

Not Soft Power, But Speaking Softly

'Everyday Diplomacy' in Field Relations during the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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Based on long-term fieldwork in Russia, but focusing mainly on the aftermath of the 2014 Malaysian airliner downing in Ukraine, this article examines the individual ethnographer and informants alike as unwilling 'diplomatic' representatives in the field. Firstly, I discuss the authoritarian political context in Russia and how it affects the notion of 'soft power' and 'public' discourse. Then I relate the familiar 'political testing' experience of researchers by informants, and 'neutrality' in field relations (Ergun and Erdemir 2010). Next, I draw on the anthropology of indirect communication to characterize 'everyday diplomacy' after the event as a particular kind of civility. I go on to examine attendant affective states of 'tension, disturbance, or jarring' (Navaro-Yashin 2012) that both threaten civility and enable it. Finally, I argue that classic ethnographic rapport-building deserves further examination in the light of the porosity of politics, the social environment and the field.

Keywords: affect, civility, everyday diplomacy, field relations, nationalism, popular geopolitics, soft power, Russia

Introduction

I have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in an area encompassing a district of villages and industrial towns four hours from Moscow in Russia for the last six years and visited the place for many years prior to that. Most of my informants are blue-collar families who live in a socially compressed space of a few housing blocks in a deindustrializing former single-factory town.

The Ukraine conflict has been presented in Russian media as part of a NATO conspiracy instigating a 'neo-fascist' coup in Kiev. I was sure this would affect fieldwork in some ways. As it turned out, I arrived back to the field shortly after the intensification of armed conflict in the east of Ukraine (June 2014), a few months after the annexation of the Crimean peninsula (March) and the Winter Olympics (February), and a few weeks before the downing by anti-aircraft units of a Malaysian airliner carrying Dutch passengers (17 July). These events became the subject of intense public interpretation and media manipulation in Russia. They also came hot on the heels of what was seen



as a novel and rare Russian success in the field of deploying 'soft power' through the successful hosting of the Olympics. This adoption of a strategy to 'attract and co-opt' (soft power) (Nye 2004: 2) was in marked contrast to the usual interpretation of Russian foreign policy actions as coercive, neocolonial or revanchist (Tsygankov 2006). The ordinary citizen and ethnographer alike were loudly hailed by an unrelenting media campaign of counter-propaganda about the West. This was impossible to avoid, as it took place on a multi-platform basis (mainstream state-controlled TV and small armies of paid government bloggers on social media). As a society characterized by increasing authoritarian and coercive measures, people living in Russia have commensurately become the objects of revanchist great power rhetoric, xenophobia and other strategies for masking or distracting from political failure at home – the political 'event' has become increasingly difficult to completely exclude or banish from the everyday, as much as an individual might want to do so. As Grix has recently argued, surveying the projection of the greatness of nation through the Winter Olympics, the primary audience for this display of soft power is domestic (Grix and Kramareva 2015; see also Persson and Petersson 2014).

The sense of an individual's loyalty to the state being on public display has re-emerged in a form not seen since the Soviet period. In this state-saturated context, the everyday 'diplomacy' of field relations inevitably becomes politically charged, but also offers opportunities to connect the ethnographic turn in the anthropology of the state, popular geopolitics, and the burgeoning work on intimacy-geopolitics in geography (Pain and Staeheli 2014). While 'common sense' understandings of politics are shaped strongly by elite manipulation, particularly in a state like Russia, this article argues that fieldwork relations themselves can serve as useful sites to explore how notions of political eventfulness are incorporated into the everyday. The ethnographic is a site of encounter that can foreground how the everyday is both subject to the coercive nature of that 'event' (the essentializing of the Ukraine conflict's meaning as revealing the hostile intentions of the West), but also the local incorporation of less propagandistically charged meanings that arise in the encounter between informants and foreign researcher. Fieldworker as diplomat is a metaphor that sits uncomfortably but in some ways, faced with the over-determining nature of the event, inevitably 'fits' that role, even if the ethnographer is unequal to it. Informants and researcher are forced to negotiate the event within their everyday encounters in a way that maintains civility and the possibility of an ongoing commitment to relations. This is the 'intimate' reconstruction of (geo)political subjectivities both in the light of state-linked identities and in spite of it. In that sense the article contributes to a vision of popular geopolitics that emphasizes the agency, as much as the manipulation of local communities.

Cross-Cultural Research Positionality

There is a considerable body of literature on ethnographic field relations, and not only in anthropology: the influence of a researcher's gender, race, class and so on features even more visibly in sociology and geography, whose adoption of ethnographic methods is relatively recent or whose fieldwork often occurs in the 'origin' cultural environment of the researcher. There is less writing explicitly devoted to the significance of a researcher's

origin 'culture'. Methodological interest is more often in 'native' anthropology than 'foreignness', the latter taken as a self-evident aspect of traditional anthropological fieldwork and therefore bundled with positionality more generally. 'Cross-cultural' positionality as an object of discussion appears more often in geography scholarship – often in discussions of visible and less visible race difference (Mullings 1999; Twyman et al. 1999; Merriam et al. 2001; Liamputtong 2008).

Cross-cultural issues often concern white researchers working in the Global South and therefore discussion focuses on questions of unequal power. The binary insider–outsider is frequently adopted, with some researchers arguing that it is possible to move to a kind of 'adopted' insider status, despite racial or national difference (Merriam et al. 2001: 8). Others concentrate on criticizing an insider–outsider dichotomy, arguing that ethnographers are never fully home in any culture (Gallinat 2010: 27; cf. Abu-Lughood 1991), and that the term 'native' anthropologist – often used in the post-communist context – is misleading.

Despite the possible relative degrees of insiderness/outsiderness, it is striking how rarely attention is given to concrete categories such as expatriate heritage and bilingualism/biculturalism in contributing to intermediate or indeterminate statuses. The interactions described in this article take place against the cultural 'backdrop' of two parallel yet contradictory 'qualities' of the researcher in the eyes of informants – relative Russian linguistic and cultural competence, and yet a persistence in 'foreignness' made suddenly more visible by political crisis. If the former is a 'success' for the researcher and something worked on very carefully to the degree that it comes 'naturally',¹ then the latter is a recent, if inevitable, failure and highlights the limitations of the 'diplomacy' mode of behaviour for the ethnographer when faced with an environment over-determined by political discourse that strongly conflicts with his or her values. In such a case, personality and origin-culture personhood come to be perceived by researcher and informants alike as key aspects of positionality (cf. Moser 2008). Given my cultural comfort in Russia and with Russian, my critique of Russian foreign policy over the Ukraine conflict served to emphasize a split insider–outsiderness.

As Ortner argues, regardless of whatever else has happened to bounded notions of culture 'minimally, [ethnography] has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self – as much of it as possible – as the instrument of knowing' (Ortner 1995: 173). And with that retention of self comes inescapably the idea of a self's particular cultural attachment – made visible in the ethnographic encounter through difference of appearance, dress, body or language. At times of political stress this can suddenly loom large in field relations. I discuss such moments of stress and their diplomatic negotiation in more detail below, but a striking, even humorous example, is worth presenting here. I had grown to feel extremely comfortable in my British-Russian cultural 'skin', working in Moscow in the second half of the 1990s. During the 1999 Nato bombing of Serbia – a key Russian ally – I suddenly found myself in a politically problematic position as the unwilling representative of the West: the 'imperialists' indiscriminately bombing Serbian 'brother Slavs'. In an observation of which one can image Mauss approving, a male acquaintance commented along the lines of: 'You can say anything you like about having a balanced view [being against Nato bombing *and* against Serbian aggression] – that's so English of you: balance, logic,

fair play and justice. But your body language says you are uncomfortable, that you don't really believe in your words – so typically English too; look how you sit, with your arms and legs crossed. That's not how a Russian would do it. They would be confident in being right, even if they were wrong!

This encounter nicely summarizes long-standing stereotypes held in Russia about cultural difference: the West as 'decadently' liberal, postmodern, equivocal and guilty of double standards, while Russia is less rational, but spiritually and emotionally confident in its rightness at the same time as conscious of its failings. These are all intercultural tropes that appear in the everyday discourses on the current Ukraine conflict. In turn, as an intimate everyday encounter that links to the geopolitical, it reminds us that 'culture' is always contaminated by the politicized world (Abu-Lughod 1999: 13).

Thus this article in part reflects on the ways in which the identity of the fieldworker becomes framed in relation to national origin and international politics even if he or she seeks to construct alternative positions. In addition, it ponders the meaning and suitability of diplomatic metaphors for the researcher's and informants' positioning in such context. This is carried out on two levels: the researcher and researched are compared to normative understandings of 'diplomacy' – for example, to what degree must a diplomat remain open and cooperative in conduct at the same time as pursuing 'transactional objectives' (Rose and Wadham-Smith 2004: 34–55)? Both researchers and the researched engage in relations of exchange but also of withholding information – both critical aspects of formal diplomacy. Thus there are empirical parallels between what fieldworkers and diplomats do, and this also raises the question of whether an expanded definition of diplomacy would include fieldworkers within its remit, rather than saying they resemble diplomats. At the same time there are limits to this resemblance – particularly because of the affective spectrum of response denied to the diplomat. Secondly, the article applies critiques made of agent-centric conceptualizations of international relations such as 'soft power' (Szostek 2014) to micro-scale field relations. Politics is always at once structured by the 'weirder world' (Kemper 2009) of embedded and enduring, shared social values (Lock 2009). Local contexts can detune the orthodox interpretations of the political – leading to both the affective (revealing intimate sympathy and angry frustration), and more measured, civilly solidary and tolerant responses (seen as distinct positions – the latter acknowledging but not agreeing with difference).

Researcher as Representing 'Soft Power' and Political Testing by the Researched

Firstly I outline some of the political testing that foreign researchers undergo in the field, the parrying tactics forced upon the researcher by such circumstances (a key aspect of diplomatic practice), and the experience of the researcher as everyday purveyor of their origin country's soft power. Soft power – a concept currently fashionable in political science of post-communism, is defined by Nye (2004) as the 'ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes'. This is most often linked to the manipulation and exploitation by a state of its perceived cultural and political

values as instruments of foreign policy. Criticisms of the concept of soft power point out that it relies on both structural and agentic interpretations simultaneously – how can it be ‘produced’ as a resource if it resides already in a cultural make up (Szostek 2014)? At the same time soft power is problematic because it presupposes positive or negative messages can be transmitted via media directly to change or persuade subjects’ values. This is a lot like the traditional notion of the hypodermic effect of advertising on individuals. By contrast the ways in which media merely reflect and reinforce a priori shared values is generally overlooked. Terms like ‘latency’ or ‘affect’ appear pertinent to the understanding of field relations as ‘diplomacy’. But these terms are relevant both to the Western researcher’s status in the field in post-communist societies, and to the Ukraine crisis’ manipulation by Russia.

An English (or British)² person doing research in Russia might appear to be the visible embodiment of soft power. Generations of Russians have been brought up to respect British cultural achievements. A vague yet warm Anglophilia reigns in the most varied social contexts. In what was a closed society that until very recently craved difference, the kind of foreignness the English researcher offers can, along with some Russian language skills and a sympathetic attitude, generate ‘cultural proximity’, and allow a researcher to cross over temporarily into a partial ‘insider’ status which can build rapport, trustworthiness and openness (Ergun and Erdemir 2010: 18). For Ergun and Erdemir, the insider/outsider distinction is therefore ‘frequently situational, depending on the prevailing social, political, and cultural values of a given social context’ (Kusow 2003: 592, quoted in Ergun and Erdemir 2010). There are a number of recent reports by English-speaking researchers working on post-socialism that highlight the benefit to their research of their particular ‘foreignness’ (Katz 1994; Walker 2011; Morris 2016). This is both related to affective factors and is latent, in that it has built up over generations. At the same time the post-socialist context is significant in that with the closedness of Soviet period gone, foreign commodities and persons suddenly fulfilled a pent-up demand for the exotic Western other. They were, and remain, objects of high cultural and social value. It is no coincidence that Laura Adams’ coining of the terms ‘mascot researcher’ relates to Western fieldwork in a post-Soviet space (Adams 1999; cf. Morris 2016).

On the other hand, what I call ‘political testing’ by informants has been part of doing research in Russia since the 1990s. ‘Testing’ essentially means probing of views to ascertain whether or not the foreigner is sympathetic to the ‘victimhood’ view of Russia’s treatment by the West, or at least open to discussion of the West’s perceived double standards in foreign policy. Along with the example of the Serbian campaign, frequent conversations take place between the researcher and informants about the cold war ‘encirclement by enemies’, and the ‘unfair’ settlement of the post-socialist period (particularly regarding Russia losing its influence in Eastern Europe). Overall though, the essence of the political testing seeks to uncover the agreement or not of the researcher with the ‘big truth’ of the West in the eyes of many Russians: its moral hypocrisy. The West sets itself up to judge the misdeeds of Russia – which are admittedly many – but is always and everywhere unequal to its own standards. ‘Are you the same?’ the informant asks. If so, you – the researcher – become ‘*nenashi*’, literally ‘not ours’: not only a non-Russian, but a person unsympathetic to things Russian (cf. Kelly 1998: 125;

Caldwell 2002; Wickström and Steinholt 2009). Criticize Russia as much as you like, but acknowledge the double standards! Often this leads to absurd conversations which are impossible to negotiate. Recently I talked to an elderly woman – ‘Auntie’ Tanya – about some financial problems her son was having due to the economic situation in Russia after the Ukraine conflict. I provocatively mentioned that her family would need to ‘wait out a change in the authorities’ [*nado zhdat' poka smenitsia vlast'*]. Her response was to talk about Obama: ‘Change will do nothing. “Change” – that’s what Obama promised, but look at what evil he caused in the world. I can never forgive Obama for Libya! Your Western politicians are just as much liars and hypocrites as ours are.’

However, testing has other resonances that imbue it with emotional sensitivity and often intensity. Not only is there the suspicion of possible duplicity by virtue of the anthropologist’s role as ethnographer – their potential ‘trickyness’ (Marsden 2012a), there is the danger of the sublimation of perceived double standards and duplicitous behaviour typical of the Anglo-Saxon world onto the person of the researcher. Again, there is a very long-standing binary opposition of Russian–Western cultural values in pairings like sincerity v. falsity and spirituality v. cold rationality (Pilkington and Omel’chenko 2002: 208). In turn this is complicated by the assumption of duplicity in personal relations because of its frequent historical necessity in social intercourse in Russia. This stems from the totalitarian past where one needed to continually police speech politically, even to trusted others. This should not be underestimated, even now, and indeed remarking on the ‘theatricality’ of everyday life has a long scholarly pedigree going back to equally oppressive Tsarist times (Lotman 1984). What this means is that Russians are usually attuned to the parrying and equivocality of performative social intercourse of the sort the foreign ethnographer is forced into in political talk. They know that words need to be a form of diplomacy, but that diplomacy is a difficult and sometimes impossible game. The point also is not that Russians see themselves as non-hypocrites, just that insincerity and dissembling are seen as ubiquitous, and therefore requiring an extra effort in overcoming to cement not only civil – to which I will return later – but sincere relations with others.

Thus to pass the political testing requires one of two answers, the first of which is not possible, but the second, and most important of which, is ironically not political. The first requires unequivocal acknowledgement of the moral equivalence of evil acts – something which I am usually unwilling to do. You can’t compare Libya to Ukraine, I would argue. This cuts no mustard. However, you have a second chance – a kind of ‘get out of jail’ card. You can always compensate using a different currency of loyalty – cultural competence. This is linked to the affective meanings of national identity, which combine the political and the cultural. There is no fall out to my conversation about Obama and Libya because I follow up by confidently playing a Russian board game with ‘Auntie’ Tanya’s grandchildren – a game which involves a relatively good knowledge of Russian fiction writers. This, and other cultural and linguistic competencies, make me *svoi* [our own] – the opposite of *nenash*. Here cultural sincerity and the affective attachment to cultural value wins out over charges of potential political hypocrisy.

The National Patriots

From some informants, their response to the researcher after the Ukraine conflict was predictable, based on their previous clearly expressed patriotic and anti-Western views: Sasha is a long-standing key informant of mine who has always enjoyed making combative and provocative statements about the decadent and treacherous West. For as long as I have been visiting Russia, informants like Sasha have readily made reference to geopolitical issues, British and U.S. foreign policy, linking the researcher and origin country, history (the Second World War, in particular), and politics in the widest sense.³ Like the earlier Serbian example, this prodding and my diplomatic response, or more combative parrying, is tinged with humour, irony and mostly good will, reiterating the idea that the researcher as diplomat can straddle cultures and succeed in this through sincerity in their engagement with cultural competencies. Shortly after we first met in 2000, Sasha came up with a nickname for me: the slang term ‘foreign car’ [*inomarka*] – literally ‘the other brand’ – a highly ambiguous word and intended as such. It can refer to both the positive and negative ‘otherness’ and exoticism of the Western-built vehicle. In the 1990s the Russian market suddenly opened up to such vehicles and many working-class male informants were enthusiastic in sharing their motoring interests. A foreign car is something highly valued – much higher quality than Russian cars, bespeaking workmanship, comfort and performance – but ultimately unsuitable for Russian road conditions: liable to break and to be expensive to fix, perhaps too good to be true (recalling the duplicitous trope of the West), vulnerable to theft and vandalism, and well, just a bit too unpractical. This term became a perpetual source of good-humoured laughter between Sasha’s family and my own, as in my absence he would ask my relatives: ‘How’s the *inomarka*?’ Implicitly he expressed concern at the risk that I had broken down or had reliability problems. Equally implicit is the *politically* inflected framing of Russian masculinity as more robust and resilient.

In current fieldwork, Sasha is representative of the politicized national-patriot encountered. A former factory forklift driver and now eking out a living in the informal economy, Sasha, in one conversation in 2014, expressed himself thus: ‘Wait until winter. Over there in your [using plural ‘you’ form] Europe you’ll be cold and hungry enough when we cut your gas off. You’ll be begging us for breadcrumbs.’ This was said without the slightest malice, and though those present who knew him less well were shocked, others interpreted this as just more of his politically tinged dark humour and irony. Sasha and his circle reflect some of the most disenfranchized Russians, who readily latch on to official narratives about Russia’s renewal of greatness and position as the enemy of the West. They are partly the target group for state-controlled televisual framings of the Ukraine conflict as a proxy for geopolitical victimization of Russia and her refusal to be ‘bullied’. Putin here is presented as a rational, calculating and honest, if cunning, resistor of Western neoimperialism. At the same time, when discussing aspects of domestic politics, they are also extremely critical of the Russian government and Putin. Interestingly, it was the same Sasha, together with his father-in-law, who would usually mute the television when Putin or another politician was giving a speech, saying ‘They don’t care about ordinary people. There’s no point in listening to them.’

This ‘group’ of informants are well known for their perpetual political testing. In the best traditions of official state diplomacy, one possible response from the researcher

is polite silence or ambiguous deflections (Blackman 2001). But how realistic is long term 'field neutrality' in such circumstances – when the researcher is from a country with a long history of political enmity or mistrust? As during the Serbian campaign, the current Ukraine conflict means researchers in Russia are unwillingly interpellated as national representatives – everyday diplomats, if you will.

My response to Sasha's initially aggressive 'testing' or posturing on the Ukraine-Russia-sanctions issue was deflective – to avoid a response – silent even. However, as with the Serbian context, this was untenable – a semi-public-facing response had to emerge. As earlier argued, this is not so much about 'loyalty' as about the call to recognition of the other's position and hopefully, an empathetic response – in that sense a diplomatic mode really does permeate social relations. This involved parrying: politely insisting that things were going to be fine in the U.K. and that we had our own gas supplies, and so on. It also involved concessive and culturally sensitive empathizing: pointing out that despite continuing sanctions I would continue to bring Sasha a personal supply of British malt and hops for his home-brewing, following up that this was technically 'sanction busting' and then pushing the conversation towards the topic of Russian beer and the reduction in quality brands since the early 2000s. Sasha quickly became much more like his usual self and 'normal' conversation continued without reference – at least for a while – to the conflict. Nonetheless the conflict led to a reinterpretation of the researcher and researched as national representatives.

Willingly or unwillingly, we had come to embody public diplomacy. Public diplomacy (of which 'soft power' is a recent scholarly sub-category) is about building credibility abroad through the display and demonstration of particularistic values and policies (Melissen 2005: 3). It is also about 'openness and cooperation'. On the one hand, these diplomatic roles are similar to those normally adopted by the ethnographer: credibility is built with informants, rapport established with a means to an end, but tempered by ethical values that are supposed to be transparent and demonstrable to informants. The paradox of diplomacy therefore extends to ethnography – it is simultaneously means- and ends-directed activity. Hence the long-standing comparisons of ethnography with espionage and liminality. For ethnographers, like it or not, as for official representatives of a state who reside as aliens in another jurisdiction, 'trust' is a necessary by-product of activity that has 'transactional objectives' (Rose and Wadham-Smith 2004: 34–35). Taking into account the intrusion of geopolitics into field relations, the diplomatic comparison appears equally apt.

Nevertheless, both the metaphor and empirical parallels break down, and in some respects necessarily so. Unlike the diplomat, the informant and researcher alike can pursue various tactics not available to the official state representative. Firstly, and importantly, continual deflection through disavowal of the national representing role – 'I am not a representative of my state' – increasingly, as I established that I would always 'fail' to pass the political testing, this was the tactic I used. But this, as indicated above, is not tenable over time as the usual response is: 'Yes, but what do you *really* think about this conflict?' More powerful than disavowal is 'silence' and continuing 'civility' – two modes of indirect communication, both 'diplomatic', but equally available to researcher and researched as tools to resist interpellation by politics and open up avenues for alternative interpretation of cultural and national difference in the field. They can be

deployed in a classically 'diplomatic' manner, but they can also be characterized by affective modes that go beyond this framing.

Civility and Silence

Social theorists have celebrated civility as a civic virtue that aids the modern citizen in negotiating value pluralism (White 2006) and as a key form of the expression of respect for others and acknowledgement of the moral equality of citizens (Boyd 2006) – yet this is mainly framed in terms of the mono-national context. Following Elias they also remark that civility is marked by a deep-seated ambivalence that emerges through historical processes of pacification and the distinction between those groups who have a right to voice demands of the state and those who do not (White 2006: 454; Ryan 2008). Recent scholarship on inter-state relations has highlighted parallels with historically internal developments of civility (Linklater and Mennell 2010: 403). The transnational context to civility highlights the increasing interdependence of peoples and the growth across nation-state boundaries of shared standards of 'self-regulation' (ibid.: 408). However, in terms of the purview of most popular geopolitics scholarship, these insights remain restricted to large-scale effects and interactions (e.g., the effect of popular culture and media on aggregate groups) rather than examining geopolitical effects at the micro, or 'intimate' citizen–citizen level.

In a mono-national context Kingswell (1995) proposes two key characteristics of civility useful in formulating the moral principles of public debate in a heterogeneous society, which can be usefully interrogated in the cross-cultural context of ethnographer as unwilling diplomat. These are 'context-dependent' restraint and 'interpretative tact', the latter requiring a person to sincerely suspend their own 'insincerity' about the truth value of the other's position (White 2006: 455). Kingswell's proposal of a 'thick' conception of justice based on 'genuine respect' mirrors the 'thick' meaning of rapport the ethnographer seeks to build that resembles, but goes beyond, that of the diplomat (Kingswell 1995, cited in White 2006: 455). The geopolitical event of the Ukraine crisis is echoed in the meeting of researcher and informant. Unlike in the treatments of mono-national citizen civil engagement, where a '(minimal) common social project' is a desired outcome (White 2006: 456), in fieldwork relations, the researcher seeks to enter and remain inside the boundaries of the social world of the other – to be as fully accepted as possible. Thus their 'use' of civility, and tactical silence or reticence, is both like and unlike that of the diplomat: it is functional and of necessity has an intrinsic empathetic moral value – the 'display' of sincere cultural competence already highlighted (cf. Boyd 2006: 864). This sense of civility as ambivalent is implicit in Elias's original conception (2000[1937]), as highlighted by White (2006: 458), and similarly echoes the mobility of the insider–outsider researcher status, their diplomatic/more-than-diplomatic positioning and transactional/non-instrumental relationship to the people of the research, the latter characterized by affective responses that the professional diplomat cannot display.

To a degree my response to Sasha's kind of passive-aggressive discourse is already suggested: what *could* one say in response? More or less my reaction was civility and silence over time when the topic came up in similar circumstances. For informants,

this was also, increasingly, a micro-political response encountered. Silence and civility against the backdrop of international conflict involving people's respective states is both self-censorship, but also pregnant with affective meaning: the beginning of the mutual acknowledgement of trauma of some kind. 'Performing the script' of national representative breaks down in the face of the inadequacy of politics to express the intimacy of field relations and vice versa. A quieter politics inevitably ensues (cf. Askins 2014 on the script performance of refugees, affect and friendship). Reticence, if not silence, speaks to acknowledgement of the other in a way that open discussion and argument would not.

New meanings of globalized 'intimacy' are currently being calibrated in anthropology, in which the accent is put on the problem of differentiating 'authentic' from purely performative (Sehlikoglu and Zengin 2015: 23). But such an opposition presumes a 'naïve belief in cultural purity' (Ortner 1995: 176), which is tenuous at best. The experience of the 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod 1991), and the distinct category of the intercultural researcher described in this article, can also reveal the "deep" knowledge of the field [as a] realm of the intimate' (Sehlikoglu and Zengin 2015: 24). Indeed they, possibly more so than the native or clearly delineated (by language) foreigner, may be caught up in the geopolitical 'event' as it intrudes on the field (cf. Subedi 2006). As Pain and Staeheli suggest, the 'stretching of intimate spaces' – of private conversation – to accommodate geopolitical meaning should not verify the political as primary, but acknowledge the geopolitical itself as always already intimate and the mutli-scalar (2014: 345).

In contrast to the group of mainly male informants noted for their interest in the political, most field interactions were characterized by absence or avoidance of talk about Ukraine and politics – and this relates back to both previous moments of 'undiplomatic' candour against a backdrop of silence and civility in talk – even with the aforementioned Sasha. While all of the previously mentioned exchanges, even the putatively combative ones, were characterized by civility, this main group I particularly characterize as 'civility and silence'.

Summer is the season of Russian rural hospitality and I was busy travelling between industrial town and summer village. A number of informants, whom I have followed in the winter, retreat to a holiday cottage for some or most of the summer. On the afternoon after the shooting down of the Malaysian airliner, in which three-hundred mainly Dutch holiday-makers were killed, I had been invited to give an English-language class to an ecological village resort as a favour to a well-to-do informant gatekeeper who was a local entrepreneur. About twenty people took part. My role was to talk to them about everyday topics in English. Afterward the host Andrei made a short speech about how important it was to think of the most important things in life at 'this difficult time'. Otherwise no political talk occurred. Andrei is rather wealthy and therefore generally keeps himself to himself; Russian society, especially in the village, is typified by envy and mistrust of those who have done well. Unusually, he made a show of hospitality, which I had never been on the receiving end of before, despite doing him similar favours in the past. This was the first of a number of what I would call over-hospitable, and overly civil encounters in the next weeks.

Ritualized and festival-related hospitality is a very important part of Russian culture, encompassing contradictory notions of politeness (and therefore a certain concealment

of self [Parkes 2001] comparable to the diplomat's role), as well as genuine warmth and openness, particularly when outsiders are concerned. Candea and Da Col (2012: S1) note the problematic polyvalence of hospitality's meaning in anthropology: it can be seen as a form of civility, but can reveal fear, and expresses 'a tension between spontaneity and calculation, generosity and parasitism, friendship and enmity, improvisation and rule'. If hospitality has the ambiguous meaning of the treatment of the stranger, then what of everyday hospitality to the habitual other of the ethnographic researcher, especially during periods of political stress? On the one hand we can interpret renewed efforts to 'host' a researcher who has spent time in a community and become more of an everyday stranger as a 'prophylactic defence' (Candea and Da Col 2012: S3) in times of trouble – as reinforcing the indirect communication to the researcher that they have only conditional 'social and political rights' as guest (Pitt-Rivers 1968: 24, quoted in Candea and Da Col 2012: S5). However, I have been part of most of my informants' lives for so long that while welcoming and hospitable, most people in my field site don't generally treat me the same way they would other foreigners – that is, with the overwhelming hospitality characteristic of such encounters. This more 'natural' cosy accommodating could be seen as 'more' and 'genuinely' hospitable; what could be less political than the non-conditionality of hospitality? However, the change in amplitude of any response or interaction, like that of the 'political testing' above, is liable to be interpreted as reflecting an intensification of the inherent tensions that underlie any symbolic interaction, as Marsden argues: hospitality is 'co-implication' in contingent events, and is not detached from the world, but through that co-implication facilitates degrees of trust-building and can 'soak up' (without resolving) uncertainty (Marsden 2012b: S127). Thus the form of intensified display of friendliness can be seen as both solidary and less-than-solidary – like the ambiguous irony of Sasha, who simultaneously expressed distance and closeness. This is somewhat in contrast to conceptions of hospitality as facilitating resolution of intractable differences and which is coercive in its operations – forcing people into situations where cooperation is the result (Candea and Da Col 2012: S8–S9). As argued with regard to the researcher's inadequate response to political testing, a resolution of the problem of insider–outsider and difference–sameness is not possible – indeed this may well be the function of a form of hospitality that does not pitch the other as complete outsider.

While at least partly coincidental, the number of overly hospitable social gatherings I was invited to over the next few weeks, by both people I knew well and less well, was troubling. Similar to hospitality, gift-giving, while a routine part of such social intercourse, suddenly loomed larger in my everyday encounters than before. A week or so after his outburst about our suffering in the U.K. as a result of the conflict, Sasha brought a keg of his home-made beer to me – a gesture rather out of character. This was the essence of meaningful civility and silence. We all made an effort 'not to mention the war' which carried on in front of us on the ubiquitous kitchen televisions where the official media endlessly and vocally was presenting it as a proxy conflict between East and West, between European and Russian worldviews. In terms of indirect communication, the 'meaning' of these hospitable encounters can be as ambiguous as any official diplomat's difficult audience with a representative of a foreign power: displaying one's sense of dignity and supposedly higher values regardless of

circumstances; making a statement that politics is beneath personal relations; perhaps silence and civility can be intended even as a display of both cultural superiority and an admission that something is awry.

Only twice was the spell of civility broken, both times in company that included people not met before. In the first case a conversation with highly educated informants turned to talk of how the Ukrainian people did not constitute a historical entity. To this I certainly couldn't be accused of being diplomatic or speaking softly in my response – something I had been at pains to maintain in my 'front stage work' previously. Nonetheless the conversation was steered away and civility reigned again. The second time was a village barbeque on 2 August 2014 – Annual Paratroopers Day: a high point in the patriotic calendar. A local football coach and ex-paratrooper had had too much to drink and asked me with a smile whether I really believed the Western propaganda that a Russian missile had brought down the airliner. The host Boris, also an ex-para, quickly retorted: 'I am sure he has his own opinions and that they are different to ours. We should respect his silence on this; no one has to talk about it'.

Tension, Disturbance or Jarring

This brings me to the final discussion of the effect of the conflict on field relations: affective states of 'tension, disturbance or jarring' (Navaro-Yashin 2012). Navaro-Yashin here talks about how the physical environment can provoke emotional responses in a post-war polity – particularly the objects and houses of the defeated enemy. She speaks of the 'phantomic' in terms of the spectral yet visible and tangible affect produced by abandoned Greek-Cypriot homes. In the case of my field site the (geo-)political environment – made tangible in the overwrought propagandizing of the Russian state to its citizens – disturbs and is in turn disturbed by intercultural encounters between researcher and researched as they are hailed as unwilling diplomatic representatives. On a mundane level, one could talk about this in terms of how, when politics gets serious in Russia, people pay attention, as violent conflict of one sort or another is the usual outcome. In short, people get 'irritable' – another term adopted by Navaro-Yashin in relation to phantomic effects. And visible foreignness of a researcher's personhood adds to that irritability, even if a researcher has achieved partial insider status with some informants, even a surrogate form of 'cultural intimacy' (Herzfeld 1997).

But to return to Navaro-Yashin's insight: what is the visible spectre here? The Ukraine conflict as a manipulated media spectre makes it that much worse. All the overdone media propagandizing about CIA operatives in the Donbass and crucified Russian children in Eastern Ukraine merely make the psychological states of Russians more and more 'disturbed' yet impossible to express adequately or in their own way. Outrage and tragedy is being daily performed on people's behalf by the state media, depriving them of the right to develop their own feelings of trauma and loss. There is an immediacy and pain – increasingly the conflict becomes real as relations with family or friends in Ukraine or Crimea, longstanding relations between Ukrainians and Russians, are broken, or families with serving military personnel are affected – while at the same time the conflict is 'absent', in that no public sign of it is allowed to escape the carefully orchestrated depiction in the media. Meanwhile people carry on mostly

in silence in the sunny and quiet lives of a Russian summer. Navaro-Yashin makes use of the concept of simulacrum; nothing fits this better than the Ukraine conflict as experienced by people in Russia.

The last remnants of the independent Russian media talk of the social catastrophe the conflict in Ukraine has accelerated in Russia: the 'loss of public understanding of the reality of its own existence ... the cause of the moral degradation of society' (Kobrin 2015). However, the silence and civility I mainly encounter refutes this patronizing and stereotyping statement of Russians' supposed complicity in their own brainwashing, something also evident in academic discourses of popular geopolitics (cf. Butler 2004 on the 'regulation of the [public] sphere of appearance', cited in Dittmar and Dodds 2008: 439). The pregnant silences and civility of the field continue to reflect the inadequacy of words and talk in expressing the different types of fear, shame, anxiety and trauma of people. Rather than distance them, the general unwillingness of people to move beyond silence can be seen to draw people together at least in acknowledgement of the way their worlds had been jolted out of position. Sometimes civility and intimate silences break down as forms of indirect communication. More often than not this is when some kinds of intellectualizing is attempted. Only rarely are the silences ambiguous or hostile.

Without over-emphasizing the 'jarring' effect of the researcher in the field, the silences encountered, punctuated by matter-of-fact references to nuclear war, collective punishment, Europeaness as difference, etc., suggest a broader projection of the real catastrophe of people's own trauma, the trauma of the late Soviet and post-socialist epoch: state and inter-state violence as a substitute for politics; abrupt social change, impoverishment and upheaval; the division of common spaces by ethno-nationalism. However, this article argues that the political event can both distance and draw the researcher closer to informants in unpredictable ways and that the affective, intimate, response is significant (whether that of the visibly angry and upset or the physic effort of front-work that then is expressed in other, indirect ways). Neutrality can work for short-term encounters (but showing feelings helped, even with those who disagreed). But the 'diplomatic' metaphors of field research are difficult to stretch as far as has been tried to in the past ('ask provocative questions', 'assume an air of ignorance', 'maintain a front'). Especially in the era of hyper-connectivity, instant news and global travel, there are few naïve informants to mislead with feigned neutrality. Researchers are inevitably representatives of the conception of culture's soft power, however critical we might want to be. There are no prescriptions for dealing with origin-culture geopolitical baggage, except for continuing to both speak softly, civilly, but sometimes let our dramaturgical front break down, as well as to respect the meaningful and affectual silences and civilities of the people in the field we encounter as they express so much through them.

Conclusions

Classic ethnographic rapport-building deserves further examination in the light of the porosity of geopolitics, the cultural credentials of researcher, and the field. Neutrality seems impossible as politics infects nearly all fieldwork relations. When thinking about the so-called 'shaping' of public opinion by media, as much as our own claim

to maintaining diplomatic neutrality in field relations, perhaps Orwell's famous line on nationalist propaganda is worth repeating: 'One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool' (Orwell 1945). Interestingly Orwell here develops his idea of the (partly class-based) distinction between patriotism as *feelings* of shared culture, and nationalism as rationalizing of difference. In a sense he anticipates Herzfeld's idea of cultural intimacy, but brackets it off as 'patriotism' – a 'social poetics' of hope – in contrast to nationalism – a social poetics of exclusion. Similarly, patriotism is linked with affective and shared states, nationalism with calculated advantage and relative prestige (Lutman 1967) – distinctive positions that can be seen replicated in some field encounters here. While Sasha baits me, his instincts are those of the 'victim' positioning: performing the defensively patriotic person. Similarly, the paratrooper's talk was not directed at asserting nationalistic superiority over me, or claims to Ukrainian inferiority. Contrast this to the most unpleasant and barbed nationalistic sentiment expressed by any of my informants: a Russian professor who calmly stated that Ukrainians were undeserving of statehood.

Geopolitical subjectivities are continually renegotiated in everyday interactions, which include political testing and 'conflictual' talk, concessive civil gestures, affective moments of solidarity, and ambiguous silences. This is 'diplomacy' at the level of the everyday, but while resembling formal diplomacy between states, it foregrounds the intimate potential of geopolitical relations. Herzfeld likens the dynamism of social poetics that contribute to cultural intimacy as akin to the performance of the ethnographer in the field (1997: 23). In considering the meaning of 'everyday diplomacy' at the intimacy-geopolitical nexus, it is worth bearing in mind Herzfeld's contention that performative cultural intimacy is always both socially embedded and potentially 'deforming': departing from the 'script' of self-presentation in interpersonal relations. In addition, politicized agency at some level is mediated by affect – it necessarily is 'jarring', as Navaro-Yashin shows. State identity and international relations are increasingly interrogated through the lens of personhood. This can be seen in work that links Herzfeld's cultural intimacy of citizens to behaviour and 'responses' of the state itself to external criticism – and an acknowledgement of 'affect' and the 'emotions of shame, guilt or embarrassment' (Subotic and Zarabol 2013). Anthropologists can therefore make a worthwhile contribution to the study of intimacy-geopolitics, and the cultural turn in international studies, by bringing to the table their awareness of both the embedded nature of personhood, and the way in which it can abide in more than one culture. Or, to reiterate Marsden's image of the 'sponge' of hospitality, the researcher as cross-cultural interactant can 'soak up' the contingencies and ambiguities of the political event. After all, post-realist, post-structuralist notions of the relationship of state to 'international community' are akin to anthropological notions of individual to person. The latter originates in a community- and socially-oriented self which acknowledges individual agency, but constrains it and subordinates it to collectively held and negotiated normative values.

Notes

1. I am reluctant to expand on this personal experience beyond the material used in this article.
2. For many Russians 'English' and 'British' are interchangeable 'nationalities'.
3. A particularly widespread belief is that the Western allies were secretly and actively negotiating a separate general peace with Nazi Germany and engaged in imperialist intrigue. It is obvious how current interpretations of xenophobia and Russian responses to the current crises must be understood in terms of the long-term exposure of individuals to ideological materials embedded in all kinds of cultural contexts.

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