ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Disruptive Definition As A Method Of Deterritorialization In Modern Argumentative Contexts

Abstract: This paper proposes the concept of disruptive definitions as a tool to territorialize, deterritorialize, and reterritorialize argumentative space. Upon exploring definitional scholarship, I investigate the argumentative strategies of herders along the Mongolian/Chinese border. Then, I ask how cross-border protest movements have used disruptive definitions to deterritorialize and reterritorialize government definitions of citizenship. Finally, I juxtapose these protests to Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology to investigate the complex terrain of political struggle in our hyper-globalized, internetworked society.

1. *Introduction*

In this paper, I propose the concept of disrupting definitions as a tool to *territorialize, deterritorialize*, and *reterritorialize* argumentative space. Specifically, I examine arguments made by herders along the Mongolian/Chinese border where argumentative space is territorialized by governments that define identity by residency. Communities have resisted this territorialization through cross-border protest movements using what I call disruptive definitions, those that define identity by culture, religion, history, or access to open space to *deterritorialize* and *reterritorialize* argumentative space. To better understand the effect of these new argumentative spaces, I juxtapose this analysis to Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of *nomadology* to explore the process of culture and identity meaning making among modern herding communities. From this study, I argue that deterritorialization-by-definition may produce radically expanded argumentative definitions that can be used as tools to investigate the complex terrain of political struggle in our hyper-globalized, internetworked society.

2. *Disruptive definitions*

Questions of definitional certainty in argumentative contexts have been widely discussed within a variety of contexts. Scholars such as Edward Schiappa (1993) and David Zarefsky (2009) have examined the use of persuasive definitions and the dramatic implications of those definitions in regard to strategic maneuvering. These works have illuminated the use of definitions to plead a cause and to differentiate between the "is" and "ought" of deliberation. Such studies have been applied theoretically by contest round debaters, using topicality challenges to investigate the argumentative relevance of claims (Spring, 2010). Pragmatically, these studies have been used by Kenneth Broda-Bahm (1999) to understand environmental security and land development. In each instance, definitional scholarship has been used to mark argumentative and tangible spaces – territories – that create authoritative terminologies that bind deliberations by inclusion and exclusion.

The resulting *territorialization*-by-definition allows argumentation scholars to produce coherent analysis, yet makes it difficult to understand those communities, spaces, and arguments that transcend demarcated territory. In this paper, I utilize the figure of the "nomad" as one such metaphor that moves between demarcated spaces, between both the "is" and "is not" of *territorialized* definitions. Yet, to approach the figure of the "nomad" requires a disturbance in the process of definition, resulting in the creation of "disruptive definitions," those definitions that open space for multiple possible understandings, embodiments and entailments. This approach is required as nation-states have sought to define mobile citizens using terms such as "nomad" in an attempt to settle and control communities.

This trend towards nationalist definition is seen in western literature that typically refers to Mongolian herding communities as nomads, pastoral nomads, or pastoralists. Relying on the metaphor of "nomad" tends to suggest that community members wander through the fixed gridlines of nation-state geography as "random atoms," acting in a backward, uncivilized manner (Lafitte, 2011). This misunderstanding of Mongolian herders misses the complex, often hierarchical structures of their communities and networks of exchange. The label "nomad" also tends to reinforce a dualism that ossifies divisions between the nomadic and settled communities, between the civilized and the barbarian, between the knowable and unknown, and between right and wrong. Disturbing this state expectation and definition of "nomad" expands the possibilities of

identity meaning making by communities such as Mongolians on the Chinese/Mongolian border.

Disruptive definitions, particularly those seen in Mongolian communities, have much in common with the process of *deterritorialization* proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guarttari (1983) in *Anti-Oedipus.* Here, *deterritorialization* is used to describe processes of de-contextualizing sets of relationships, creating origami-like folds in the paper of meaning, finding new points of meeting and departure – distant actualizations – that previously eluded perception.

Many deliberations are premised on territorialization, the process of definition that uses a key word to mark territory and understand contexts that inform argumentative possibilities and deliberative analysis. These demarcations function to limit deliberation, but also limit the connections that deliberators can draw between multiple views and theories. The process of argumentative territorialization-by-definition excludes many perspectives, including the nomadic that rejects such boundaries. A process of deterritorialization recontextualizes and resists these argumentative territories and boundaries. In this moment, connections and positions that had previously been considered beyond the scope of a deliberation, labeled as "is not" and "ought not," again become possible. The new connections uncovered by deterritorialization may lead to reterritorialization, the marking of territory in new ways where the argumentative definition is radically expanded or rearticulated. Or, the definition may remain permanently deterritorialized, resulting in an expectation of multiple competing understandings in deliberation.

3. *Nomadology*

My own work, through an understanding of disrupting definitions of the figure of the "nomad," aims to integrate our understanding of modern struggles within the broader dialogue about *nomadology* as a mode of critical inquiry. The figure of "nomad" requires special attention to the competing definitions used by self-identified communities, ethnographic studies, development projects, nationalistic movements, and philosophical theories. In this essay, I examine Mongolian communities along the Mongolian/Chinese border where revolutions, cartography, and climatic change have drawn divisions between traditional Mongolian herding communities. The Chinese and Mongolian governments anticipate that citizens, even those choosing to live as herders will choose to identify as citizens of modern nation-states. As a result, conflict frequently occurs

when herder communities choose to identify via extra-state networks such as traditional grazing patterns or family structures. A plethora of publications, protests, and productions point to a more nuanced understanding of cross-border connections. Applying the term of disruptive definitions to this milieu reveals previously misunderstood connections between definition and disruptive definition, between territorialization and deterritorialization.

Juxtaposition of disruptive definitions to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of nomadology further enhances our understanding of cultural and identity meaning making among modern herding communities. In this essay, through an examination of cross-border protests, I ask if the pressures created by the need to contest definitions and present counter-definitions have created quilting points that have deterritorialized or reterritorialized the figure of "nomad," in ways that awaken new understandings of both specific definitions of "nomad" and the argumentative study of definitional deliberation.

For example, the Mongolian government is currently territorializing herding lands. Articulated as a linear progression, this process is prefaced by the concept of empty land, terra nullis, which government officials use to justify new development projects. This is a strategy that could be articulated as territorialization (government parcels land and defines it as *terra nullis*), deterritorialization (herders articulate land use in response to terra nullis by using a frame of movement-as-*otor*), and reterritorialization (herders produce new assemblages to participate in public forums while maintaining herding traditions). Argumentative clash emerges in this process as mining companies are attracted to the "open spaces" of the Eurasian Steppe where strip-mining is used to quickly extract vast reserves of coal, copper, uranium, and rare-earth minerals. Many interventions into mining protests within China and Mongolia seeking to reach peaceful resolution have failed because they have assumed that herders are only vying for monetary reparations for lost land. I argue that these studies are incomplete because they have not accounted for the process of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization from which modern clashes emerge. Were these efforts to engage in the study of disruptive definitions proposed by this paper, they would be able to access the richer history and entanglements between herder communities and herding lands. While such an understanding might assist mining corporations in better averting protests, it is more likely to encourage analysts and negotiators to produce protections and policies inline

with herder communities' needs.

4. *Land disputes*

Exploring Mongolian land disputes through Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual triptych of *territorialization, deterritorialization*, and *reterritorialization*, can encourage better understand both how this land came to be known as empty and why protests are occurring. The concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization help us to understand the ways in which this land can be understood as neither empty nor full, but instead a "rhizomatic mechanic assemblage." In doing so, we begin thinking about the Mongolian steppe as a mechanic assemblage incorporates the complex body of interpretations, connections, and dimensions that can be joined together in multiplicitious ways to create new understandings of the Mongolian steppe. These new connections create a realm of multiplicities that herders can use to resist the attempts of states and governments to "over code" herder identity or privilege a singular, government authored, definition of what it is to be a herder.

Mongolian communities' have long dealt with competing definitions of what is means to be a herder or a nomad. These definitions have been used by invaders, colonizers, nationalists, and development programs to justify boundaries, education, and readings of history. As such, these definitions are ideal locations for an analysis of disrupting definitions. Scholars have produced a number of nuanced terms and hierarchies with which to describe herders. For example, anthropologists classify, Mongolians as pastoral-nomads because they move in biannual migrations with herds of domesticated animals. In Marxist terms, Mongolians are landless peasants, and for Social Darwinists they exist at the lowest level of human development. A territorialized definition of the Mongolian nomad would require that one of these definitions were chosen as the primary mode of analysis, and all other definitions understood as competing definitions. However, a deterritorialized definition might take a broader scope of possibility; Mongolian communities could simultaneously and selectively embody the definitions of anthropologists, Marxists, Social Darwinists, and governments, while also maintaining their own definitions of community and movement.

The need for such deterritorialization of definition was seen in 2005 when President N. Enkhbayar stated; "It is not my desire to destroy the original Mongolian identity but in order to survive, we have to stop being nomads" (as cited in Diener, 2011). Similarly, across the border in Inner Mongolia, the Chinese

Government released a whitepaper indicating that by 2015 there will be no more nomads in China (Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, 2012). At the same time, Mongolians were producing disrupting definitions, deterritorializations, of the terms "herder" and "nomad" to explain their complex interactions with modernity. Here, state territorialization, and community deterritorialization produce definitional clash that I argue illuminates the need for disruptive definitions.

Pastoral-nomadic communities, along with other types of nomads, hunter-gathers, and travelers from whom Deleuze and Guattari pull to create their metaphor of nomadology, present a special problem to definitional scholarship. These communities resist and therefore do not have figureheads such as presidents and community leaders. They may on occasion appoint a speaker, or a speaker may appoint herself to speak for her community, but the power of that appointment is short term and intangible. As such, the artifacts, speeches, protests, and discussions that I analyze are but single entry points to understand the assemblage of multiplicities in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. What these deliberations do for my analysis is provide quilting points that bind together herders, the nation-state, and international organizations. Analysis of these quilting points indicates the emergence of new forms of protest and identity. For example, Mongolian mining protests articulate neither traditional herding culture nor the government definitions of land and citizenship. Instead, these mining protests articulate the emerging shifts and developments amongst herding communities in late modern capitalism.

5. *Protest rhetoric*

In China, the Cultural Revolution resulted in the arrest and persecution of at least 100,000 Mongolians who resisted collectivization and the cultural politics of the Chinese Communist Party. This history has been used as a reference point for divisions between Mongolian herders, farmers, and urbanites, and between Han and Mongolian citizens of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese government attempted to smooth over these poor relations by establishing university and government position quotas for Mongolians, allowing exemption from the national birth control policies, and sponsoring specific ethnic events. These exemptions did not work as intended, and conflicts such as the 1981-1982 protests by Mongolian students over "filling up Inner Mongolia" with Han Chinese continued (Jankowiak, 1988). More recently, conflict erupted as 650,000 herders

were evicted from traditional pasturelands (Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, 2011a). These evictions, which the government calls "environmentally-driven resettlement," are coupled with plans for state-sponsored education, public health, and housing services. However, such policies still restrict movement of herding communities under the auspices of saving land and limiting the effects of climate change (Tan, 2011).

For example, in Inner Mongolia, China, in May 2011 a herder named Mergen set up a roadblock protest to prohibit the transportation of coal across his grazing lands. In assessing this protest, it is important to remember that transportation infrastructure in this part of Inner Mongolia is minimal. Mergen was blocking the pathway frequently taken by mining companies, taken so frequently that tire tracks had cut through the low grasses that feed herds of cattle. This is not a paved road, and the space alongside the road is identical to the road except it is not cut by tire tracks. Mergen was run over by a Han Chinese truck driver who drove through the roadblock of herders and horses. Mergen's head was crushed beneath the truck's tires and his body dragged across the steppe. Mergen's death was only one of many deaths-by-traffic accidents that occurred during the spring and summer of 2011. What made his death different, however, was the immediate recording and distribution of images of Mergen's death and crushed skull accompanied by the Han-Chinese truck driver's statement "my truck is fully insured, and the life of a smelly Mongolian herder costs me no more than 40,000 Yuan (approx. 8,000 USD)" (Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, 2011c). Although the driver was eventually tried and executed for his part in Mergen's death, it was only after weeks of protest that he was tried for his crime. In press statements prior to his execution, the truck driver continually emphasized that his victim was both a Mongolian and a herder. To the driver, this ethnic and lifestyle classification legitimized his dehumanizing rhetoric.

A wide variety of protests emerged from Mergen's death, including the Song *Dedicated to Mergen, Hero of the Grasslands,* which was both published and banned on May 29, 2011. This song calls forth a broad audience of Mongolians, from those living in the steppe with herds to those in apartment buildings who only speak Mandarin. In this song, the author identifies as Mongolian, focusing on bloodlines rather than the government's use of bounded land and special ethnic characteristics such as language. The implications of this identify is to explode the definition of "Mongolian" and link with communities living as, and identifying

as, herders.

I am a Mongol even if I sing my rap in Chinese
No matter what you say I am a Mongol
Mongol blood flows in my veins
The vast Mongolian steppe is my homeland.
(Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, 2011b)

The Song *Dedicated to Mergen, Hero of the Grasslands* exemplifies reterritorialization in a realm of multiplicities where the song's author has provided a connection between two completely different multiplicities. This connection forms a parallel evolution – or deterritorialization and reterritorialization – so that the protesters deterritorialize the Chinese definition of Mongolian identity by making keeping applicable portions of the government definition and mixing in their own interpretations. This process demonstrates the way that Deleuze and Guattari think of connections that produce multiplicities, which then connect together to create rhizomatic assemblages.

In the time since Mergen's death, herders along the Chinese/Mongolian border have continued to protest state infrastructure projects that they see as threats to their identity. The Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center outlines five deaths that have occurred since 2010, along with large-scale protest, and imprisonment of protest leaders and Internet activists. (Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Yet, these clashes are not endemic to only Inner Mongolia, similar clashes are occurring in Tibet ("Hundreds of Tibetans," 2014) and Xingjian ("Mongolian Herders," 2014). Additionally, outside of China, Maasai (Kanduli, 2013), Bedouin ("Arrests At," 2013), Native American (Strasser, 2013), and Aboriginal communities ("Traditional Landowners," 2014) are engaging and disrupting state definitions of identity in land-rights conflicts.

6. *Conclusion*
Deleuze and Guattari identify rhizomatic assemblages as "lines of flight," pathways that we can follow to escape the hierarchical modes of control and the emphasis on a center and periphery that characterize modern governments. While Deleuze and Guattari suggest that nomadology is a useful line of flight for settled communities, my work asks if nomadology is also useful to understand the lines of flight utilized by herders to escape repressive government regimes.

The possibility found in modern Mongolian protests, articulated by disruptive definitions, is the emergence of arguments that embody new possibilities, frames, and connections. The results of such disturbed definitions, and the deterritorialization that they produce, are difficult to predict before they have come to fruition. However, those definitions that have emerged, such as the definition articulated earlier in the *Song for Mergen*, point to the ability to better analyze complex arguments, for deliberations to incorporate multiple competing and at time contradictory positions in a manner that engenders new connections and understandings.

Skeptics might argue that this study has merely proposed a correction, evolution, or better understanding of what it means to be a Mongolian, herder, or nomad. My argument is that the use of static definitions misses the very being of herder communities, and as such will always fail to inform discussions and policies pertaining to these communities. Yet my argument, that a definition should be in flux, risks producing both messy deliberation and analysis – how can we study a song writer who identifies as both Mongolian and Chinese, speaks in a language that he opposes, heralds a herding lifestyle while writing from an apartment block? We might call him hypocritical or accuse him of speaking for others – but in doing so we miss, or worse silence, critical aspects of his identity. What is required is a definition that can embody both of these opposing polarities – that resists the desire for definitional certainty that is dependent on polarities. By using disrupting definitions as a tool to territorialize, deterritorialize, and reterritorialize argumentative space we might be able to move towards better policy making, better argument analysis, and better deliberative practices.

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