THE HOFEFER PRIZES FOR EXCELLENCE
IN UNDERGRADUATE WRITING

In recognition of writing achievement in the
undergraduate field of study

May 22, 2002
“Not True to Scale or Directions”:
Remapping Out-of-the-Way Places

BECKY BLANCHARD

for
Cultural and Social Anthropology 90
Theory in Cultural and Social Anthropology

PAULLA A. EBRON
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
"Not true to scale or directions": Remapping Out-of-the-way Places

by Becky Blanchard

As a girl growing up in Oregon's Willamette Valley, I used to pace out distances in the field of my family's small farm. One hundred strides from the barn entrance to the north side of the pond. Seventy steps from the front door to the creek bed. Two hundred paces from the goats' pen to the rusting Volkswagen we'd inherited from the land's previous owner. I would weave my measurements together into a distorted map of our acreage as seen through my eyes.

Mapmakers, like anthropologists, are storytellers. They create representations of landscapes with a cartographic language of symbols inextricably situated in webs of cultural meaning that give significance to particular features and ways of interpreting the landscape. From hand-drawn sketches to satellite images, maps always value certain ways of knowing and categorizing the world. Maps, therefore, are not objective depictions of the ground below, but cosmologies drawn up much like texts that offer the audience an inherently subjective message entangled in political discourse.

Despite this, maps are often presented as truth. Their supposed objectivity is an exercise of power in which discourses about the value of places, and especially about out-of-the-way places, are enacted on the landscape, and seemingly innocent lines, dots and shading have real impacts in peoples' lives. From her own work in Indonesia, anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes:

Maps of South Kalimantan drawn since the 1970s tend to include a dotted line marked "proposed highway" [...] The dotted line signals more an imagined road, however; it marks out an entire dream of development in which the untidy forests and backward peoples of the Meratus Mountains are tamed and transformed. (1993: 287)
In her book *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, a study of marginality in South Kalimantan's Meratus Mountains, Tsing calls for a remapping of out-of-the-way places, not only to acknowledge the situated knowledge of the cartographer, but also to decentralize the concept of rigid and static boundaries -- in geography, community and identity -- that has historically been privileged in anthropology. In this paper, I hope to show the ways in which Tsing's work challenges classical norms of ethnography as well as discourses of science and development and to show how reflexive anthropology inspires my own research on Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in Southern Oregon.

In childhood, I loved maps and treasured the atlases I was given each Christmas from my family. They lived on a shelf with old copies of *National Geographic* saved from the estate sale that took away other prized possessions -- my grandmother's dresses from her youth in the Philippines, my grandfather's crab pots, the mysterious icons of Catholicism I had promised never to touch. For me, maps represented a world I could only imagine, of sinuous rivers, rugged ranges and wave-worn shores as elusive to me as the settings of my grandparents' stories of the war-torn islands. I read them like novels, romanticizing the life I might lead amongst the exotic names on their pages.

About the time that I was filling the pages of my grade-school notebooks with treasure maps and expeditions to the headwaters of our crick, Tsing returned to Indonesia's South Kalimantan province to continue her fieldwork in the Meratus Mountains. In exploring the marginality of Dayak shifting cultivators and the ways in which the Meratus Dayak continually redefined their position on the state's periphery, she examined state rule, formation of regional and ethnic identities and gender differentiation (1993: 5). With their autonomy increasingly threatened by Indonesia's drive for state
expansion, Meratus have both been shaped by new forms of state-centered knowledge, through programs such as family planning and resettlement, as well as responded to and reinterpreted them (1993: 8).

Tsing's study of Meratus marginality is significant both in its content, which challenges classical norms of anthropology by emphasizing its dynamism and position within national and global ideologies; but its form as well offers a strategic departure from classic ethnographies. By choosing to change the names of the people who appear in her stories, to "doctor" the photographs that begin each chapter, to write herself into the stories she presents and to connect the parody performed by Uma Adang with her own use of parody as a tool, Tsing takes responsibility for her subjective representations of the people and places she writes as just that -- representations. Positioning herself in a reflexive schism over the utility of classic norms of ethnographic writing, as described by Renato Rosaldo in *Culture and Truth*, Tsing inserts herself as ethnographer into her ethnography and acknowledges her role as storyteller.

This strategic situating in a real/made-up place populated by the people of the Meratus Mountains/the characters of Tsing's story is meant to be disorienting and prepares the reader for the theoretical debates into which she enters. The publication of *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* coincided with the publication of the second edition of *Culture and Truth*. Tsing's work is located at a moment in which anthropologists drew upon literary studies to question the discipline's quest for a scientific understanding of culture. Reflexive anthropology drew a critical eye to the classical norms of ethnography, including the objectivity of the detached expert observer, cultures as whole and bounded units, and the use of the ethnographic present to fix subjects in time and space. (Rosaldo
1993). *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* challenges classic norms of ethnography in a series of stories about marginality in an out-of-the-way place that mixes past and present tenses and acknowledges the fluid and dynamic nature of cultures. Tsing explicitly challenges anthropologists to move beyond classical norms that fix cultures in timeless space:

> In defining itself as a science that can travel anywhere, anthropology has classically constituted its objects -- "culture" -- as essentially immobile or as possessing a mobility that is cyclical and repetitive. The contrast between a travelling science and its fixed objects is displayed in the expected practices of fieldwork: The anthropologist travels; the culture is found in a set place. (Tsing 1993: 123)

Mobility plays a central role in Tsing's study of the Meratus Dayak shifting cultivators, both due to the importance of travel for many Meratus and to the impact of government resettlement programs on Meratus communities.

Further, the mobility as a means of transcending categories and challenging socially constructed boundaries is a motif throughout the work of both Tsing and Rosaldo. It comes in response to a history of privileged structuralism, in which anthropologists' definition of culture as a set of shared meanings has emphasized "shared patterns at the expense of processes of change and internal inconsistencies, conflicts, and contradictions" (Rosaldo 1993: 28). Anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas, naturalized the discipline's penchant for categorization and creation of ideal types, writing, "[T]he yearning for rigidity is in us all. It is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts" (Douglas: 163). However, internal inconsistencies and contradictions are central to the content and form of Tsing's ethnography. Tsing's approach confuses the reader; however, an understanding of the way in which her writing comes at a particular moment in the history of anthropology and responds to the limitations of the discipline's
classic norms, can help the reader locate Tsing's work in theoretical debates raised by reflexive anthropology.

The sense of disorientation Tsing employs in her representation of the people and places in her writing is carried into the arena in which it seems most ironically unlikely, and also most striking. Tsing includes several maps, both "official" and unofficial, on national and local scales. Maps usually derive their utility from imposing familiar grids, scales, symbols and categories upon unfamiliar landscapes. Like a scientific report or a classically modeled ethnography, maps utilize a codified structure to communicate subjectively valued ideas in a form that writes out their subjectivity.

Tsing's parodic use of maps -- she acknowledges distortions of distance and direction -- and her comparison of forest types as mapped by state officials and by local people described below, act subversively against interpretations of maps as the objective eye/I of science. In the context of a Western world in which the capabilities of technological vision modifications, such as satellite imaging and global positioning systems (GPS) are becoming part of everyday life, the careful pencil of the cartographer is being replaced by the digitized bitmaps of machine. With changing technology, the question of objectivity is dodged by claims of never-before-achieved accuracy. Feminist scholar Donna Haraway insists that contemporary Western science's disembodied quest to see remains a quest for power:

Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all perspective gives way to infinitely mobile vision, which no longer seems just mythically about the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice. And like the god-trick, this eye fucks the world to make techno-monsters. (Haraway: 189)

Haraway suggests that the scientist with his or her satellite image or GPS model mirrors the colonial explorer with his compass and ink. Both encode the world into a way of
knowing that is presented as objective truth, and this attempt at universalizing the situated cosmology of Western science is itself an attempt at conquest. Tsing refutes this presentation through the parodic use of maps in her work and specifically explores the role of mapping in programs of development.

Maps bring out-of-the-way places into discourses about development, in which empty space implies blank space to be filled. Such empty space denies the agency and tenure of its population, and this means that without demarcated rights -- ownership or rightful residency delineated in the map's world-as-code -- the area's resources may be perceived as free and open for development. Tsing points out the operation of such discourse in the Meratus Mountains in her classification of the area as an "out-of-the-way place" (defined as an area that is politically up for grabs.) She writes of the discrepancy between official government maps of forest resources in the area and maps drawn by her friend Ma Salam, a local resident:

By drawing the boundaries of primary forest so widely, the [government] map restricts Meratus resource use in the central mountains to this, stream-side ribbons, denying people's occupation of the entire territory [...] In contrast to the official map, Ma Salam's drawing offers a complex history of the forest. Ma Salam drew not only young, regrowing brush only a few years old, but also older secondary forest felled before his time but still recognizable to him from the trees -- and the stories through which trees enter conversation. [...] [To Ma Salam, t]he history of the forest is also the stories of farms and farmers over time. (Tsing 1993: 160-164)

The conflicting visions of these two cartographers coupled with earlier discussion of the proposed highway through South Kalimantan illustrates the ways in which mapping reflects not only theoretical discourses about people and landscapes, but the potential ways in which the lines upon the map (or, in many cases, all of the things which are not represented on the map) have real, tangible effects on the ground and in people's lives.

The impetus for my own research was, in some ways, a proposed change to the map of my home state and a curiosity of the ways in which a "paper park," impacted local
people's real lives. In the summer of 2000, outgoing President Bill Clinton designated a 52,000-acre checkerboard swath of federal land in the Southern Oregon Siskiyous as Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Several local and national groups had been working for decades to protect the area from off-road vehicle use, overgrazing and timber harvests. Prior to its designation as a national monument, the Bureau of Land Management had managed the area as the Cascade-Siskiyou Ecological Emphasis Area. As temperatures heated up that summer in the tinder-dry Rogue Valley, debate over the monument and its impacts on local communities blazed across the pages of newspapers around the country. With a change of presidential administration, new Interior Secretary Gale Norton referred the designation back to Jackson County Commissioners to make a recommendation based upon further collection of public input. Without real numbers in her support or precedent to revoke or reduce monument boundaries, Norton effectively undid the monument's intended function as an area of ecological restoration by freezing the draft management plan and therefore retaining management of the monument as if nothing had changed but the name. Still, local people debated on the impact the monument would have upon their lives — while some monument boosters printed up maps and banners for visitors, others advocated removing any signage that might make the monument an attractive nuisance. Both monument advocates and opponents worked busily to organize with their neighbors and form coalitions with local, state and national organizations, institutions and politicians. The drama playing out in their backyard became the test case for the future of the other monuments declared at the end of Clinton's second term.
Yet, if you look at a map of Jackson County, it is unlikely that you'll see any hint of the vibrant communities and politicized resources of the headlines. You will likely see a blank space. It was all I saw, even as I steered the car south from my Portland-area home to take up life in a cabin I guessed at the time would be 14 miles off the freeway and about 180 degrees from my life in the metropolitan Willamette Valley. On paper, Jackson County's main feature is a sinuous stretch of Interstate 5 that tears through the Rogue Valley on its way to the sunshine skies of Los Angeles or the bustling urban hubs to the north. The freeway is flanked by a handful of towns with plain-folk names like Gold Hill and White City that cling to its shoulders with fingers of quick-stop gas stations and "Indian" trading posts. The smaller towns seem to revolve around the bloated gray sprawl of Medford, which is encroaching each year upon its neighbors with new freeway on-ramps and freshly paved expanses of strip mall. Farther south, just before the wearing run up Siskiyou Summit, lies Ashland, home of Southern Oregon University and a long-time pilgrimage for Shakespeare-lovers and bed-and-breakfast weekenders alike.

Even as I headed down for my field research, I had surprisingly little knowledge of the rest of the map, of those apparently empty spaces that didn't lie within visual range of the freeway. There are topography contours, sure enough, in the southern part of the county. Every motorist in the state has a story about an overheated engine or an unexpected snow on his or her way to California. There are a scattering of roads connecting the freeway to Cascade mountain lakes and the high desert beyond. Other than the corridor immediately surrounding I-5, Jackson County appears to be a whole lot of nothing. Rural areas, devoid of political features, appear desolate and forgotten, just
another place for tourists to pass through on their way to city lights or picture-postcard vacations elsewhere, like pioneers before them, always on the trail to someplace else.

My road maps betray a fixation with boundaries. Cities appear fixed and neatly contained within shaded polygons; everything inside the boundary is Medford, everything outside is not. Jackson County is separated from Klamath County by a dotted line just as Oregon is separated from California by a bold line. These sharp divisions of geography have sometimes led me to the naïve assumption that identity follows similar categorization -- that I am an Oregonian because my hometown is enclosed by the Columbia and Snake Rivers, the Pacific Ocean and the 42nd parallel, and I am therefore not a Californian. Identity and membership in a community, however, cannot be drawn up from mutually exclusive and clearly defined categories, just as the negotiation of urban/rural geographies cannot be visualized as taking place in a landscape of precisely bounded cities and the undifferentiated, inward-focused hinterlands beyond. Such a view erases the true complexity and dynamism of urban/rural interactions and ignores important questions about the utility of these categories.

Tsing’s ethnography of the Meratus Dayak also recognizes the complex interactions and fluidity between urban and rural categories: "The connections formed between remote rural areas and cosmopolitan centers involve impositions of meaning as well as political and economic expansions" (Tsing 1993: 287). The boundaries set around urban and rural places and people, then, are not merely geographical, but historical, political, economic and cultural. Boundaries drawn on maps work to reflect and corroborate socially constructed hierarchies of race, gender, sexual orientation and class.
Boundaries, however, are never so clear or fixed as the lines on a map, and Rosaldo writes that social borders are equally dynamic:

Although most metropolitan typifications continue to suppress border zones, human cultures are neither necessarily coherent nor always homogeneous. More often than we usually care to think, our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds. Social borders frequently become salient around such lines as sexual orientation, gender, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, politics, dress, food, or taste. (Rosaldo 1993: 208)

Maps, then, too often elicit visions of a world in which places, people and features are easily differentiated from one another -- in which rivers have clear beginnings and ends, important places are noted in boldface type and city limits lasso people into community belonging.

In *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, Tsing calls for a remapping of out-of-the-way places, and along with that, the recreation of anthropology as a discipline that seeks new understandings of borders and marginality in culture as well as geography. To do so, anthropologists must play with new forms, such as parody, to replace or supplement the classical norms of ethnography. In my own work, I hope to draw upon Tsing's parodic use of maps both to situate my own subjective knowledge as an ethnographer and to show the limitations of boundary-setting.

Mapmakers, like ethnographers, are storytellers. Somehow, as a little girl, I knew this. Somewhere along the way, in studying maps as tools of science, in becoming entangled in webs of discourses on science and development, I forgot this. Tsing, Rosaldo and other reflexive anthropologists make subjectivity and situated knowledge explicit in their work, challenging classical norms of ethnography that stem from discourses of science as a privileged way of knowing. The empty spaces of out-of-the-way places are part of this story of a scientifically justified development. The study of out-of-the-way places fills in the blank space of "official" maps. Though Tsing's maps
may not be true to scale or direction, they are true to her own experience in dialogue with
the Meratus Dayak, and by challenging discourses of science and development, maps of
out-of-the-way places bring in new voices and storytellers and offer another view of the
world -- not a god-trick or the objective eye/I of science, but a view situated in time and
place.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

180.

Haraway, Donna. 1999. "Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminisim and
the Privilege of Partial Perspective," pages 172-188 in Mario Biagioli (ed.), The

Beacon Press.

Princeton University Press.