narrativity as constituting what anthropologist Geoffrey White refers to as "the semiotic and social processes that produce cultural understanding," (White 1991: 13) through shared spheres of meaning-making evinced in a given culture's representational practices, because "narratives of shared experience and history do not simply represent identities and emotions, they constitute them" (White 1991:13).
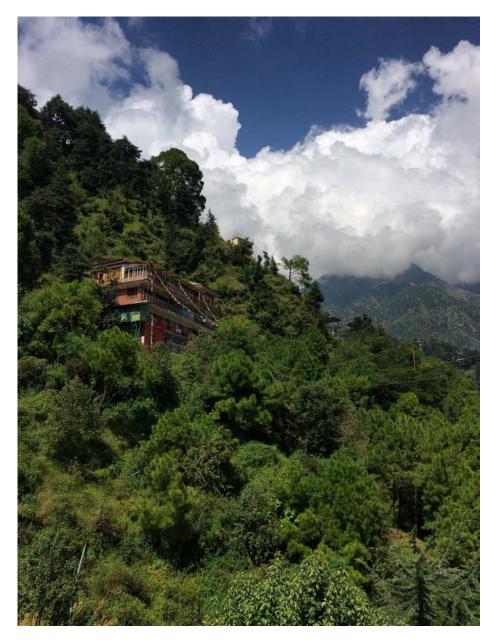
Setting the Stage: the (re)birth of Tibet in Exile

In 1959, following a failed uprising in Lhasa, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, made his way to life in exile, in India. Alongside him, and each year since his departure, thousands of Tibetans came to India, fleeing the persecution they were subjected to in their homeland in the wake of its occupation by Chinese forces. Today, several decades after this first important movement across borders, or first "passage", in terms that cohere with the concept of liminality stemming from rites of passage[3] (Szakolczai 2009: 1), there exists in India a thriving Tibetan community-in-exile, 90,000+ strong[4]. The nerve-point of this community is the town referred to above, alternatively known as McLeod Ganj (the settlement on 'top' of the hill) and Dharamsala (the lower town, but also the generic name used for the

entire area in question). Dharamsala has, since 1960, served as both the official residence of His Holiness, and the headquarters of the community's Government-in-Exile (formally known as the Central Tibetan Administration or CTA). The area that houses the CTA, located in 'middle' Dharamsala, between McLeod Ganj and the lower town, is known as Gangchen Kyishong (or 'Gangkyi', to local residents). Translated from Tibetan, Gangchen Kyishong stands for "The Happy Valley from the Land of Snow" (Odelys 2010: 85), with the 'Land of Snow' being a commonplace metaphor for Tibet. For these reasons, Dharamsala has become a charged signifier, standing as it does for the community's capital in exile; spiritual, owing to the presence of the Dalai Lama, and secular, owing to the presence of the now democratically elected administration (the cabinet or *kashag*) in Gangkyi. Incidentally, the road that leads down to Gangkyi from the Tsuglagkhang Complex (the residence and temple of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama) was renamed 'Potala Road' in 2015, to mark the Dalai Lama's 80th birth year celebrations. This is charged symbolism indeed, for the name evokes His Holiness's lost home: the famed Potala Palace, which was the chief residence of the Dalai Lama prior to his entering exile in India.

The Tibetan refugee community has organized itself into 'settlements', which span the length of the Indian subcontinent and run further East into Nepal. These settlements look to Dharamsala for guidance and leadership, whether this pertains to the running of their larger affairs, their dealings with local Indian government bodies, or matters related to the community's efforts to inculcate and perpetuate a distinct social, religious and cultural Tibetan identity in exile. In other words, they look to the CTA in Dharamsala to provide structural integrity – a blue-print based on which these 'scattered' settlements can attempt to negotiate their Indian home/setting without losing what it is that the community itself identifies as making/keeping them Tibetan. The irony here is that while Registration Certificates – one of the handful of 'official' documents made available to Tibetan exiles in India – denote the nationality of their holders as Tibetan, no country in the world acknowledges the corollary to this recognition: the existence of a nation from which this nationality can derive meaning – a free Tibet. This paradox lies at the heart of the argument for reading this exile community as one inhabiting – and in some ways perpetuating – what, building on Turner, Szakolczai identifies as 'permanent' liminality. This, as Szakolczai posits, means that Turner "recognised the possibility that in exceptional cases 'transition [can] become a permanent condition', leading to a paradoxical, almost contradictory 'institutionalisation of liminality'" (Szakolczai 2001: 4).

Known locally as 'little Lhasa', in its very name, Dharamsala serves an important mnemonic function in the articulation of a moral orientation for the geography of exile, even as it attempts to be two places at once: what it was prior to a 'passage' brought a community here (before it became the base of the community

En route to the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA), Jogibara Road. Dharamsala, 2015. Photo by Harmony Siganporia.

in exile), and what it became by serving as a resting place for Tibetan refugees, who had been forced into such transformative displacement. There can be read in this act of naming the beginnings of a narrative geared towards generating nostalgia for a lost homeland – perhaps even more crucially, alluding to the possibility of its reclamation and restitution in exile – and it is this narrative which informs the shape Dharamsala has, since 1960, taken. This narrative is evidence of the fact that it is in indeterminacy; in liminality in other words, that what Thomassen calls 'structuration' indeed becomes possible.

To go a step further, it is possible to read the 'structuration' process as itself emanating from narrative in the first place, if, as Paul Cobley suggests, narrative is the ordering and mediating principle crucial to our ways of seeing, knowing, and understanding what it means to be human. He suggests that "the tendency to storify" rests at the heart of the human impulse to engage in communicative acts, even as it generates processes of meaning-making (Cobley 2001: 2). Paul Ricoeur adds to our understanding of narrative the concept of temporality, holding that narrative is what mediates the human relation with time (Cobley 2001: 17), an idea that takes on a certain poignancy when introduced into the framework of loss which underscores what it means to live life in exile. We are – and become – the stories we tell, and it would stand to reason therefore that nowhere does the power of 'story' become more vital than in the space/time of liminality. Narrative thus serves to mitigate what Thomassen calls the "dangerous or problematic aspects of liminality" (Thomassen 2009: 11), and it is this aspect we address next.

The Narratives Underscoring Dharamsala

Like so many Indian towns in the Himalayan region, buildings and constructions in Dharamsala cock a snook at gravity, treating it more as a guideline than an absolute: this is visible in the way they seem to defy it by clinging magically – or perhaps on the promise of hope, prayer, and karma accrued besides – to the barest sliver of mountainside. The defining principle, were one to attempt to decipher it from the vantage point of the town 'square' (which is not a square at all, but an interstice, a liminal space which affords access to potentially everything the town offers) appears to be the possibility of performing 'kora', the Buddhist practice of circumambulation, primarily undertaken around sacred sites or objects; natural and man-made[5]. It can be read as an act offering obeisance, as well as recourse to meditative practice, allowing its practitioners to focus simultaneously inward as well as out. It is a constitutive element of any Buddhist pilgrimage. The word kora – and the idea it signifies – takes on more pertinence in the context of its juxtaposition with the meaning of 'Dharamsala' explored above, for a 'dharamsala' is a place of rest, not a final destination, typically dotting the route of a pilgrimage, offering sustenance and shelter; precisely what the town offers the Tibetan refugee community in exile. It is possible to walk – perform a 'kora' – around the stupa which has been converted into a full-blown temple right in the heart of the main square, giving onto each of the two main roads which emerge from it, and around which the town has grown: Temple Road, and Jogibara Road. Continuing down along Temple Road from the main square, it becomes possible to perform a kora around the hill on which the Tsuglagkhang complex itself rests. Some of the other (smaller) monasteries and nunneries which dot the hillside between the Tsuglagkhang and Jogibara Road afford the same possibility. One walks to engage with the environment, and let it engage back: a kora can be, as poet and Tibet activist Tenzin Tsundue shows

in an early collection of poems and stories, both a metaphorical as well as literal coming "full circle"[6] (Tsundue 2004: 24). Adding to this, in a personal interview in 2015, journalist and long-time Dharamsala resident Tenzin Gaphel explained to me that performing a kora is as much about seeing as being seen: it can be a solitary exercise, but performing a kora, especially around the hill which houses the Tsuglagkhang Complex, is where/when most people, old and young alike, meet and exchange news, making this a site which fulfils needs both spiritual as well as social. A kora may be many things, but it is not purposeless: in its ability to provide a location for the 'practice' of reaffirming one's religious and social identity, it serves as a mitigating factor that allows and fosters the emplacement of identity markers, in development of the potential for 'structuration' inherent to liminality discussed above.

The town square located just above the main bus depot which services the region faces the two main streets that run through Mcleod Ganj. To the left, the road forks again, leading on one side up Bhagsu Road, home to a well known Shiva Temple, several restaurants, shops, and the Tibetan Resettlement Office. On the other, it snakes upwards past the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA), and further to the enclave known as Dharamkot. TIPA was the first institution established by the Dalai Lama upon entering exile, and it is charged with documenting, preserving and perpetuating all that is today, in sum, understood as comprising Tibetan culture. From making musical instruments to learning and compiling folk melodies and dances from the various regions of historical Tibet, and hosting Tibetan Opera (Lhamo) festivals besides, TIPA is an organisation charged with a heavy mandate. Its artists travel around the world performing Lhamo and other forms of Tibetan music and dance, primarily to underscore their difference from the competing Chinese-Tibetan cultural troupes who attempt to lay claim to depicting and iterating Tibetanness in their own practice and performance. This contestation ties in to the narrative of preservation – the utopian notion that identity can be 'preserved' because culture is a sum of artefacts and practices. In interview after interview[7] with TIPA performers and administrators past and present, I encounter the same argument: following His Holiness and the CTA's stance that China systematically continues to destroy all that was once the Tibetan way of life, it is primarily in exile that this phoenix must rise again. This attitude suggests that it is only in exile (India) that it is 'still' possible to be truly Tibetan (Siganporia 2016). After the wanton destruction evidenced in the desecration of thousands of monasteries and resulting in innumerable deaths[8] following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, the attempt of the CTA has been to "preserve our identity and language by practicing our culture and traditions," in exile – a mandate they believe can be fulfilled by every Tibetan refugee, "irrespective of gender, age and education, whether lay or monk/nun"[9] (CTA 2003: 6). Lhamo performed by Chinese-Tibetan groups has come to be Sinicised, shot with inflections and tonality alien to Tibetan opera, but directly traceable back to Beijing[10]. Even the Potala palace and Lhasa itself, from

recent reports, have come to be little more than tourist destinations for mainland Chinese visitors (Tibet Watch 2014), shorn of symbolic significance as the erstwhile residence of the Dalai Lama (with the attendant connotative implication of serving as the focal point of Tibetan Buddhism itself). It is this memory of Lhasa that Dharamsala seeks to physically embody, existing as it does in and across the India (present)/Tibet (past; pre-1950) binary. Every such negotiation is an attempt to mitigate what happens when exile threatens to become the end-point and not a pause in a longer narrative which concludes in the 'end' of liminality with, in this instance, a return or reclamation of the homeland on the other side of this long and hazardous rite. In the absence of an end which can be foreseen, the 'mimicry', to adapt a concept from Bhabha (1994), of structures and markers which held identities in place in 'prior' or older societal rubrics, serves to govern against the dangers of the liminal moment. This idea speaks to what Foucault identifies as the 'trace residue' that is left after paradigm-altering ruptures, because in liminality one starts from a suspension of previous structure; not the annihilation of the very memory of its existence. This definition of 'rupture' allies with Foucault's notion of discontinuity, which he explains as being that moment of transition which forces a "redistribution of the [prior] episteme" (Foucault 1970: 345). This refers to the process which makes it so that alongside the 'new' rules of any discursive field – which would necessarily redefine boundaries and iterations of knowledge and identity as they come into being in the present moment – a rupture must also necessarily take cognizance of the significant continuities with the past which are its legacy.

That identity is fractured, non-contiguous, polyphonic and plural[11] is a position which would run counter to a refugee community's bid to 'preserve' and re-create what has been lost: the bid is to read identity as a fait accompli instead of as a process, because only then can the loss of a homeland be mitigated, for what is lost may be painstakingly rebuilt and repossessed even in exile. Examples of this manifest across the visualscape of Dharamsala and are to be deciphered in the act of 'naming' that anchors meaning, which, in semiotic terms, is what Roland Barthes identifies as being one of the two possible roles played by any linguistic code (Barthes 1977: 155-157). Every building, every restaurant, guest-house, office is named for an 'other'; perhaps one left behind in Tibet. This is why the Shambhala Cafe rubs shoulders with the Snow Lion Hotel, Tibet Tours and Travels, Dolma Ling Nunnery, Takten House, Potala Road, Oser's Second-Hand Electronics Shop, Dawa's iPhone Service Centre, Lhodrak Menthang Hostel, and literally scores of yoga and 'wellness' centres offering courses and spiritual retreats or workshops. What is also ubiquitous is Tibetan prayer flags: there is not one car or taxi (many even owned by local Indians) which is not bedecked with them; not one home or hillside left bare.

Conclusion

For long years, Tibet and Tibetans have had to bear the burden of a crippling utopian narrative thrust upon them by the 'West': the linking of Tibet with Shangri-La. Donald Lopez goes as far as suggesting that this narrative has been a prison Tibetans seem unable to escape from (Magnusson 2002: 195). This is primarily because at its heart, this narrative is not about a utopia which belongs to Tibetans: it is "merely a reflection of the Western Self" (Magnusson 2002: 196). Peter Bishop was among the early scholars to pick up on this leitmotif which runs through numerous accounts about Tibet by Western explorers and researchers, and in his attempt to outline what Tibet means to the 'Western' imagination, he posits that it has undergone a change from a "geographically grounded place to a placeless utopia, an alternative society, and as a criticism directed at modern society," (Magnusson 2002: 196) itself. After 1959, once the community had entered exile, this 'myth' had to be expanded, Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya argues, to include displacement (the birth of an exile community) and narratives of Chinese destruction and repression (Magnusson 2002: 198). This gives moral legitimacy to the claim forwarded by the Dalai Lama and successive (exile) Tibetan Administrations, that their articulation of Tibetan-ness is 'truer' than anything available in Tibet (diminished as it is into denoting merely the Tibet Autonomous Region or TAR) today.

This idea reinforces the impetus behind the phenomena of narrativising and naming explored in this article, and goes a way towards establishing what it is that holds Dharamsala purposively together: if it is to be the repository and keeper of the flame of Tibetan Culture which may no longer be found or practiced in Tibet today, it needs necessarily to mimic the form and functions of the other capital (Lhasa) it has inherited its mantle from. In its staggered three-fold lay-out; lower (largely 'Indian') Dharamsala, giving up into Gangkyi which is the seat of the secular (the Administrative complex), and further into McLeod Ganj proper on top of the hill, home to His Holiness and therefore the sacred centre of Tibetan life in exile, Dharamsala defines what it means to be a liminal space, positioned as it is between the past and present/Tibet-India binary here explored.

Read in the light of Thomassen's premise that 'structuration' takes place in and from liminal positions, Dharamsala's almost schizophrenic quest to become its other (Lhasa, here standing in metonymic relation with all that is Tibet and Tibetan), and thus straddling worlds, times, and the contested construct we know as 'nation', yields up the utopian/ narratives which inform its shape and form. Cautioning again that liminality is "pure danger" without the final stage of reintegration configured into a rite of passage, Thomassen proceeds to post the following pertinent questions, particularly of large societies or communities where the "social drama" they are living through appears to have no foregone conclusion: "how is the liminal period dealt with, and how (if at all) is it ended?... who will become the "carriers" of the new world-view that is eventually institutionalized?" (Thomassen 2009: 19). This

article proposes that the beginnings of an answer to the first of these questions is to be found in studying the recourse a community takes, in moments of transition and suspension of prior epistemes, to the act of generating narratives which allow for the processes of meaning-making to continue: these narratives inform the shape of the community to come, and serve as emplacement mechanisms for identity at the collective or 'group' level in times of extreme societal upheaval and instability.

The second question can perhaps be answered by modifying its central proposition: adding 'where' (location, symbolic and physical) and 'what' (practices, artefacts) to the "who" it places as the carriers of new world-views, room can be negotiated for the exploration of cultural practices which have either survived translation into exile or have organically emerged from this location, where erstwhile nomadic and pastoral people sing of revolution, their diction, language, and style tested in this singing of new tunes. This is how in seeking Dhasa one finds oneself confronted inevitably with an ephemeral but no less real for it, vision of Lhasa.

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Notes

[1] *Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) is one of the largest international NGOs which works with the community in exile. See https://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/ for details on the organization and its mandate.*

[2] *Referring to, in particular, Thomassen's 'The Uses and Meaning of Liminality' and Szakolczai's 'Liminality and Experience:Structuring transitory situations and transformative events', both of which appear in the special issue on Liminality published by the journal International Political Anthropology in 2009 .*

[3] *Szakolczai, explaining Van Gennep's concept of the structure of rites of passage world over suggests that "It starts with the rites of separation, continues with the middle, and central, phase, the "passage" itself, involving a genuine performance or trial, and ends with the rites of re-aggregation, celebrating the successful completion of the transition," (2009: 1).*

[4] *A survey by the Planning Commission, Central Tibetan Administration in India, titled 'Demographic Survey of Tibetans in Exile–2009' cites the total number of Tibetans living outside Tibet as being 1,27,935. Of this number, 94,203 people live in India. For details, see the following Hindustan Times newspaper article: http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NorthIndia/127935-Tibetans-living-outside-Tibet-Tibetan-survey/Article1-634405.aspx*

[5] *See Toni Huber (1997) and Keith Dowman (1998) for more on the decoding of this practice which is central to the understanding and performance of Tibetan Buddhism.*

[6] *The very title of Tsundue's collection 'Kora' (2004) refers to the act and practice of performing kora, even as it explores the theme of coming full-circle in a short story which sees the past and present of the Tibetan struggle come together in the form of a dialogue between a young Tibetan refugee and an older Tibetan revolutionary.*

[7] *I forward this claim on the basis of several personal interviews with renowned TIPA artists such as Choekyi Tethong-la, and the former (and present) directors of TIPA all through 2014 and 2015.*

[8] *The CTA document 'Tibet: Proving Truth From Facts' (1993) pegs this number (from starvation during famines, violence, and other indirect causes of the occupation) at approximately 1.2 million Tibetans.*

[9] *This report is analysed and quoted at length in Stephanie Roemer's The Tibetan Government-in-Exile: Politics at Large (2008: 67).*

[10] *Personal Interview with Choekyi Tethong-la in March, 2014.*

[11] *Or 'hybrid', as Homi Bhabha and several post-colonial and post-structural theorists would hold. See Bhabha's The Location of Culture, especially "Signs Taken for Wonders" (1994: 145) for an exploration of these themes.*

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On the Edge of Existence:
Malian Migrants in the Maghreb

By Line Richter

Abstract

Based on ethnographic fieldwork among Malian migrants and migration brokers in Mali, Algeria, Morocco, and France, this article investigates life in exile on the edge of Europe. Zooming in on the experiences of interlocutors in Morocco and Algeria, the article will explore the experiential dimensions of living in an extended liminality. Anthropologically, life in so-called places of transit, such as the Maghreb countries, has often been dealt with through the lens of liminality. In this article my aim is to build on the insights from such endeavors, and re-orient the focus by illuminating what this specific type of permanent liminality entails. I posit that a more suitable term to call this is 'limbo'. This, I argue, consists of three main features. First, the motivation for leaving Mali is for most migrants embedded in the lack of opportunities for social mobility: the Malian youth who end up leaving, are in Honwana's words, stuck in 'waithood' at home, in what many argue is a liminal social position. Second, social and political structures are not absent in the Maghreb, rather they are quite discernable and can be seen as continuations and mimicking of existing structures. Third, experiences of dramatic ruptures with humanity and morality are key characteristics of life on the edge of Europe.

Keywords: Migrants, Maghreb, Mali, Liminality, Limbo

Introduction

"On n'as pas le choix, qu'est-ceque on va faire, on peut pas retourner"

On the Moroccan hills behind the Spanish town of Melilla, I met a group of sub-Saharan migrants waiting for their chance to enter Europe. A young Malian man quickly took in the scene and said, "We don't have a choice, what can we do? We can't go back". The lack of choice referred to his continuous attempts to cross the border into Schengen territory. He did not see returning to Mali as a possibility and therefore was in the hills on the borders of Europe. The destituteness of the place is hard to conjure: small rudimentary tents (*bunkers*) are set up under the pine trees and provide little shelter for the, at times, harsh climate here next to the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the young men are dressed in worn-down and dirty clothes. Some are playing checkers on homemade boards with bottle caps for game pieces; others are huddled around a small bonfire. Everyone I talk to tells me that life is very difficult.

This article addresses liminality in a specific type of exile; that of migrants en route to Europe. Many anthropologists have analyzed Sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb countries through the lens of liminality. Their works lead our attention to the extremely marginalized positions that the migrants, who often wish to enter Europe, hold in political, social and economical terms. Victor Turner's (1979) seminal work on the structure of the 'rite de passage' has become somewhat of a Rosetta stone used to analyze the social trajectories of young migrants, claiming that they leave behind a state of youth, and pass through a liminal phase in order to finally enter a state of adulthood. Scholars have applied the term in order to explain the marginalized state of migrants, who they see as being in a liminal or liminoid state, which they seek to move on from (Sargent and Larchanché-Kim 2006). The youths who leave their country of origin are seen as motivated by a desire to escape the social state of youth.

This article takes a similar yet re-oriented focus. It looks at the way Malian migrants in Algeria and Morocco live an everyday life literally on the edge of Europe, as described in the case above, and uses this as a key to understanding what so-called liminality may mean as 'experience'(Szakolczai 2009). This article argues that the liminality these migrants inhabit, by virtue of the Maghreb being a place of 'in-between'-ness, does not limit itself to being an inter-structural phase in their lives (Turner 1979) but becomes a type of permanent liminality. I wish to show how this is characterized by three main components: *First*, the underlying motivation for leaving i.e. the experience of being socially stuck in Mali, *second*, a continuation (or mimicking) of social and political structures, and *third*, experiences of dramatic rupture with humanity and morality. In doing so, it is my intention to move beyond the focus on the "in-between" and beyond the classical scope of placing this type of migration, i.e. irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa towards Europe through North Africa, within the 'liminal' state, and I suggest the term 'limbo' as a

better conceptualization of the existential experiences of Malian migrants in the Maghreb, many of whom live in this more or less permanent liminality.

Methodology

This article is based on a total of 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Mali, Algeria, Morocco and France from 2013 to 2015, where I have followed a loosely structured network of young migrants from Mali along points on the road to and in Europe. The overall aim of the project has been to understand the positions, practices and prospects of migrants as they seek to move from Mali to Europe. Starting out in Mali and following the trajectories of young Malian men through North Africa and into Europe by 'snowballing' my way through the loosely organized networks/affiliations of the migrants, I have worked my way into a field that opened up to me as I went along. The interlocutors that I engaged with in Mali were either close to departing and trying to gather the funds for the journey or were talking about leaving in a more distant future.

From Mali, many migrants, and specifically the group I have worked with, enter Algeria. Many of them go there to earn money and do not have specific (pronounced) ideas about leaving for Europe. For many, this idea is somewhat faint, but will grow as they encounter other migrants and hear of successful crossings into Europe. The difficult living conditions for irregular workers in Algeria are also a factor in the desire to leave. From North Africa, there are currently two main routes into Europe: through Libya, and through Morocco. In Algeria, I connected with migrants who were, for some reason or other, waiting to enter Morocco, from where they would try to enter Europe. Many of the migrants worked in gardens where their Algerian employers would provide them with shelter and a modest salary (between 10 and 20 euro/day – with no guarantee of regular work). In this setting, I became close to migrants who intended to leave soon, and to some of the middlemen who were involved in arranging their journeys. The latter and former groups of people cannot easily be distinguished from each other, as the organizers themselves also try to go to Europe, and some of them occasionally also work as day labourers to make ends meet.

Nonetheless, the emic French categories of *anciens* and *passagers* provide a useful distinction for these social groups, where *anciens* are those migrants who have been in Algeria for a long time, and who have themselves tried on several occasions to enter Europe, and *passagers*, those migrants who immediately try to make their way into Europe. In Morocco, it is hard(er) for migrants to find work, and the migrants who are there are mostly either looking for a way to enter Europe or involved in arranging these journeys. As in Algeria, I talked to both groups, *anciens* and *passagers*. In France, I connected with some migrants I had met during former fieldwork projects and other newly arrived migrants, who had mainly undertaken the journey through Morocco. I also connected with former *anciens*. The female

perspective has not purposefully been excluded, but as I quickly came to realize, Malian women do not travel in the same way as the young men through the treacherous desert and into Europe clandestinely, therefore they are not part of the present study.

The article relies mainly on empirical material generated in Morocco and Algeria intermittently from February to June 2014, but I also draw in some examples from my fieldwork in France (from September 2014 to February 2015), in terms of migrants' retrospective accounts of their time in the Maghreb. All names of people and places have been changed or disguised in order to secure the anonymity of my interlocutors.

The article commences with a discussion of the key concepts of transit and liminality before laying out the pillars of the argument in three sections, which deals with 1) motivations for leaving, 2) the continuation of political and social structures, and 3) the migrants' experiences of dramatic ruptures with humanity and morality. Finally, the conclusion points to the use of 'limbo' as a conceptual framework for understanding this specific type of exile.

Transit

Ethnographic work on sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb countries tends to focus on the journey and the transitory nature of the area – stressing that the North African countries are transit places through which migrants pass to reach Europe (Baldwin-Edwards 2006, Barros et al. 2000, Bredeloup 2012, Collyer 2006, 2010, De Haas 2005, 2008, Hammouda 2008, McDougall and Scheele 2012). More recent works also focus on the mobile/immobile nexus of the trajectories of the migrants (Schapendonk 2012), re-iterating that not all people are equally mobile and many migrants who wish to move are unable to do so. They hereby still emphasize the migrants' movements – or prospects thereof – over other aspects of their lives. Whether the localities are transit spaces, or whether they become sites of dwelling, few works focus on the existential dimension of the migrants' lives in these sites, in the way experiential ruptures are configured in social structures that resemble familiar ones. Instead, there tends to be an emphasis on how to categorize these types of movements or im/mobilities. By insisting on this focus, the 'in-betweenness' of places of transit is reiterated. Some scholars nuance this by stressing that these places become places of 'stuckness' or immobility (see e.g. Pian 2008, Hage 2005). In this article, I wish to step aside from discussions regarding what type of places these settings are in terms of voyages taken or not taken, and instead focus on the way these sites create particular existential experiences of ruptures with humanity and morality in what we may call 'everyday life' in migration.

The Malian migrants find themselves in a pinch. They are literally at the edge of Europe, which they can see in the distance from where they are, but are not sure they will make it there. "It is a matter of chance," many tell me.

Liminality

Turner's work on the liminal phase of rituals stresses that it is not a state, but a phase or period. The liminal period is, when neophytes are excluded from social life, an inter-structural period between two states: "We are not dealing with structural contradictions when we discuss liminality, but with the essentially unstructured," he claims (Turner 1979: 236). This entails the complete suspension of social hierarchies for neophytes (those transitioning). The experiences in the liminal period are "felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte" (ibid.: 239). Since it no longer adheres to cultural rules and creates ambiguity between inclusion and exclusion and life and death, Turner claims that this is a "realm of pure possibility" (ibid.: 236).

Even though young Malian men leave Mali in order to, as one of my interlocutors in the Maghreb phrased it, "look for my own, to look for a good life", the time spent searching for this is not 'essentially unstructured', as Turner claims is characteristic of the liminal phase. Rather than a realm of pure possibility, such migrant communities quickly configure in structures that resemble or mimic political organizations elsewhere, creating recognizable frameworks for social life.

Looking for Life - Motivations for Leaving

Lucinda Honwana conceptualizes a young generation in Africa that is unable to move into a state of adulthood and proposes the term 'waithood' to designate an inauspicious youth: "I use the notion waithood, a portmanteau term of "wait" and "-hood", meaning 'waiting for adulthood', to refer to this period of suspension between childhood and adulthood,"(2012: 20) she writes.

The notion that young people in Africa are unable to move into adulthood resonates with much earlier anthropological work in West Africa (Utas, Vigh, and Christiansen 2006). As Vigh argues, migration can be a way out of this state: "Migration is seen to provide means of escape from the 'social death' (Hage 2003) that characterizes the lives of young men in Bissau" (Vigh 2009: 93-94).This is a very recognizable portrait of the situation for youth in Mali who wish to 'become someone'. Like in Bissau, young men in Bamako leave in order to escape these situations of 'waithood' and 'social death'. Even though the journey can be seen as a transitional phase where the youth exits one state in order to enter a new one (on the other side) most authors agree that this, for migrants, does not always entail successfully re-entering social life on the other side of the liminal phase. Becoming a man, rather than a boy (or youth), free from the shackles of being stuck in waithood, is for many not the outcome of migration, as Lucht states: "[the migrants] often appear less as agents of change and travel, working both sides of the border, than as stuck in a negative zone, recognized neither legally nor socially" (2012: 17). They become stuck in this so-called liminality, as they, in spite of having entered this transitional

phase, cannot move on (Hage 2005). As one interlocutor I talked to in Morocco poetically phrased his endeavours to reach Europe: "I am looking for my life over there".

Building on these insights, in the following section I wish to sharpen our understanding of what living in an extended liminality entails by zooming in on the structures as well as the ruptures of the experiences of Malian migrants in Morocco and Algeria.

Continuations of Political and Social Structures

In Algeria and Morocco I did fieldwork in the Malian migrant communities of a number of towns, which are renowned for being hubs for irregular migration, contraband and smuggling. Here, I interviewed and talked to a range of migrants particularly from the Wassoulou region of Mali (due to my research design), but also from elsewhere in Mali. The migrants live in tent camps or in small houses (like huts) provided by their employers in the agricultural sector. Many of the migrants in the Maghreb are unable to move on due to financial and political circumstances. As mentioned earlier, Malian migrants can roughly be divided into *passagers* and *anciens*. There are many overlaps in these two groups, and people can move from one to the other quite quickly. The *passagers* live mainly in disturbingly shabby tent camps in the woods, on dried riverbeds, or in urban spaces (in poor neighbourhoods, on the more or less abandoned grounds of a university campus etc.), and are waiting for an opportunity or for money to arrive from their families, enabling them to move closer to their much desired Europe. They are sometimes also termed *clandestins*, by members of the *anciens* or themselves. The lengths of their stay vary greatly, but many end up staying for quite a while (as long as five years), often moving between different places in North Africa. Journeys between these points are erratic and migrants' decisions to move to another location are taken ad hoc, in situ, based on the latest rumours about new entry points into Europe, about employment opportunities, or new political circumstances, such as the new 'regularization' arrangement in Morocco that was installed in 2014 (but later more or less abandoned), where migrants who could show proof of having lived in Morocco for at least 5 years could obtain paperwork that allowed them to live and work legally in Morocco for at least a year. This gave some migrants hope of finding work in the country, or getting papers, which could eventually lead to other and more desired paperwork or statuses (such as asylum, visas, or scholarships in Europe or elsewhere).

During all of my fieldwork (from Mali in 2013 to France in 2015), I have been struck by the fact that I rarely met anyone who had a clearly defined route they wished to follow before embarking on their journey. To undertake adventure (*faire l'aventure*) in Mali is synonymous with going far away – migrating (legally or illegally) – in order to make a better life for oneself and one's family. Adventure is not

just about seeking thrills as popular narratives convey; rather the migrants' adventure denotes dislocation in order to find something new and better, facing the unknown and being constantly vigilant (Bredeloup 2008).

In these places, a wide range of nationalities from sub-Saharan Africa are represented. They are primarily from West and Central Africa, often with the largest groups coming from Mali, Nigeria, and Cameroon. My interlocutors are part of the Malian communities, which are divided into *ghettos*, an emic term that denotes groups led by different leaders – *Thiamen* – who are responsible for housing members of their group. Each national group has its own organization (with a few exceptions). The term *Thiaman* comes from the English 'Chairman', and was introduced by Anglophone migrants, who are said to have set up this quite structured organization of the communities (Pian 2008, Schmitz 2008). A ghetto has its own government including a president, cashiers, police and several council members. There is a *law of the ghetto* and members of the community pay a *ghetto tax* the first time they enter. Some members of government are involved in the facilitation of border crossings, which starts with transporting people illegally across the border between Algeria and Morocco, from where they try to move on into Europe. Although there are differences in the political landscapes of Morocco and Algeria (the main issues being that the access to work is easier in Algeria, and that the state security apparatus is experienced as more impeding by migrants than in Morocco) I choose here not to explore these differences. This is first and foremost in order to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors and secondly, as the structures of the migrant communities are similar across the borders, and the ghetto structure, with *Thiamen*, police and governments is in place across the Maghreb where transnational links to colleagues are common, and the migrants' experiences resonate across countries, these differences do not alter the argument of this article.

It is here worth briefly mentioning the puzzling and almost comical mimicking of international political symbolism and structures in the migrant organizations. In one of the migrant communities, government meetings are held in a large tent constructed of sticks and blue tarpaulin ironically dubbed "the white house" and the different (particularly West African) nationalities are united in what they – always with a smile – call the CEDEAO (Communauté Economique des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest – also known as the ECOWAS). In this respect, the migrant communities not only resemble local West African organizations, they also mimic them and other power structures in comical and what we may call, borrowing from Achille Mbembe, obscene and grotesque ways (Mbembe 1992: 3). These frameworks, nonetheless, only support certain aspects of life as it is known: substantial ruptures in humanity and morality are experienced by practically all of my interlocutors, and they are examined below.

Experiential Ruptures - At Odds with Humanity and Morality

An animal life

A large part of the migrants I met in the Maghreb expressed experiences of 'dehumanization'. This dehumanization seemed to be the kernel of their experience in the Maghreb and they would compare their lives to those of animals.

The following is a clipping from the written travel account of an interlocutor, Ali, whom I met in Paris through a loosely structured network of young Malian migrants. He writes about his time in Gorogo (a forest in Morocco next to the Spanish town of Melilla) in this way:

> The emigrants live in Gorogo like animals:
>
> 1. We live in the woods, always under the rain
>
> 2. We always eat from trash cans
>
> 3. We are always worn down by the military, by the police, by assailants, by sickness.
>
> Death is always close to us.

Being without shelter, finding food in trashcans and being haunted by authorities, assailants and sickness is what for Ali creates an "animal life". A life that is not human. The way he frames the experience in Gorogo in the three indexed items tells the story of how Ali sees animal life as the negation of a "human" one, defined by having a roof over your head, being able to eat without having to succumb to digging through thrash, and being safe from external threats.

Many other Malian men in the Maghreb linked their experiences to those of animals. One Malian man, Mamadou, working in an Algerian olive garden weeding between trees, told me that there are actually machines that can take care of this type of work. But they are expensive. "Here *we* are the tractors. We are like donkeys. They treat us like animals," he said. Such statements are numerous in the empirical material and do not only tell the story of hardship, but also of an essential aspect of life for sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb: being stripped of their sense of humanity. Some migrants linked this experience to human rights, dreaming of a Europe where "there are human rights" as opposed to this place, where according to them, there "are no human rights".

To place this into a larger context, one could turn to Hannah Arendt's established critique of the functioning of modern nation-states. Her argument is that they create citizens, whom the rights of man apply to, as well as "minorities" to whom no rights apply (Arendt 1951: 150,155). In many ways, the migrants' experiences resonate with Arendt's work. Whether migrants were living in tent camps on the fringes of Europe, or whether they were working in the gardens of Algeria dreaming of a better place, the notion of an absence of rights was a common denominator that marred their experiences in the Maghreb. They could not seek or count on help from the

states in question, because their very presence in particular places is seen as not just illegal (because this is a grey zone), but outside the law. In an insightful discussion on the 'commonsense' way of ordering the world into rooted national entities, Lisa Malkki, inspired by both Turner and Arendt, shows how Hutu refugees in Tanzania do not easily fit into 'the national order of things'. She claims, "Refugees, liminal in the categorical order of nation-states, thus fit Turner's famous characterization of liminal personae as 'naked unaccommodated man' or 'undifferentiated raw material' (1967: 98-99)" (Malkki 1992: 34). In much the same vein, sub-Saharan migrants in the Maghreb, stripped of humanity, become naked, unaccomodated and undifferentiated raw material. The Arendtian view provides ample perspectives to the extremely precarious status of undocumented migrants in the world today, as also pointed out by Lucht (2012), de Genova (2002) and Krause (2008) to mention only a few. Importantly, migrants do not live this 'animal life' outside structured life altogether, but are integrated into distinctive political realms (the migrant *ghetto* system) as shown above, which nonetheless do not grant them full access to a human life. The concept of *limbo* stems from the Latin *limbus*, which denotes edge or border, and in the case of the migrants living in the Maghreb this may be more fitting than liminality. They are stuck in a place defined by the borders nearby, which they cannot transgress: they are literally at the edge of Europe, outside the life they are looking for.

Stuck en route

Moussa, one of my close interlocutors in the Maghreb, held a position as 'police', and sometimes as middleman, in a Malian ghetto. During our time in the Maghreb, he was in a pinch. One day I walked into the living room of Moussa's house, and found the usually animated Moussa sulking on the couch. I asked him what was bothering him, and he said that his father had just called him and told him to come home, because his family needed him mainly in the form of financial support, which he could not currently provide. He did not want to go back to Mali, partly because he was doing fine where he was and because the dream of making it big (here or in Europe) still lived in him. In the Maghreb, Moussa is a kind of "big man", (the concept of 'big man' has been widely discussed, but in this context it suggests that he holds a powerful, yet unstable position that is dependent on the relations he has and his ability to extend solidarity. This position is as Utas notes, "in part measured in status symbols and the ability to fill that big man role according to social criteria" (2012: 7) see Utas 2012 for a further discussion of bigmanity); he fools around with a handful of women, helps other migrants with food and money and holds a prominent position in the community. Exemplified by a comment made by a Malian who lived in one of the nearby tent camps, when asked how he got by, paid for food etc. "these guys help me," he said, pointing at Moussa who had accompanied me there. This day on the couch he was in distress, as his father threatened to evict his mother from the house if he did not return. He hoped that his father would calm down, and

told me there was no way he could return to Mali at that time. Since Moussa had been gone from Mali for 4 years without advancing his social position at home, he would be set back, at the age of 27, to being an unmarried son in his father's house. At the same time, he was acutely aware that his position in the Maghreb was of a more temporary character, like when he was telling me that he was not done trying to get to Europe, and that his last attempt was only a year or so ago.

The following is from an interview we did a few days after my arrival:

> Line: But when you think of Europe, what do you think about?
>
> Moussa: When I think of Europe it gives me courage again to go there.
>
> Line: What do you think?
>
> Moussa: I think… over there?
>
> Line: mhm
>
> Moussa: I think that if I get in I will find a better life there. Because there I will find work […] like that I won't need money from my parents anymore […] even now my parents [/kin] ask me to return there. But when I return again it will be the same thing. It will be them who will take care of me. Because in Mali, to find work it is very difficult, and the heat [chaleur] too – it's too much… so it is not viable… I say I will return, but they [the kin] have to give me 1 month–2 months, like that.

Moussa's story draws our attention to the inherent temporariness of migrant life even as he has climbed the social ladder and become part of the government of the Malian ghetto. He cannot return to Mali because it will be the same as before if he returns, his parents will have to take care of him, which would be too belittling an experience to endure. Moussa cannot go back and has so far been unable to move forward. The paradox of what Moussa is expressing is that in terms of his current situation, he is doing quite well. Nonetheless, he is unable to make plans for the future and unable to move on socially, resonating with Honwana's term 'waithood' discussed above, as well as Vigh's notion of a 'social moratorium' (Vigh 2006). On another day, one of Moussa's close friends, Issa (an *ancien*, but not part of the government or the business of border crossings) told me that even though Moussa generates income from the business of migrant journeys, he often asks Issa for money, as his own money quickly dries out. Issa says it is because Moussa spends it all on women and partying. But being part of the government also means having to take care of other migrants in town, and being a big man entails keeping up appearances with fashionable clothes, jewellery and a fancy telephone, all costly affairs that keep him stuck here, unable to provide for his family in Mali or establishing a family of his own. He is still to this day in the Maghreb, with the hope of one day leaving.

Shameful living

As well as being stripped of humanity, many migrants are struggling with a sense of shame and of being at odds with morality in the Maghreb. This became especially clear one day when I visited a group of young Malian men in Algeria, in a small

garden house where they lived on the premises of their work site – an olive garden. My contact, a young man from the Southern part of Mali (like the other men in the house) had already told me that I couldn't take any photos when we got there. I assumed it was because of the range of illegal activities, from working without permits to the sale of drugs, or the business of smuggling that took place there or nearby, but this notion was quickly challenged by a young man, Sul. He asked me if I hadn't brought a camera. I said yes, but I left it in town as I was told I wasn't allowed to take any pictures. He said "yes, we don't want our parents to see us like this. That is shame (c'est la honte)". The men lived under very hard conditions and had certainly not reached their goal of making it big outside of Mali, which they desired.

Sul emphasized the unexpected and very difficult circumstances he found himself in. He has a degree in accounting from Mali and left because he could not find any work in his home country. At that time (and still to this date) he was working, on the days he could find work, in the fields. By accentuating the shame in being seen in this condition, he pointed to an experience of being outside a moral life. His very way of living was shameful. It is a life, but a life at odds with morality. For *les anciens*, experiences do not always have the same tone of dehumanization and demoralization. Nonetheless, they echo this shift and gap in social and moral life. The movements between social categories do not necessarily imply a movement into a more existentially "secure" world.

To be or not to be 'good'

Spending most of my time with migrants in the group of *les anciens* gave me an intimate view into the everyday life of long-time migrants, some of whom have risen to privileged positions in the Malian migrant communities. It also made me aware of the constant moral evaluation that was inferred upon themselves and others. Many of the *anciens* had some kind of business with local Moroccans or Algerians, and many of them spoke a bit of Arabic. The everyday language of Bambara and French was often strewn with Moroccan Arabic glossary. A couple of terms kept recurring; like *nishān,* which is a way of indicating the direction straight ahead, and *hikihiki,* explained to me as zigzagging from side to side. When talking to someone about a common acquaintance of ours, it was quite common to hear the sentence "Him, he is not *nishānnishān*, he does like this" while my interlocutor would first show his hand moving up and down, and subsequently move his hand from side to side, thereby showing that he does not "do things right". Often they would assert themselves as being *nishān*. A few people would even say about themselves "here one has to be like this" and move the hand from side to side: *hikihiki* they would say.

Oumar, one of the men in charge of a Malian community became a close interlocutor of mine. One day as we were talking about life there, Oumar once again told me to trust no one there. Whilst reminding me constantly of the opacity of social

relations, he also hinted at his own transgression of the boundary between good and bad:

> Some people say Oumar, he is good. Other people say Oumar, he is not good. It is not good if everyone thinks you are good and it is not good if everyone thinks you are not good. Here, you fall down the hole. Even me, I have fallen into the hole.

He often told me that I am a good person. I told him that so is he. To this he usually replied, "No, *you* are good," thereby underlining his (in his own perspective) more pragmatic engagement with good and bad. Oumar's own assessment of having to be both good and bad in this place underscores the way he thinks he has to act here, in what he calls the 'hole', thereby accentuating his metaphorical fall from grace, or moral distortion.

Conclusion: On the Edge of Existence

The lack of options and possibilities for creating viable lives in Mali is most often the driving force behind the migrants' departure for Algeria and Morocco. Many are stuck in a social state of youth, or what Honwana terms 'waithood', and they leave Mali in search of a life of their own. This departure often leads to prolonged stays en route, which create a specific type of exile.

Anthropologically, this move and particularly life in so-called places of transit, such as the Maghreb countries, has often been dealt with through the lens of liminality. In this article my aim has been to build on insights from such endeavours and re-orient the focus to understand what this specific type of permanent liminality, which in a more suitable word can be termed 'limbo', entails. In addition to the motivation for leaving as mentioned above, this limbo consists of two main aspects. Firstly, there is the continuation and mimicking of familiar and recognisable social political structures. Migrants are organized in structures that resemble other well-known political structures (although different in nature), which simultaneously borrow from international political symbolism in grotesque and obscene ways. The ghettos, the *anciens,* their 'governments' and the evocation of powerful political symbols such as the construction of a rickety tent known as *The White House* are examples of this.

Secondly, migrants experience extreme ruptures of life as they know it. Ruptures with the very essence of being human – dramatic experiences of dehumanization, and the notion of living an animal life – were widely repeated. Morality was also being ruptured. Being ashamed, not wanting to reveal to your closest kin the real conditions of your life, was an intrinsic part of the experience here. Having to compromise with one's own notions of being good or bad was another rupture of morality that was specific to this place.

Ultimately, the article argues that liminality conveys a transitional phase of 'neither/nor', etymologically stemming from the Latin *limen*, which means *threshold*

or *entrance*, but the concept of limbo, from the Latin *limbus*, which means *edge* or *border*, can also help guide our attention to the fixity and dead-ended-ness of migrant life on the move.

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Temporally Adrift and Permanently Liminal: Relations, Dystalgia and a U.S. University as Site of Transition and Frontier

By Frank G. Karioris

Abstract

This article seeks to explore temporal reconceptualizations and forms of nostalgia that first-year university men are experiencing and creating. It will explore the ways that time can be conceived of in relation to the present and a future that is not-yet-existent. The article takes as its starting point ethnographic fieldwork in the 21st century at a private, Catholic university in the U.S. and, in particular, men in an all-male residence hall. In focusing on this hall, it means to locate and localize the thinking in the context of the 21st century as well as within the U.S., including neoliberalism as a social and economic method of relating.

Through the exploration of these men's envisioning of themselves as their future selves and the way they re-view the self that is now, this article makes a claim that they are – through both their actions, ways of relating, and the societal positioning – multiply liminal. Further, it will explore the way that through this temporal representation they are endowing themselves as permanently liminal both currently and in the future. The article situates these men amidst the university as an institution, as well as seeking to elucidate the importance of this temporal creation as a building of forms of transition and frontier.

Keywords: masculinity, higher education, time, liminality, residence hall, nostalgia

Introduction

> Memory is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experiences… (Benjamin 2006, xii).

There is a quote by Milan Kundera that says, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (Kundera 1996: 4). In context, Kundera was focusing primarily on the struggle against power. For the purposes of this article, it is important to think more heavily about the second element: memory and forgetting. Particularly the ways in which memories are created in such a way as to forego forgetting, or to work around the forgetting that will eventually happen by way of a temporal transition forward to the future from which to have a memory back against. This process is, in some ways, the opposite of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (2003) where the narrator/author looks back to come forward to the present. The object/action investigated here is not the searching for lost time, but the creation of time not yet had or lost.

This article takes as its starting ground ethnographic fieldwork undertaken at a private, Catholic university in the Midwest of the United States – called the University of St Jerome (USJ) – in an all-male residence hall. In locating the article in this way, it also means to set up not merely a global context, but a historical one – the 21st century United States – and a temporal one, as all of the men in the residence hall were first-year university students or in other words, 'freshmen'. While this article relies on ethnographic fieldwork, it is far more theoretically based rather than told through vignettes or fieldnotes. In my fieldwork I undertook numerous interviews and spent an entire year building up relations with these men. It is this that the following article speaks to and builds on.

Through this article I aim to begin exploring the connections between these men's experiences of university, time, and the way that liminality (beginning from: Turner 1967; 1969) plays a role in situating and creating these experiences. One might start with a brief but current definition of the term: "Liminality therefore suggests an impossibility of location within existing classifications and categorizations" (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill 2013: 129). In particular, I aim to explore the way that the idea of permanent liminality – seen in part in Michael Kimmel's (2008) *Guyland* (though he does not narrate it this way) – is played out in these men's homosocial relations through the treatment of time as a frontier, and their experiences on campus and in the hall as a transition phase which one is liable to get stuck in. To do this I will first situate the university and set up some of the experiences of students. I will then analyze them and bring these experiences into relation with concepts of time, nostalgia, and permanent liminality. Unlike many early anthropological studies of time and people's understandings of time – which concretized entire cultures based on specific idioms, linguistic devices, or otherwise (Munn 1992) – this piece situates itself in both a specific context and suggests not that this

is *the* way time is perceived in this context, but asks what this specific perception might suggest about these men, their place in society, their age, gender, race, class, and desires.

The Men of Regan Hall

Nestled amidst a bustling mid-sized Midwestern city, the University of St. Jerome (USJ) is a medium-sized university that boasts a wide range of majors, both graduate and undergraduate. While Catholic, 25% of its population self-identifies as non-Catholic, and its Catholic identity is something that many choose not to have as part of their collegial experiences.[1] Like many US universities, USJ has a strong residential program, with a large number of residence halls scattered throughout the campus – there is also a two-year on-campus requirement for most students.[2] Set just off the main part of campus sits Regan Hall, a 300-person all-male residence hall for first-year men. Regan is seen as the black sheep of the residence halls – due in large part to its status as the all-male residence, and to its position at the far end of the campus. Almost none of the men choose to live in Regan, but are instead assigned it, out of lack of space in other residence halls. This status as undesirables (as individuals) and unwanted (the building) put the community and the men in a position already in the midst of social conflict with other halls, and Regan men frequently express that they feel they are treated poorly due to where they live.

As all first year students, they are roughly 18 years old, and this comprises, for most, their first time living outside of the familial home. While many of them are from the surrounding area, they come from most states and internationally. Regan is set up in 'traditional' residential fashion, with students sharing a room with one other student and common area bathrooms on each floor. This type of housing – much like all-male (or all-female) halls – is being phased out of most universities as they move to provide greater and greater amenities and choices to students. The building also has a series of common areas, notably the basement, called the 'Man Cave', which has couches, TVs, ping-pong, pool, and is a frequent spot for any number of activities within the building.

Like the university itself, most of the men in Regan are white and come from generally middle-class backgrounds, although with changes in universities in the U.S. in the past ten to twenty years, the class backgrounds of university students is also beginning to change (Stuber 2011), a fact the university has sought to capitalize on, to reach as wide a population as possible (Blacker 2013). The adaptation of educational systems has been well documented by Bowles and Gintis (1976), who, while not focusing on the university alone, demonstrate the ways that education is incorporating greater and greater degrees of individuals and doing so in such a fashion as to bring the system itself into the market. These changes though are still exceptionally gendered, classed and raced, and predicated upon a specific vision of

university life that campuses are creating, seen in Armstrong and Hamilton's *Paying for the Party,* which documents the ways that universities are setting up pathways through college, many of which are built on parties, and specifically fraternities and sororities (2013).

Showcasing a distinctly different image of college life than Armstrong and Hamilton, Rebekah Nathan's *My Freshman Year* suggests a view of time that is tied, rather than to parties, to academics. "Clearly, the key to success was the careful management and control of our time (a.k.a. life)" (Nathan 2005: 111).[3] Further, she says that "any kind of spontaneity threatened to thwart the best-laid plans" (Ibid. 112). These two images – along with Michael Moffatt's *Coming of Age in New Jersey* – are the three book-length ethnographies of residence halls, and in that way set up a backdrop upon which this fieldwork and theorizing finds itself.

Students' Time: Fast & Slow

Having given some context and background of these men, I will move on to discussing the ways that they specifically situate themselves within a temporal and liminal frame through which they cast their lives, and which puts their experiences of life in and under university within a specific framework that might be called a nostalgia for the present. The act of 'speaking of time' is similar to Kunzel's description of men in prison:

> In prison… 'time accumulates new dimensions.'… [It] distort[ed] conventional understandings of time as orderly, linear, and rationally clocked… Time, to prisoners, was something to be 'done'; prison time could be 'hard' or 'easy.' For some, incarceration took place in a strange and disorienting time out of time; for others; it suspended time altogether. (Kunzel 2008, 1)

While these men did not speak of easy or hard time, the ways that they expressed their experiences of time are shaped by a similar "time out of time". Almost all of the men that I spoke with talked about their experiences at college in two seemingly contradictory fashions, and which I asked them about as the topic came up.

For these men, their social relations with the other men in the building took primacy over most of their other relations, creating a form of kinship that worked outside of the heteronormative ordering and that was simultaneously not the same as fraternity brotherhoods. They spoke about their friends from Regan in ways that would indicate not only a deep connection but also a depth far deeper than what might have been imagined from the fact that they had known each other for less than nine months (by the end of the year).

Their relationships are imbricated with a necessitated time commitment. Interviewing many of the men, I asked them how much time they spent with their friends. While their answers varied, for many of them it was well over 40 hours a week, with a few guys[4] responding that they spent up to 80 hours a week socializing with their friends. This level of intensity gave rise to, and was part of, the way their

lives were temporally constructed. When they would leave for a long weekend – going home for Thanksgiving or Easter – they would come back full of stories and longing to reconnect and catch up with their friends. It was like they had been away from each other for a period of years, when in fact it had only been three days. Asking them about their friends, they said that it felt like they had known them forever, and – in no uncertain terms – seemed to indicate that their friends were constitutive of their lives in a massive fashion.

Simultaneously, when I asked them how it felt to be almost finishing their first year of university and how the year had gone by, almost every one of them said the exact same words: "It went by like a flash". They felt that the year had flown by, leaving them breathless as the speeding rocket of a year neared its close in May.

Taken together, we can begin to see the first temporal quakes. They feel like they have known their friends forever, but the year has flown by. Put another way, one might suggest that in their friendships, time has moved slowly (giving the time together cavernous meaning), while the year has moved quickly (flying by). In the one period of time, time itself has moved in a polyrhythmic fashion. In doing this, they open up a way of viewing time as flexible. Not only is time both fast and slow, but it is also empty and overflowing.

Michel de Certeau talks about this phenomenon in relation to *strategies* and *tactics*:

> Tactics are procedures that gain validity in relation to the pertinence they lend to time – to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms into a favorable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action, to the possible intersections of durations and heterogeneous rhythms, etc (de Certeau 1988, 38).

He continues, saying "strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the *establishment of a place* offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever *utilization of time,* of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (de Certeau 1988: 38-39). Institutions or power-positions enact *strategies*; whereas *tactics* belong "to the other" (Ibid. xix). The heterogeneous rhythms of *tactics* play on the opportunities that they can, and in so doing thrust a spatial and temporal split into institutional and normative ways of seeing and doing time. These *tactics* are put to use by the men who I studied with as ways of altering and impacting their relationship not just to themselves (or their self), but to the broader situational constitution of power and institution that they find themselves encountering in their daily lives. Here one might list, and I will come back to this later, such things as: the university, their parents, the market, and societal treatment of adolescents.

The bending and playing with of time, for these students, is thus a challenge in some ways to specific norms and normatives. This usage and enactment of time runs counter to ideas of chrononormativity, which suggests that time be organized to maximize productivity (Freeman 2010). This form of schedule and life dictated

around productivity is dramatically tied to capitalistic regimes of order, as well as to gendered visions of production and reproduction. This term seemed very apt for what I am investigating, and the way that these men determine their time based on productivity, and then, through processes external to the larger construction of time, seek to move outside the bounds of productivity.

Students' Time: …And Forward and Backwards

That time is both experienced as fast and slow simultaneously is not so unusual; what is more important is the way that – having established a specific relation to temporal fluidity – they establish and narrate a nostalgia for the present that is neither in the here and now, nor in the future. Before theoretically discussing it, let me first establish more exactly the process by which they enact this nostalgia of a chronographic charting of time.

While hanging out with one group of guys, smoking on the front steps of Regan, they began talking about the future, in a sense. They were not talking about the future in the way that they were planning to do something in the future ("when I get older I will…"), but they were talking about it and thinking about the here and now. They talked about themselves as married 40-somethings (most likely with imaginary children), getting together and hanging out with their (male) friends. These friends are the friends that they are currently surrounded by on the steps – distinctly, and they are the only friends in the frame of vision. They sit around – again, presumably on a nice backyard deck or patio, surrounded by a big, green yard – drinking beers together, reminiscing about the 'good-old days'. The 'good-old days' though are, in fact, the very days that we are in at the moment, smoking a cigarette on the front steps of Regan. They are reminiscing about this exact moment. These guys – neither necessarily 'boys' nor 'men' – are searching out a 'good-old days' not only of their own imagining, but of that of their father's world (and therefore of a past that is *just* past). This vision they've created is an image out of Norman Rockwell, with dialogue written by Dali. They are transitioning their own selves, but are also – as with most generations – transitioning expectations from what their parents have given them to what they are able to now know.

In an instant they have gone forward twenty to thirty years – not passing through those years but merely jumping them as Evil Knievel jumped the Grand Canyon – and then, from this future, looked backwards that exact same number of years (almost to the day). The jumping makes *tenses* difficult to differentiate or maintain, in this way I would suggest that the position in the future of looking backwards might be called the creation of *future past presents*.

Students' Time: Nostalgia for the Present

It is important to distinguish this move from a simple idea of *nostalgia*. One might suggest, taking the clichéd phrase "the grass is greener", that nostalgia is the thought that, either forward or backwards, the grass was greener then. Whether the 'grass was greener back then' or 'the green *will* be greener soon', in either case, one might suggest that nostalgia is this rosiness tinting Ezra's glasses.

What is to be made though of things which might not fit into this idea? Frederic Jameson presents us with an interesting example. Taking his cue from a Phillip K. Dick novel set in a 1950s US that is not quite 1950s US, he discusses the way that "a formerly futurological science fiction (such as so-called cyberpunk today) turns into mere 'realism' and an outright representation of the present" (Jameson 1991, 286). Not only does science fiction – so often thought of as the unmitigated and unfurnished future – become reality in the sense that it is present (for those readers reading it in the 1950s), but, further, "the possibility Dick offered us – an experience of our present as past and as history – is slowly excluded" (Ibid.). While Jameson is talking about the broader conditions of time, memory, and possibility, he also lights up a way of seeing the ability for the overlapping of times, and the way that nostalgia – once enacted as forward looking – can be brought into the service of the present as well. Through the representation of the present (1950s), Dick is able to conjure up possibility as a temporal element, bringing potentiality into the *chrono*-context, while simultaneously making the presented future unreal.

These men, rather than merely looking forward or backwards to see the grass being greener on that side of the past/future, are in fact looking forward to look back and in doing so are seeking to see the present as better than it 'is' or than we are currently experiencing it. This process, which I will lightheartedly call *dystalgia*, is a process through the renegotiation of the now as better than it might be conceived, and, in so doing, adding weight to the importance of these events, actions, and the time itself. As a humorous aside, George Carlin once remarked that it seemed impossible to be nostalgic for something that had just happened an hour prior. "Can anyone explain to me the need for one-hour photo finishing? You just saw the fuckin' thing!" (Seeing his exasperated face dramatically adds to the impact of the response!) Yet, it seems, as we have been discussing, that one is able to be, while not necessarily nostalgic, hold affection and distilled impact for things that have just happened, those happening currently, as well as those which have not happened yet.

Déjà vu, Memory of the Present, and Creation of Future Past Presents

In so many ways, these men are not merely creating new forms of time but are in fact reacting and interacting with mnemonic devices and memory conceptually. "Rather than limit itself to preserving traces of times past, memory also applies

itself to actuality, to the evanescent 'now'" (Virno 2015: 7). This 'now', is not simply here and now as itself, 'now', but is simultaneously experienced as both now and 'now' in the future looking backwards. "The instantaneous present takes the form of memory, and is re-evoked even as it is taking place. But what can 'remembering the present' mean, except having the irresistible sensation of having already experienced it previously?" (Ibid., 7). It is crucial to dive, briefly, into Paulo Virno's ideas, recently published, on the ways that déjà vu intersects with memory of the present, and from here, move forward to continue discussing the creation of future past presents.

"It is impossible to change something that has taken on the appearances of memory… they [individuals] become spectators of their own actions, almost as if these were part of an already known and unalterable script" (Virno 2015: 8). For Virno, those who create a memory in the present do so in a form of cynicism, and as a way of reducing themselves to spectators. Yet this is not so; not only so at least. One is able to create out of the present now a future that is alterable; the necessity that the future – which the now created in memory – elaborates, does not necessitate stagnancy. Through a reading of Bergson, who says that "there would be no memory at all, if it were not, first of all, memory of the present," he suggests that the reason the memory of the present in déjà vu is different is that rather than simply allowing perception to take that which it needs for "impending tasks", it instead prefaces perception with a remembrance of what is happening "while it is happening" (Ibid, 12).

He continues, elaborating on the idea that the distinction between perception and memory (again, taking from Bergson) is that perception "fixes the present as real, complete, resolved" while memory is "the modality of the possible" (Virno 2015, 14); the overlapping construction of a futurist-y memory of the present thus entangles both the real and complete (perception) with the realm of the possible (memory). "The synchronic operation of the two different modalities could provoke a hypnotic effect, dilating and congealing the immediate *hic et nunc* [here and now]" (Ibid. 15). In combining memory and perception one is able to be lulled into the concretized iteration of the present. Continuing, he says that "the possible is the *hic et nunc* made into an object of memory, placed under the sign 'back then', re-evoked in the very moment in which it is lived" (Ibid. 17). This possibility (in memory) is evocative of both the present it is lived in, as well as the remembrance of the present lived in, and the future-future looking back at the past-present as was potentially lived as.

This back and forth, this reversion and movement, are of crucial importance for this discussion, as well as the point from which we take leave from Virno, away from déjà vu and towards a conception of the creation of *future past presents*. Virno is aiming at reflecting on the ways that the 'end of history' is conceptualized, and the elusiveness of a form of the memory of the present within this concept, and that undermines the project of the end of history. Here, rather, we are seeking to explore

and extricate more a narrative, methodological idea of the memory of the present dis-related from broader historical ripples. To do this, we must go further into our understanding of time, and understandings of time rather than merely memory. In this, it means this article is distinct from studies of memory (such as: Ricoeur 1990, 2004; Wood 1991). Virno allows us to conceptualize and see the ways that these men, in their specific ways, are creating ideas about time in ways that are linked to broader conceptions of History (with a capital 'H') and to a world system (in this case US neoliberalism) while simultaneously working through, around, and with norms and normatives about lives, life, and understandings of self.

Augustine, in his *Confessions*, says that there are three times: "a time present of things past; a time present of things present; and a time present of things future…" (Augustine, quoted in Virno 2015: 22). Continuing, he says, "The time present of things past is memory; the time present of things present is direct experience; the time present of things future is expectation" (Ibid. 22). One must then ask, where do these men's constitutions of a combined future that is simultaneously also past and present fit in this categorization?

Aiming at Permanent Liminality

It is, I would suggest, both exceptionally easy and impossible to answer that question. The easy answer is – as the set up for this article should suggest – liminality: they are betwixt and between. The difficulty though is that this liminality is not merely an ambiguity of condition, but something much more elusive and at the same time temporally ambiguous than what one might traditionally think of as liminal. Let us take as our starting place Victor Turner's statement on it:

> The attributes of liminality or liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the networks of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, conventions. (Turner 1969: 95)

These young men sit within a variety of liminal positions (the multiplicity of their liminality is discussed below), but what is important here is the way that their liminal status is not merely based on temporal movements, but is also itself a temporal status implicated not temporarily – not as an adjustment to the tempo – but far closer to permanent, and as a *leitmotif* throughout the possible nows, futures, and future pasts. In this section and the following, I aim to further explicate that these men's *future past present* is not merely liminal singularly or temporarily, but is multiply and permanently liminal; in particular, utilizing Michel de Certeau's conceptions to theorize these processes and states further.

For de Certeau, rather than the concept/word liminality, he uses the idea of the bridge and frontier – an apt metaphor for US masculinity and men, whose identities are exhumed from a history of 'meritocracy', 'manifest destiny', and the 'wild wild

west'. "The river, wall or tree *makes* a frontier. It does not have the character of a nowhere that cartographical representation ultimately presupposes. It has a mediating role" (de Certeau 1988: 127). In this sense, the frontier is itself not a non-entity, but a space unto itself – even if a space outside of common space. While the frontier is a mediating force, "The *bridge* is ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy" (Ibid. 128). The frontier and the bridge act as spaces of connection, points of touching. He says,

> Thus, in the obscurity of their unlimitedness, bodies can be distinguished only where the 'contacts' ('*touches'*) of amorous or hostile struggles are inscribed on them. This is a paradox of the frontier: created by contacts, the points of differentiation between two bodies are also their common points. (de Certeau 1988: 127)

These 'contacts' are the points of liminality, the spaces of in-between. They are, to put it metaphorically using de Certeau's verbiage, the bridge itself. Only the contact points hold them in place – no matter how liminal one is, they are still in contact with that which it is they are not. The liminal space of the bridge is one which is both always connected and yet always outside of; and, like all bridges, is also filled with forms of danger, failure, and risk of falling. These men, as they seek to put themselves in the future that is not, are actuating a frontier that is not creatable except as a form of fiction, which is distinct from untrue.

The amorous struggle is not, in this case, against another or Other, but against the Other that is their self not actualized yet. From a vantage point – that is itself between positions (the college student, who is conceived of as between adult/child) – they are remaking their future self as similarly between social locations. The stories that they are telling – the time(s) they are creating – are not merely impacting on the vision of the future enshrining of a liminal position but further elucidating a position in the here and now which is itself liminal. Further, these "stories are actuated by a contradiction that is represented in them by the relationship between the frontier and the bridge, that is, between a (legitimate) space and its (alien) exteriority" (de Certeau 1988, 126). The exteriority here becomes, in a sense, the position of a non-liminal position. In inverting the non-liminal position into the liminal position – through *dystalgia*– they reposition themselves as cyclically exterior. In creating their future selves as liminal, they position themselves continuously outside of structured and fixed positions, imposed by society, jobs, relationships, etc. In creating this possessed and possible future, these men are aiming towards both the unresolvable and the desired, which is simultaneously impossible.

If one were to collate this into a single sentence, it might look like this:

> Come to college, collect friends, narrate *dystalgia* into the future (i.e. longing for what they have, but in the future), and put yourself permanently in-between.

This permitting of a permeating in-between status is bound into the positions they occupy currently, and is furthered through a methodological enactment of *dystalgia*

that projects a nostalgia from their future selves backwards onto the self that is current, which is voiced by the self that is current, yet not the self the future nostalgia seeks to create.

Liminality, Rupture, and Frontiers

The frontier that these men create and cross creates instantiations of rupture, of spillage, of breakage. This is seen not only in the way they discuss the future, but the impacts that this has on the present. "As a transgression of the limit, a disobedience of the law of the place, it [the bridge] represents a departure, an attack on a state, the ambition of a conquering power, or the flight of an exile; in any case, the 'betrayal' of an order" (de Certeau 1988: 128). Through the ordering of themselves in the present as working towards a future where the present is different than its current-as-is state, they transgress not simply temporal bounds, but rupture sense and affects of social connectivity. It both springs bonds into the future – making friendships seem to blossom eternal – as well as pressurizes these relations in the now in such a fashion that it rips the relationship out of the simple present and puts it in a position outside of merely the interaction taking place. To come back to de Certeau, one final time, he reminds us that:

> … at the same time as it offers the possibility of a bewildering exteriority, it allows or causes it the re-emergence beyond the frontiers of the alien element that was controlled in the interior, and gives ob-jectivity [sic] (that is, expressions and re-presentations) to the alterity which was hidden inside the limits, so that in recrossing the bridge and coming back within the enclosure the traveler henceforth finds there the exteriority that he had first sought by going outside and then fled by returning (de Certeau 1988: 128-129).

The bridge here continues to act as the liminal space, which simultaneously always connects itself at both ends, leaving that contact (touching) as the fluid travel between the present, the future, and the future past present.

These forms of rupture are contextual in both the sense that they have a context (place) as well as that they are driven by surrounding contexts. Ivor Southwood, reflecting on Marc Augé's 'non-places', suggests that in the 21st century more and more spaces have become outside of place – and are, therefore, out of place. He says that these non-places - such as retail parks, virtualized call centers, transitional spaces of communication – are themselves not just "placeless" but "amnesic" and act as "liminal zones" (Southwood 2011: 31). These non-places create neither "singular identity nor relations; only solitude and similitude" (Augé 1995: 103). One might similarly look to the ways that schools and the market are pushing men towards educational margins, particularly related to sexuality (Mac an Ghaill 1994). These non-places though, at the same time, open up creative uses of space rather than simply negating possibility. These men's friendships, in their own way, are

opening up such a space and utilizing ways of being permanently liminal that stretch the borders of temporal and intimate boundaries.

It is important to return to the university, as an institution and powerful actor, sliding through our view of these men's interactions and ideas of time. In this, it is crucial to understand the way that the university – both as philosophical idea(l) and pragmatically-situated organization – is always contextual, to both a historical moment and a geographic locale. Universities in the US, at this moment (as well as historically), are places of social division and collection. Simon Critchley, commenting on this, suggests "Universities are phallic knowledge machines designed to accumulate at all costs. Capital and the university collide in the model of the rich American private university where the value of the institution really lies in the size of its endowment" (Critchley 2014: 128). He, humorously, reminds us that "everyone wants to be well endowed" (Ibid.). Universities are oft divisive in creating and being premised on homosocial meritocratic ideas (Rotundo 1993), where social life does not necessarily link, but can frequently be used to divide. This division, though – particularly amongst men (who were also the only ones originally allowed or given the opportunity to attend university) – also provided the basis for connection and an ethos of challenge to adulthood, the world, and the market.

"American[5] college life was originally a new adolescent culture entirely of the students' own creation, arguably the first of the modern age-graded youth cultures that were to proliferate down to pre-teens by the late twentieth century" (Moffatt 1989: 29). While these rebellions and youth cultures were always partial – for example the birth of the fraternity in the US which pushed for independence from the faculty while simultaneously excluding students on the basis of religion and skin color – they are still an integral part of how one must contextualize micro visions of change. Put another way, one might suggest that they are part of the "reorganizations of education" that Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips (2008: 125) call for in concluding what is needed to open up new forms of intimacy. This call for new forms of intimacy is answered, if tentatively, by the haunted temporal and liminal vision of these guys' friendships and relations that reorient understandings of desire for selves and forms of relationality that bear no necessary correlation to a specifically-located bound, while at the same time acting as canaries for ways that neoliberalism processes individuals and the ways that individuals, in their pervasive resilience, are able to contest these iterations with counter narratives.

Conclusion

One might like to, if only playfully, begin the end by stating that: "After all, barring some life-erasing catastrophe, there will always be a future in the future" (Ruti 2008, 114). Ruti is tackling what she calls the anti-social thesis in queer theory, playing tongue-in-cheek with Lee Edelman's book *No Future* (2004). While Ruti is tackling the ways and forms of sociality that are proffered and disavowed by

Edelman, the concept of *no future* is one that ties back to ideas of *queer time* and *queer space*, in particular to Jack Halberstam. Halberstam says that

> if we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault's comment in 'Friendship as a Way of Life' that 'homosexuality threatens people as a "way of life" rather than as a way of having sex' (310)". (Halberstam 2005: 1)

Without appropriating the idea of queer temporality, it seems fair to suggest that the figures and usage of time that these men work with does not necessarily fit the conscripted pattern of life which they are meant to be fitting and fulfilling. Further, he also suggests that we "rethink the adult/youth binary" and that which "lie(s) outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (Ibid. 2). Halberstam, in presenting an alternative to more straight-laced (and straight) critical geographers (Jameson, Soja, Harvey), brings the heteronormative ordering into temporal and spatial understandings in a way that compliments previous understandings while shedding light on the complicated fashion through which sexuality – not merely the 'who's' of the sex act, but the ordered ordering of relations – can be shown to have dominant roles in this.

The argument of this article has meant to lay out the ways these men at university in the US today, a decade and a half after the turn of the century, are challenging notions of time through the use of forms of liminality that are not simple or singular. The forward motion to come backwards of these men's stories is both a temporal journey as well as a search for greener grass in the current; in where they are now. By putting themselves forward in a now that is not in fact now's now, they are seeking both to make their now seem better than it might in fact be, as well as putting themselves in a liminal position that is doubly betwixt and between. Yet, it is – at least partially – a world of their own creation. Between in the sense of time – as in neither here (the present) nor there (the future) – and life position (they are neither children nor adults; neither in college nor out of it).

In various ways, throughout the piece, these men's actions have been presented as liminal, situating them outside the bounds of childhood/adulthood, boy/man, powerless/powerful, here/there, now/then, and present/future, as well as various other positions. It is crucial to recognize the reality though that these men are still, in so many ways, the soon-to-be-s and the inheritors. Lynne Huffer sets out that the duel burdens of ethics are "the acknowledgement of harms, and, second, the active elaboration of alternatives to those harms" (Huffer 2013: 31). This piece has elaborated on the alternative possibilities that these men are creating by positioning themselves liminally, and by creating the protracted potential of a permanent liminal status. That does not, though, mean that they at all points acknowledge the harms of the system or their continued role in it. As such, it is important to not project onto them a utopian queerness which they neither seek, nor would be able to fulfill.

In tabulating time and tempo, robbing nostalgia from the future like a thief, we must think back to the future that is both past, present and now. We need to think about the sketches and words being drawn onto them – "them" being both the men themselves and the "them" of their futures to be, futures to be created. Rene Ricard once said, in relation to graffiti lines and signatures, "In these autographs is the inherent pathos of the archaeological site, the cry down the vast endless track of time that 'I am somebody,' on a wall in Pompeii, on a rock at Piraeus, in the subway graveyard at some future archaeological dig" (1981). We will ask: who is the radiant child?[6] The question is both a reference to the title of Ricard's piece and is also meant to return us to the site of the future adult looking back at themselves, and seeing in that the burgeoning childhood of the university and the ways that the university sets up the space to be continuous and, potentially, permanently liminal.

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Notes

[1] There have been, in recent years, large debates about the 'Catholic identity' of the university and what role this should play. Many alumni and donors feel the school should be more explicitly Catholic, while the university itself seems to be moving towards a more secular position.

[2] Exceptions are primarily for non-traditional students and commuters.

[3] It should be noted that Nathan, a faculty member, lived in a primarily second-year dorm, and – judging from her own admissions – did not gain access into the student's lives the way one might expect deep ethnographers might. This may, itself, be strongly linked to age and her position as (one might assume) clearly not a 'traditional' student, and who the students would feel distant from, as she was in at least her 40s when doing the fieldwork. Further, I would personally note that her method of covert ethnography (for which she also changed her authorial name – her real name is Cathy Small) is something that I do not support.

[4] Throughout this article, and my work more generally, I fluctuate between references to these individuals as "men" and "guys". This linguistic slippage is meant to highlight the fact that they are neither fully children nor fully adult – as is part of the larger argument of the piece. In using "guys" I seek to point to some of this ambiguity.

[5] In both this quote and Critchley's above, it is crucial to understand "American" as related specifically to the USA, rather than the broader Americas. This political distinction is important in recognizing the multiplicity of cultures within the Americas, and to dethrone the idea of the US as 'America' (in the singular).

[6] The reference – 'radiant child' – is also an homage to Jean-Michel Basquiat, who is one of the artists Ricard is discussing in his piece.

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