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Memory and Enshrining Writing: Rethinking the ethnocentrism imbedded in written vs. oral traditions

Elizabeth Eklund
The *Arizona Anthropologist* proudly presents its 28th issue, dedicated to the tenth anniversary of Sandrizona, a linguistic anthropology conference created and organized by graduate students at the University of Arizona and the University of California, San Diego. In honor of Sandrizona, we assembled a wide range of papers from multiple disciplines and perspectives. Each is unique, but we believe that all speak to the goals of both the Sandrizona conference and of *Arizona Anthropologist*: to showcase graduate student work, to highlight process, methods, and developing ideas, and to advance the field of anthropology.

The founders of Sandrizona—Dr. Maisa Taha (Montclair State University), Dr. A. Ashley Stinnett (Western Kentucky University), and Dr. Elizabeth Peacock (University of Wisconsin-La Crosse)—open this issue with a history of the Sandrizona conference. It is a very personal reflection on the difficulties of creating and maintaining this kind of scholarly meeting and the benefits it has provided to graduate students at the U of A, UCSD, and other institutions throughout the years. We enthusiastically thank them for their contribution.

The remainder of the issue addresses the research of six of the University of Arizona’s own graduate students. The first article shares a first-person reflection on an incredible fieldwork experience: participating in a whale hunt in Indonesia. The next outlines the different ways that cultures think about members of its society by retelling the author’s experience of attending the funeral of Tariq Aziz, a high-ranking of-
ficial within Saddam Hussein’s government. The third article analyzes the racial coding of the word “terrorism” and the acts of violence that said term brings to mind for many Americans. Our fourth article focuses on the social memory of fishing practices and, through interviews, shows that certain segments of society may interpret their environment differently than others. The fifth article addresses the way that the language of NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990) creates ambiguity in the categorization of and repatriation of culturally sensitive material. Our final article is a critique of the hegemony of written records in Western social sciences and offers a call to archaeologists and anthropologists to more seriously consider the role of oral histories in their work.

Finally, we thank the School of Anthropology, the authors, the reviewers, and our supporters within and outside the University of Arizona for their contributions to this journal. This is our first fully online edition, and we hope that it will allow us to reach out to the community in an even more inclusive manner. We offer special thanks to Dr. Drexel Woodson, our faculty advisor, Dr. Diane Austin, the Director of the School of Anthropology, as well as the entire departmental administrative staff for their continuing support and encouragement. We would also like to thank and recognize our staff for their hard work in the production of this issue: Rebecca Mountain, Rachel Rosenbaum, and Alena Wigodner.
Anthropology is a practice of learning from context, of being a student of circumstance with an eye for meaningful patterns. Linguistic anthropologists often point to how language is central to such meaning making and therefore to the anthropological enterprise—the subfield’s minoritarian status notwithstanding.¹ The challenges involved in learning the craft of linguistic anthropology continue to expand as different schools of thought intertwine, from a well recognized grounding in semiotics to variationist and sociocultural linguistics, conversation and discourse analysis, ethnomethodology, gesture and kinesics, visual analysis, and dynamic traditions in language documentation and revitalization. These frameworks provide tools for contextualizing language use and elucidating the powerful social and political work it does in people’s everyday lives. As graduate students at the University of Arizona (Stinnett and Taha) and the University of California, San Diego (Peacock), we wanted to create a forum that would allow us to openly explore this complexity and hone skills related to fieldwork, data collection and analysis, and public presentation of results. Beginning in the spring semester of 2009, we established an event to do just that. Under the portmanteau of “Sandrizona,” this workshop-conference continued through ten iterations over the course of eight years, as it alternated

¹ Among the 66 graduate programs in anthropology across the U.S., 29 currently offer graduate training in linguistic anthropology (American Anthropological Association, AnthroGuide 2016).
between the UCSD and UA campuses and drew students from a variety of language-focused disciplines. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on the founding, organization, and history of Sandrizona as a student-centered initiative. Its development over the years also offers a window onto the changing contours and priorities of linguistic anthropology itself.

**Genesis: How Sandrizona Got Started**

The three of us first met as graduate students in 2008 at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Annual Meeting in San Francisco, and in the course of an informal conversation realized we shared an interest in creating an alternative but complementary venue where students from our respective campuses could share work at various stages of progress. Since our universities were relatively close to one another geographically, and our departments had complementary strengths in terms of faculty expertise and training methods, we decided that a collaborative conference would be ideal. Furthermore, as linguistic anthropologists, we considered that a workshop format would provide opportunities to examine data excerpts and engage in sustained discussion about relevant theory, methods, and analytic frameworks. Finally, we wanted to leverage our collective power: place student work at the center but showcase faculty contributions and recruit our departmental mentors into building cross-institutional and cross-generational connections to enhance our training.

We envisioned this event as an entirely graduate student run effort. We would set the agenda, raise funds, and do the organizing. Additionally, we intended the format of the event to be flexible, conducive to discussion, above all, and shifting with the changing needs of the student participants while responding to developments in the field of linguistic anthropology. What we ended up creating was a collaborative conference that gave graduate students an opportunity to present their material—at whatever stage it was in, from project proposals to post-field work reflections, from completed class-
room projects to preliminary data analyses—to a diverse group of peers and scholars.

To these ends, Sandrizona meetings generally lasted one-and-a-half days, featuring a series of 30- to 40-minute single-session presentations, and 15-20 minutes of discussion following each paper. In this way, we ensured constructive feedback for each participant. We arranged the flow of presentations by alternating presenters from each institution, instead of grouping papers thematically. A single keynote speaker was invited each year from among the faculty at the non-host university and often spent the bulk of the conference weekend attending student presentations and offering feedback. Host university faculty made a point of attending, as well, and all those interested were invited to share meals together during the conference. This format gave way to ongoing conversations as participants crowded in together among computers and tables in UCSD’s linguistic anthropology lab or gathered around trays piled high with a tamale lunch at the UA.

At the onset, the UA students brought to Sandrizona the focused training and methodology from their program’s linguistic anthropology track, guided by Jane Hill, Susan Philips, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Jennifer Roth-Gordon and, later, Qing Zhang. UCSD students, on the other hand, were part of their department’s cultural anthropology track and did not have a dedicated linguistic anthropology program. With the support of Kathryn Woolard and John Haviland, UCSD’s core Sandrizona participants included a group of students who were highly interested in language, with varying degrees of training.

Keynote speakers (see list in Appendix) addressed a range of methodological, geographic and thematic interests, from the semiotics of race in travel writing on West Papua to social justice through linguistic activism in the United States. Student presentations, in turn, spanned the globe from Tonga to Mexico, Norway to Ecuador, Jordan and the Philippines. Those from UCSD tended to favor sociolinguistic concerns that linked language to wider notions of nationhood, national memory, and global concerns, including how memories of
North Ireland conflicts are located in physical landscapes; how the linguistic practices of families in rural Mexico reveal competing values of Spanish and the local language being taught to the next generation; and how Ukrainian youth’s clothing choices reflect class-based identities that engage with notions of the West. UA students’ work highlighted semiotic and discourse analytic approaches to the construction of power, identity, and inequality through face-to-face interactions, including research on disability talk among members of a U.S. women’s wheelchair basketball team, the linguistic and social indexing of foreignness in Japan, and the instantiation of racial authenticity among Afro-Brazilian activists.

In short, by fostering an atmosphere of collegial intimacy as well as serious intellectual exchange, we created something we both wanted and needed.

Organizing and Sustaining the Meeting

Planning and facilitating this workshop-conference required coordination within and between linguistic anthropology students and faculty at UCSD and the UA. Early on, we recognized the importance of building organizational memory around the event and laid groundwork for it to continue as the three of us moved into new stages of our own training and became less directly involved. We aimed for long-term sustainability, looking to examples such as the Michicagone Graduate Student Conference in Linguistic Anthropology and the CLIC/LISO Conferences (Center for Language, Interaction, and Culture at University of California, Los Angeles and the Language, Interaction, and Social Organization unit at University of California, Santa Barbara). And for its duration, Sandrizona provided a unique opportunity for supporting the regional vibrancy of linguistic anthropology in the midst of institutional flux. (At the UA alone, for example, faculty retirements and relocations, along with university-wide policy changes in hiring practices, have resulted in a smaller overall program, even as the joint PhD program in Anthropology and Linguistics (ANLI) contin-
ues to attract students interested in a variety of linguistic anthropological projects.)

Organizational Nuts ‘n’ Bolts

In an effort to provide continuity with our intentions, we developed a balanced approach to organizational responsibilities between the host institutions. We decided that the initial Sandrizona would be hosted by UCSD, and the second would be hosted by the UA. In this way, we brought “the desert to the ocean” and “the ocean to the desert,” as our motto went, with each subsequent year. No single institution would host two meetings in a row.

To host Sandrizona, a committee of students undertook a series of coordinated tasks. These milestone responsibilities allowed for the further development of graduate student training, along both professional and academic trajectories. At minimum, hosting meant: securing funding, inviting a keynote speaker from the sister program, organizing a call for papers from students, composing and coordinating an abstract submission review committee, securing a venue that would provide adequate space and technology, providing or facilitating housing for the visiting presenters, facilitating housing and transportation for the visiting keynote speaker, producing a conference program, producing and distributing Sandrizona advertisement flyers online and around campus, and coordinating the speakers and events during Sandrizona. Throughout this process the organizing committee also needed to remain in contact with the sister institution’s students, the faculty members at the host institution, and build and maintain commitment and excitement for the event.

The timing of our gatherings turned out to be of special consideration since UCSD observes a quarter system and the UA is on a semester schedule. Most Sandrizonas fell on or around the three-day President’s Day weekend in mid-February, which coincided for the UA and UCSD. In addition, organizers had to factor in travel time between La Jolla and Tucson,
Figure 1. Participants at Sandrizona 2009, featuring keynote faculty Rupert Stasch (center), gathered in the UA School of Anthropology Grad Commons to hear presentations.

Figure 2. Sandrizona 2011 participants included (L to R), first row: Priscilla Shin, Haleema Welji, Jessica Nelson, Melanie McComsey, Sara Goico, and Ashley Stinnett; second row: Bryan Gordon, Shane McClain, Charles Norton, Candler Hallman, and keynote faculty John Haviland.
Figure 3. John Haviland chats with Li Xiaoting during Sandrizona 2010, while Ashley Stinnett and Elizabeth Peacock consult in the background.

Figure 4. Sandrizona 2017 participants included (L to R), front row: Rachel Bristol, Maisa Taha, Elizabeth Peacock, Mary-Caitlyn Valentinsson, Ashley Stinnett, Haleema Welji, and Jessica Nelson; back row: Taciana Pontes, Tom-Ze Da Silva, Rachel Hicks, Jessica Ray, Kevan Joe, Maya Klein, Bill Cotter, Qing Zhang, Elizabeth Kickham, and Aaron Graybill.
as well as time zone differences due to Daylight Savings Time to allow visiting students to make the six-hour trek by car caravan.

As the majority of event coordination in the first years was cumbersome, we developed a packet of information and instructions that eventually morphed into a Sandrizona-wiki page that could be maintained online and passed down to future Sandrizona coordinators. From a blog page created during Sandrizona’s first year, we also made a dedicated Facebook page to share news of upcoming meetings and help sustain connections among participants. While the transmission of these archives was most successful within each institution, rather than between them, this attention to long-term organizational details helped maintain the conference and reduced the overall burden on future students. This in turn helped the continuation of Sandrizona for eight years.

Faculty Involvement

From the beginning, UCSD and UA faculty were enthusiastic supporters of these efforts and facilitated academic collegiality and engagement through this event. Over the years, they made contributions by attending sessions throughout the conference. Even after retirement from the UA, for example, Professors Susan Philips and Jane Hill came to hear student and keynote presentations. Professors Kathryn Woolard and John Haviland spent entire days in the UCSD linguistic anthropology lab during Sandrizona weekends, offering feedback and asking key questions of presenters. In addition, the keynote faculty “swap” between institutions created an opportunity for students to hear from and interact with leaders in the study of language and culture whom they might not otherwise have had a chance to meet.

Faculty involvement was crucial to Sandrizona’s continued operations in other ways, as well. Faculty at UA sponsored internal funding requests and attended presentation practice sessions to offer feedback before students travelled to the host campus. They also opened their homes for pot-
luck dinner receptions as it became clear that rising costs and falling funding levels made it more difficult to arrange a conference meal out on the town. In contrast, faculty at UCSD secured departmental support, offered to transport and house visiting keynote faculty, and often invited former student presenters to give extended presentations in the lab, as a culmination of their graduate school study.

Reflections and Challenges

Differing enrollments across the two institutions presented a challenge to sustainability. At the UA, students from the School of Anthropology as well as ANLI were central to Sandrizona’s organization. With planning committees of seven to ten people annually, team members divvied up grant writing, housing arrangements, or catering options and budget management. Hosts held planning meetings a year in advance along with regular check-ins as event dates drew near. With only two or three students available to organize the meeting at UCSD, tasks unfolded in a more ad hoc fashion but also involved greater time and effort from each individual. UCSD organizers also reported struggling from time to time to recruit participants. Oftentimes, other UCSD anthropology graduate students were hesitant to participate, thinking that their research was not “linguistic enough” for Sandrizona. Graduate students from other departments with a focus on language—such as communication studies, linguistics, and cognitive science—were recruited from time to time, but often found the anthropological perspective a bit too unfamiliar to them. In short, interdisciplinary participation was a key goal for those at UCSD from the start, but a goal that was not reflected more widely on campus. And in 2016, UCSD students made a strategic decision not to hold the event due to the time commitment involved and the challenge of having very few people managing all of the conference logistics. Instead, those attending the AAA meetings—a subset of potential Sandrizona-goers—opted to meet informally there. Over the years, organizers at both institutions increasingly promoted wider participation, accept-
ing presentations by both graduate and advanced undergraduate students doing a variety of language oriented research, with UA students drawing in participants from linguistics, American Indian studies, education, and modern languages; and UCSD students successfully recruiting peers from the sub-fields of cultural and psychological anthropology.

Such challenges are part and parcel of organizing this kind of forum. The potential benefit of Sandrizona in terms of connections and experience had to be balanced against the reality of graduate students’ contributing their labor in the midst of scholarship and teaching responsibilities. It may also be that, as the academic job market grows more competitive, it behooves students to set their sights on prominent regional, national, and international presentation venues in order to nurture professional networks beyond their own campuses. At the same time, organizing a workshop-conference as a graduate student is a valuable experience that echoes the type of service work prized at four-year comprehensive universities and potentially setting candidates apart on the job market.

In light of these complexities, it is also worth acknowledging that Sandrizona was founded in a kind of practical idealism. We felt that creating an intentionally supportive space for examining our own and others’ work would not only nurture our professional development, but also create a sense of disciplinary community. For this reason, we created gift-giving rituals in which the visiting cohort would present their hosts with memorabilia from the partner university. We stayed on each other’s couches or stretched out on hosts’ floors in sleeping bags. We talked for hours during meals, happy hours, and in the car on trips between Midtown Tucson and La Jolla. We strengthened connections both between and within our programs while testing our growing mettle as scholarly practitioners.

The importance of this dual commitment is borne out in the comments of several past participants who were consulted for this essay. They emphasized the open collegiality of the meetings and the opportunity to work through emerging analyses. One remarked that, as a new graduate student, he
had appreciated seeing “people at all stages of their careers participating in organizing and giving talks” and that it gave him the chance “to see that this thing called grad school was something that we could all do, and that Sandrizona was a space where we could come together with those half-formed ideas and work them out, supporting each other with useful feedback, and encouraging each other to keep going.” Another, who went on to serve on the Sandrizona organizing committee in subsequent years, noted that she especially liked “how much autonomy grad students had over the planning and direction of the gatherings.” She said she felt inspired “to […] be a part of building up that kind of intellectual community.” A third noted that, through Sandrizona, she found a group of colleagues that she continues to depend on.

Still, where we aimed for process-oriented intellectual exchange, we may have erred in favor of informality. As one past participant and organizer explained, he benefitted from the intimate two-way exchange regarding his work and learned a lot from running the meeting itself, but he also “felt that the conceptualization of Sandrizona opened up a moral hazard—that intimate and informal meant less effort and rigor.” Another noted that as she moved toward the final stages of her degree, she found it harder to get critical feedback from Sandrizona meetings. Such observations illuminate a need to be addressed in any future similar efforts. What we sacrificed in the tightness of the 15-minute conference presentation (with its inevitably-too-short discussion) we might have regained by establishing the means for deeper debate: circulating conference papers among participants ahead of time or organizing a discussion focusing on a handful of key readings or emerging trends in linguistic anthropology.

In the end, given the flexibility of Sandrizona’s premise, outcomes were reliant upon its changing constituency who, as part of their respective programs, shaped what was possible and what conversations unfolded. This, in itself, is an apt reflection of our field and profession. How we contribute within the contextual affordances and limitations of our institutions and professional societies (such as the AAA, Society
for Linguistic Anthropology, or Linguistic Society of America) marks our scholarly contribution as part of a larger picture of inquiry and discovery. Indeed, the changing themes and emphases of Sandrizona meetings over the years have pointed to the continuing evolution of linguistic anthropological interests.

Concluding Remarks: The Evolving Conversation

Such breadth of conversation speaks to the multidisciplinary relevance of linguistic anthropological knowledge. The broadly constructivist approach used in linguistic anthropological analyses, grounded in detailed ethnographic methodologies including audio and video documentation, make possible a nuanced understanding of how language acts as a dynamic matrix for thought and action, material experience, and the shaping of everyday human struggles and resiliency. Increasingly, this means using academic knowledge to propel real change in the world—and this was something we saw reflected in the presentations for the tenth Sandrizona meeting, hosted at the UA in February 2017. As invited keynote speakers returning to the meeting for the first time in several years, we were also audience to a vibrant and varied line-up of student research that spanned analytic approaches and theoretical frameworks but placed social change and community engagement at the center of their agendas. We took that opportunity to reflect on the evolution of our own thinking and training in linguistic anthropology, and we do so now by way of ending this essay and sharing how our involvement with Sandrizona—as graduate students and now as tenure-track faculty—inform our growing perspectives on our field.

First, the efforts of Sandrizona scholars to connect with others beyond our fields remains an important goal for linguistic anthropologists. And it remains a difficulty, as interdisciplinary engagement cannot be a one-way street: all parties must recognize the value of the other. As linguistic anthropologists, this means that we must reach out to others who are open to listening to our voices, neither speaking into the
echo chamber nor towards the brick wall of those who refuse to listen. In terms of scholarship, this means reaching out to others in similarly marginalized fields, reaching out to those at one’s own institutions, and engaging in collaborative research earlier and more frequently. It is increasingly important for us to publish in interdisciplinary journals and in journals outside of anthropology and linguistics, as well as to seek feedback from scholars outside of our field.

In terms of teaching, we can bring linguistic anthropology “to the masses” by developing general education courses that draw upon linguistic anthropology but are designed for undergraduates with no prior experience in the field. Furthermore, making connections with faculty from other majors and programs can help us better communicate the value of what we do to students beyond anthropology and linguistics. This may involve cross-listing courses with other departments, or having them approved as electives in programs beyond our home departments.

And in terms of service, our involvement with Sandrizona was training ground for contributing to our home departments, institutions, and wider academic organizations by promoting interdisciplinarity. Because language, and the politics of its everyday use, are fundamental to meaning making across human experience, bringing this insight to the fore through scholarly service, as well as service to communities, can also help bridge the gap between academics and non-academics. Sandrizona presentations over the years have modeled keen attention to the social impacts of linguistic practices. These are findings that can sensitize communities to the multi-dimensional struggles and triumphs of different groups. We therefore encourage scholars to seek ways to share their work with communities, such as through public library or museum programs.

Indeed, there seems to be increasing interest—by the undergraduates we teach, by the agencies that fund us, and especially by those of us working on social justice issues—in engaging with the communities we study at a deeper level, in order to develop concrete solutions to the problems they face.
We have seen some of this with the creation of the Committee on Language and Social Justice by the Society for Linguistic Anthropology. Thus far, the Committee has sought to replace the use of “illegal” to refer to migrants in the media, to refocus discourses of “language gaps” among disadvantaged children to highlight wider structural inequalities, and to denounce the use of racist mascots by sports teams.

Importantly, the last Sandrizona meeting illustrated the increased visibility of “insider” researchers, those who come from and work closely with the communities they research. Anthropology has always been saddled by its colonial roots, and many programs struggle to recruit and retain students and faculty of color. It is commendable that Sandrizona featured such scholars in 2017. However, we can do more. For example, when seeking submissions for conferences, we need to remember to also send calls to graduate student organizations that are not discipline specific, and personally encourage individuals to participate who might not take the risk on their own from a wide array of communities and scholarship backgrounds. Just as we are open to a variety of methods in researching language issues, we also need to allow for a variety of styles in presenting findings and results.

Lastly, we recognize that the practical skills learned in hosting and participating in Sandrizona become more relevant as students progress through the academy. While we acknowledged above that the burden of hosting Sandrizona can be overwhelming and disproportionate among individuals and institutions, we also suggest that these ‘soft’ skills are critical in the formation of active scholarship. Being able to negotiate and attend to a multiplicity of needs across a group of individuals is a critical professional skill. Organizing schedules, working with granting agencies and staff to provide funding, communicating goals, and creating an environment where people are able, willing, and feel welcome to contribute are essential to the task of the professorate. With Sandrizona we tried to facilitate this professionalization within a flexible and supportive community.
References

Appendix

List of Sandrizona keynote speakers and titles by year and venue:


Spring 2010, UCSD: Jennifer Roth Gordon, “Race, Order, and Progress: Linguistic Encounters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil”

Spring 2011, UA: John Haviland, “Metaspace and Metaiconicity in an Emerging Sign Language”

Spring 2012, UCSD: Qing Zhang, “Warring Standards: Contestation over indexical order in Cosmopolitan Mandarin”

Spring 2013, UA: Esra Ozyurek, “Being German, Becoming Muslim: Religious Conversion, Islamophobia, and Belonging in Germany”

Spring 2014, UCSD: Susan Philips, “Scale and Scaling in the Tongan Court Hierarchy”

Spring 2017, UA, Co-founders Panel:
Maisa Taha, “Reflections on a Training in Linguistic Anthropology”
Ashley Stinnett, “Crosslingpology: Applying linguistic anthropology across disciplines and subfields”
Elizabeth Peacock, “Linguistic Anthropology at a Teaching College”
The First Whale of the Year: Reflections on learning to whale, and learning to write about whaling, in the Savu Sea

Florence Durney
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Background

This “Note from the Field” is a self-reflexive exploration of both experiencing, and writing about, traditional whale hunting in Indonesia. For the past year I have been working in Lamalera, a village on the southern side of the island of Lembata, which sits near the end of the chain of islands that make up the province of East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Lamalera is famous for being the last adat or traditional whaling village in Indonesia, though they also hunt other large marine prey including dolphins, porpoises, manta rays, as well as flying fish and various coral species. It is how Lamalerans hunt—jumping with harpoons onto the backs of their prey from sail boats called tena—that has captured the attention and romantic imagination of photographers, reporters, and TV crews from Indonesia and around the world in recent years. The iconic photograph of an elegant body launched mid-air over the sleek back of a surfacing sperm whale shows up in magazines, at the regional airport, and on t-shirts in roadside stands in the island’s main town.

Lamaleran’s have struggled with their recent notoriety. While it has increased the flow of tourism here, it also increased the attention of conservation NGOs and the state. Commercial whaling was banned in Indonesia in the 1980’s and exploitation of all cetacean and manta species was recently banned by the current Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF). Efforts by the MMAF, in concert with various marine conservation NGOs, to convince Lamalerans to switch from whale hunting to whale watching tourism have been refused.
by the community at different junctures since 2009. The national government is wary of garnering negative international attention for whaling and is also concerned about the population levels of mantas in the region, as two species have already been listed as endangered. These logics, however, fail to appreciate the centrality of hunting to Lamalerans’ cosmology, identity, and economy. Furthermore, they expose a rift between the national identity that the state is still working on stitching together and the staggering cultural diversity represented in its more than 17,500 islands. As I am often told there, “Lamalera was here long before Indonesia existed.”

In local cosmology, marine prey is categorized as rejeki or blessings that have been sent to the community by their ancestors to nourish the current generation. Refusing this gift would be sacrilege to a group people that still actively worships their forbearers. This represents a type of foundational cosmological difference between Lamalerans and Western fisheries science, but it is not the only reason for Lamalerans’ inability to comply with various conservation efforts. Much of life in Lamalera is conceptually organized around hunting. All residents belong to clans, and each clan cooperatively operates a hunting boat, which is in turn tied to a clan house and a yearly calendar of rituals. When the boats come back from a hunt, animals are parted out through a complex and centuries-old system based on which boats successfully caught the animal and the clan relationships between the people in each of the boats. Traditionally, gender roles have been defined through this work as well: it is the responsibility of men to go to sea, but it is the responsibility of women to prepare and cure the meat and barter the meat for fruit, vegetables, and rice at weekly open air markets with women from mountain farming villages. This barter system, in turn, connects Lamalera to the rest of the island.

Lamalera, like many other rural places in Indonesia that still maintain strong adat traditions, is also struggling with how much modernisasi or modernization they want to allow in their village, and how to control its flow. While it is a much larger identity issue tied to technology, schooling, out-migra-
tion, and the money economy, this struggle has manifested most symbolically in an inter-generational conflict about how much hunters use outboard motors verses paddles and sails. Outboard motors have been forbidden on the traditional harpoon boats, or *tena*. In the last few years, however, the current generation of fishers have started to tow the tena out to meet the whales using smaller boats outfitted with 15 hp Yahama outboards during hunts. These outboards were given to villagers as part of a rural development aid program from the central government. Older generations, and many of the people no longer active in the fishery (those who have attained government jobs or moved away to work in cities on bigger islands) disagree with this use of the outboards and have called for a return to “the old ways.” This inter-village conflict has in turn come to intersect with conservation conflicts, because the use of motors endangers Lamalera’s “traditional” hunter status, which may serve as some protection against government regulation. The iconic nature of this “story” has also captured international media attention, deepening the fissures and raising the stakes of the conflict within the community, as the narrative is repeated in news articles, TV specials, and photo essays.

Hunting in Lamalera is divided into two types based on season: 1) hunts that occur during the *musim lefa* which begins in May and ends in October and represents the bulk of fishing activity where boats go out and actively hunt a variety of marine prey, and 2) the *Baleo* hunts, which are opportunistic hunts that happen only if a sperm or orca whale is spotted off the coast. The following description comes from a *Baleo* hunt in March of this year, the first successful hunt of the year.

### The Baleo

The call comes at about 9:00 a.m., in the middle of an interview with Mr. Marno, the boat maker and his son, Jon, about traditional rope making rituals. Now that they are done with the boat that they have been building since January, Jon is intermittently working on his motorcycle and adding to the conversation.
Mid-thought, Jon’s whole body suddenly perks up like he’s been electrified, and Marno and I look over. “There’s a Baleo,” he says, raising a finger to alert us to the sounding, and then he begins to repeat the call himself. “Baleooooo, Bale-Baleooooo.” Marno picks up the call, and then the men in yards of the houses around us, the sound rising and echoing throughout the village. I stop the tape and move to get out of the way and pack up. Jon, now in the middle of running around to get ready, looks at me and says, “Flo, do you want to come with us in the tow boat? “Yes!” I practically shout at him (I’ve been waiting for this day for months). “Meet us at the boathouse then,” he says.

I trot home, passing men walking quickly or jogging towards the beach. At home, I frantically grab a big t-shirt and fill up a water bottle, and then run out the door. I tell Mama Thersea (the mother of the house where I live) that I’m headed out for the Baleo. She looks at my small bag with motherly suspicion, asking if I packed any food. I admit that I haven’t, and she scolds me soundly, sending me off with a handle of bananas. I pass my neighbor Mama Ani on the way down to the beach, and she laughs in delight seeing my little sacks and my running, knowing that I’m going to go on the hunt. “Did you bring long sleeves?” she calls after me, and I lie, pointing to my bag with the big t-shirt. I will seriously rue this moment later when I am sunburnt within an inch of my life.

The beach is busy with bodies running back and forth, men, women, and children gathering to launch the boats. I find Jon and his family at their boathouse, and we start dragging the tow boat, called a bodi, down the beach into the surf. We’re one of the first to launch. It’s Jon, two crewmen (a young boy and an older man), and me. Jon mans the motor, while the other two sit in front to bail and manage the ropes. Jon keeps us in position as we watch our terna team come together and launch. Some bodi launch after us, others come streaming back in at top speed from the horizon, having been out porpoise hunting. Ten terna eventually launch with their accompanying tow boats. We end up in the middle of the group as we hook up to our terna, the Starfish. Jon’s brother Peter is the Lamafa, or chief
harpooner for our *tena*. From the launch forward he’s perched on a bamboo harpoon platform that extends from the front of the boat. Each time I turn around to check our tow-line, it is his bearded and fiercely concentrating face that I see, frowning at the horizon. The boats head out at full throttle, and we travel southeast, past the bay to the other side and towards the tip of the island. It takes about two hours, the boats traveling diagonally with the current. The men start actively scanning about an hour into our trip. Peter stands on his platform and holds his left hand flat up to his face at eye-level. His right hand comes up to make a right angle with the bottom of the left hand. This blocks out glare from the sun and makes a flat horizon so that he can focus on the smallest signs of surfacing or spouting, blocking out all other visual noise from the rolling horizon.

As we travel, we spread out so the farthest boats are barely visible on the horizon, others off to the sides are closer in. At two hours, we cut the engines and stop to scan. Suddenly, our rope manager sees a sign, and we are off to the east. For me, every dark spot on the waves looks the same, but he’s seeing something for us to follow. Nearby boats follow our movement. A few minutes, later my inexperienced eyes finally see the sleek and bumpy grey back of a sperm whale break the surface. At first, I only see the stumpy dorsal but then a bigger section of the whale’s back. It moves with that ponderous grace of all large mammals. This makes it look slow, but we’re traveling at top speed to try to catch up with it. Right then, the sighting feels like the most exciting moment of my life, and I let out a sort of throttled squeak of joy. The men around me only murmur but all strain forward, tense with anticipation. We follow along, gaining on it slowly. I look back, and Peter has his spear at the ready and is now crouched on his platform. The whale changes direction northward and we follow, getting close. About 20 yards away we let off the lines for our *tena*. Another tow boat comes in from above and drops off its *tena*, the two boats coming to meet, in motion, on top of the whale. The men in both *tena* are rowing madly to keep the boats in motion. The men in my boat and others bellow “*FULE, BAPA,*
“FULE!” (Pull, men, Pull!). Both Peter and the other *Lamafa* are poised to jump, but it is the other man that is in a better position. He jumps off, but it’s not an elegant leap—more like a pole vault, his body hiked up to bring the most weight down on the harpoon point. The pole comes off the harpoon, and it takes a moment to see if it made contact. Other boats come into position, or try to, their *tena* crew yelling back if they think their tow boats are positioning them incorrectly for entrance. The boat that has now harpooned the whale starts to be pulled around as the whale sounds and moves southward below us. It picks up speed, and the men onboard pull like crazy on their rope as they are being hauled along, in order to bring in the slack line and hitch themselves closer. We hook up with our *tena* again, and we’re off on the eastern side, chasing, looking at the tilt of the boat being pulled and then the whale itself, which is surfacing often now to breathe because it’s wounded and swimming at top speed. We chase, all boats trying to come into position a second time for a harpooning.

Men start to shout and gesture like crazy for a moment because a second whale has arrived. “*Temannya ikut!*” exclaims Jon, tapping my shoulder (“Its friend has come!”). Some boats peel off and try for the second whale, which is now heading northwest. I see my neighbor, Markus, is second man up on his *tena*, standing behind his *Lamafa* who jumps for the whale, but misses, Markus shouting at top of his lungs at the crew when the miss becomes apparent. We let go of our *tena* again for a second try on the first whale, which has surfaced again to the southeast, but the position is wrong, and we circle the *bodi* back around. Jon, who is standing up to steer now grabs my shoulder to show me that the harpoon boat attached to the first whale has capsized, the crew now in the water holding on to the boat or various pieces of paddle or sail. They’ve let go of the harpoon line in order not to lose a man or the boat, so we all pick up our *tena* and spread out again looking for signs of either whale, leaving the capsized *tena* to be righted by its *bodi*.

We motor in a wide loop, looking for signs in the water and looking at the behavior of the other boats. We see the second whale again through its spouting and chase it east and
north, only to lose it again. We head back south towards the open ocean, the men starting to get antsy. Though there is no discussion, at some point I think that they give up and start back in the direction of home. About 15 minutes further north and towards the island, we see promising activity in another boat and we’re off again at full throttle, following. This time the *bodi* and *tena* come in from all different directions. We watch as another boat again gets the first harpoon and then chases this hope, this time north and east. We keep pace for a bit, gradually gaining on the whale, which they tell me is the second one. On all the *tena* around us the *Lamafa* are beginning to enter their crouched position again, harpoons at the ready. We’re well positioned with a few other boats on either side when we let go of our *tena*. Another *Lamafa* in the *Lucky Wind* jumps to harpoon a second time, his crew and others again shouting “*Fuuuuuuule!*” as they row. The whale changes direction westward, but the *tena* are encircling it now. They end up clumped up on top of the whale, and a third and fourth *Lamafa* jump and harpoon, including our *Lamafa*, Peter. More boats come, and at least five boats get so close that they are banging up against each other with the whale under and between them before drifting apart again. A number of *Lamafa* now jump to harpoon from this cluster.

The whale turns over and over in the water trying to rid itself of the harpoons and attached ropes but gets more tangled each time. It wriggles around so it can smack its giant tail, first in the water creating big splashes, and then against the boats themselves, the crews throwing themselves out of the way of the edge of the boat where the tail is making contact, splintering bamboo poles and the top rails on the boat. Eventually, the whale gives up fighting so hard. In accordance with their right, the first *tena* to harpoon brings the whale alongside the boat and men from other *tena* jump on board to help. One man climbs down to stand on top of the whale itself once they have started to secure it to the side of the boat. He makes a deep cut to the base of the whale’s skull so that it will bleed out and end the process quickly.
The water around the boats, a bit pink before, starts to turn red now. In this moment, my mind is pulled away from our current activity, and I can’t help but think back to the conversations that I have had with so many people here about how the images of blood in the water that have brought Lamalerans so much worry. “People from the city, people from the West, they see these pictures with the blood, and they think we’re savages,” a friend explained once. I hear versions of this story over and over. It’s a strikingly beautiful color, brilliant red in the midst of this dark turquoise water, and yet I find myself wishing for their sakes that whales’ blood ran clear.

It takes another hour at least for the whale to be secured and for the boats to get their ropes and harpoons sorted out. The bodis sit outside the cluster of tena, motors idling. Jon realizes we’re low on gas and taps our extra tank, asking me to hold the pipe in the inlet tank and check the flow. I feel ridiculously gratified to be given even this smallest task. While we’re waiting, Jon reaches for a cigarette, pushing out a sigh of relief with his first drag. Our bailer explains to me that the men in the tena cannot smoke, drink, or eat after the whale has been harpooned but before it has died. It wouldn’t be respectful. At first, I think he is talking about the rules for all boats and fall all over myself to apologize because I’ve been drinking water all through the day, but he quickly clarifies: “Just the men in the tena are forbidden, not us in the bodis, Flo.”

We wait a bit longer and then head back to the tena with the whale. Peter, our Lamafa, has been helping there to secure the whale, and we pick him up to bring him back to our tena. Peter sort of cannon balls himself into the water with open arms, making a giant splash that flings water all over us. I think he does it on purpose, and I laugh in surprise. No one else laughs or yells at him though, and I realize to my immediate chagrin that he jumped that way on purpose, his hands full of a long knife and a harpoon, to avoid cutting himself or losing the tools. Feeling like a green idiot, I hand him two bananas to make up for my gaffe, which he gratefully wolfs down. We bring him over to our tena where he repeats the giant splash. This time I do not laugh.
It seems like we’re set to go, but it takes us almost another hour to leave. First because the blood in the water has attracted a shark that another boat captures, and secondly because, according to tradition, we need to execute the complex maneuver of tying all the boats together in a single file line: first all the bodis, then the tena, with the tena that first harpooned (and now carries) the whale making the triumphant caboose. This operation requires much gesticulation, passing of ropes, and some swimming (a risky maneuver now with this much blood in the water because it draws sharks). With this completed, we all slowly begin the trek homeward, engines chugging at half speed. I take out my phone and realize it is 4:00 p.m., and we’ve been out all day. We are far enough east and south that it takes us about four hours to travel home, this time fighting the current. The boat in front of us calls for cigarettes as they’ve run out. They send along a little closeable Styrofoam container on a rope into which we stick a few cigarettes and then toss back over. We mostly sleep, Jon dozing and steering at the same time.

The sun sets over our bow, its ridiculously pink light casting a rosy glow over our procession and making us into a living, breathing postcard. Once it’s dark, we watch as the lights come on in the towns on the island, and the crew point out the various towns to me based on their position and light pattern. Our crewman starts to bail again, and, as the water hits the surface of the ocean, sparkles light up the dark glassiness like tiny stars. Bioluminescence, or menyala (“lights”) Jon says, laughing as I scramble around the boat to watch with a wondrous grin splitting my face. He points behind us to our wake, which is indeed sparkling. I stick my hand over the side and twirl it around in the water, each movement of my fingers reflected in sparkles a moment later. I feel filled with pure, child-like joy at the sheer beauty of it. I look up and see the stars above, a bit hazy from cloud cover but still visible, and think of the stars now below in the water. I picture our line of boats skating along home in between these two layers of stars, and I feel such an overwhelming sense of connection, for these
bodies, to this sea, and this place that I have to mentally smack myself for such romanticism.

As we come up to our familiar coast, people are shining flashlights along the cliffs. When we come around the point to our little inlet, flashlights and torches light up the beach, the families of the crews waiting to bring us all in. Voices are laughing and hollering with excitement in the dark as people run back and forth and bring the first boats in. We cut the motor, pull in over the reef, and hit the beach. Timed with the waves, the boat is pushed up the beach by about twenty men arrayed along the sides and pulled from the top with a rope towed by a group of about ten wives, children, and grandparents. “Ja Ho!” is the call for pushing/pulling, after someone counts off one, two. Once the boats are pulled into shelter, I meet up with Marno, who asks how it went. I tell him it may have been the best day of my life. He smiles and accepts that this is as it should be. With our boat secured he tells me to go home, eat, and rest. Tomorrow morning, we will all get up before the sun to start the hard work of cutting up and sharing out the whale according to adat law. I walk slowly home, tired, burnt, and creaking with salt, but happy. I climb the stairs to my house, to find a group gathered on the porch. They all gasp and chuckle at my crusty state. “Theresa,” I call on my way to the bath, “man, was I glad for those bananas.”
At the end of May 2015, I boarded a plane from London bound for Amman. I had just spent a couple of weeks in the United Kingdom at my Master’s alma mater with colleagues, preparing to go to the field while getting over the Tucson to London jet lag. By the end of two weeks in the U.K., I was ready to get on the ground in Jordan and start my summer of fieldwork. It seemed like the plane had barely hit the tarmac before I found myself being hurried into a car by the cousin of a colleague, along with at least one person that I didn’t know at all, and soon we were all barreling north from the capital towards Jerash.

I was going to Jerash in order to try to conduct pilot interviews with Palestinian refugees living in what is known locally as “Gaza Camp,” a United Nations refugee camp established after the Six Day War of 1967 to house refugees fleeing fighting in the Gaza Strip. As I’ve discussed elsewhere (Cotter 2016), the name of the camp is somewhat misleading, given that the refugees in question are almost uniformly not from Gaza but had been living in Gaza as refugees following the forced migration of Palestinians out of historic Palestine in 1948. Many of Gaza Camp’s residents are thus doubly refugees. They represent not only the enduring legacy of the Palestinian refugee crisis, which long stood as the largest refugee community in the world,¹ but reflect the all-too-common and incredibly complex sociopolitical and demographic reality that the Palestinian community faces nearly seven decades after the creation of the state of Israel.

Weaved into this broader summer project of attempting to spend time with members of this community to better

¹ As a result of the Syrian Civil War, the Syrian refugee crisis has now surpassed the Palestinian refugee community in terms of its size.

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understand their lives, their history, and for me, as a linguistic anthropologist, their language, were a number of experiences that stick out in my mind as defining what that field experience was like and how I reflect on it two years after the fact. One of these experiences frames what I present below and represents an amalgamation of my field notes from the summer of 2015, experiences culled from my social media feeds and my admittedly imperfect memories about the day and event in question.

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I woke up on June 13th to a phone call, which I admittedly wanted to ignore. The call was from Ahmad, a friend and local PhD student who had been helping me conduct my research near Jerash. For much of my time in Jordan in 2015, I had been unbelievably depressed. In speaking with colleagues, depression seems to be a fairly common fixture of at least some portion of many field experiences, and it’s very much a core experience for me anytime I go to the field. As a result, I had been sleeping until early afternoon most days of the week and if I didn’t have anything planned, my days were often spent re-watching bootleg copies of Tremors over and over on my laptop or writing at the plastic table in the middle of my studio apartment.

Trying to force myself to wake up as I answered my phone, Ahmad asked me if I was interested in hanging out but said that he wanted to do something else aside from doing interviews. I put aside both my depression and my frantic desire to do as many interviews as possible before I had to leave the field at the end of the summer and agreed to take a day off to do something relaxing. At least, I assumed it would be relaxing when Ahmad initially asked me to spend the afternoon with him.

When I got in his SUV outside of my tiny apartment that sat above a gas station along the road to Amman, Ahmad

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2 A pseudonym
3 I’m almost ashamed to admit, but I watched this over twenty times that summer. I counted. Depression manifests in interesting ways.
asked me if I wanted to go to a funeral. I hadn’t been in Jordan long, but in the short time I had been there that summer I already found myself at a funeral earlier that week, that one for a relative of a friend of a friend. That earlier funeral left me somewhat uneasy given that I didn’t know the deceased, and my status as a foreigner certainly made me stick out like a sore thumb among a large group of mourners. Add to that the fact that in my usual, non-fieldwork life, I make a point to avoid funerals as much as possible, even when they’re for people that I know.

So, I assumed that Ahmad was suggesting that we go to the funeral for another friend of a friend or potentially a family member. As I queried Ahmad about who this person was, I quickly realized that he was asking me to attend something completely different. He wanted us to go to the funeral for Tariq Aziz, former Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq and close personal advisor to Saddam Hussein.

The Eight of Spades

I didn’t really feel as if I was in much of a position to say no. However, I did raise the question of how a heavily tattooed American researcher would be received at the funeral for a top Ba’ath Party official. I had certainly heard of Aziz, but my only real recollection of who he was or his role in Saddam’s government stemmed from the Second Iraq War, which I had watched transpire on television and in the newspaper while I was in high school. In particular, I recalled George W. Bush’s statement about Aziz, declaring that he was one of the people in Saddam’s government that was shielding the location of Iraq’s purported weapons of mass destruction. Somewhat hesitantly, but also out of an admitted curiosity, I agreed, and Ahmad sped out of the parking lot of my apartment building.

As we headed towards Amman and from there on to Madaba, the site of Aziz’s final resting place, I dug out my phone to look up who he really was and his role in the regime

that my government had so vehemently despised. Aziz served as Saddam Hussein’s Foreign Minister (1983-1991) and Deputy Prime Minister (1979-2003) and was an important member of Saddam’s inner circle. During the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, Aziz acted as the face of the regime, justifying their actions within the international community. During the Second Iraq War, Aziz was ranked 43 out of 55 on the United States’ list of most wanted Iraqi officials.\(^5\) On the now infamous decks of playing cards that were handed out to American forces in Iraq, Aziz was the eight of spades.

Aziz was a unique figure within Saddam’s regime, in part due to his ethnic and religious background. Born in the northern Iraqi city of Tel Keppe, Aziz was Chaldean Catholic, and one of the only Christians in Saddam’s inner circle. He surrendered to American forces in April 2003 and was subsequently imprisoned. The Iraqi government charged Aziz with the deaths of 42 merchants executed by the regime, as well as planning the forced displacement of Kurds from northern Iraq, although in both cases the extent of his involvement in those crimes was heavily disputed.\(^6,\(^7\)) He was sentenced to death by the Iraqi government; however, his execution order was never signed. Aziz suffered a stroke in 2010 and ultimately passed away in 2015 in a hospital in Nasiriyah at the age of 79. He was to be buried in Jordan, where his son and sisters live.

\textbf{A Ba’ath Party funeral}

As we arrived at the church just outside of Madaba, forty minutes south of Amman, we ran into Ahmad’s friends who had also decided to pay their respects and spend their afternoon attending the funeral of this key Ba’ath Party player. Standing outside of the entrance, I took note of the Bedouins whose tents and land seemed to surround the grounds of the church. The church seemed oddly placed to me, although it had clearly been there for longer than I can really imagine.

\(^5\) http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=79511&page=1
\(^7\) http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11631462
Figure 1. Tariq Aziz playing card. (photo from Christian Science Monitor.)

I initially didn’t bother, but after thirty to forty-five minutes of waiting under a tent to shield us from the blistering summer sun, I inquired as to when the funeral was actually going to take place. That morning, a larger funeral had been held for Aziz at the St. Mary of Nazareth Church in Amman before his body was to eventually be transported to Madaba for his final burial and service that afternoon. As I looked around at the other faces sitting under the tent, I saw what I would eventually be told were family members, Jordanian politicians, and other key members of the Ba‘ath Party. There were also a number of people with no connection whatsoever to Aziz.
They were people like us, who were either curious or simply wanted to pay their respects. We waited, as a long stream of cars continued to pull up, with my friends pointing out prominent people as they made their way into the courtyard of the church. Party members embraced each other, and along with colleagues and friends paid their respects to Aziz’s family. The crowd grew gradually as we all waited for his body to complete its trip from Amman.

After having had enough of the cheap white plastic chairs that filled the area under the tent in the church courtyard, I stood up from my seat, wandering and looking out over the sea of mausoleums and graves surrounding the church. It wasn’t lost on me that I was one of only a few foreigners there, aside from two foreign photojournalists. I was certainly the only American in attendance, which I came to feel quite acutely when chants sprung up denouncing the American invasion of Iraq that ultimately led to Aziz’s capture and imprisonment, America’s seemingly unwavering support of the Israeli government, and the tumultuous relationship between Iraq and Iran.
Even though I shared the general sentiment of much of the rhetoric denouncing America’s role in upending life in Iraq in 2003, being the only American at a Ba’ath Party funeral was a unique and admittedly uncomfortable experience.

Despite my discomfort, my identity as an American either didn’t wear as plainly on my sleeve as I assumed it did, or, perhaps more likely, no one at the funeral really cared. There were simply far more important things going on that day. We sat in the courtyard, making the polite kinds of conversation with those around us that seem emblematic of a funeral service. As the afternoon dragged on, the sound of bagpipes and chanting slowly grew from the direction of the road leading to the church. Aziz’s funeral procession had finally arrived in Madaba.

I stood, looking out towards the road. His casket was flanked on either side with Ba’ath Party supporters carrying the Iraqi flag, along with large framed photos of Aziz and the late Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein. His body moved slowly up the road with the chants growing louder and more pronounced, taking what seemed like an eternity before it even approached the walls of the church grounds. Journalists moved with the procession, snapping photos of Aziz’s casket and his supporters. When the procession made its way into the church courtyard, everyone was standing. I noticed the aging politicians and party members wiping the sweat from their brows as others jockeyed for a good spot from which to photograph or film the casket as it moved through the courtyard. I found myself doing the same thing, pulling out my cell phone to photograph and film the procession as it moved. As I looked around, beyond the journalists covering the funeral both from the ground and from the rooftops of the church buildings, we were all documenting it on some level. Videos and photographs of the event were rapidly making their way onto the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the people who were there, including my own.

In retrospect it’s unsettling to me, having been enculturated into treating funerals as decidedly somber events that I would never think of putting on social media. But looking back
at my Instagram feed, in the moment, I obviously couldn’t help myself and neither could anyone else. Maybe we were all motivated because of who it was, his importance to the Ba’ath Party, to Arab nationalism, his status as a prominent Christian, or his legacy of anti-imperialist views. Or maybe we all just wanted to show that we were there. Thinking about my own motivation, I suspect the latter.

The procession eventually made its way into the maze of mausoleums and gravesites that surrounded the church itself. Most of the people in the courtyard didn’t follow the body, and the sound from the bagpipes and the chants faded away. The church courtyard seemed to lull back into a dull hum of conversation. People were crying. The politicians and party members shook hands, embracing each other before they began to move towards their cars. It was over, and Aziz had been laid to rest. I wondered aloud to my friends what would happen to the oversized photos of Aziz and Saddam that had been carried with the procession. At the time they struck me as gaudy and cumbersome, but now in retrospect they almost remind me in some ways of the photo memorials that one might see at a Christian funeral in a place like the United States, albeit with notable political overtones. My friends told me they would most likely be left at the site of his grave, and I’m now wondering two years later if they’re still there.

**Conclusion**

Occasionally, I find myself thinking back to that day. I recall telling a Jordanian colleague that I had attended the funeral and she told me that, in her opinion, it was good that I had. Aziz was a long-standing figure. He played a key role in events that defined the face of the modern Middle East and stood beside one of the region’s most well known and polarizing political leaders.

Looking back at my notes, I see nothing on the pages that reflect any political or emotional reaction to being there. I grew up with the War on Terror as a political backdrop to my adult life and although Aziz was a target of my govern-
ment’s metaphorical war, I found myself ambivalent about it from its beginnings. That ambivalence is compounded by the point raised by scholars like Talal Asad (2007, 13) in noting that not only did my government and its allies provide Saddam’s regime with intelligence and weapons, but that we also destroyed it for our own reasons, which ultimately had little to do with the atrocities that the regime carried out.

When I reflect on that funeral, with two years of distance, I’m struck by the enduring inequalities that are inherent to the ways in which liberal democracies like the one I call home conceptualize political violence or “terror.” Asad (2007, 2-3) argued that terrorism and its manifestations, despite being cast as non-modern or non-liberal, are ultimately part of liberal subjectivity. As I entered college during the Second Iraq War, even with my frustration surrounding my government’s actions, the framing of the war cast figures like Aziz as antithetical to who “we” were as Americans. Maybe that’s what drove me to take interest in attending his funeral, that despite my own feelings about what my government has done and continues to do in the Middle East, Aziz encapsulated a lingering representation in my mind of what I had been told I was supposed to stand against.

References

Can the Subaltern Body Speak?
Deconstructing the Racial Figures and Discourses of “Terrorism”

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In the past 15 years, over half of all terrorist attacks have occurred in just five countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Syria (Global Terrorism Index 2016). Despite the geographic specificity of terror attacks and the intimate links between zones of political instability, violence, and conflict to the proliferation of terrorism, widespread panic and anxiety about terrorist attacks have created a narrative of proximity and critical intimacy between “terrorism” and Euro-American spaces. This paper will aim to explore and deconstruct the use that results from this narrative of “terrorism” as a racialized term in American discourse and will interrogate the consequences of associating “terrorism” and “terrorist” with specific understandings of violence and bodies.

As I will show, the understanding of a terrorist as related to “radical Islam” and as a manifestation of “jihad” has become so natural that it has defined the ways in which Americans categorize, publicize, and condemn violence, entrenching new processes of social differentiation rooted in racialized understandings of bodies. In Gayatri Spivak’s important piece, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” she advocates for a methodology that deconstructs the impulse to speak for or listen to the subaltern subject and instead attempts to speak to the subaltern and measure the silences of discourse (Spivak 1988). Spivak asks, “Can the subaltern speak?” In this instance, I want to ask, “can the ‘subaltern body’ speak?” as a way to measure the silence and call forth how ideas about the worth of particular bodies as less valuable than others come to circulate through the ordering of certain violence as “terrorism.” As discourses
of “terrorism” circulate, they teach people to how evaluate the worth of bodies, create ideas of terror that are attached to bodies, and create racialized understanding of moral citizenship, all working to entrench racial hierarchy.

Redefining “Terrorism” in Discourse

Current definitions of the term “terrorism” by government agencies and public policy institutions do not reflect many of its uses in social and media discourse. Today, the FBI (2002-2005) defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.” This definition, however, is not what is applied in popular discourse and is often not what is used to define or make sense of violence. The departure from the legal and state understanding of terrorism and the social use of the term creates a catachresis, re-shaping, re-defining, and re-imagining what counts as terrorism socially and politically.

The (mis)uses of the word “terrorism” in Euro-American discourse today can be traced to a history of racial stereotypes about Arab and Muslim people (see Said 1978) as well as 9/11 and the War on Terror, increasing the proliferation of the term “terrorism” in the media and in daily discourse (Hess and Marvin 2003; Kellner 2004; Rohner and Frey 2007). As one of the most consequential attacks another country has enacted on American soil outside of traditional war, 9/11 deeply called into question the security of the United States both ideologically and in terms of physical borders. In the wake of the gratuitous violence of 9/11, the American people (and people around the world) looked to U.S. leaders to make sense of this violence. The state and technologies, or “tactics,” of the state (Foucault 1982) tell us what acts of violence “are” and dictate the ways in which we first receive information about them; institutions control the content of discourse and are expected to convey the “truth.” If these communications link violent events to terrorism and only certain acts are given this
distinction, then that term will slowly consolidate in meaning, regardless of the empirical or state definition of the crime.

Michel Foucault gives a deeper understanding of how the production of discourse and knowledge relates to “the truth.” Foucault (1977/1980) questions the “authority” of certain types of knowledge, especially the production of discourse. Discourses for Foucault are sites of knowledge. These sites of knowledge are concepts that knowledge producers created and that are widely known as “the truth” (truth and power cannot be separated). These sites of knowledge interact with one another, creating a web of knowledge, which, according to Foucault, is power at work. These knowledge systems are created by institutions (and now with the rise of the internet, by individuals in everyday circumstances), to construct and perpetuate norms (Foucault 1977/1980). Power at work (discourse) is a force of normalization and in this way discourse is a disciplinary force. Discourse regulates how people behave, what they talk about, and how they interact. In post 9/11 contexts, Euro-American technologies of discourse have installed terrorism as distinctly different from other forms of racialized violence, such as gang crimes, many mass shootings, and police brutality, fitting terrorism into already existing ideologies of violence and the racial order.

To explore the consequences of the discourse of terrorism within the distinct context of a post-9/11 world, I will turn to two different spheres of American experiences with terrorism: foreign and domestic. To explore these spheres, I will employ Anne Stoler’s use of philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte’s “interior” and “exterior” frontiers. Stoler says: “As Fichte conceived it, an interior frontier entails two dilemmas: the purity of the community is prone to penetration on its interior and exterior borders, and the essence of the community is an intangible ‘moral attitude,’ ‘a multiplicity of invisible ties’” (Stoler 2002, 80). This conception stresses the idea that a national community is premised upon particular moral ideologies, in this case moral attitudes about violence and what violence means both domestically and globally.
These moral attitudes about violence are part of how we imagine citizenship and race in the U.S. American citizenship has historically been predicated on whiteness and the ability to prove one’s whiteness (Brodkin 1998). As Jennifer Roth-Gordon (2017, 98) argues, “whiteness is always relative, imagined, produced, and insecure” (Roth-Gordon 2017, 98). In the case of racially coding the terrorist’s body in America, we can take this argument to say that citizenship is necessarily insecure because the production of whiteness is imagined and relative. Terrorism here acts as a way to (re)define what whiteness and citizenship means. The meanings of whiteness in the United States currently exclude Muslim bodies, further evidenced by the possibility of introducing “MENA” (Middle Eastern or North African) as a new category on the U.S. Census (Krogstad 2014). One can attain and prove citizenship/whiteness, but this can also be disproved. Roth-Gordon remarks that people “engage in the endless process of reading bodies for racialized signs of civility or disorder in an attempt to keep themselves safe and make sense of the violence” (Roth-Gordon 2017, 60). The U.S. public similarly reads bodies for signs of disorder as a way to order national and moral understandings of violence and citizenship in a post-9/11 world, in this context manifesting in acts like interpreting Arab language or a woman wearing a hijab on an airplane as a threat to safety. Given our racialized understandings of terrorists, U.S. citizens read bodies to “expose” these threats amongst our own citizens.

This reading of bodies is evidenced in virtually every breaking news story and investigation into violent acts later classified as terrorism. A recent example can help illustrate this process. In September 2016, there was a series of bombs set off, two in New Jersey and one in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, New York. No one was killed, but several were injured in the explosions. Originally, Mayor de Blasio and city officials did not deem this a terrorist attack (Workman et al. 2016). Their hesitancy, however, drew criticism from the media and they continually fielded questions from the press
asking if this was a possible act of terror. The New York Times commented:

Mr. de Blasio risked creating a dissonance between the dictionary definition of terrorism — violence with a political motive — and the creeping sense of inevitability that the terror attacks more common elsewhere in the world would find their way to New York. To some, Mr. de Blasio also appeared to conflate terrorism in general — a deadly tactic with many political motives — with terrorism motivated or carried out by the Islamic State and other radical Muslim groups.

Goodman and Craig (2016)

This sentiment is significant in its emphasis that not all terrorism is motivated by a “radical Muslim” body; however, this did not influence the New York Times from reading the suspect’s body for those specific signs of terrorism in a separate article, again calling forth the catachresis between state definitions and sociopolitical discourse. Once a suspect for the bombings was apprehended, his citizenship and whiteness was immediately called into question. The New York Times article detailing the suspect primarily describes him thus: “Mr. Rahami, who previously served time in jail, was born in Afghanistan but is a United States citizen” (Workman et al. 2016). This simultaneously criminalizes him and establishes his descent as something evidencing his predisposition for “terrorism,” nullifying his American citizenship. The article also states:

At this point, little is known of Mr. Rahami’s ideology or politics. He used to wear Western-style clothing, and customers said he gave little indication of his heritage. Around four years ago, though, Mr. Rahami disappeared for a while. Mr. Jones said one of the younger Rahami brothers told him that he had gone to Afghanistan. When he returned, some patrons noticed a certain transformation. He grew a beard and exchanged his typical wardrobe
of T-shirts and sweatpants for traditional Muslim garb. He began to pray in the back of the store.

Kleinfield (2016)

This statement indicates an attempt to make sense of this type of violence through drawing a connection to foreign values and a disavowal of racial citizenship. Stoler remarks, “Racisms have riveted on ambiguous identities—racial, sexual, and otherwise—on anxieties produced precisely because such crafted differences were not clear at all...racisms gain their strategic force...from the internal malleability assigned to the changing features of racial essence” (Stoler 2002, 144). While no clear link to international terrorist groups was found, Mr. Rahami’s acts of violence needed to make sense to the American people. His identity was too ambiguous and therefore produced anxieties about intimacy with this unidentified type of “other.” Shifting the discourse to account for his bodily transformations – prayer in the store, “Muslim garb,” and a beard—allowed this type of violence to be understood through folk racial ideologies. In Stoler’s discussion of Europe’s “new racism” ushered in under colonial rule, she argues that distinctly physiological distinctions of race were replaced with disguised forms of racism, installed in the everyday structures of life (Stoler 2002). This “new racism” has also coded American discourse to hide and naturalize racism in racial codes. American discourses about terrorism in the interior frontier rely on these racial codes, reading bodies for markers of race, working to make associations of particular violent events with terrorism seem given.

While these incidents of “home-grown terrorism” often are made sense of through drawing connections to foreign influences and breaking down racial ambiguity, there are incidents of contradiction. These incidents, however, do not reveal a breakdown in this treatment of terrorism and terrorists; rather, they reveal how entrenched these ideologies of race and terror have become. Dylan Roof is a white man who opened fire on an African American church, killing nine African Americans. He confessed that he did this to incite a race
riot; his “manifesto” detailed his hatred towards black people, remarking that black-on-white crime is the biggest issue facing America (O’Connor 2015). He additionally said that slavery was an exaggerated myth and that segregation existed to protect white people from black people (O’Connor 2015). Despite his clear political motives and espousal of white supremacy, he was charged with a hate crime and murder, not domestic terrorism. Let us revisit the FBI’s own definition of terrorism: “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (FBI 2002-2005). This incident clearly fits this definition and there is overwhelming evidence of his political and social objectives. Yet, white supremacy as terrorism does not fit with the image in which people have been trained to make sense of terrorism. This type of violence cannot make sense within our conceptions of racial citizenship. Rather, 9/11 created a figure of transnational terrorism as distinctly foreign and distinctly Muslim that has come to be synonymous with the definition of terrorism itself.

However, what happens when the government and the American public do finally understand whiteness as compatible with a terrorist? This can be seen in a recent incident in which three white men who were calling themselves “The Crusaders” were arrested on domestic terrorism charges for intent to bomb a housing complex and mosque of predominantly Somali immigrants (Berman et al. 2016). The FBI described the group as, “a militia group whose members support and espouse sovereign citizen, anti-government, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant extremist beliefs” (Beckman 2016). This group is certainly not the first group of white actors to be charged with domestic terrorism, but the image and treatment of terrorism in widespread discourse does not vastly change because of cases like these. In my analysis of over 50 news sources covering this story, only 20% contained the word “terror” or any of its offshoots. Additionally, in the 10 sources that did contain the word, four included the word only once and three others only included mention to terrorism in indexing
the charge of “domestic terrorism” by the FBI. Furthermore, a plot to kill over 120 people with an explicit goal of inciting more violence against Muslims and immigrants was not breaking news on any major national news outlets. This contrasts to similar domestic terrorism cases (like the above in New York City) where the actor(s) are non-white and non-Christian. Again, white supremacy, even as technically classified by the U.S. government as terrorism in the internal frontier (the KKK as one example), does not destabilize a fundamentally racialized view of terrorist as “other”, as non-white, and as not sharing a racialized moral citizenship. In assessing terrorism in the interior frontier, we can see how American popular discourse establishes this moral citizenship in which terrorism must involve certain types of victims (white) and certain types of perpetrators (non-white). This further entrenches a harmful racial hierarchy in which people are trained to conceive of non-white bodies as less valuable, less American, and as always already dangerous. Focusing on these markers of racial citizenship allows people to justify and reaffirm these categories. This shows the level of effort involved in upholding the racial order and the ways we make sense of violence. Here, the “subaltern body” can only speak as a perpetrator of violence.

**Exterior Frontiers**

This sense of racialized morality extends to the exterior frontiers, where non-white bodies are still seen as incompatible with being the victims of terrorism. This is very well evidenced in the vastly different treatment of two similar terror acts happening just one day apart in Beirut, Lebanon and Paris, France in November 2015. In Beirut, two suicide bombers killed over 43 people and wounded over 200 in a neighborhood in Southern Beirut (Levine 2015). The bombs devastated this predominantly Shi’a neighborhood in an open-air market, bustling with families gathering after work (Samaha 2015). The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for the attack. One day later, there was a series of coordinated terror attacks in Paris within populated commercial areas consist-
ing of two suicide bombings and a mass shooting at a concert (Reilly 2015). Over 130 people were killed and over 300 were injured, resulting in a city-wide lockdown. ISIL also claimed responsibility for this attack.

The treatment of these nearly identical terrorist attacks could not have been more different. According to a Google search trend analysis I conducted of the phrases “Paris attack” and “Beirut attack” during the month of November 2015, interest in Paris outnumbered Beirut 100 to 1 at its peak.¹ Search activity correlates with the vast difference in mentions of these two incidents in the media and condemnation of them by world leaders. President Obama issued a statement about the Paris attacks saying, “This is an attack not just on Paris, it’s an attack not just on the people of France, but this is an attack on all of humanity and the universal values that we share” (Reilly 2015). He continued on to say:

Paris itself represents the timeless values of human progress...The American people draw strength from the French people’s commitment to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness. We are reminded in this time of tragedy that the bonds of liberté, égalité, fraternité are not only values that the French people care so deeply about, but are values that we share

Reilly (2015)

This solidarity between America and France is based on shared national values, or evaluations of national morality, entrenched in the principles of liberalism. Uniting with France in condemning this attack with no mention of solidarity with the Lebanese people positions the Paris attack as a terrorist attack on shared national and moral values of humanity founded in “equality” and positions the Beirut attack both as not terrorism and as an attack on those outside of “humanity” and without these “universal values.”

When the President of the United States does not condemn both of these attacks, this signals to the media and to the American people that one of these incidents must be spoken about (meaning it is abnormal) while the other is silenced (normalized). In the instance of Beirut, we must measure this silence: do Muslim bodies matter, too? Can the “subaltern body” speak? The majority of Euro-American discourse does not focus on Beirut because this incident is read as Muslims bombing Muslims. This does not fit into the distinct image of terrorism that American discourse recognizes. Instead of seeing Lebanese civilians murdered by ISIL, people saw an attack by ISIL on Hezbollah or Shi’a Muslims: an act of terrorist against terrorist. For America and France, Beirut was positioned as a space in which terrorism was normalized and expected, whereas in Paris terrorism was something constructed as out of place, as too intimate and too proximate to American values. For Beirut, there were no national monuments lit up in the colors of the Lebanese flag, no way to overlay a Lebanese flag onto a Facebook profile picture, and no way to signal a safety check on social media to loved ones. This disparate treatment of these two similar incidents is both a reflection of the constructed image of a terrorist as non-Euro-American, non-white, and Muslim and also constitutive of a narrative that makes Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent start to internalize their lives as less valuable than white bodies. On the blog “A Separate State of Mind,” Elie Fares writes:

The more horrifying part of the reaction to the Paris terrorist attacks, however, is that some Arabs and Lebanese were more saddened by what was taking place there than what took place yesterday or the day before in their own backyards. Even among my people, there is a sense that we are not as important, that our lives are not as worthy and that, even as little as it may be, we do not deserve to have our dead collectively mourned and prayed for.

Fares (2015)
These incidents of terrorism encountered in the exterior frontier, in foreign spaces, reveal how terrorism begins to make sense to people. Terrorism relies on the manufacturing of “common sense” narratives, positing only certain acts as terror and only certain bodies as worthy of being victims. Terrorism then connotes violence against white bodies in white spaces, perpetrated by brown, “Muslim” bodies of Middle Eastern descent. This example is also revealing of a broader narrative of national morality predicated on racialized citizenship. For France and the United States to “share” values of liberty and equality also poses citizenship in these places as fundamentally at odds not only with the values of terrorists (ISIL and Hezbollah in this case) but also with the values of the Middle East as the places that are seen to produce this terrorism. Racialized citizenship in the United States is shown to value lives aligned with “whiteness” and to devalue and be suspicious of bodies read as Arab or Muslim.

Conclusion

Narratives around terrorism encountered in both the exterior and interior frontiers reproduce the fear of the Muslim other and re-entrench racial hierarchy, silencing and dehumanizing the “subaltern body.” This fear constitutes a narrative of proximity with terrorism in the interior frontier, a critical intimacy with the other, giving way to insecurity and anxiety. To make sense of this, Americans are trained to view this other as fundamentally at odds with American citizenship, leading people to read bodies for signs of terrorism as racial difference.

In a global context of Middle Eastern people falling out of categories of whiteness in the United States and Europe (Krogstag 2014), we can see how the figures and discourses of terrorism work to reimagine and re-entrench racial hierarchy in our society. Furthermore, these discourses train people into particular understandings of which bodies are valuable--especially which dead bodies are valuable. It becomes exceptionally
important to deconstruct the definitions and uses of “terrorism” and “terrorist” in order to denaturalize the body of the terrorist as being only Muslim and non-white and the only victims of terrorism as white or Euro-American. We must measure the silences surrounding the “subaltern body” both in life and in death, opening up spaces to illuminate other injustices and instances of violence that are muted by similar processes of categorization and dehumanization.

References


Ethnoarchaeology Can Be Used for Ecological Conservation Because It Can Detect Shifting Baselines

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Abstract

“Shifting baselines” describes the human difficulty with perceiving long-term change across overly short timeframes. This is due to humans having lifespans that are too short to accurately perceive long-term change, as well as the difficulty of developing continuous perceptions across successive generations. The bigger picture is obscured by focusing on short-term fluctuations. Fortunately, archaeology allows us to gain greater perspective because of its profound time depth, which is especially important because no realistic definition of “sustainability” is possible without time depth. However, trying to apply archaeology to modern “shifting baseline” problems will be of limited use until combined with high-resolution ethnographic methods. While cultural anthropologists and archaeologists have increasingly come to utilize one another’s work for their own purposes, applied fusions of the two are still unpopular. Ethnoarchaeology has great potential for connecting modern ethnographic data with archaeological data because both disciplines can interface across a common data source – physical, preservable artifacts. Additionally, ethnoarchaeology can be used to detect potentially dangerous shifting baselines in modern perceptions of ecosystems health. This paper demonstrates what shifting baselines can look like in an anthropological context through a case study of a subsistence fishing community in northeastern Brazil. Future research directions for fusing ethnoarchaeology and archaeology are suggested for expanding today’s baselines of ecological health.

Here, ethnoarchaeology will take Carol Kramer’s textbook definition as “ethnographic fieldwork carried out with the ex-
press purpose of enhancing archaeological research by documenting aspects of sociocultural behavior likely to leave identifiable residues in the archaeological record” (David & Kramer 2001, 12; emphasis added). However, ethnoarchaeology can not only enhance archaeology—it can also help make archaeology useful to living people. Humans already communicate within and across generations, but ethnoarchaeology can further empower the communication of ecological information from beyond the limits of a single lifetime. In this way, ethnoarchaeology can create standards for sustainability policy, as well as empower communities with an understanding of the environment which they co-create locally. This paper explores how ethnoarchaeology can detect shifting baselines and briefly suggests what would be necessary to create grand ecological baselines using both archaeological and ethnographic data. Due to space limitations, this work will primarily focus on demonstrating what shifting baselines can look like in an anthropological context using a case study concerning subsistence fishing in northeastern Brazil.

What Are Shifting Baselines?

In 1995 Daniel Pauly introduced the concept of “shifting baselines” in fisheries science to describe how perceptions of change across overly short timeframes can give an unrealistic understanding of an ecosystem’s health (Pauly 1995, 430). For example, a scientist or fisherman basing their assessment of a fishery’s health on a few decades of fish stock observation might conclude the population has been relatively stable and therefore healthy. However, a study of the same fishery using data gathered over the past century or more could indicate that the fishery actually experienced a catastrophic population crash before reaching its current “healthy” state. In order to avoid this type of error and gain a holistic perspective of ecosystem health, research must utilize long time series. Because humans live for short time periods relative to multi-decadal or multi-centennial ecological shifts, the shifting baselines phenomenon creates an amnesia in which oral history can fail to
convey a fluid perception of ecological change across generations. However, archaeology and history can help communities overcome generational myopia when it is made relevant to their lives now.

Below, I provide an example of shifting baselines observed in Brazilian subsistence fishing communities. However, mine is only one of several such ethnographic studies (Sáenz-Arroyo et al. 2005, Bender 2013, Papworth et al. 2009). Several historical (Sáenz-Arroyo et al. 2006) and archaeological efforts are also being made to develop longer-term ecological baselines (Carder & Crock 2012), reaching even a 4500-year time stretch (Maschner 2008). In the future, efforts similar to mine and those above would be better at creating additional time depth by interfacing in an interdisciplinary manner, rather than existing in isolation.

**Pilot Data on Subsistence Fishing in Northeastern Brazil**

As part of a pilot study, I conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with subsistence fishermen in the Atins and Queimada dos Britos area in the state of Maranhão of northeastern Brazil over a 30-day period in July and August, 2013. My interviews indicated significant fishery degradation over the course of a 78-year period. Informants were divided into nearly equally sized groups by age (10-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55-69, 70 and older). Only one participant, however, was in the 70+ age group because informants of this age were difficult to locate. Only two of the twenty-one informants were female, which reflects the male-dominated nature of the area’s subsistence fishing economy. All of my informants are described as subsistence fishermen because their catches usually only feed immediate family or are sold within the village. In addition, their methods include line-fishing, net fishing by hand in the surf, and operating small wind- or oar-propelled boats. This is in contrast with the area’s industrial scale fishing complex that uses motorboats, long-lining, and shrimp trawling. Seven of the twenty-one informants occasionally also sold their fish in the nearest city, Barreirinhas.
Informants were asked to name species they commonly caught as well as their size and quantity, both in the present as well as at the time they first began fishing. The same questions were posed in regards to the memories they had of the catches of their parents or grandparents. Informants then described the changes in fishing technology, weekly frequency, and the distance from shore where they typically fished. Other questions included species of bycatch, the amount of time they had lived in the area, if and where they sold their fish, where the informants learned to fish, and what threats (if any) they perceived to their fishing livelihood or the fishery itself. Informants were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 the health of their fishery today, as well as to estimate from 1-10 that fishery’s health one hundred years ago. Lastly, the informants described whether or not they thought their children or grandchildren would continue to be fishermen and why.

Changes in Species Diversity

According to informants, species diversity in fish being caught has dropped significantly within their lifespans when over the age of 24. This was a pattern that was most pronounced in the oldest age group, who experienced a loss in species diversity three times that of the youngest group (Figures 1 and 2). In fact, no difference in species diversity was reported in the 10-24 age group (Figures 1 and 2). In the informants’ collective past 12 species dominated their catches, while today only 7 species were named.

Species that are no longer frequently caught by the interviewed subsistence fishermen include sharks, bonito, mero, dolphins, camurupim, and shrimp. Camurupim (tarpon) in particular was repeatedly brought up as a species that was once common enough to be spear-fished, but now can only very rarely be caught with even multiple passes of a net. Instead, the majority of fishermen now catch almost entirely tainha (mullet fish), a small R-selected (i.e. fast-reproducing) species (Abou-Seedo and Dadzie 2004, 97). This species appears to have been the most resistant to overfishing by humans. The
near complete loss of large, slow-reproducing fish such as *camurupim*, sharks, and local *peixe-serra* is a symptom of degradation in this fishery. Figure 3 demonstrates that all generations commonly find mullet to be the only species of fish caught today, while this was the case less and less in past generations as one looks farther back in time. In fact, the two oldest generations never used to catch solely *tainha* in the past.
Changes in Catch Size, Quantity, and Labor

Among middle-age and elderly fishermen complaints were ubiquitous about the decrease in catch size and quantity of fish obtained over their lifetimes. More labor became necessary in order to catch the same quantities of fish; for example, while one swift pass of a net was once sufficient to catch 30-50 kg. of fish, a fisherman can now spend hours at sea trying to obtain the same amount.

As shown in Figure 4, at the beginning of each fisherman’s career (typically at the age of 10), the lowest value quoted for average catch per day was 6kg., whereas today that number is 0.66kg. The highest value for average catch per day was 400kg. in the past, which has reached 67kg. today. This suggests that fish resources may have been 510% more than what they are today in the average collective past of this area’s fishermen. Notably, the numbers quoted for average catch per day were low for the 10-24 and 25-39 age groups but shot up radically after the 40-54 age group. This may suggest that shifts in fish population occurred suddenly within the last thir-
ty years because the 40-54 age group began their careers, at the latest, 30 years ago. This is particularly interesting because as the age groups get younger from 70+ until the 40-54-year limit group, reported fish acquisition increases dramatically. This may indicate that, starting about 70 or so years ago, as each younger generation began to fish, individual fish acquisition increased until fish populations may have crashed in the last 30 years.

Changes in technology, number of dependents per household, or economic demand in general each may have had a role in this increase in fishery exploitation until the crash happened. Many older informants explained that declines in their fish stocks were the result of illegal industrial fishing that went on unpoliced, especially in the case of long-lining trawlers. Informants reported decreases in catch size unanimously, indicating an unquestionable perception of crashing fish stocks.

![Average Fish Caught Per Day, Past and Present](image)

Figure 4
Changes in Method and Skill Lineage

The oldest informants were the only ones who reported having learned their trade alone or by observing local fishermen, rather than by learning from family. That includes all informants between 60-78 years old (N=6), with one exception that claimed “brother-in-law”. All other informants learned from family members, almost always from their fathers (although one 54-year-old reported having learned from family early in life and then local fishermen later on). This suggests that as of about 50-60 years ago people moving into the area or being born there did not generally have a family tradition of fishing, while subsequent generations followed in the footsteps of hereditary lineage.

In the past, line-fishing and spear-fishing were more common; however, in recent times competition from motorboats has made sustainable, low-impact methods unattractive. Also, as a result of the wave of industrial fishermen deploying long-lining and shrimp-trawlers, many fishermen have been forced out of traditional paddle or sail boat net fishing—forced instead to fish by hand nets in the shore’s surf. This is because it is more difficult and less lucrative for motorboats to fish near the shore. Today, wooden boats lay abandoned across the landscape, artifacts of long-lost easy fishing. Parents discourage their children from becoming fishermen because they believe with fewer fish, fishing will become prohibitively difficult.

Rating of Ecosystem Health: Past, Present, and Future

Informants were asked to rate the health of their local fishery today on a scale from one to ten. They were also asked to do this again in estimation of fishery health around one hundred years ago. I also asked them whether or not they thought their children or grandchildren would be fishermen and why. Unfortunately, these questions were implemented several days into the research schedule, and many informants were no longer available to answer the question, so the sample size is regrettably lower (N=8) than with the other answers collected due to travel constraints. However, it provides an example of how
to gauge perceptions of fisheries health to be correlated with the data above. These ratings are based at least partly on their own experiences, and display a shifting baseline.

The two groups most optimistic about how their fishery today compared to that fishery one hundred years ago are, not surprisingly, the two youngest groups. That is, the two groups with the shortest baseline perceive the least degradation in the fishery (Figure 5). The 40-54-year age group, which experienced by far the most extreme change from high-yield fishing in the past to low yields today in Figures 4 and 6, is also the most pessimistic by far about the fishery’s health. The 55-69-year age group was the second most pessimistic as well, having had experienced the second most extreme change in fish yield (Figure 6).

The one member of the 70+ group was unable to answer the second half of the rating question and was therefore left out of this data. As a result, it appears the two oldest groups experienced the greatest changes over the course of their lives in terms of changes in the quantity of fish caught. Referring back to Figure 2, we can see this is the case for two oldest groups in terms of species diversity as well. As a result, the older generations have not only longer baselines than the younger groups, but they also have more pessimistic opinions about the state of the fishery as a result of having witnessed the longest periods of the fishery’s degradation.
Expectation of Future Fishing

Similar to Figure 5, Figure 7 shows that the oldest groups had the bleakest outlook on whether or not their grandchildren or children would become fishermen. The age group of 40-54-year-olds who fished during the worst of the fishery crash, similar to the 70+ group, unanimously believed their future progeny would not become fishermen. Additionally, older age groups more unanimously believe future fish stock populations will dramatically decline (Figure 8). No one suggested that fish populations in the future would increase very much.

These data together demonstrate a shifting baseline wherein age (and therefore experience levels) coincide with different perceptions of ecosystem health. Lacking an older group, however, our understanding of the degree of this fishery’s degradation could be enhanced in the future by combining these results with the results of archaeological and historical materials.
Figure 7

Figure 8
The interviewed subsistence fishermen live in and around a dune park where mangroves naturally occur. However, over the course of decades of deforesting the mangrove area and degrading other turf-maintaining local vegetation with roaming domesticated animals, people have eroded the shoreline by several kilometers. That is, the sands of the coastline have been progressively sweeping out to sea, causing buildings such as resorts to be submerged and destroyed under the waves. Because the shoreline has been receding in this way, it is difficult to understand how much of the decrease in fish stock quantity and species diversity is a result of these environmental forces rather than directly from overexploitation of the fish themselves; therefore, further study is required.

This pilot study also unfortunately has the small maximum sample size of 21 people, and more data is required to support the preliminary results reported here. Also lacking is data on actual, rather than reported, quantities of fish taken. More precise and elaborate data is also needed about the amount of time spent at sea in the past and present, as well as the impacts of seasonality. The data used in this study are based on estimates of annual averages. Lastly, better data should be collected on changes in fishing technology and their relation to the phenomena described above.

**Future Directions and Conclusion**

The Atins/Queimada dos Britos fishery appears from this initial ethnographic data to be severely degraded, although the extent of that degradation cannot be reliably grasped without the formation of a grander interdisciplinary baseline. While long-lining and shrimp-trawling are officially prohibited, enforcement is so lax that these practices can be observed from shore daily. Better enforcement of industrial fishing is necessary to prevent the disappearance of subsistence fishing as a livelihood in this and similar areas.
My results demonstrate a shifting baseline across generations of fishermen. In the future, these or similar ethnographic results could be incorporated into the production of a grand fisheries baseline for the area, utilizing data from local sambaqui shell mounds, historical accounts of species variety and quantity, and historical representations of technological change. From these data sources, one could investigate changes in species diversity, relative quantity of marine resources, changes in technique (e.g. nets, boats, spear-fishing platforms), and estimated population densities of both humans and marine resources. More interviews could be conducted, as well as participant-observation and quantitative evaluation of marine resources (e.g. by weighing catches and estimating the amount and dynamics of ecological impact).

Ethnoarchaeology is especially well-positioned to fuse ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data for the creation of baselines with deeper time depth because ethnoarchaeology centers on material culture. Material culture and biofacts can serve as a common frame of reference between both the past and the present. For example, we can explore declines in species diversity by examining zooarchaeological shell mound remains, as well as through historical and ethnographic evidence of fishing practices.

Similar to biofacts, changes in fishing technologies are explorable through ethnographic, historical, and archaeological sources alike. This is important because changes in technology may represent changes in resource availability, possibly providing another line of evidence for changes in an ecosystem’s health. For example, in my Brazilian case study, industrial overexploitation of a fishery forced many subsistence fishermen to abandon the use of small wind- or oar-propelled boats in favor of collection with nets by hand in shallow water. The creation of larger ecological baselines, however, is not solely a task for anthropologists. Rather, communities should be empowered by this process by being informed co-creators of their area’s environmental narrative, rather than remaining
ignorent of a process secreted away within academic spheres. While parenting and oral history already communicate within and across generations, creating longer baselines through applied anthropology can further empower the communication of ecological information from beyond the limits of individual lifetimes.

References


The Future of the Past: Reclassification of ‘Culturally Unidentifiable’ Human Remains Under NAGPRA

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Abstract

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 provided specific instructions for the documentation and repatriation of culturally affiliated Native American human remains held by museums and federal agencies. The original legislation, however, left the issue of remains classified as “culturally unidentifiable”—those that could not be affiliated with federally recognized tribes—untouched and in legal limbo. Many of these human remains have undergone reclassification since first inventoried, particularly since the passage of new legislation that created new guidelines for the disposition of culturally unidentifiable remains in 2010. As of early 2017, 8,217 human remains in the United States originally inventoried as “culturally unidentifiable” have been classed as culturally affiliated with a federally recognized tribe. These reclassifications call into question the utility and symbolic significance of the term “culturally unidentifiable.” The classification criteria of the deceased under NAGPRA are established by the United States government and reworked when federal rules change. Such politics over the inclusiveness of the criteria evidences Native Americans’ continuous struggle for recognition in American classification schemes—a struggle originating at European contact and continuing through the centuries including present-day issues surrounding “federal recognition” of native tribes. Establishing “cultural affiliation” criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of human remains works in symbolic, semiotic, and pragmatic domains to continue to mediate, by legal languages and practices, the control over Native American groups both living and deceased.
Introduction

The disturbance of Native American graves began as some of the earliest European settlers arrived in North America, with a Pilgrim exploring party removing items from a Native American grave before returning to the Mayflower (Heath 1986). This kind of disturbance was often sanctioned by Anglo-American law in the following centuries, such as the implementation of federal policy in 1868 requiring military personnel to collect Native American body parts for the Army Medical Museum (Bieder 1990), and the 1906 Antiquities Act officially treating Native American human remains as archaeological resources that could be excavated with a proper permit (16 USC §§431-433). Typically unmarked, Native American graves and other unique mortuary practices such as canoe or tree burials were rarely afforded the same legal protection as their European counterparts (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000). Ancient burial grounds were often classified legally as “abandoned,” or denied a “cemetery” classification altogether, and their occupants disregarded because of their antiquity and lack of known next of kin. Native Americans were also not legally considered “people” until 1879 under federal law (United States ex rel. Standing Bear v. Crook, 1879) and not granted citizenship until 1924 (8 USC §1401(b)).

As a result of these legal inequities, the graves of between 100,000 and 2,000,000 Native Americans have been disturbed and their remains put on display or stored by various agencies and museums without regard for descendants’ rights. Grave looting and desecration has affected virtually every Native American group in the United States (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000). The power differential between those who disturb gravesites and those whose sites are disturbed offers distinctive criteria for inclusion and exclusion in rights of populations living within the Anglo-run United States, from the earliest days of European contact to the present. Disturbed graves raise the possibility of Native claims of desecration and reclamation, particularly if recognized by the state, making for one of the enduring struggles for Native North Americans.
In 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was enacted by the federal government. This legislation was designed to protect Native American burials and facilitate the repatriation of human remains and funerary objects held by government agencies to affiliated tribes. It had become apparent to legislators by this time that common law, based on judicial precedent, and individual state laws were inadequate to address the nationwide issue of desecration of Native American graves and trafficking in human remains and burial objects. Federal action was needed. NAGPRA was also intended as human rights legislation, in part “designed to address the flagrant violation of the ‘civil rights of America’s first citizens’” (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000:139).

There are three major components of NAGPRA. The first deals with issues of repatriation of items in existing collections. This component requires federal agencies and museums receiving federal funds to repatriate human remains and associated funerary objects upon request to those determined to be descendants or culturally affiliated tribes (25 USC §3005). Cultural affiliation is determined using information from the following categories: “geographical, kinship, biological, archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, folkloric, oral traditional, historical, or other relevant information or expert opinion” (25 USC §3005(a)(4)). This affiliation is based on the overall evaluation of the evidence and does not need to be established with scientific certainty. As for culturally unidentifiable remains, the 1990 NAGPRA legislation calls for the Review Committee to compile a list of unidentifiable remains and, in consultation with the tribes, develop a process for the disposition of these remains (25 USC §3006(c)(5)). Additionally, the repatriation component of NAGPRA provides guidelines for the return of unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and items of cultural patrimony (25 USC §3005 (a) (2)).

NAGPRA also requires federal agencies and museums to provide inventories of the Native American human remains and funerary objects in their collections (25 USC §3003). They
are required to identify the cultural and/or geographical affiliation of the remains or items based on the information in their possession. The institutions then notify affiliated tribes so they can make claims on the remains and items. The inventories are then published in the Federal Register. Summaries of unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and items of cultural patrimony are also required, however object-by-object inventories are not mandatory (25 USC §3004).

The second component of NAGPRA deals with the ownership and control of all Native American human remains and objects found on federal and tribal land in the future (25 USC §3002). Proven lineal descendants are given first priority, followed by the tribe in control of tribal land, then the most culturally affiliated tribe to the remains found on federal land, and, lastly, whichever tribe has the strongest ties to the federal land on which the remains were found. In execution of these rules, the only entities that are designated “tribes” are those designated by the federal government; state or locally designated groups do not have any control over repatriation. Any excavation of cultural items requires the permission of (on tribal land) or notification of and consultation with (on federal land) the appropriate tribes. If cultural items or human remains are discovered inadvertently, all activity must cease and the appropriate tribes must be notified.

The third component of NAGPRA prohibits the trafficking in Native American human remains and cultural items without the full consent of the appropriate tribe or next of kin (25 USC §3002). Violators face fines of over $100,000 and possible jail time. NAGPRA also created a Review Committee of seven tribal and museum officials that monitors the implementation of the legislation (25 USC §3006).

Culturally Unidentifiable Human Remains

According to NAGPRA, cultural affiliation is “a relationship of shared group identity which can be reasonably traced historically or prehistorically between a present day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an identifiable earlier
group” (25 USC §3001 (2)). Culturally unidentifiable human remains are “human remains ... in museum or Federal agency collections for which no lineal descendant or culturally affiliat-ed Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization has been identified through the inventory process” (43 CFR §10.2 (e)(2)).

The original 1990 NAGPRA legislation required only a good faith effort on the part of federal agencies and museums to use information already within their possession to determine cultural affiliation. No additional research or exhaustive study was required or even encouraged. NAGPRA stated that the cultural affiliation research should not be construed as “an authorization for the initiation of new scientific studies of such remains and funerary objects or other means of acquiring or preserving additional scientific information from such remains and objects” (43 CFR §10.9 (e)(5)(iii)). As mentioned above, there were no guidelines in the original NAGPRA legislation for the disposition of unidentifiable human remains, allowing museums and government institutions to keep them in perpetuity and leaving them in legal limbo.

In March of 2010, the Review Committee drafted and passed the final rule on the “Disposition of Culturally Un-identifiable Human Remains” (43 CFR §10.11). Section 10.11 provides guidelines for federal agencies and museums receiving federal funds for consultation with appropriate tribes, for completion of inventories of the remains in their collections, and for the final disposition of the remains. Consultation must be initiated and repatriation arranged even if no tribe makes a claim, unless a museum or agency can prove it has a right of possession to the human remains. Priority of control of the remains is first granted to the tribe from whose tribal lands the remains were removed, followed by the tribe from whose aboriginal lands the remains were removed, and if the remains are refused by both groups they may be offered to another federally recognized tribe. Special permission can also be granted to transfer the human remains to a non-federally recognized tribe or to directly reinter the remains in special circumstances and when the groups of higher priority do not object.
In 2007, a NAGPRA intern completed a survey of the Culturally Unidentifiable (CUI) Native American Inventories Database and prepared a short report for the NAGPRA Review Committee exploring some of the attributes of the human remains listed in the database (Kline 2007). He focused on the states with the highest numbers of unidentifiable remains and found that the vast majority of these could be associated with a geographic location (minimally to the state level) and archaeological time period. Additionally, 65% had one or more associated funerary objects, and 71% had been scientifically excavated. All of these data suggested that up to 80% of the human remains currently classified as culturally unidentifiable could “reasonably be culturally affiliated” (NAGPRA Review Committee: 17).

In July 2010, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report revealing that several government agencies were not in compliance with NAGPRA. In particular, the report noted that agencies frequently incorrectly report a lack of cultural affiliation (GAO 2010). The federal courts have found similar results, suggesting that affiliation decisions are often “arbitrary and capricious” (e.g. Bonnichsen v. United States; Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe v. U.S. Bureau of Land Mgmt.).

Reclassifications and Implications

The CUI database currently contains 131,417 unaffiliated human remains held by agencies in the United States. According to the NAGPRA database website, 8,217 human remains that were originally inventoried as culturally unidentifiable have since been classified as culturally affiliated (National Park Service 2017). While this only represents nearly 6% of the total number of unidentifiable human remains in the CUI database, the fact that any reclassifications have occurred is promising. This lends credence to the findings of the NAGPRA Review committee and GAO that agencies and museums are likely overusing the “culturally unidentifiable” designation.
There are several additional implications of these reclassifications. First, the term “culturally unidentifiable” is inappropriate if at a later date, or with additional research, many of these remains can be “culturally identified.” They are not, in fact, “unidentifiable,” but merely “unidentified,” as many Native American groups have argued (e.g. Riding In et al. 2004). A change in terminology would be practical and would keep the door open for the periodic reevaluation of affiliation status of the remaining unaffiliated human remains. Reevaluations and reclassifications would be appropriate in order to incorporate new developments and discoveries in the fields of history, anthropology, and archaeology.

Additionally, the reclassifications suggest that the majority of cultural affiliation studies are rarely as detailed or as comprehensive as needed. This is most likely in part a result of NAGPRA legislation only requiring that affiliation determinations be made using the information already in possession of the federal agency or museum (43 CFR §10.9 (a)). The historical treatment of Native American human remains, socially and legally, as specimens, data, archaeological resources, or cultural objects rather than human beings may also impact perceptions of institutional “ownership” of the remains among public agencies implementing NAGPRA to this day (Trope and Echo-Hawk 2000).

Institutional resources also likely play a major role; already thinly spread museum resources would be further strained by the need for investigation into existing warehoused or displayed collections (NAGPRA Review Committee). While federal funding exists to support these efforts, many smaller institutions lack the staff with the time or skills to pursue these grants. Many agencies and museums also rely heavily on archaeology and more “scientific” lines of evidence for affiliation studies, and overlook other types information such as Native American folklore or traditional oral histories (Beisaw 2010; Birkhold 2011; St. Clair 2013). NAGPRA specifically states that museums and agencies must identify cultural affiliation “to the fullest extent possible” (43 CFR §10.9 (a)) and use categories of information, which include both folklore and
oral tradition (25 USC §3005(a)(4)). It does not appear that most affiliation studies comply with these rules.

Finally, the reclassifications have implications for the future of the over 120,000 human remains still listed in the Culturally Unidentifiable (CUI) Native American Inventories Database. As mentioned above, approximately 6% have already been reclassified and the NAGPRA Review Committee suggests that up to 80% of the remaining individuals could potentially be affiliated under the new rules and practices. This would seem to indicate that any reevaluation of the individuals currently listed in the database would yield additional reclassifications. In light of NAGPRA’s new rule requiring the repatriation of unidentifiable human remains (43 CFR §10.11), the number of individuals classified as “unidentifiable” should then be expected to decline in the future as further research is conducted in preparation for repatriation.

Conclusion

NAGPRA has offered long-sought protection to Native American burials and facilitated the repatriation of thousands of human remains, funerary objects, and objects of cultural patrimony; however, the issue of classifying culturally unidentifiable human remains persists. Approximately 6% of the human remains that were originally inventoried as “culturally unidentifiable” have since been culturally affiliated with a federally recognized tribe. This suggests that the class of “unidentifiable” remains is terminologically inappropriate, that the majority of cultural affiliation studies have been inadequate, and that any additional affiliation research would significantly reduce the number of unidentifiable human remains listed in the NAGPRA CUI database in the future. The criteria for cultural affiliation, established by law and embodied in the American bureaucratic system, including museum procedures and practices, not only draws symbolically from historical classifications, but also continues to affect the symbolic meaning of Native American identity in the present. Contact and distinction between Native and Anglo-Americans remains ongoing, and
the politics of this contact and distinction are visible in the concepts and legal languages that govern both the living and the deceased.

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Memory and Enshrining Writing: Rethinking the ethnocentrism imbedded in written vs. oral traditions

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Author’s note: The following essay is a call for further research, rather than a summary of all the available research on the topic. There is a need for both anthropologists and archaeologists alike to start teasing apart the tradition of storytelling from other forms of social memory that carry forward key lessons of (sacred) history.

Introduction

This essay seeks to shed light on the debate about the validity of oral history, not by focusing on oral traditions but rather by addressing cultural biases within mainstream US culture that undermine non-written histories. First, I will illustrate a few of the differences between folklore and sacred / historical accounts to show that there is a problematic expectation of entertainment and make-believe that has been associated with orally transmitted folklore. Then, I will discuss the vocabulary used to describe unwritten accounts versus written ones, to show how dominant (Euro-American) cultures have a strong ethnocentric bias that honors the written text over the oral form. I will also comment on some of the hegemonic discourses and practices that defend and reproduce this bias against oral traditions. Finally, I will show that, despite a firm belief that something that has been written down has permanence, Euro-American heritage (dominant US culture) writers are part of a tradition that intentionally changes stories in new and different written and recorded forms. This documented variation in narratives (histories or just stories), subtly reinforces the hegemonic discourse that a people cannot accurately maintain a sacred history in the absence of writing.
Oral Traditions are not Folklore

Ideally, and more than once, I have stood in a dark cabin in the woods, but more often I have stood before an undergraduate class, and recounted the legend of the White Wolf. The story I tell is adapted from Schwartz’ Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark. I use the word adapted because “memorized,” while equally true, does not capture the fact that I know I am not telling it using the exact same words Schwartz wrote. Rather, I know that what matters are the key details, the elements of the story, and the audience’s reaction as I drag them into the tale of a former hunter that broke a vow to never hunt again.

This is part of the art of storytelling as I have learned to practice it. Folklore exists to be shared and spread. However, there is a major difference between the realm of make-believe (popular stories) and fact (stories we tell about our past and our world). A story, like the beguiling stories I share before a campfire, exist to entertain. All I need to know are the key plot points. In contrast, certain venues demand precision. An individual can go to prison if they “fill in the details” if called before a court to testify under oath. Setting aside all the epistemological debates about “what is a fact,” generally there is consensus that “what happened” at a crime scene should not change. Facts don’t have to be “remembered” from recent events. Most of the readers of this article will know “what happened” on Sept. 11, 2001. While few may remember first hand Dec. 7, 1941, shared facts of “what happened” on that date are part of US history. It is true, some readers will know more about Sept. 11 and Dec. 7 than others, and there are a lot conspiracy theories out there. But these histories are narratives based on indisputable facts. Sacred stories, “true” stories, and “facts” are not meant to be changed.

Sacred stories occupy an odd place in writing-centric cultures. Despite primacy placed on a Holy Book, it is common in Abrahamic belief systems to memorize all or part of the sacred text. This act of remembering does not allow for change. Rather, the memorization of short Bible verses or the recita-
tion of the Quran in its entirety, is expected to be accurate. This contrasts with the European fairytale where many of the classic stories have vestigial passages and parts have been lost to time (Opie and Opie 1974). The folklore tradition of “urban legends” are particularly known for their variations.

However, facts, accounts of the past, and sacred stories are not just a part of communities that practice writing. Because US (and European) traditions of folklore have been practiced orally as a mean of storytelling, sacred and historic narratives maintained as part of an oral tradition have been widely mistaken as just “folklore.” It should also be noted that concepts of power and class are imbedded into the word folklore. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2017), folklore is “traditional beliefs, legends, and customs, current among the common people” or “popular fantasy or belief.” This denotation indicates the beliefs are “common” or belonging to lower class “ordinary” people. The connotation, specifically the use of the word “fantasy,” captures the notion that these are false beliefs or not factually based. In practice, folklore can also have a positive connotation. Jim Griffith and the Southwest Folklife Alliance founded continue to host Tucson Meet Yourself. Tucson Meet Yourself (2017) defines folklore and folklife as the “informal, familiar, common side of the human experience that is not contained in the formal records of culture.” This organization actively breaks down the marginalization of everyday (“folk”) life by celebrating the its importance and diversity. Nevertheless, “folklore” remains “informal” by definition.

Choosing the word, “oral history” has helped restore dignity to non-written traditions. Many sacred traditions are not meant to change the same way sacred stories and written histories (facts) are also not meant to change. Furthermore, the term “oral history” is also used to define an anthropological method of gathering personal narratives about the past as retold by individuals present during past events. For this reason, scholars like Keith Basso (1996) simply use the word “history” while commenting on how previous scholars (including Spicer) had a difficult time recognizing the practices
of Western Apache historians because of the ethnocentric assumption that history is written, or “in print.”

Enshrining Writing

Conventional science places a strong degree of certainty or permanence in inscribed forms over oral traditions. Indeed, there are many strengths to the written word. To write is to set one idea in a form that can be stored, distributed, and shared. The importance of creating written words is captured in the methodology of ethnographic data collection. There is a moment, which is temporary, ephemeral. The ethnographer must not only bear witness, they inscribe it in their field notes (after Geertz 1973). To describe the act of writing as “inscribing” is a term often used, and sometimes critiqued (for a small set of recent examples see Ghaffar-Kucher 2015; Knowlton 2015; and Young 2015). The permanency of “inscribe” captures the sense of something durable, yet the etymology captures a direct link to writing. While “write” and “inscribe” have drifted apart in modern English, there is a strong link between writing and creating a durable, permanent and unchanging form.

The importance of writing is enshrined in the very concept of “civilization.” As Spicer (1962) illustrates in *Cycles of Conquest*, the project of bringing “civilization” varied based on the ethnocentric view of the colonizers. A key component was schooling and the teaching of writing. The high place of writing as part of cultural evolution models is also shown in the work of Morgan (1877) and Tyler (1920). This deeply problematic concept marginalizes oral tradition societies, making it harder to be “civilized” without writing.

Regardless of the strengths of documentation, these definitions are deeply hegemonic. They offer no place for memorization nor a sense of how people can maintain knowledge of their

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1 Basso’s work demonstrates that Anglo-American history is “unspoken and unanimated, it lies silent and inert on the printed English page” while Apache historical materials are in “footprints” and “paths” on the land, shown through place names (1996: 33).

2 Specifically, the word comes from “Latin inscribere to write in or upon, < in- (in- prefix2) + scribere to write.” (Oxford English Dictionary 2017)
past. Like the ideas of folklore, the idea of writing vs. oral tradition reflects a form of Gramscian hegemony where common peoples’ beliefs and history are perceived as fluid because that moment of action is transient and cannot be fully documented if it is not inscribed in one form or another. This does not mean that writing isn’t permanent. As seen by the stela of the Maya and of ancient Egypt, records can outlast memory. It is the subtle belief that inscribing is more permanent or accurate than memory that produces a hegemonic discourse that keeps the oral histories chaotic (in a Gramscian sense, keeping the proletariat disorganized and easier to control) and less socially valued when dominant society crafts historical narratives.

Mocking Memory

The other side of valuing writing is the mirroring hegemonic discourse that discounts human capacity to accurately remember details. Again, the fallacies of human memory and quantifiable research into what advances or hinders the production and details of memory and recall have been well documented and carefully and repeatedly studied (for a small fraction of recent examples, Garcia-Osta and Alberini 2009, Lindner et al. 2017, Melinder et al. 2017, Patihis and Place 2017, Peltonen et al. 2017, Soleti et al. 2017, Titta et al. 2013, Zovkic et al. 2013).

The validity or uncertainty of memory is beyond the scope of this essay. It is a hegemonic view that people do not, or cannot accurately memorize or orally transmit accounts across multiple narrators, a lynchpin of oral traditions. This is seen in the quest for first-hand accounts, the preference for eyewitnesses, and how things that happened to “a friend of a friend” quickly fall into urban legends.

Whatever the truth of memory and the weaknesses of oral traditions are, mainstream US culture teaches a bias against orality to our children in the game “telephone.” In this game, a group of children sit in a circle. One student starts the game by passing a message, whispering a short statement in their neighbor’s ear. That student tells the next, and so on un-
until the last to receive the message says it out loud. Usually, the 
message is seriously distorted and has changed greatly from 
the original, and the kids laugh. The moral of the game is how 
badly garbled a message can become when it is passed on orally. However, I have found that when the game is played with 
older children, they intentionally change the message because 
they know it is supposed to become hilariously distorted. The 
accuracy of the game becomes muted because it is a children’s 
game, rather than adults attempting to be as accurate as pos-
sible. The purpose of the game is to teach children that oral 
transmission of stories is riddled with errors. Whether the 
core lesson is true or not, the game intentionally reinforces a 
hegemonic discourse against oral traditions.

**Documenting is not Enough: The Tradition 
of Intentionally Alternating Stories**

Quests for the “authentic” original or earliest version of a 
folktale have promoted a popular myth that people do not re-
member or tell oral stories the exact same way each time. We 
can only guess at the earliest version (shown by the work of 
Opie and Opie 1974 and by Tatar 2017). European fairytales 
and American folklore have origins in imaginary (empty) time 
to draw from Benedict Anderson, 2006). It is difficult, even 
impossible to say if there is an “authentic” version of a story.

For example, consider the contrasts between “*Sole, 
Luna, e Talia* [Sun, Moon, and Talia]” (Basile 1634), “*La Belle au 
bois dormant* [Sleeping Beauty in the Wood]” (Perrault 1697), 
“*Dornröschen* [Little Briar Rose]” (Grimm and Grimm 1812), 
and “Sleeping Beauty” (Disney 1959). These similar but dif-
ferent versions of the story “show” how the tale shifted over 
time.³ It is possible that this reflects drift in oral retellings, 
but why the change? It may be possible that people could not 
accurately retell the story they had heard. However, narrators

³ It should also be noted that a different argument, that there are recurrent 
  motifs in folklore regardless of time and culture. This is demonstrated by 
  the Arne-Thompson classification index. Using that system, these “sleeping 
  beauty” stories are classified as AT Type 410.
may have intentionally modified the story either to suit their needs or to reflect anticipated interests of their audience.

This intentional shift is documented in the so-called Disneyfication of fairy tales. It is, again, beyond the scope of this paper, but it has been widely discussed how Disney (Walt Disney Company) has changed “classic” fairy tales for a variety of reasons (for examples, see Bell et al. 1995, Dong 2011, Mortensen 2008). However, Disneyfication of fairy tales has also spawned a series of intentional alterations, including productions like DreamWork’s Shrek film series. Why might the movies diverge from documented narratives of classic tales? We are not surprised by explanations like “artistic liberty” or attempts to commercialize, or even political correctness. Today, fairy tales are considered children’s literature. This allegation is often attributed to Disney (in popular discourse), but remember that the Brother’s Grimm named their 1812 collection Kinder-und Hausmärchen [Children’s and Household Tales]. Yet, over a century ago L. Frank Baum originally wrote the Oz books (1900-1920) in part because fairy tales were considered too violent.

Sometimes a story attracts intentional revision to make it either happier or more violent. For example, William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet has been re-imagined multiple times. In many of these versions, some on Broadway (West Side Story), children’s movies (Gnomeo and Juliet), others in TV scripts (various shows) allow the starcrossed lovers to live, or find a different path to a happy ending. Baz Luhrman’s 1996 production of Romeo+Juliet maintained the original dialog and added more violence with the addition of firearms.

While the stories recorded by Mother Goose (Charles Perrault) and the Brothers Grimm are from the oral tradition, part of the western tradition has been to change stories, even when there is a clear print version that has no tie to oral traditions. How many variations of Harry Potter style stories have been written as young adult fiction? How many Star Wars stories seek to cash in on the success of the franchise? How many “origin” stories exist for Spider-man? How many times has Hollywood “rebooted” a successful movie?
There is a clear and repeated drive to retell and revise popular and public domain stories in mainstream US culture. While this could be attributed to current capitalistic models, a cursory review of European history shows an interest in the re-telling of popular stories. Classic paintings re-tell myths and historical events. Classic theater retold the stories as well. For example, consider the mythology of Agamemnon, whose history was inscribed by the poet Homer and playwrights Aeschylus and Sophocles. We know the details of these accounts because the texts have survived to the present day. However, despite being a people with a writing history, ancient Greeks still re-wrote and retold stories.

Collectively, this could be taken as evidence that it is human nature to modify and retell stories. It would be a reasonable interpretation if it were not for the fact that the same descendant culture, Abrahamic faiths, have strived to find the earliest and most accurate version of sacred texts.\textsuperscript{4,5} In other words, western culture feels free to retell certain accounts to suit contemporary needs and tastes, while seeking to preserve the “authenticity” of other records.

**Remembering the Flaws While Recognizing the Bias**

Working in Italy and Kentucky (US), Alessandro Portelli (1991) has gathered oral histories that were factual and in some cases counter-factual. His work showed that people could remember things differently. However, instead of focusing on how some accounts were factually accurate, and others “false,” he wove the narratives together to demonstrate subjectivity, how

\textsuperscript{4} This process of finding the most “accurate and early version” of sacred texts is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls led to revisions of some Biblical texts, specifically Isaiah and Habakkuk to capture a more accurate translation. Bible scholars will point out to the history of identifying heresies and apocryphal texts and the challenge of identifying the “authenticity” of ancient documents. The preferred term in the New Revised Standard Version (Catholic Bible, used in some Protestant denominations) is “ancient authorities.” (Metzger 2016).

\textsuperscript{5} It should also be noted that the Quran was both memorized and recorded on papyrus in Arabic when it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad AD 610-632.
people remembered what was important to them and created meaning for an event.

There is still much to be learned about oral history and how oral traditions are maintained in the absence of written records. Any research should not approach oral records with bright eyed naïveté. However, we (Euro-Americans and those who learn from that tradition), must be more aware that our culture celebrates writing and is deeply hostile to the multiplicity of other ways of knowing and passing on wisdom. While memory may be imperfect, we must recognize that we have inherited a tradition that loves modifying, personalizing, and retelling narratives. This is demonstrated through practices as diverse as the way Hollywood has retold fairy tales, and in revisionist histories where scholars uncover new facts (or “facts”) to create a different narrative that can fundamentally alter how an event is perceived. This desire to change may even be viewed in the emergence of “alternative facts” in the current political climate. It is these biases that we, as scholars must face before we draw upon oral histories. Though they may, indeed be imperfect, we have emerged from a hegemonic discourse that has trained us to expect them to be inaccurate before we have even begun the conversation.

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