Edinburgh Research Explorer

Re-locating the Ethnographic Field

Re-locating the Ethnographic Field

From 'Being *There'* to '*Being* There'

Máiréad Nic Craith and Emma Hill

Abstract

When considering the ethnographic field, language-use has been of continued anthropological concern. Traditional approaches to the field have associated language-use with concepts such as place, territory and ethnicity and have tended to bound them within a single site. However, in conditions of increasing globalized mobility, approaches to both fieldwork and language-use within the field are changing. Using existing scholarship on minority-language communities in Europe alongside original fieldwork with Somali migrants in Glasgow, this essay considers the dynamics of that relationship within the contexts of single-sited, multi-sited and online fields. It finds that, for an inquiry focused on both language use and mobility, established modes of thinking about the field are a methodologically restrictive practice on 'being *there'.* Instead, the authors argue for rethinking the field as a "spoken" one where, with language at the fore, emphasis is placed on '*being* there'.

Keywords

Closed community, Great Blasket Island, multi-sited fieldwork, online ethnography, Somali

***

At the beginning of the twentieth century a number of Celtic folklorists visited the Great Blasket, a small island at the most westerly tip of the Dingle Peninsula off the south-west coast of Ireland (Nic Craith 1988). The visitors included Nordic scholars such as Carl Marstrander, Carl Wilhelm von Sydow as well as British scholars like Kenneth Jackson, George Thomson and Robin Flower. They were in search of a traditional, pure, Irish-speaking community and keen to study an authentic language and lifestyle. These folklorists were impressed with their findings. From their perspective, they had encountered a Neolithic lifestyle untouched by modern civilisation. On this small Island they had discovered a closed community speaking a very pure form of Irish Gaelic with an oral

tradition untouched for centuries. The remoteness of the location had served to maintain the purity of language. Being surrounded by the sea had ensured that the community had minimal contact with the mainland.

The scholars encouraged the tradition-bearers to recount their life experiences, and with time several scholarly accounts as well as the reflections by the Islanders themselves were published (e.g., Ó Criomhthain 1929; Ó Súilleabháin 1933; Sayers 1936). Introductions to the English-language translations of these autobiographies emphasised the closed nature of the Island community. In his preface to *Island Cross-Talk* by Tomás O'Crohan, Pádraig Sugrue asked the reader to 'imagine that small, lonely island, the most western habitation in Europe cut off from the life and knowledge of Europe' (Enright 1986: 5). In a subsequent edition, Tim Enright begins with an extract from Virgil's *Aeneid* (Enright 1986: 1). E. M. Forster advised readers of O'Sullivan's *Twenty-Years-a-Growing* that they were 'about to read an account of Neolithic civilization from the inside' (Forster 1933). Luce (1969: 151) described the Blasket writers as 'peasants, eking out a scanty living' whose writings clearly indicated 'Homeric qualities'.

Although not strictly speaking anthropological case studies, these field trips to the Blasket were precursors of many anthropological case studies of language communities in other regions of Europe, and the themes coming out of these earlier studies underlie some fundamental assumptions by anthropologists about the relationship(s) between a people and their language, culture and place (the field). The links made by these scholars between the bounded landscape of the Island and the 'purity' of the Islanders' language echoes a view found in what we might call 'traditional' anthropology (Marcus 1995: 101), in which language was understood as the very expression of the culture of a people (and so also the delimiting expression of their ethnicity). Language was valued because it was the conduit for the 'native's point of view' (see Malinowski 1961: 25). In this tradition, language alongside other cultural factors such as 'peoplehood', religion and race, was seen as a key indicator of common culture or ethnicity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 9). Whilst peoples, their culture and their ethnicity were understood as contained within the territory, locality

or landscape of the physical field, language, as an expression of the peoples' (physical and spiritual) world, tied place and culture together (Marcus 1995: 101).

The last fifteen years have seen a shift in ethnographic practice (Wittel 2000; Hannerz 2003; Van Maanen 2006). Globalisation, transnationalism and increasing mobility have changed traditional understandings of the 'field', and new methodological solutions have emerged (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Hine 2000; Wulff 2002; Van Maanen 2006). While classic fieldwork focused on single, closed sites, anthropologists today are increasingly conducting multi-local fieldwork. They are also engaging with online and virtual fields. As anthropologists' conception of the field has changed, their understanding and use of language in relation to the field has not necessarily kept pace. Language still remains associated with the relationship between an individual, a community, a culture and their environment, although clearly it is not inherently, essentially and fundamentally linked to these and the relationship between field and fieldwork should be far more fluid and ambiguous (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Drawing on original fieldwork, and with language-use particularly in mind, we consider the changing dynamics of fieldwork, from its initial conception as single-sited, to the complexities of multi-sited fieldwork. We argue that thinking about the field from a geographical perspective is methodologically restrictive and in the second part of the essay, we use online fieldwork as a starting point for a discussion on how a focus on language may aid a wider disciplinary re-evaluation of the troublesome anthropological concept of 'being there'.

Single-Sited Fields: Language and Locality

As the foundational concept for contemporary fieldwork, the single-sited field remains important in anthropology. It continues to be celebrated not only as a site in which depth of knowledge and understanding of people and culture can be achieved, but also as a place which holds the potential of time, allowing the anthropologist to gain a broad-view of a society's living patterns, rituals and practices. Marcus suggests a key element of single-sited fieldwork is 'a temporality of slowness […], patience and gradual, accumulative achievement' (Rees 2008: 7) that allows the anthropologist

to achieve a greater depth of understanding of the field. In terms of practical language-use, the single-sited field offers similar potential to the anthropologist as it may allow them to better familiarise themselves with local expressions and unpack nuances of everyday speech. In terms of conceptualising language-use within the field, the often geographically-defined or territorially-bounded limits of the single-sited field offers the anthropologist the opportunity to explore links between language-use, people and place and analyse linguistic phenomena against a local back-drop.

There are a number of studies that provide analyses of this relationship (e.g., Nic Craith 1996a, 1996b). Malcolm Chapman's (1978) exploration of the Celtic Fringe in Scotland focussed not only on the Scottish-Gaelic language and the people who spoke it, but also on Anglo-Saxon/Celtic racial stereotypes that exemplified and intensified the animosity between dominant and minority cultures. More recently, Sharon Macdonald (1997) conducted an ethnographic investigation of the revitalization of Gaelic culture in the Scottish Hebrides. In both Chapman's and Macdonald's studies, language, people and place are closely associated, and perspectives on either minority (Scottish-Gaelic) or majority (Anglo-Scottish) language-use are taken as indicative of the tensions between Celtic and Anglo-Saxon races and cultures. In both studies too, the setting of the fieldwork takes primary importance as it provides a point of contrast for the relationships of both 'native' and non-'native' speakers with the land. There are themes here, which, if taken further could link language-use and place to concepts of ethnicity, identity and belonging – links which a focus on a single-sited field encourages. Olaf Zenker's study (2013) in Catholic West Belfast makes these links explicit. His fieldwork identifies the Irish language as carrying a web of ethnic significance for the local community. In the meantime, fieldwork by Kockel (1999) and Echeverria (2003) in Spanish contexts has identified similar political sensibilities, whilst Urla's (2012) work in the southern Basque country identifies political and nationalist themes in connection with the revitalisation of the Basque language.

In these single-sited studies, language-use is an important feature that can open-up the ethnic, racial, cultural and political undertones of the field. However, although in highlighting these undertones, language-use, combined with awareness of geographical boundaries, helps identify and bound the field, the 'single-sited' element of the field tends to be determined firstly on territorial grounds, and secondly by language-use (and other elements). Kathryn Woolard's (2008) fieldwork in Catalonia pushes this order of precedence. She argues that the 'authenticity' of Catalan language-users is dependent on the language's links with a specific local territory. However, her study treats the relationship between language-use and the field in a slightly different way. Woolard argues that whilst the territorial anchor of the Catalan language determines the field as specific and single-sited, the speaking of 'authentic' Catalan – the act of speaking from place – determines the field. Where other scholarship treats language-use as a feature of the (already bounded) field, Woolard integrates it into of the bounding of the field itself, anticipating a more multi-sited approach to the relationship between language-use, people and place.

Multi-Sited Fields: Language across Place

The emergence of multi-sited fieldwork has coincided with anthropology's growing interest in the effects of globalisation, the mass movement of peoples, 'translocalism' (Hannerz 2003: 206), and those culturally united in an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983; Cook et al., 2009: 59) but geographically scattered. Its scope has also expanded recently beyond physical fields, to include virtual, online fields.

For anthropologists considering multi-sited fieldwork, language's function as a 'coherent' of culture has become increasingly important (Marcus 1995: 101). Whilst in single-sited fieldwork, language is not necessarily the sole 'coherent' of the field, the territorial and cultural spread of the multi-sited field requires a sharpening of definitions. Therefore, Marcus comments, just as language in 'traditional' fieldwork 'gives the bounded field – for example a people, an ethnic group, a community – its most important coherence as a culture, [it is] as important in multi-sited fieldwork

and with even more exactitude' (Marcus 1995: 101). In fact, we would suggest, as his argument develops, Marcus allows language to go beyond this function of 'coherent' of the field to instead become the identifier of the field. Multi-sited fieldwork, he comments, is 'impelled' by 'empirically following the thread of cultural process itself', whilst 'strategies of quite literally following connections, associations and putative relationships are [...] at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research' (1995: 97). If we view language through a postmodern lens, it 'doesn't just reflect or record the world [but] shapes it so that how we see is what we see' (Barry 2009: 61), and can be understood as not only reflecting but constituting the very 'cultural processes', 'connections' and 'associations' that anthropologists follow to define their field. If we follow these, we implicitly follow language, so why not explicitly do so to order and define multi-sited fieldwork?

There are many instances of anthropologists doing just that. Some have worked with language minorities across national boundaries as well as with nomadic peoples such as Travellers, Sámi, Roma and Sinti (e.g. Binchy 1994; McDonagh 2000; Okely 2006; Beach 2012; Kopf 2012; Payne 2014). With nomadic peoples especially, as the field loses its territorial, placed and landscaped boundings, its definition becomes more dependent on the cultural features of a group of people and its location is frequently cross-bordered (see Beach 2007). In fields such as this, where 'place' is not so much diluted as diffuse, anthropologists have used language in a deliberate manner to identify the field, and in these cases the relationship between a language and the people, rather than the relationship between a people and territory, has become a conscious identifier of ethnicity.

However, there are issues with allowing language-use to define the multi-sited field. For instance, despite the strong link between Sámi ethnicity and their language, the latter remains an unstable identifier for bounding the multi-sited field. Reliance on language networks to identify a multi-sited people becomes even more complicated when considering a group of multilingual people. For instance, considering Somali migrants in Glasgow (Hill 2014, 2013), one soon finds that language is not a unified identifier of their ethnicity. Whilst some groups of Somali in Glasgow

prefer to speak Swahili or Arabic, our fieldwork has revealed that others (though Swahili speakers) instinctively use a Swahili dialect, Kibajuni. Somali itself, which might be assumed to be a lingua franca for Somali people, might not be spoken at all or used as a third or fourth language (sometimes after English). Thus, if we wanted to establish a field here by following language-use, we would need to take into account a number of languages and dialects. How then to determine what is a 'Somali' language or dialect (and what of English here) and how important is the distinction between languages and dialects? (Nic Craith 2000).

Even if we were to establish a list of languages indicating 'Somaliness', there would be a danger of distorting the field by assuming a non-existent 'connectivity' (Hine 2000: 61) between language-users. Our explorations of the variety of language-use amongst Somalis in Glasgow signal the presence of different groups with little in cultural common. In particular, we noted that the presence of Kibajuni is due to a community of Somali Bajuni – a small clan originating from an archipelago south of Kismayo in Somalia. Kibajuni is spoken only by the Bajuni people, and is a key marker of their ethnicity. This is significant because the Bajuni's ethnicity determines their social standing according to the Somali patrilineal clan hierarchy (Höhne 2006: 402). Considered not 'real' (=ethnically integrated) Somali, (Hill, Fieldnotes, February 2014), the Bajuni are thus the least empowered of Somali clans (Abby 2005: 14) in Glasgow, and considered 'tiku' (slaves; see Allen 2008: 2; Bajuni Campaign 2013), routinely ignored or discriminated against by some members of other clans. By gathering the languages spoken by Somali in Glasgow into a hypothetical language umbrella, we may assume a commonality of experience, culture and ethnicity that simply does not exist. Moreover, how would the Glasgow location compare to another European site – would there be a similar gathering of 'Somali' languages? How would this affect the way the multi-sited field is identified?

Diaspora and Europe: language out of place?

The challenges facing anthropologists wishing to conduct language-sensitive fieldwork with a multi-sited diaspora are clear and many: in an increasingly globalised world, movement of peoples and their ability to adapt to new environments have altered language-use as much as they have altered anthropological practice. In this context, Ralph Grillo (1989) has explored immigrants and their languages in the United Kingdom and France. Others have focused on the impact of communicative abilities on the education of immigrant children (e.g. Alamdar-Niemannd et al. 1991; Wang 2011; Wolber 1991). In the meantime, there has been an occasional focus upon non-European immigrants and their languages; examples include Marranci's work (2003, 2006, 2007) concerning the use of English and Arabic among Muslim diaspora communities, and Blommaert's (2001) focus on African asylum seekers in Belgium. More recently García-Sánchez (2014) has explored the cultural and linguistic life-worlds of Moroccan immigrant children in Spain.

However, migrant ethnic minorities in Europe have not received sufficient language-orientated attention from anthropologists in recent years. In Europe, where non-European migrant languages continue to be considered not part of Europe's speech community (Gal 2006), and with as many as 40 million regular minority language-users who seek legitimacy and greater 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1991) for these languages (Nic Craith 2010), this type of work is increasingly needed. For these reasons, and although we note the (unanswered) concerns about the dangers of language-networked multi-sited fields, we would press the importance of attention to language use in multi-sited fieldwork.

Our own fieldwork has clarified that the Bajuni experience discrimination in Glasgow *because* of their ethnic difference from other Somalis – of which language is a marker. Here language reveals not only social relations, but also social practice among migrant Somalis. Language use has a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of Bajuni in Glasgow. It determines who of the Somali community will support them and who is likely to turn them away – important factors especially for those still awaiting the results of their asylum applications. Indeed, the Bajuni's language use remains critically important in their interactions with the UK state, as the UK

Border Agency attempt to 'prove' Bajuni ethnicity through much-criticised language analysis techniques (Craig 2012; Bajuni Campaign 2014).

Though here language networking may not provide reliable boundaries for the field, it not only reveals a lived social structure and practice concerning Somali migrants in Glasgow, but also the way power is distributed through this practice, both within Somali groups and in their interaction with the UK state. Taking this point further, we might consider, firstly, that in a Foucauldian (2004) sense, language and power are closely related and, if language is both a cultural construct and constructor, it is itself a container through which the perpetuation of power and inequality can be studied; and secondly, from a Spivakian (2010) perspective, that those with power may not determine who might 'speak', but certainly determine who will be heard. In the context of multi-sited fieldwork, which has been critiqued for focusing too much on the details of each separate site rather than on the connections between disparate people (Hannerz 2003: 206), multi-sited, language-sensitive studies reveal patterns of power and domination across territories and nations, and can be understood as both a means and expression of 'translocal' connections.

Online Ethnography: Language in Space?

If we think of contemporary fieldwork in this migratory context of 'translocality', we of course need to consider the implications of online connectivity for defining both the field and the relationship between anthropology and language. Fieldwork that has included online elements has further challenged notions of multi-sitedness, not only in terms of 'bounding' the field, but also in terms of talking about the field as physical place (see Ardévol and Estalella 2012). This challenges the understanding of human interaction in terms of 'face-to-face' communication and the personal hospitality of communicative exchange.

Anthropological studies of online fields have ranged from full immersion in the virtual worlds and lives of online gamers (Boellstorff et al. 2012) – what we understand as 'virtual fieldwork' – to a lighter emphasis of following the way multi-sited people communicate online with

those physically distant, which we understand as 'online ethnography'. Online ethnographies have tended to use varying degrees and combinations of online/offline engagement, ranging from a full-focus on the online connectivity of participants (Koikkalainen 2012) to a combination of 'realworld' and online fieldwork (e.g., Hirvi 2012). Our own fieldwork has engaged with the online aspect of the Glasgow Bajuni campaign as well as face-to-face encounters with local informants. These different approaches to online ethnography both solve old problems – for example, aiding the management of the expense, travel and multiple foci of multi-sited fieldwork – and create new concerns (discussed below). Alongside established anthropological ways of connecting with people, these studies add a new, evolving tool-set to anthropological methodology.

Since its 'official' inception in the early 2000s (e.g., Hine 2000; Wittel 2000), the potential benefits of online fieldwork have remained tempered by the limitations of both its methods and its resultant data. Online methods have been accused of making the concept of 'the field' too abstract, placeless and faceless (Wittel 2000). There have been concerns over the depth of anthropological data obtained by these methods, and the extent to which data can be considered empirical. Wittel, for instance, argues that a field defined by a series of (virtual) networks necessarily leads to an abstract study of the system of networks rather than the more anthropological interests of people, their culture and their everyday lives (Wittel 2000). Apparently supporting Wittel's conclusions, Varis and Spotti (2011: 2) argue that social media encourage far more 'egocentric' expressions of community than the more collegiate communities of everyday life. Following Wittel, Varis and Spotti, and considering the difficulties of negotiating the 'celebrated and mystified notion of "being there"' (Hannerz 2003: 202) even within a 'realworld' multi-sited field, we anticipate further problems for online ethnography: Where is 'there'? How should one 'be' there?

In tandem with these conceptual and practical concerns, language-use in an online environment also faces criticisms of rootlessness and cultural and environment divorce – a momentary irony, perhaps, for a forum that purports to compress distance rather than enhance it, but a more concrete concern for anthropology for which the importance of a connection between

language, culture and place remains. Where a focus only on the online field raises objections about 'surface' knowledge – that the anthropologist can only mine so far into the cultural, environmental or social conditions of a community's activities through online methods – a focus on language highlights that the internet is a place of conspicuous presences rather than notable absences, so that the occlusions, omissions and out-of-the-ordinaries that arise in the nuances of placed and peopled conversations are lost in favour of only those elements that people have already selected for visibility.

Whilst these observations already cast doubts on the 'quality' of online data for everyday interactions, if we view language use in broader terms, they also raise concerns regarding minority versus majority language use, and about access to both language and the public sphere generally. As English remains the dominant language of online communication, some scholars have expressed concern about the 'degree of cultural and linguistic homogenisation' (Hogan-Brun 2011: 325). Others have taken it further, suggesting that that the emphasis on (English-language) 'presence' online creates 'discourses of identity and negated identity that echo those of the European maps of colonized and colonizable space of nearly a century ago' (Frohne and Katti 2000: 12). In the context of online ethnography, we would argue, these observations should act as cautions when considering the language choices of a particular community or group in or as the field. For instance, for the Glasgow Bajuni campaign's wordpress blog, Kibajuni rather than English was the initial language of choice, not only because it was the first language of all the campaigners, but also because it was the language with which campaigners felt most connected. Initial blog posts from September 2013 see the campaign alternate between Kibajuni and English, yet by January 2014 the campaign has chosen to write in majority English. Our concern with language-use online is with the visibility of this choice, because in the online environment of the Internet, this language choice is not just unclear, but nearly invisible. The public 'face' of the Internet, in which English is an expectation rather than an option, occludes the campaigners' language choice, and thus the conditions of (language-based) inclusion and exclusion to which they decided to adhere. This

language-based demand can be seen as an instance of what Derrida (2000: 15) called 'hospitable violence' done to the migrant, and is indicative of wider institutional mechanisms – and thus should be of disciplinary interest: '[t]he [foreigner] has to ask for hospitality in a language which is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the home, the host […] This person imposes on him translation into their own language, and that's the first act of violence'. Yet, given the complexity of the conditions of language use in this case, the hidden absences, the lack of locative anchors, we would ask again, is language use too broad or too knotty a theme to even consider it an indicator of the field? Or is it this very complexity that should make it central to fieldwork?

Roots in Place or Language?

The question of context perhaps points to the crux of the arguments that highlight the problems of online ethnography. With a focus on language use, the question of context really becomes a question of interactivity – an issue of the limited meaning one can gain through the window of a Skype conversation, or glean from the reading of a post, or watching a video or live-stream. In these instances in which the materiality, the touch, feel and smell of the field is lost, the 'humanity' of language also appears lessened, begging the question of whether this constitutes anthropological data at all. Caverero explicitly makes this link, arguing that

> in the uniqueness that makes itself heard as voice, there is an embodied existent, or rather a 'being there' […] in its radical finitude, here and now. The sphere of the vocal […] anchors it to the existence of singular beings who invoke one another contextually (Caverero 2005: 173).

Just as Hannerz emphasises the advantages of time spent 'being there', for Caverero, language – voice – is linked not only to the material and the bodily, but also temporality and the particularity of interaction at a particular time. Following Caverero, it might be argued that online ethnography

thus ignores the virtue of the practice of language. Combining online and offline ethnography may reduce problems here – but does this mean that all studies that involve online ethnography must also consider 'realworld' ethnography? And are these, in a fundamental, disciplinary sense, serious concerns, or simply reflecting an extended anthropological epistemology?

Criticisms concerning a lack of place, face and interactivity, levelled out of concern for anthropological depth, appear to be caused as much by the online status of the field as by the methods anthropologists use to follow the online (parts of the) field. That mobile people choose to use online methods to maintain and form communities is of anthropological interest, for the ease, the quickness and convenience facilitated by online communication says much about what type of connection, and therefore what type of community, is acceptable to people living in 'translocal' conditions. In these communicative choices, increasingly multi-sited people themselves adapt to the 'distancing' of the online environment and the lack of 'human' contact, preferring slightly more diffuse communication to none at all. In many instances, although the dis-placing effects of online communication still occur – in the sense that they either obscure or occlude the 'realworld' loci of communicative acts – the 'placing' of interaction still occurs in the creative acts of 'imagining community'. In a study conducted by Canagarajah (2004), the use of different media was found to aid 'plurilingual' and 'minority language' communities to 'reclaim the local' (cf. Hogan-Brun 2011: 325), so that although speakers of very particular languages were distantly separated, they were able not only to achieve a sense of close community through online communication, but to invoke a sense of an originary location and culture (Nic Craith 2004).

This line of argument is supported by our field who which has followed the Glasgow Bajuni's use of Kibajuni in their online blog posts. Despite settling on English for their majority language, the campaign has continued to insert Kibajuni into their narratives, in the form of Bajuni proverbs or aphorisms. This specific use of Kibajuni acts not only as a touchstone of Bajuni identity for the blog-writers and blog-readers, but also as a more personal iteration by the blog-writers of their continued part in the Bajuni community. In Somali culture, proverbs and aphorisms are used

frequently in everyday speech as strongly structured, densely meaningful pieces of language. They are used to pass commentary of everyday events and act as temporal and cultural referents, connecting present-day practices with the practices of the past (Jama 1994). Their use requires knowledge of the culture from which they originate and understanding of the environments in which they are appropriate. The dense and allusive quality of the proverbs allows the Glasgow Bajuni to invoke a Bajuni sense of place, practice and heritage, which distils a far more concentrated sense of Bajuni identity than other, less structured language expressions. Furthermore, because the proverbs are informed by Bajuni customs and beliefs, their iteration invokes a sense of familiarity, of shared community that binds online the physically-distant Bajuni islands and physically scattered Bajuni people with the campaign's Glasgow base. Thus the language of the Bajuni's blog does not simply 'reclaim the local' – it *is* the local: the place in which community is imagined and lived. In this sense, the Glasgow Bajuni, indefinitely distanced from their 'homeland', do not encourage a sense of 'rootlessness' but instead supplant roots in place for roots in language.

From 'being *there'* or '*being* there'

A number of the studies referred to in this essay comment on how modern conditions and contemporary lifestyles have caused communities in Europe to reassess the way they understand the relationship between language, identity and place. Not all studies do this explicitly: Canagarajah (2004), for instance, implies that although plurilingual societies maintain a connection between language and 'the local', the physical separation of communities means that 'the local' has become somewhat imagined. Varis's and Spotti's (2011) focus on the 'egocentric' expression of online communication implies their conclusion that online language use has become concerned less with environment (place) and more with the here and now of the subject. Koikkalainen's (2012) study of migrant Finns more explicitly removes 'place' from the equation by identifying people through their language-use, whilst Beach's (2007) study of the Sámi people describes a cross-border community, which explicitly supplants territorial definitions with linguistic boundaries. Studies

such as Zenker's (2013) establish the importance of language above place for carrying 'webs of significance'. From these studies, one might observe that in the same sense that Glasgow Bajuni have begun to imaginatively find 'the local' in their language-use, (minority) communities elsewhere are reconsidering their relationships with language, territory and identity.

This point is not entirely new; however, it has potential for further development. Anthropology's strength has tended to come from its capacity to learn, understand and adapt to the living patterns and communicative choices of its participants. Despite many studies demonstrating its continued ability to do so, we would question whether it has yet fully done this in contemporary communities in Europe. The modern migratory contexts discussed in this essay have shown that migrating people no longer necessarily associate 'the local' with physical place, nor do they necessarily associate their language-use with a particular physical environment. In the face of ever-increasing mobility and the 'online' turn, continued disciplinary concern with traditional-looking, 'mystified' notions such as 'the (bounded) field' itself and of 'being there' (Hannerz 2003), although academically instructive, are perhaps not particularly helpful modes of thought as they hold on to more static ideas of territory, place and the relationship between language and identity. Instead, some refocusing is needed – not to exact fundamental disciplinary change, but enough to encourage further emphasis on more postmodern concepts of language and related themes. In the case of the Bajuni, for example, this refocusing would highlight the way Kibajuni reaffirms an identity, ethnicity and nationality that is otherwise denied them by the UK immigration authorities. In this example, language is the Bajuni's connection to their culture and to the way in which the patterns of everyday life are given meaning. It is the site of their 'being' – but not necessarily the site of their 'being there'.

This final distinction is one that we would carry forward. If '*being* there' rather than 'being *there*' is an increasingly prevalent condition of migratory lives, then it follows that anthropology might shift its emphasis. Inevitably, this would have some immediate methodological and practical consequences, especially when considering defining 'the field', for following a people's mode of

'being *there*' is a far less concrete prospect than following their mode of '*being* there'. Yet, nebulous as this proposition may seem, we have suggested here a number of foci and points of reference that facilitate this new emphasis, with language at the centre. Far from advocating an overhaul of established anthropological practice, we are simply bringing to the fore elements of anthropology that have perhaps received less specific emphasis in the past.

This point is best illustrated with a return to the Great Blasket Island, where we began this essay. Although scholars were initially impressed with the 'authenticity' of culture there, the Island was far more cosmopolitan than they had actually envisaged. While academics visiting the Island may have felt the need to construct the Islanders as a 'closed, territorially bounded community', as evident in Sugrue's introduction of Tomás Ó Criomhthain as being 'of the Gaeltacht. He knows nothing else in the wide world. He never put a foot outside Corcaguiney'. This ignores the frequent references to migration and returned migrants in Tomás's own autobiography. Tomás's brother left for America while Tomás was still at school. His sister spent three years in America and was subsequently joined there by two other sisters before she returned home. Tomás was particularly concerned that a marriage would be arranged between himself and a return migrant from America who had come home 'wearing an ornate hat with a couple of feathers sticking out of it, and an ostentatious gold chain hung from her neck'; she spoke 'with an accent, both in Irish and in English' (Bannister and Sowby 2012: 89).

While clearly an Island community physically cut off from the mainland, the sea was often a point of contact with rather than a barrier to other ways of life, making the cultural dispositions of the Blasket community layered, nuanced and internationally connected. Yet this was not sufficiently reflected in the scholars' focus on the 'authentic' unity of place, people and language. In other words, the emphasis on 'being *there*' was the scholars' undoing, as it gave precedence to the relationship between the Islanders and the Island territory, rather than the Islanders' way(s) of life. The scholars' focus on the immediate territorial boundaries of the islands made this 'the field', so that everything within it necessarily referred back to place, consigning their study to beginning and

ending at the water's edge, even as the islanders' lives went beyond it. While 'isolation is a key "trope" and certainly a reality for much of island experience, environment and social functionality, it is also well understood that islands are very much spaces that link and map into relational activity and events around them' (Danson and Burnett 2014: 154).

Of course, these studies were conducted at a time when academic practice and disciplinary interest was different, but even so, a focus on the language use of the Islanders might have helped address the limitations the scholars encountered. Following the Islanders' language use could have given greater emphasis on the interactivity of their lives with their territory and other cultures, and eased the evident clash between the scholars' focus on 'authentic' island culture and the lived experience of the Islanders. Given that these scholars had some interest in the Islanders' language use already, our suggestion to bring this dimension to the fore merely entails utilising traditional anthropological lenses in a slightly different way.

This suggestion should not be seen as discounting the importance of place in both the everyday lives of the Islanders and any anthropological definition of 'the field'. Rather, we are proposing a 'lighter touch' when it comes to consideration of 'place', understanding it alongside language as being 'environmental', but not always tied to territory or physicality. This lighter touch enables 'place' (as environment) to be understood in an affective sense that corresponds to an emphasis on language and 'being there'. In this way, 'the field' might remain bounded, but perhaps in a less structured, more flexible sense, akin to the serendipity and selectivity described by Gupta and Ferguson (1997).

Conclusion

These observations inevitably have consequences for both multi-sited and online ethnography, and invite a comparison of methods, such as between Wulff's (2012, 2014) multi-sited 'yo-yo' fieldwork in Ireland and Hirvi's (2012) online ethnography of the Sikh community in the USA. Where Wulff chose to manage both her distance from and the multi-sited nature of her participants

by conducting regular personal visits to Ireland, Hirvi, having conducted some on-site ethnography in the USA, observed further activities through online means. One might say that Wulff privileged 'place' to a greater extent than Hirvi because she travelled to the site, conducting fieldwork by 'being there'. However, Wulff's methods place value on face-to-face interactivity, whilst Hirvi's methods understand interactivity in a wider sense, giving consideration to the potential of online fora. While Hirvi (2012: 42) notes that 'without the help of the Internet, the act of getting there might have been a lot harder and slower' she concedes the importance of 'realworld' interactivity: 'fieldworkers learn through all the senses through movement through their bodies and whole being a total practice' (Hirvi 2012: 42). Despite the apparent contrast in their methods, Hirvi's and Wulff's approaches are rather similar in that they both privilege bodily presence, 'being there', above more diffuse forms of interactivity. This precedence is both indicative of a wider anthropological consensus and at the root of online ethnography's troubles – for despite its ability to condense distance and provide constant access to 'the field', it remains able only to produce simulacra of face-to-face communication.

If the discipline remains interested in presence, 'being' and 'voice', the texts of online communication present a problem, for they seem to remove the temporal, situational and practiced elements of everyday life, which remain of so much interest (Caverero 2005: 150-151). Yet some scholars suggest that this could change. Derrida (1998) identified writing itself as a trace of somatic activity, consequently linked to the body, the person, and the environment in which it was produced. In a similar vein, Cixous (1976) uses the phrase 'écriture feminine', commonly translated as 'white ink' (i.e., breast milk) to express the maternal bond between the writer and his/her mother's body. Frohne and Katti (2000: 10) observe that 'media are always materialized and thereby a physical part of the world […] bound to certain practices which themselves are embedded in cultural features and in political effects and consequences'. Whilst this approach might cause some division of opinion within the discipline, it is worth considering, as it may add credentials to the 'online dimensions' (Hirvi 2012: 42) of participants' lives and, in doing so, present a solution to

the problems facing online ethnography. In the meantime, despite many ongoing philosophical and epistemological challenges faced both by fieldwork and 'the field' itself, the challenges for anthropologists remain the same. In the context of language use, anthropologists today are asking the same questions as fifty years ago: What motivates people to use one language rather than another? Why are some languages privileged over others? Why do people continue to speak a language even when it is politically sensitive? How do we understand language as a 'web of significance' for ourselves and for others (Geertz 1973, 5)? Should we 'be *there*'? Or '*be* there'?

Máiréad Nic Craith

Intercultural Research Centre, Heriot-Watt University

(m.niccraith@hw.ac.uk)

Emma Hill

Intercultural Research Centre, Heriot-Watt University

(ech2@hw.ac.uk)

Bibliography

Bajuni Campaign (2013) 'Why are we doing this…?' *Bajuni Campaign: Seeking Justice for Glasgow Bajunis* <https://bajunicampaign.wordpress.com/page/3/> (accessed 28 January 2015)

Bajuni Campaign (2014), 'Sprakab Scandal', *Bajuni Campaign: Seeking Justice for Glasgow Bajunis,* <https://bajunicampaign.wordpress.com/2014/05/31/sprakab-scandal/> (accessed 26 January 2015).

Abby, A. (2005), *Field Research Project on Minorities in Somalia* (London: Oxford House).

Allen, B. (2008), *The Bajuni people of Southern Somalia and the Asylum System* (Dublin: Refugee Documentation Centre).

Alamdar-Niemannd, M., Bergs-Winkels, D., and Merkens, H. (1991), 'Educational Conditions of Turkish Migrant Children in German Schools', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 2 no. 2: 154–161.

Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso).

Ardévol, E. and Estalella, A. (2010), 'Uses of the Internet in European Ethnographic Research' in U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith and J. Frykman (eds), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 480-96.

Bajuni Campaign (2013) 'Why are we doing this…?' *Bajuni Campaign: Seeking Justice for Glasgow Bajunis* <https://bajunicampaign.wordpress.com/page/3/> (accessed 28 January 2015)

Bajuni Campaign (2014), 'Sprakab Scandal', *Bajuni Campaign: Seeking Justice for Glasgow Bajunis,* <https://bajunicampaign.wordpress.com/2014/05/31/sprakab-scandal/> (accessed 26 January 2015).

Bannister, G. and Sowby, D. (2012) *The Islander. A Translation of an tOileánach by Tomás Ó Crohan* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan).

Barry, P. (2009), *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Beach, H. (2007), 'Self-determining the Self: Aspects of Saami Identity Management in Sweden', *Acta Borealia* 24, no. 1: 1–25.

Beach, H. (2012), 'Nordic Reflections on Northern Social Research', in U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith and J. Frykman (eds), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 32-50.

Binchy, A. (1994), 'Travellers' Language: A Sociolinguistic Perspective', in M. McCann, S. Ó Síocháin, and J. Ruane (eds), *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies), 134–154.

Blommaert, J. (2001), 'Investigating Narrative Inequality: African Asylum Seekers' Stories in Belgium', *Discourse and Society* 12, no. 4: 413-449.

Boellstorff, T., Nardi, B., Pearce, C. and Taylor, T. (2012), *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Canagarajah, A. (2004), 'Reconstructing Local Knowledge, Reconfiguring Language Studies', in A. Canagarajah (ed.), *Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice* (Malwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum), PP. 3-24.

Caverero, A. (2005), '*For More than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

Chapman, M. (1978), *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's).

Cixous, H. (1976) 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *Signs* 1, no.4: 875–93.

Cook, J., Laidlaw, J. and Mair, J. (2009), 'What if there is no elephant? Towards a conception of the un-sited field', in Marh-Anthony Falzon ed, Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research (Farnham: Ashgate), PP. 47-72

Craig, S. (2012), 'The use of language analysis in asylum decision-making in the UK – a discussion', Journal of Immigration Asylum and Nationality Law 26, no. 3: 255-268.

Danson, M. and Burnett, K. (2014) 'Enterprise and Entrepreneurship on Islands', in C. Henry and G. McElwee eds. Exploring Rural Enterprise: New Perspectives on Research, Policy & Practice: Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research, (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited) pp. 151-174.

Derrida, J. (1998), *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press).

Derrida, J. (2000), *Of Hospitality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

Echeverria, B. (2003), 'Schooling, Language and Ethnic Identity in the Basque Autonomous Community', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 34, no. 4: 351–372.

Enright, T. (1986) 'Introduction', in T. O'Crohan, *Island Cross-Talk: Pages from a Diary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-9.

Forster, E. M. (1933) 'Introductory Note', in M. O' Sullivan, *Twenty-Years-A Growing* (London: Chatto and Windus), PP. v-vi.

Frohne, U. and Katti, C. (2000), 'Crossing Boundaries in Cyberspace? The politics of 'Body' and 'Language' after the emergence of new media', *Art Journal* 59, no. 4: 8-13.

Gal, S. (2006), 'Migration, Minorities and Multilingualism: Language Ideologies in Europe', in C. Mar Molinero and P. Stevenson (eds), *Language Ideologies, Policies and Practices: Language and the Future of Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), 13–27.

Gal, S. and Irvine, J. (1995), 'The Boundaries of Languages and Disciplines: How Ideologies Construct Difference', *Social Research* 62, no. 4: 967-1001.

García-Sánchez, I. (2014) *Language and Muslim Immigrant Childhoods: The Politics of Belonging* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell).

Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic).

Grillo, R. (1989), *Dominant Languages: Language and Hierarchy in Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (1997), 'Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method and Location in Anthropology', in A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (eds), *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Hannerz, U. (2003), 'Being there… and there… and there!: Reflections on Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Ethnography* 4, no 2: 201-216.

Hill, E. (2014), 'Reassessing the Role of the "Trickster": a Consideration of Immigrant Campaigning in Scotland in a European Context', paper presented at UACES Conference, Cork.

Hill, E. (2013), 'Reconsidering the Character of the 'Trickster' in the Context of the Glasgow Bajuni Campaign', paper presented at Refugee Studies Centre Conference on 'Refugee Voices'.

Hogan-Brun, G. (2004), 'Language Planning and Media in Minority Language and Plurilingual Contexts', *Current Issues in Language Planning,* 12, no. 3: 325-329.

Höhne, M. (2006), 'Political Identity, emerging state structures and conflict in northern Somalia', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, no. 3: 397-414.

Hine, C. (2000), *Virtual Ethnography* (London: Sage).

Hirvi, L. (2012), 'Multi-Sited Fieldwork amongst Sikhs in Finland and California: Researching the Offline Online', in L. Hirvi and H. Snellman (eds), *Where is the Field? The Experience of Migration Viewed through the Prism of Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society), PP.23-44.

Jama, Z. (1994), 'Silent Voices: The role of Somali women's poetry in social and political life', *Oral Tradition.* 9, no. 1, 185-202.

Kockel, U. (1999), *Borderline Cases: The Ethnic Frontiers of European Integration* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press).

Koikkalainen's, S. (2012), 'Virtual Fields: How to Study a Scattered Migrant Population Online: The Case of Highly Skilled Finns in the European Union', in L. Hirvi and H. Snellman (eds), *Where is the Field? The Experience of Migration Viewed through the Prism of Ethnographic Fieldwork* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society), 45-65.

Kopf, S. (2012), 'Roma and Sinti: The "Other" within Europe', in U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith and J. Frykman (eds), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 310-321.

Luce, J. (1969) 'Homeric Qualities in the Life and Literature of the Great Blasket Island', *Greece and Rome,* XV: 151-68.

Macdonald, S. (1997), *Reimagining Culture: Histories, Identities and the Gaelic Renaissance* (Oxford: Berg).

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1961), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: Dutton).

Marranci, G. (2003), '"We Speak English." Language and Identity Processes in Northern Ireland's Muslim Community', *Ethnologist* 25, no. 2: 59–77.

Marranci, G. (2006), 'Being Muslim in Northern Ireland: Dangerous Symbols and the Use of English', in U. Kockel and R. Byron (eds), *Negotiating Culture: Moving, Mixing and memory in Contemporary Europe* (Münster: LIT), 167–185.

Marranci, G. (2007), 'Faith, Language and Identity: Muslim Migrants in Scotland and Northern Ireland', in M. Nic Craith (ed.), *Language, Power and Identity Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), 167–178.

Marcus, G. (1995), 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1: 95-117.

Nic Craith, M. (1988), *An tOileánach Léannta* (Dublin: Clóchomhar).

Nic Craith, M. (1996a) *Watching One's Tongue: Issues in Language Planning* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press).

Nic Craith, M. (1996b) *Watching One's Tongue: Aspects of Romance and Celtic Languages* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press).

Nic Craith, M. (2000), 'Contested Identities and the Quest for Legitimacy', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 21, no. 5: 399–413.

Nic Craith, M. (2004), 'Local Cultures in a Global World' in U. Kockel and M. Nic Craith (eds), *Communicating Cultures* (Berlin: LIT), 279-99

Nic Craith, M. (2006), *Europe and the Politics of Language, Citizens, Migrants, Outsiders* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).

Ó Criomhthain, T. (1929) *An t-Oileánach* (Dublin: Cómhlucht an Talbóidigh).

Okely, J. (2006), ‚Kontinuität und Wandel in den Lebensverhältnissen und der Kultur der Roma, Sinti und Kále', *Berliner Blätter* 39: 25–41.

Ó Súilleabháin, M. (1933), *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (Dublin: Cómlucht an Talbóidigh).

Payne, M. (2014), 'The integration of Roma Slovak pupils into a secondary school in Sheffield: A case of school super-diversity?', Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies, <http://www.tilburguniversity.edu/upload/4e5e24bd-a509-4600-ae75-de492dc115d2_TPCS_101_Payne.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2015).

Rabinow, P. and Marcus, G. with Faubion, J. and Rees, T. (2008), *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).

Rees, T. (2008), 'Today, what is Anthropology?' in Rabinow, P. and Marcus, G. with Faubion, J. and Rees, T. (2008), *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 1-12.

Sayers, P. (1936), *Peig: A Scéal Féin* (Dublin: Talbot).

Spivak, G. (2010), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in R. Morris (ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press), PP.21-80.

Urla, J. (2012), *Reclaiming Basque: Language, Nation, and Cultural Activism* (Reno: University of Nevada Press).

Van Maanen, J. (2006), 'Ethnography then and now', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal,* 1, no. 1: 13-21.

Wang, X. (2011), 'Which Language? Which Culture? Which Pedagogy? A Study of Mandarin Chinese teachers' Perceptions of their Professional Self in a British School Context', Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies, <http://www.tilburguniversity.edu/upload/ef52e907-70a9-4b10-8e8b-2a9cd8d6571d_tpcs%20paper4.pdf> (accessed 22 January 2015).

Wittel, A. (2000), 'Ethnography on the Move: From Field to Internet', *Qualitative Social Research.* 1, no. 1 <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1131/2517> (accessed 22 January 2015)

Wolber, B. (1991), 'More than a Golden Bangle . . . The Significance of Success in School for Returning Turkish Migrant Families', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 22: 181–199.

Woolard, K. (1989), *Double Talk: Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity in Catalonia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Woolard, K. (2008), 'Language and Identity Choice in Catalonia: the Interplay of Contrasting Ideologies of Linguistic Authority', in K. Süselbeck, U. Mühlschlegel and P. Masson (eds), *Lengua, nación e identidad. La regulación del plurilingüismo en España y América Latina* (Frankfurt/M.: Vervuert/Madrid: Iberoamericana), 303-323.

Wulff, H. (2002), 'Yo-yo Field-work: Mobility and Time in a Multi-Local Study of Dance in Ireland', *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures,* 11: 117-136.

Wulff, H. (2012), 'An Anthropological Perspective on Literary Arts in Ireland', in U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith and J. Frykman (eds), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell), 537-550.

Wulff, H. (2014), 'Anthropologist in the Irish Literary World: Reflexivity through Studying Sideways', in T. Hylland Eriksen, C. Garsten and S. Randeria (eds), *Anthropology Now And Next: Essays in Honor of Ulf Hannerz* (Oxford: Berghahn), 147-60.

Zenker, O. (2013), *Irishness is all around us: Language Revivalism and the Culture of Ethnic Identity in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berghahn).