

Territorial Phantom Pains (and Other Cartographic Anxieties)

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Abstract:

National loss of territory is commonly described in corporeal language of mutilation and dismemberment. This article argues that this language is not simply poetic or metaphoric but that it reflects a genuine association between the individual body and the national contours, and that this identification has been greatly facilitated by the emergence of the national map. In revisiting the common trope of the nation-as-body through inclusion of insights from neuroscience, the paper explores what happens when a lack of fit intervenes between the physical geographical extent of the nation and the mental map held by its inhabitants. Taking Manchuria as its main focus while suggesting a much wider applicability, the article suggests that 'lost' territories, no longer included within the national body, remain nonetheless part of a previous national incarnation. As such, they draw national sentiments and affect, eliciting what can be labeled 'phantom pains'.

Keywords: phantom pains, cartography, body, neuroscience, Manchuria, Russia, China

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Introduction

In an article published in 2002, the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* reported that some Chinese were surreptitiously throwing rocks and sandbags into the Amur River, allegedly in an attempt to increase Chinese territory by linking disputed river islands to their side of the river (Kuhrt 2007: 127). These news came at a time when Russia and China were working on a resolution concerning their remaining territorial disputes. It had been agreed as early as 1991 that the Damansky Island (Ch: Zhenbao dao 珍宝岛), the site of the Sino-Soviet clashes in 1969 that subsequently led to the Sino-Soviet split, would be ceded to China, but two unresolved disputes still remained: the Bolshoi Ussuriisk (Ch: Heixiazi dao 黑瞎子岛) and Tarabarov (Ch: Yinlong dao 银龙岛) islands, located near the Russian city of Khabarovsk.

The majority of commentators were understandably dismissive of the claims made by *Izvestia*, the image of a country as large as China trying to extend its boundaries in such a furtive manner eliciting a certain amusement. That so much effort would be expended for the sake of two small islands of no particular significance, and that such attempts should be perceived as a vital threat to Russia, an even larger entity, seemed rather puzzling. Yet, such events are common occurrences. Many contemporary conflicts take place precisely over such small and apparently worthless pieces of real estate. Thus the lynchpin of the current conflict between India and Pakistan is the snowy wastes of Siachen, a Himalayan peak as iconic as it is unfit for human life, and where battle is waged primarily between man and mountain (Walsh 2012).

Other conflicts over tiny specks of land, too barren or too distant to hold economic or material value (Chung 2004: 2), have proven very difficult to solve. The Kurile Islands, between Russia and Japan, or the Pinnacle Islands (Jp: Senkaku 尖閣; Ch: Diaoyu 钓鱼), between Japan and China, are such examples. Commentators have read these territorial stakes as rational moves, ultimately predicated on economics, geopolitics, or even national pride and patriotism. The Kurile Islands for instance, while uninhabited, have a significant indirect material value in the fish stocks that surround the archipelago. A transfer of these islands to Japan would signal heavy losses for the Russian fishing industry (Kuhrt 2007: 73). In the case of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands that sit astride rich oil deposits, the material value is even more explicit. But explanations based purely in material advantages can oversimplify the motives of involved actors, and the material or strategic value of disputed territories frequently seems to be found in the observer's assumption that the state is ultimately a rational actor carefully balancing its books. Yet the economic fallout of territorial disputes often far exceeds any potential benefits. The lack of a Russo-Japanese resolution over the Kurile Islands for instance has embittered relations between the two countries, leading their economic relations to stagnate: despite geographical proximity, Japan lags behind as Russia's eleventh trade partner (Simmons 2005: 829) and the balance of trade between the two countries is minuscule.

While state decisions are certainly motivated to a large extent by a rational balancing of economic and political advantages and liabilities, ultimately decisions may not rest entirely with state governments and elites alone are not responsible

for the worst manifestations of nationalism (Toft 2003: 15). As Chien-peng Chung (2004: 6-9) has argued, popular sentiments are in fact frequently at odds with state ambitions, and governments are forced to play a two-level game of negotiations between both the other nation and their own constituents. In the case of the Tarabarov and Bolshoi Ussuriisk islands, the Russian and Chinese governments finally came to an agreement in 2004 (finalized in 2008) without seeking the involvement of their respective citizens. This move elicited considerable public resentment in both countries. In Russia, the two islands had played a major symbolic role in the Sino-Soviet split, a thirty year period of hostilities that was accompanied by the hermetic closure of the border and relentless propaganda; the decision to cede Tarabarov Island and part of Bolshoi Ussuriisk was seen as an admission of defeat. For Chinese nationalists, this agreement signaled the irrevocable sealing of the 'unequal treaties' (*bu pingdeng tiaoyue*) of the 17th and 19th centuries that saw the transfer to Russia of former Chinese territories such as Outer Mongolia and large parts of Manchuria. Both Russian and Chinese nationalists, as well as ordinary citizens, were also angry at having been sidestepped in these decisions, feeling that territorial integrity was a question too crucial to be made without a public referendum.

If these patriotic sentiments are tied, in part, to the recent decades of relentless nationalist propaganda, ethnographic data from other regions of the world suggest a deep affective response to issues of territorial integrity. Nationalism borrows heavily from the corporeal register, thereby equating discursively the nation with a physical body. An emphasis on corporeality is especially visible when the nation is

felt to be under threat, with nationalist discourse finding expression in allegories of disease, immunology and epidemiology (cf. Martin 1990). But while both popular and political literature is rife with somatic analogies, they are often seen as little more than poetic metaphors. My argument in this paper is that, on the contrary, these statements index a strong emotive association between ego's experienced corporeality and the more abstract, or 'imagined' nation (Anderson 1991). My particular focus here will be on the metaphors of mutilation and dismemberment, which permeate issues of territorial loss. I will show that a strong correspondence is found between geographical mental maps and 'body image' and that the loss of territorial integrity is frequently experienced by that nation's citizens as akin to a violent assault on the physical body. Lost territories, no longer included within the national body, remain part of a previous national incarnation and as such continue to elicit affect, producing something akin to the phenomenon known as 'phantom pains'.

Building upon valuable insights from recent developments in neuroscience, I will show that, in both national maps and body maps, space is not organized evenly: some parts are 'over-represented' (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998: 25), they matter more than other. Revisiting Anderson's (1991: 19) claim that the space of the modern nation-state is construed as evenly operative, I argue that national space is not found at the same resolution throughout. To the extent that they define the very shape of the nation, edges, boundaries and contours are of particular import. Infused with iconic significance, they are the ones that elicit cartographic passions (Ludden 2003: 1057).

Much of the recent literature on borders has drawn attention to regions at the edges of states and in particular to the ways in which the ethnic and cultural allegiances of local populations undercut and subvert national narratives (Donnan & Wilson 2005, Scott 2009, Bialasiewicz & Minca 2009). While the reverberations of national boundaries slicing across social, cultural and ethnic continuums do deserve analysis, far less attention has been paid to cases where, to borrow John Agnew's (2007: 399) phrasing, borders 'make the nation rather than vice versa.'

In the early 1990s, Ohmae (1990, 1996), Appadurai (2003 [1996]) and others saw the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increase in global linkages as portent harbingers of a new 'borderless world.' These overly optimistic views were much criticized by scholars in geography, anthropology and other disciplines: Ó Tuathail (2000: 142) rightly dismissed them as 'sweepingly superficial representations of the complexity of boundaries, territory and the world map,' while Elden (2005) argued that globalization is not necessarily coextensive with deterritorialization, and that the changes have been scalar rather than indicative of the demise of the nation-state. Far from 'borderless', the last decade has in fact witnessed a proliferation of wall-building exercises (Brown 2010) as well as a sharp increase in infrastructures of surveillance. Inherently, borders remain potent sites of 'dynamic configuration of social relations and networks' (van Houtum 2012: 406), not limited to statist ambitions but encompassing the aspirations and desires of locals as well (Reeves 2011).

With its emphasis on 'emotional geographies' (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 2007), this article reverberates the concerns of scholars who have interrogated the affective

dimension of territoriality and nationhood. It thus intersects productively with Ramaswamy's work (2004) on 'fabulous geographies' and loss, with Boym's (2002) study of nostalgia, as well as with Navaro-Yashin's (2012) recent exploration of the lingering of affect in physical remains such as material possessions and ruins. It also closely echoes Sarah Green's (2011) notion of tidemarks – those elusive yet powerful and evocative traces of past incarnations.

Manchuria, a vast region in northeast Asia, foregrounds this article's argument. While the international boundaries that bisect it have been amicably settled, Manchuria remains at the crossroads of various empires and the subject of historical claims by their successor states (see Fig 1). For Russians, who had a strong presence in the region from 1860 until the 1960s, Manchuria was a place where the Russian Empire's modernity and Europeanness could be showcased, notably through railway technology and 'high culture' (Carter 2002). For China, the loss of 'Outer Manchuria' (*wai dongbei* 外东北) in 1860 epitomizes what is known in China as the 'Century of National Humiliation' (*bainian guochi*) (see Callahan 2010). Manchuria is perhaps even more important to Koreans since it is the site of the Koguryŏ Kingdom (37 BC–668 AD), the founding state of Korean civilization.¹ If neither Russia, China nor Korea are making territorial claims to territories that are no longer under their control, the region of Manchuria remains for the three of them a place suffused with affect and steeped in narratives of loss.

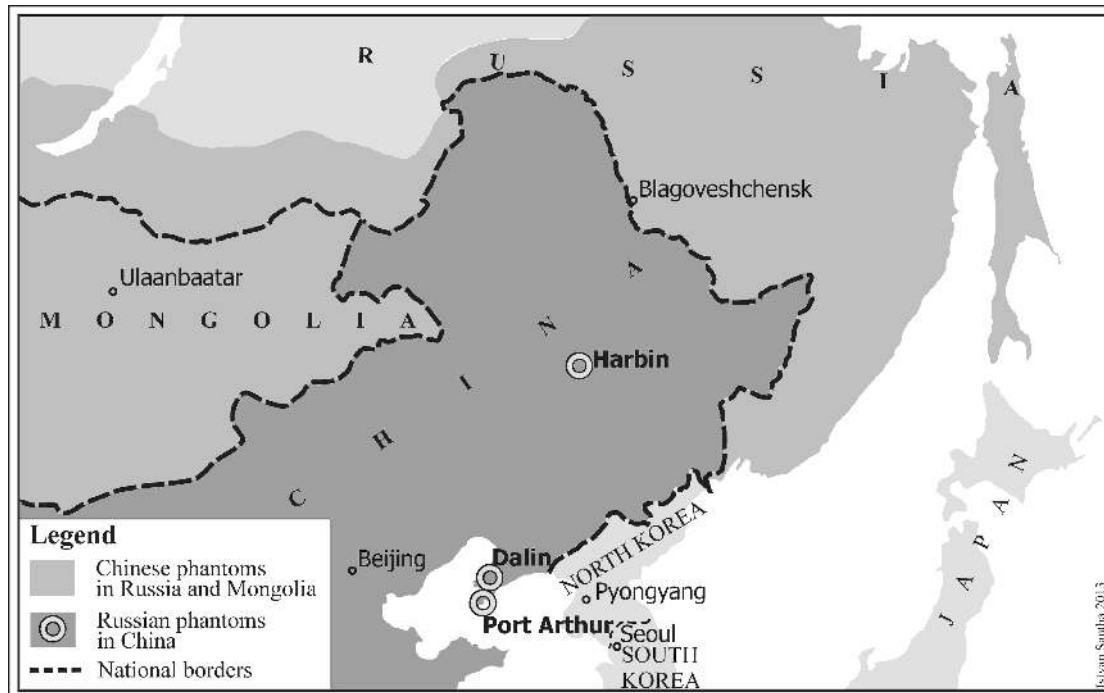


Fig 1: Phantom territories in Russia and China (©István Sántha 2013)

The ethnographic data for this article was collected in Blagoveshchensk, in the Amur Oblast, in the fall of 2011, as part of a larger project on the Sino-Russian border currently running at Cambridge.¹¹ I interviewed two dozen people of various ages and social backgrounds about their experience of living on the edge of China. The many remarks made by my respondents on the complex geography of the region piqued my interest, and the argument later grew in conversations with other scholars at Cambridge and elsewhere. While Manchuria is taken here as ethnographic case study, my argument should not be construed as tied to a specific region. Numerous examples from other parts of the world are thus given in the text to emphasize the wider applicability of the concept of phantom I am introducing. Several of these parallels were in fact provided by members of the audience at seminars where I presented this research.

The nation as body

The parallel between the nation and the body has an old genealogy, popularized through John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (ca. 1159) and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (ca. 1605), but harking back to a much earlier period, to the writings of Plutarch and to Aesop's tale *The Belly and the Members*. These works sought to delineate, through organic corporeal analogies, the responsibilities of rulers and their relationship to their subjects. Later writings codified this relationship more precisely, typically with the King as 'head' – or 'soul' (Hobbes's *Leviathan*, 1651) – and the populace as the body. Varying from one political regime to another, analogies were then extended further, with the legal system assimilated to the body's nerves for instance, the military to its arms, etc. (Grosz 1998: 34).

If the idea of the body politic has long been discarded – at least in its crude original form – the trope of the nation as body is one that has proved highly resilient.ⁱⁱⁱ Hardly anyone today would be prepared to view the state as a natural or living entity that grows, decays and dies, but metaphors drawing an explicit parallel between 'nation' and 'body' continue to abound in both popular and scientific texts, including in anthropology. The State has thus been described as a 'sentient body' (Aretxaga 1999: 61) or endowed with a 'nervous system' (Taussig 1992). Far from having been discarded as a concept, the trope may in fact have gained strength in its modern incarnation, through a parallel drawn this time between the nation and the body of the people – the 'social body' (Neocleous 2003: 24). Indeed, as a direct consequence of the emergence of the modern nation-state, with its attendant transformation

from vertical hierarchical relations to a horizontally imagined community (Biggs 1999: 386, Anderson 1991), the body of the individual citizen has replaced that of the King in this somatic analogy.

A crucial node of this state/body interface has been the national map. The modern map, as shown by numerous scholars, has emerged historically in conjunction with capitalism and the state (Anderson 1991, Wood 1993, Pickles 2004). Unlike earlier maps such as the *mappa mundi* which depicted a sacred, cosmological space, modern maps sought to represent graphically the physical extent of the nation. In addition, the advent of print-capitalism suddenly made it possible to produce identical copies in unprecedented numbers (Biggs 1999: 379), thereby allowing the standardization, and subsequent 'logoization' of the nation-state. In reifying the nation as a distinct, bound object, maps also played a crucial role in the inculcation of national identity. Far from being simply descriptive, maps in fact preceded the territories they 'represented': they inscribed boundaries and constructed objects, shaping the way space was to be apprehended. (Pickles 2004: 3). Maps, after all, like all geographic practices, have always been political, the very noun 'geography' having originally emerged as a verb: 'geo-graphing', literally 'earth writing' (Ó Tuathail 1996: 1).

But if mapping is inextricably embedded in political practices, my interest here is not about how maps are entangled in practices of 'productive power' but rather how they have come to act as organizing principle of nation-bound affect. In other words, my present concern is not how maps are *wielded*, but rather how they have become 'constitutive of the very being of modern subjects' (Pickles 2004: 21). As

David Ludden (2003: 1064) has argued, the cartographic imagination has had such a defining influence that communities the world over can only imagine nationality in maps. As social constructions of space that have now become 'second nature' (Strandsbjerg 2010: 11), maps elicit strong emotive attachments which frequently exceed or even run counter to the state's explicit aims.

I suggest here that this nation-bound affect should not be construed as epiphenomenal to the nationalist project but rather that it is testament to the ease and success with which individuals are socialized into citizens. The emergence of the 'national subject' is thus not simply the end-result of politically motivated cartographic practices, but the two have in fact emerged dialogically. As Elisabeth Grosz has argued in the context of the intimate connection between the body and the city, the isomorphism seen in representational models is not a 'mirroring of nature in artifice', but rather 'a two-way linkage which could be defined as an *interface*, perhaps even a cobuilding' (Grosz 1998: 33-34, italics in the original). This suggestion finds a particularly strong resonance in the concept of 'natural boundaries'. Of course, this notion is inherently political – there is no recorded case of a state wishing to withdraw to 'natural boundaries' (Prescott 1987: 110), natural boundaries being always the limits to which a state wishes to expand. However it is perhaps theoretically constricting to assume the notion is merely a politically-motivated discursive practice. As Juliet Fall has noted, it is currently enjoying a revival among some international conservation organizations who have called for the redefinition of political boundaries along natural features within 'bioregions' or 'ecoregions' (2004: 243). The very search for 'natural' endpoints of the nation may

thus be indicative of a general propensity to equate the nation with a body. This may in fact go a long way to explain why the analogy of the nation as body has emerged and taken hold so easily in numerous and varied ethnographic contexts.

While the crude analogy of the body politic has now largely fallen in disuse, nationalist discourse continues to be framed in terms taken from the corporeal register. Turns of phrase such as 'head of state', 'organs of the state' or even the pronoun 'she' to refer to countries, are testament to the enduring melding of the somatic and the political. That these expressions are more than simple metaphors and that they index a conceptual overlap, is illustrated particularly aptly by the concept of geo-body introduced by Thongchai Winichakul (1994) in the context of Thailand. Following this influential publication, the geo-body, a totalizing entity encompassing geographic area, peoples and culture, has proven a useful analytical paradigm and has found resonance well beyond its original ethnographic context. The ways in which the geo-body of the nation becomes naturalized and its soil imbued with primordial affect intersects for instance with the nationalist prose of Russian writer Lev Gumilev, whose ambition it was to make a synthesis between geography, history and the natural sciences. While Gumilev never explicitly referred to the term geo-body, his definition of 'ethnos' as a biophysical reality (2005: 231), constituting both a population (p239) and a natural phenomenon (p16), with particular ethnicities attached to a particular territory, strongly reverberates with the nation-building process described by Winichakul.

The idea of the geo-body has often been illustrated in political cartoons, in particular to drive home ideas of impending danger. In such representations,

national contours become recognizable shapes, shapes that are frequently anthropomorphic, and occasionally zoomorphic. Benedict Anderson remarked that with the emergence of the nation-state, and notably the practice of representing each state on a map in a different color, the nation's map gradually turned into a logo: 'Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination' (Anderson 1991: 175). Not only the 'instantly recognizable' shape of the country led to reification of the nation as a physical thing, as an object, but ultimately the map itself became a 'meta-sign'. It could be wholly detached from its geographic referent, free of longitude and latitude, free of cities, rivers or mountains, and free of neighbors as well (ibid.). Now located at the very core of the nationalist project, the nation's geo-contour became imbued with strong symbolic significance, and almost fetishized.

Importantly, the strong cognitive and cultural link between the national and the somatic realms highlighted earlier also means that we are no longer speaking merely of *national geographies* but indeed of *intimate geographies*. Invested with affect, cartographic recognition comes thus cognitively close to body image, with mental maps spanning both the individual and the national subject. This illuminates why 'cartographic aggression' (Prescott 1987: 131) may elicit such a strong emotive response, even when the territory in question is no more than a small uninhabited island or a remote mountain peak. Territorial integrity is not simply a matter of economic or geopolitical significance, it is in fact coextensive with bodily integrity. Political discourse is replete with somatic metaphors and similes, conceptualizing external dangers in terms borrowed from medicine, particularly immunology and

epidemiology, and equating unwanted influences as tumors or parasites. In the following section I propose to look at the cognate body of metaphors relating to loss, mutilation, and dismemberment, which in spite of its prevalence, has remained largely under-theorized. Yet, with their focus explicitly on territorial integrity, these similes are located at the very core of the nationalist project.

Missing Limbs

The collapse of the Qing Empire in the early twentieth century signaled the end of China's dynastic succession and the advent of a republic. It also marked the loss of Outer Mongolia, which broke away in 1921 to become an independent political entity, and geopolitical dislocation was accentuated further by Japanese military intervention in Manchuria in the first part of the twentieth century. Upon establishment of the People's Republic, China fully recognized Mongolia's independence in 1949 and formally renounced all claims to Siberia. Yet, in the popular imagination these territories remain tied historically and culturally to the body of the Chinese nation. In informal conversation, and occasionally in more formal settings as well, this 'loss' regularly finds expression. Thus, in the 1980s, the following story circulated in Chinese classrooms:

Japan, with its silkworm-like shape, ate away [Outer] Mongolia during World War II. Before the war, the geographic shape of China had looked like a type of leaf silkworms eat. After the war, the geographic shape of China resembled a cockerel which meant that it would "conquer" Japan like a cockerel that eats any type of worms for lunch.^{iv}

This amusing story, with its use of zoomorphic imagery, resonates with narratives of territorial loss heard in other ethnographic contexts. But metaphors are often far grislier. Thus John Borneman, in his study of Berlin's reunification, described the newly reassembled German capital as "suturing together its halved corpse composed of mangled limbs and appendages so out of place, so absurdly placed, as to mimic Picasso's wildest fantasies of dismembered bodies" (1992: 1).

I argued earlier in the paper that these similes are not simply expressive turns of phrase but that they reveal the conceptual overlap between 'national map' and 'body map' as well as the extent to which individuals (insofar as they have been successfully socialized as national subjects), come to perceive the national geo-contour as an extension of their own body. Given this close parallel, the experience of territorial loss can elicit affect that discursively resembles the phenomenon known as 'phantom limbs'. These eerie sensations are stubborn ghosts of limbs lost years or even decades before but not forgotten by the brain. Continuing to endure through the mental map held in the brain's 'circuitry', these sensations continue to be perceived long after the disappearance of their sensory stimuli.

The phantom limb phenomenon was first observed as early as 1545 by French surgeon Ambroise Paré, who was a battlefield surgeon and one of the fathers of modern surgery. But it would be another three hundred years before a medical article was published on this unusual phenomenon, by American physician Weir Mitchell, though under a pseudonym as he feared being ridiculed by his colleagues. Until comparatively recently, surgeons were not sure how to treat the problem, or even whether to take it seriously. To alleviate the pain, a second, and sometimes

third, amputation was at times performed, thus making the stump shorter and shorter but failing to make the problem go away (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998: 32). The phenomenon of phantom limbs is often imagined to be experienced as a tickling sensation, but more often than not the feeling is one of agonizing pain. The missing limb often feels as if it was clenched, in a distorted position, or at an uncomfortable angle. This is particularly the case when pain or paralysis was experienced in the limb prior to amputation.

The current medical consensus, namely that these sensations are due to a discrepancy between the actual physical body and the 'body map' held in the brain,^v appears to be supported by patients' responses to vision-based treatments seeking to retrain the brain, notably those devised by leading neurologist Vilayanur Ramachandran. In one such experiment, the patient places the stump and her good limb in a 'mirror box'. As the patient moves her good limb, her brain is tricked into 'seeing' the missing limb move, thereby making it possible for her to unclench it from painful positions and eliminate the pain. Mirror therapy appears to have met with considerable success, but only when the optical illusion is maintained. This is not altogether surprising: visual feedback has been shown to play a crucial role in the relation between Self and Other. Vision was demonstrated for instance to productively augment tactile sensations in a process not unlike synesthesia (Haggard 2012), and, importantly to our present concerns, vision also shapes the national topographic imagination through the use of cartography.

Phantom pains

While reminiscing about the collapse of the Soviet regime in the early 1990s, Natasha, an economic sociologist based in Blagoveshchensk, confided having found the territorial dislocation of the Soviet Union extremely distressing:

I felt Russia had suddenly become so small! (...) Looking at the new state map I saw how big Kazakhstan was, and wondered how Russia would ever be able to go on with half of the country missing. The biggest losses were Kazakhstan but also Ukraine and Belarus. It was like the country had been mutilated. The loss of Ukraine and Belarus was particularly odd to local people because that's where most are originally from. My grandmother is from a town between Russia and Ukraine and she wondered, "would she need a visa to go there now?"

Unsurprisingly, the early years of the new Russian Federation were dominated by a frenetic production of maps and atlases, seeking to re-delineate the national topography in public consciousness. Emma Widdis notes how this closely echoed the cartographic obsession that had accompanied the decade following the Bolshevik Revolution, sixty years earlier. As German philosopher Walter Benjamin had remarked on a visit to Moscow in 1927:

Russia is beginning to take shape for the man of the people. On the street, in the snow, lie maps of the [R]SFSR, piled up by street vendors who offer them for sale . . . The map is almost as close to becoming the centre of the new Russian iconic cult as Lenin's portrait. (in Widdis 2004: 30)

The continual reimprinting of the new national logo-map eventually led to a cognitive remapping of the national contours. Even though the logo-map comes to be viewed by a country's citizens as 'natural' and immutable, its actual shape does evolve. In the same way, the brain 'circuitry' shows far more plasticity than is generally assumed and brain maps can change, sometimes with astonishing rapidity (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998: 31). The younger generation, among whom Soviet topography had not had time to ossify, rapidly got used to the new shape of the country. However, for those on whom the logo-map of the nation had been imprinted over many years, remapping proved far more difficult. As Natasha pointed out to me, "Even now, it's not uncommon to hear in reference to Ukraine, including in official meetings, terms such as 'respublika' or 'our Ukraine' (*nasha Ukraina*)". In this sense, Ukraine and Belarus operate as 'phantom territories': they are no longer part of the national formation and this new political and topographic reality is consciously understood and not contested. However, on an emotional level, they remain 'attached' to the national body. They are no longer within the nation, but they have not quite become foreign either. With time, such territorial attachments fade away, and earlier logo-maps eventually fall into oblivion. But some prove to be particularly resistant to remapping.

Manchuria, a vast expanse bisected by the Sino-Russian international boundary is a region for example where phantom pains continue to strongly mold affective space. In the course of its rapid advance eastwards in the 17th century, the Russian Empire began to encroach upon Qing Empire's territory and expansion ground to a halt. If Russia would later acquire additional land, in particular the Maritime region

(*Primorskii krai*) with the Treaty of Beijing in 1860, the Russian state had essentially found its 'natural limits' (Wolff 1995). But the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway (Ru: *Kitaisko-Vostochnaya zheleznaya doroga*, Ch: *Dong Qing tielu*) at the turn of the twentieth century, a Russian-owned enterprise that linked Chita to Vladivostok, brought a large contingent of Russians to the region and led to the founding of Harbin, a Russian city within Chinese territory. For several decades, the city of Harbin remained very Russian, spatially and culturally organized around the Saint Sophia Cathedral, one of the largest Christian churches in Asia. Harbin grew significantly after the Bolshevik Revolution, to eventually become the largest center of Russian population outside of the state of Russia. The streets of Harbin were lined with European-style buildings, and the city was known as the Paris of the East on account of its strong Russian presence and rich cultural life (Carter 2002). But in the 1930s, following Japanese occupation of Manchuria, most Russians left the city, some for the Soviet Union, others for other cities in China and eventually abroad. By the early 1960s, only a handful of Russians still remained, most of them elderly.

In the course of my fieldwork, whenever I spoke with local residents about Harbin, the city was unfailingly described to me as Russian. Irrespective of the age of the interviewee, the impression generally conveyed was that Harbin had somehow remained part of the Russian cultural topography. Harbin is the nearest sizeable Chinese city for Blagoveshchensk residents and this is one of the reasons why it is an important destination for tourism and education, but the appeal is also due to its perceived Russianness. The sentiments expressed by Alina, a PhD student, echo what a number of other respondents also felt:

I've been to Harbin, I liked it. It's a Russian city, and the Chinese in Harbin have good attitudes towards Russians. Quite a few Chinese there can speak Russian, some of them have Russian ancestors. There are also Russian schools, a Russian church, and many buildings left from the time Russians lived there. Many Russians also study there. There is a shop called Churin, it used to be a big Russian shop. It's still there but it's a Chinese trade center now.

However accounts of personal experiences of the city often differed from these descriptions. More often than not, those Harbin residents who spoke Russian were in fact interpreters or tour guides, so with the majority of Harbin residents, Russian visitors had to speak English or Chinese. Interestingly, Chinese residents of Harbin do not share these perceptions of cultural hybridity. For Zhao Xin, a young Chinese woman from Harbin currently studying in Blagoveshchensk, Harbin is not particularly Russian. Yes, she agrees, it's true some of the architecture is Russian. The local beer is also quite similar to Russian beer. But neither she nor her family ever thought of Harbin in those terms. In fact, Harbin is in many ways a quintessentially Chinese city. It is known in China as the city with the purest, unaccented Mandarin, and its residents are keen to stress that 'a disproportionate number of China's television and radio announcers hail from this northernmost city' (Carter 2002: 12). Yet, for Russians it remains a space that feels somehow familiar, with a ghostly Russian past that continues to endure.

An especially fascinating dimension of the Manchurian region is that while part of China's current territory elicits phantom pains for Russians, for the Chinese vast

tracts of the Russian Far East are associated with a previously wider national map that included Mongolia, Tuva, and, in some historical interpretations, even extended as far as the Arctic Ocean. Like in the case of Harbin, these sentiments find expression outside of the official realm, in private conversations, or in Internet forums. And just like in Harbin where the Chinese are eager to stress the Chineseness of the city, the persistent Russian aspiration to emphasize the historic Russianness of the RFE is everywhere palpable. It is visible notably in the many flags and monuments found throughout Blagoveshchensk, and in the recurrent phrase adorning various monuments “Zemlya amurskaya byla, est’ i budet russkoi” (The land of the Amur was, is, and will be Russian). In Blagoveshchensk’s museum, the history of the region prior to the arrival of Russian settlers describes at length the Manchu, Evenki and other ethnic groups, but makes no mention of the Chinese. Yet most of the principal Russian cities in the region, such as Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, and Ussuriisk emerged around 600 AD. as Chinese settlements (Alexseev 2006: 111). Traditionally the Chinese name for Vladivostok was *Haishenwai* 海參崴, Khabarovsk was called *Boli* 伯力, and Blagoveshchensk was known as *Hailanpao* 海兰泡. In contemporary Chinese official documents, these cities are now referred to by their Russian names, i.e. *Fuladiwosituoke*, *Habaluofisike* and *Bulageweishensike*, but these transliterations have not wholly displaced former names and in informal conversations older Chinese names often resurface. What these older names index is the enduring national ‘body map’ held by some Chinese, who are imagined by the Russians of the RFE as remembering the exact location of the old ginseng patches

abandoned by their ancestors and yearning to reclaim possession of them (Alexseev 2006: 111).

Fetishized contours

Nikolai Gogol's satirical short story 'The Nose' tells the story of Major Kovalev who one day awakens to discover his nose is missing. In his discussion of the story, Alexander Etkind (2011: 14) equates the lost appendage with a fetish: "When in its proper place, the nose is just a little part of Kovalev's wholeness, a metonymy of his impeccable functioning as the corporeal and imperial subject. Lost, the nose turns into the all-embracing symbol for Kovalev's unaccomplished dreams and aspirations, the summary metaphor for all those goods, bodies, and statuses (...) which are unreachable for the noseless. The part is made into a fetish only after it has been lost." This interpretation strongly resonates with the territorial disputes discussed here, where considerable political, economic and human resources are expended to secure, or regain, portions of national territory that appear to have little intrinsic value.

In his book 'Imagined Communities', Benedict Anderson (1991) pointed out that in the modern conception of the nation, state sovereignty is 'fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimeter of a legally demarcated territory' (Anderson 1991: 19). This conception starkly differed from the pre-nation state era when borders were 'porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another' (p21). As discussed earlier, this idea of homogenous space was greatly

facilitated by the emergence of the logo-map (p175), emphasized even further by distinct colors implying a homogenous interior (Biggs 1999: 374).

While Anderson's point is well taken, I want to argue here that this modern concept of the homogeneous nation has unwittingly brought about an emphasis on edges, thereby turning on its head the previous conceptualization of the national space as radiating outwards from a center (see Billé 2012), and paradoxically contributing to locating the center at the periphery. While understandably studies of nationalism have frequently focused on the nation's political center, on its 'face', what interests me here is the epidermis, the lining of the nation-state defining its integrity and very identity. Indeed, the nation-state's borders constitute a privileged site 'where the legitimacy of its powers is scrutinized' (Foucher 2007: 26), and where sovereignty and legitimacy are emphasized, defended and contested. Anthropologists have noted how space at the borders has its own specialized aesthetics: 'fences, customs posts, road signs . . . whose function is in part to try to leave no doubt as to whom and where one is' (Donnan & Wilson 2005: 15). But while borders are sites of emphatic state inscription, these inscriptions themselves are subject to countless restrictions: maps of border areas are rarely freely available to the public (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 53), and photography is usually forbidden in airports or at border posts (Reeves 2008: 13).

These restrictions and prohibitions are usually rationalized as being predicated on national security, but this symbolic importance is also tied to the modern fetishization of the national contours. Just like Kovalev's nose in Gogol's short story, whose sudden disappearance turns it from a small component of a larger whole into

a site of unrivalled significance, each small island or peak on a nation's border can potentially transform into a condensed symbol of the nation itself. The two islands of Bolshoi Ussuriisk and Tarabarov discussed at the beginning of the paper acted for China precisely as Kovalev's nose, their reintegration into the national map signaling a re-composition of the country's natural shape, namely the cockerel, whose crest had been missing its tip (The Economist 2008).

Here again, recent research on phantom pains and body mapping makes for a fascinating analogy. Noting how phantom pains appeared to be relieved when other parts of the body were touched (a patient experienced sensations in his missing index finger when his upper lip was stroked for instance), Vilayanur Ramachandran explained these sensory pathway overlaps, or crosstalk, as the result of the so-called 'Penfield homunculus' (Fig.2). This odd depiction of corporeal mapping represents the way in which different points on the body surface are mapped onto the surface of the brain. In the 1940s and 1950s, Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield carried out experiments whereby he stimulated specific regions of the brain with an electrode and tracked the sensations experienced by the patients. He discovered in particular a narrow strip running from top to bottom down both sides of the brain where his electrode produced sensations localized in various parts of the body (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998: 25):

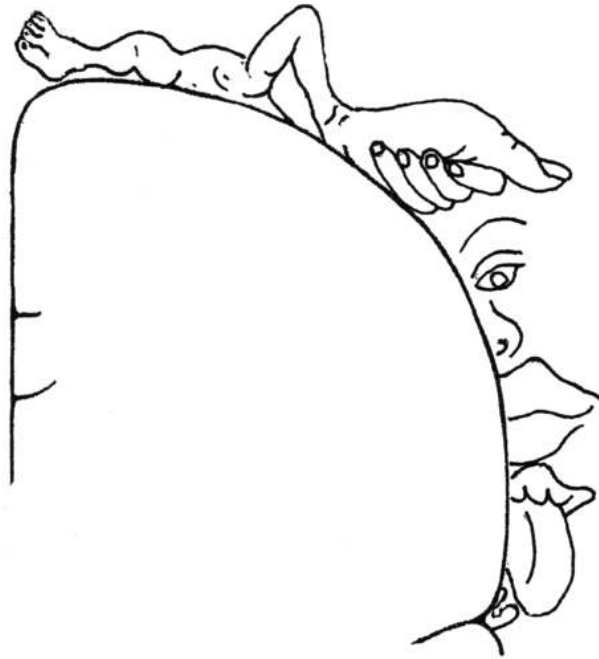


Fig 2: Visual representation of the Penfield homunculus (Wikipedia Commons)

This "sensory homunculus" . . . forms a greatly distorted representation of the body on the surface of the brain, with the parts that are particularly important taking up disproportionately large areas. For example, the area involved with the lips or with the fingers takes up as much space as the area involved with the entire trunk of the body.

(ibid. p26)

Here again, the corporeal map and the national map show several interesting parallels. In the physical body, some organs or parts of the body such as the fingers or the epidermis, are over-represented and are awash with sensory endings. In the same way, the contours of the nation, insofar as they graphically define the recognizable shape of the nation are subject to fetishization and tend to be

symbolically dominant. For Russia and China, the islands of Bolshoi Ussuriisk and Tarabarov loom large on the nation's mental map. In spite of their small size they are over-represented spaces where national affect is condensed, while by contrast the vast expanses of Siberia are frequently perceived as a compressed space.^{vi} This suggests that while the space of the nation is evenly operative, it is not evenly distributed. In fact, it is often in the 'little things' (Thrift 2000) that greater significance resides. Just as the nation-state is reproduced 'unobtrusively on the margins of conscious awareness by little words, such as "the" and "we"' (Shotter & Billig 1998: 20), the enduring preoccupation with small isles and peaks should not be read as a misfiring of the nationalist project, but in fact central to national narratives.

A further remarkable feature of the Penfield homunculus map is that it is not entirely continuous. 'The face is not near the neck, where it should be, but is below the hand. The genitals, instead of being between the thighs, are located below the foot' (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998: 27). Similarly, the nation's map on walls and textbooks may have been logoized, perception of space and distance remains nonetheless heavily inflected by affect seeping through national and personal experience. Thus the city of Harbin, as a node of Russianness in Chinese Manchuria, feels comparatively 'near' for inhabitants of Blagoveshchensk, with the geographical space between the border and Harbin is frequently compressed both affectively and temporally (people travel overnight and do not stop on the way).

Here again, neuroscience suggests that phantom limbs tend to operate in similar ways. When a phantom limb does fade from consciousness, a phenomenon called

telescoping frequently occurs. The arm – this phenomenon predominantly affects upper limbs – becomes progressively shorter ‘until the patient is left with just the phantom hand alone, dangling from the stump’ (Ramachandran & Hirstein 1998: 1606). Telescoping has not been fully understood, but it is assumed to be a result of cortical magnification. Over-represented in the Penfield homunculus, the hand and fingers subsist far longer than the arm or upper arm in the somatosensory map. What these topographic discontinuities suggest is that, despite being depicted as cohesive and continuous wholes, both the physical body and the national territory are in fact experienced as non-contiguous affective assemblages.

Nations are eager to portray themselves as ‘naturally bounded selves’, yet geography frequently plays havoc with national narratives. The Amur River which marks a sizeable section of the border between Russia and China is extremely mobile, with seasonal floods and summer droughts changing the course of the river, destroying settlements and fortifications along the banks (Zatsepine 2007: 158). The river’s islands in particular regularly change size and location, increase and disappear depending on water levels, thereby affecting the location of the main navigable channel, or *thalweg*, used as the line demarcating the international boundary. This had in fact major consequences for the resolution of the territorial dispute concerning Damansky Island in the early 1990s, when the shallowing of the river resulted in the island becoming attached to the Chinese bank and rendered the dispute moot (Kuhrt 2007: 33). Thus, if nations consistently seek to have natural topographical features correspond to political boundaries, it is an interesting paradox that ‘natural frontiers’ tend to be much less durable, and to be far more

contested than lines drawn arbitrarily without regard to the landscape (Sahlins 1990: 1441).

The shifting geography of the Amur River frames an important dimension of both corporeal and territorial body maps, namely the fiction of the body as a continuous, discrete entity. As Nigel Thrift has pointed out, bodies might look like discrete structures, but they really are 'leaky bags of water, constantly sloughing off pieces of themselves' (Thrift 2006: 140), an important observation which might be productively extended to the national body as well. In fact, it is arguably precisely because of this emphasis on stability of the corporeal and national subject that the epidermis comes to play such a fundamental role. If, following Anderson (1991), the skin-border is the contour that gives the assemblage its recognizable shape and identity, it is also the envelope that contains and protects the leaky nation/body.

In his development of the concept of 'skin ego', psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu noted how the skin is the most vital of all the sense organs: 'one can live without sight, hearing, taste or smell, but it is impossible to survive if the greater part of one's skin is not intact' (1995: 35-36). Weighing as much as 18% of the total weight of an adult, the skin is much more than a simple envelope or membrane. It is also an organ innervated with countless sensory endings. In fact, unlike the eyes, mouth or ears which can be closed or stopped, the skin is always 'switched on', making it one of the body's most crucial sensory receptors. Thus, and perhaps unsurprisingly, internal organs rarely elicit phantom pains. Directly concerning the limits of the self, all phantom pain is eminently epidermic.

Concluding remarks

My aim in revisiting the notion of the body politic through insights from recent findings in neuroscience has been to draw attention to multiple junctures and intersections between 'body maps' and the national cartographic imagination. In particular, the ways in which loss of territorial integrity is frequently experienced as a violent assault on the physical body open up fascinating avenues for research. Lost territories, even when they are not the subject of territorial claims, continue to draw in national affect and to elicit phantom pains.

Building upon Anderson's argument that the emergence of the modern nation-state has led to a 'logoization' of the national map, I have argued that this crucial shift has unwittingly contributed to an emphasis on contours and, somewhat paradoxically, to locating the center at the periphery. The fetishistic concern with borders, edges and limits, even when these do not hold material value, is thus inherently tied to the integrity of the self. This line of interpretation usefully illuminates seemingly pointless military exercises whereby nations expend vast financial and human resources to secure minuscule pieces of real estate. Expanding upon Sigmund Freud's idea of 'surface entity' (1961: 26), Anzieu's insistence that the self is eminently epidermic, has unfortunately not received the attention it deserves from anthropologists and border theorists. The intention of the present paper is thus programmatic insofar as it actively pursues a politics of the cutaneous. Indeed, while the work of an increasing number of anthropologists is now becoming concerned with borders, a more central positioning of the somatopolitical is critically required

in order to illuminate the complementarity and inherent tension between 'skin as porous membrane' and 'skin as protective integument'.

By way of conclusion, I want to add a number of caveats. The first one concerns the limits of applicability of the logo-map as a melding of the political and the somatic. If, as David Ludden (2003: 1058) has convincingly argued, the modern era has seen a 'comprehensive organization of spatial experience' whereby space only makes sense within national maps in a cookie-cutter world of national geography, other spatial realities do remain. The national map is a very powerful symbol, to a large extent because it is instantly recognizable and thus functions as logo, but it is not the only one. Mental maps that are not aligned on the contours of the nation, such as mental representations around other kinds of space – religious, ethnic, linguistic – can (and do) supplement, reinforce, subvert and crosscut the nationally-defined map. As a result, there can never be a universal emotive response to loss of national territory.

My second caveat is that of course no precise equivalence exists between body maps and national maps. My intent here is not to resurrect under a different guise the crude analogy of the body politic, but merely to put the two in productive dialogue. Similarly, the parallel between territorial loss and phantom pains that I have drawn here seeks to tease out, rather than 'map out', a certain overlap in somatic and political symptoms which hopefully can lead to further analytic exploration. I argue that the parallel is a fertile one given the strong conceptual link between the nation and corporeality, and that it may be productively extended to

other body integrity identity disorders (BIID). Extending well beyond the poetic and metaphorical, such disorders constitute in fact useful categories to think with.

Somatoparaphrenia is a disorder whereby a patient denies ownership of one of his limbs, and which in rare cases may lead to apotemnophilia, a strong desire for the amputation of a healthy limb (Bayne & Levy 2005). These two disorders are closely related to the phenomenon of phantom limbs insofar as they indicate the presence of a conflict between, on the one hand, the body map held in the patient's brain and, on the other, proprioceptive and visual feedback from that particular limb. Political analogies for such disorders have occasionally been drawn. Thus a recent article discusses somatoparaphrenia in the context of the current state of the European Union (Brown 2012). And while apotemnophilia is a rare (and largely unknown) medical condition, one might draw a parallel with Italy's Lega Nord which has relentlessly advocated amputation of boot-shaped Italy well above the knee.

While I am of course being somewhat facetious here, such misalignments can shed important light on the workings of modern nationalism where an equivalence is implicitly made between the body of the nation and the individual bodies of its citizens. Rapid territorial expansions, just like sudden losses, are frequently experienced as destabilizing events. Thus the bulimic eastward drive of the Russian Empire in the 16th to 18th centuries, which ingurgitated Alaska and proceeded down the coast to California, was perceived by many contemporary Russians as territorially unmanageable as well as a dangerous dilution of Russianness. Similar sentiments of dilution are routinely evoked in relation to the current enlargement of the European Union. With a somatopolitical contour in constant flux, rapid

expansion is proving as threatening as territorial loss, ultimately blurring the already tenuous line separating Self from Other.

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ⁱ Because of space constraints, I will only be focusing on Russia and China in this article.

ⁱⁱ See <http://www.northasianborders.net>.

ⁱⁱⁱ The nation-as-body trope has also shown considerable adaptability. One can think of Ratzel's concept of Lebensraum which proposed a different, though related, organic notion of the state, but also of the way in which the somatopolitical is increasingly couched in a language of genetics. Thus in 2008, during the American presidential campaign, Cindy McCain exclaimed: 'It's written in our national DNA.'

^{iv} As recounted by a Chinese friend at school in Guangzhou in the 1980s.

^v This thesis is also supported by the fact that younger amputees, whose 'mental map' has not yet been fully integrated, experience these sensations to a much lesser extent. Thus phantoms were reported in 20% of amputees under the age of 2, in 25% of children between 2 and 4, 61% between 4 and 6, 75% between 6 and 8, and 100% in children older than 8 (Simmel 1962).

^{vi} This difference is visually experienced on Google Maps where large capital cities can be accessed at very high spatial resolution while uninhabited regions remain indistinct and blurry.