Globalisation, Governmentality and Failure through the prism of Petén, Guatemala

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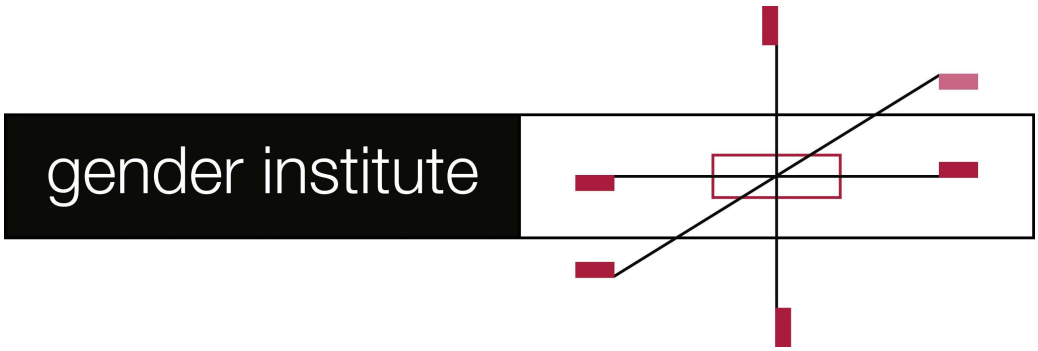
Issue 23, October 2008



New Working Paper Series

London School of Economics, Gender Institute ISSN No:1470-8515

New Working Paper Series

Editor:Wendy Sigle-Rushton (w.sigle-rushton@lse.ac.uk)
Issue 23, October 2008

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Abstract

In this paper, I consider the analytical purchase of a focus on ‘failure’ for the analysis of globalising processes in Petén, Guatemala. I locate my interest in ‘failure’ at the point of intersection between theoretical reflection and ethnographic experience, and propose to frame my interrogation of the nexus between globalisation and failure specifically in terms of governmentality. The emphasis on governmentality unsettles simplistic assumptions concerning the meanings of ‘globalisation’ to suggest the importance of a link between globalising processes and specific ‘projects of governance’. A consideration of the relation between globalising processes, governmentality and failure through the ‘local prism’ of Petén focuses the analysis on situated understandings of contemporary processes of social transformation, a point which is illustrated with reference to declarations of failure of the large conservation project Maya Biosphere Reserve. In turn, failure through this global/local prism brings into focus the knowledge practices, analytical operations, scalar assumptions and imaginative figurations inherent in thinking through global/local ‘contexts’. The paper concludes that 'failure' constitutes a concept-metaphor linked to a plurality of local/global interpretative strategies through which people make sense of globalising processes and their histories. This suggests a broader point concerning the role of concept-metaphors for ethnography.

Globalisation, Governmentality and Failure through the prism of Petén, Guatemala[1]

Silvia Posocco

Introduction

In this paper, I draw on questions thrown up in the course of ethnographic research in Petén, northern Guatemala, to examine the analytical purchase of a focus on 'failure' for the analysis of globalising processes in this region. I locate my interest in 'failure' at the point of intersection between theoretical reflection and ethnographic experience, and propose to frame my interrogation of globalisation and failure specifically in terms of governmentality. The emphasis on governmentality unsettles simplistic assumptions concerning the meanings of 'globalisation', to suggest the importance of an analysis of the link between globalising processes and specific 'projects of governance' (Valverde 1996, p. 358 cited in Perry and Maurer 2003, p. xiv). Further, a consideration of the relation between globalising processes, governmentality and failure through the 'local prism' of Petén aims to focus the analysis on situated understandings of contemporary processes of social, cultural, economic and political transformation. Evoking historical specificity as well as social and cultural location, this prism draws attention to the knowledge practices, analytical operations, scalar assumptions and imaginative figurations inherent in thinking through global/local 'contexts' (Miller *et al* 1995; Strathern 1995). The global/local prism therefore references both a historical and socio-cultural context for the nexus between globalisation and failure, and a set of analytical strategies for its apprehension and contextualisation.

The first key aspect here is that 'failure' evokes very directly vernacular understandings of, and responses to, forms of rule over territory and populations in contemporary Petén. Failure materialises in everyday conversations and in people's own preoccupations and judgments. Whilst its specific locations and manifestations may vary, here I am concerned with instances when failure is ascribed in the form of a verb, *cumplir*, conjugated in the negative. In its positive inflections, *cumplir* refers to successful execution and implementation, while the negative form references non-compliance and a failure in the realisation of an obligation, a duty, a legal prescription, or a promise. Failure is, in these vernacular inflections associated specifically with the verb *cumplir*, a failure to realise or accomplish a rule, in this double sense of a stipulation, agreement, or prescription, and a form of governing. In 1999, as Petén emerged from a thirty-six year long conflict, the overwhelming majority of my interlocutors in the field – all of whom had been politically active in the insurgency - invested much hope in the Guatemalan Peace Accords. Hope, however, was accompanied by the recurring invocation of a foreboding sense of failure. '*Los Acuerdos no se están cumpliendo*', 'the Peace Accords are not being implemented', I would be told repeatedly by ex-guerrilla combatants and sympathisers, as if the impending failure of the Peace Accords were akin to a promise that would not, in the end, be kept. In 2005, with the Peace Accords almost entirely absent from everyday conversations, declarations of failure and cynicism were directed to the Maya Biosphere Reserve (henceforth MBR), the large conservation scheme in the north of Petén first established in 1990 in the late counter-insurgent political climate which preceded by six years the signing of the Peace Agreements between the Guatemalan government and the insurgents of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). Vernacular declarations of failure of the

MBR reveal the fraying of this global/local regime of governing Petén, whilst also heralding new contemporary modalities of rule. They expose vernacular understandings of, and engagements with, historically dense forms of governmentality in Petén.

In addition to showing how the relation between modes of governing and failure can be invoked so vividly in the dense ethnographic historicity of Petén, in this paper I am concerned with a second key aspect, that is, I am equally interested in determining and reconstituting a place for failure within theories of governmentality. Specifically, I am concerned with an exploration of how a focus on failure may be tied to knowledge practices which provide important strategies for the analysis of globalising processes in the 'forms, practices and effects of governmentality' (Perry and Maurer, 2003, p. xii). The operation of tying together from the outset globalising processes and forms of governmentality unsettles the 'globalist epistemic field' (Perry and Maurer, *ibid*) which often takes 'the global' as a given, to demand instead that an analytical account of the emergence of the global is offered, with reference to situated knowledge practices and experiences. With this in mind, in the first section, I aim to write failure back into theories of governmentality. I briefly illustrate how a focus on failure has been progressively and explicitly eschewed from the analysis and argue that reclaiming its centrality enables us to account analytically for vernacular experiences of contemporary globalising processes through global/local prisms. In the second and third sections, I focus on selected ethnographic encounters to elicit the workings of 'failure' in their vernacular inflections. Failure reflects local responses to shifts in forms and practices of governmentality in the region, as well as experiences of globalising processes in their historicity. The focus on failure I am advocating here is, therefore, partly linked to the task of

accounting for global/local experiences and vernacular interpretations of globalising processes, and partly directed to rethinking the place of failure in theories of governmentality. The trajectory of the argument is dual. It alternates convergence and divergence between the empirical and the imaginative, the theoretical and the vernacular, to illustrate how ethnographic reflections on 'failure' may have consequences for theoretical pronouncements as well as for the analysis and understanding of situated experiences. When ethnography is refigured accordingly, as a theoretical field which is inter-subjectively staged and activated, the analytical effort is to work at, and through, the suture where domains of knowledge and experience emerge and connect. This suture can be figured as an '*empirical* conjuncture' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003, p. 151, their emphasis) which realigns ethnography as a methodology at once 'inductive and deductive, empirical and imaginative' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003, p. 147). Whilst being respectful of 'the empirical without being empiricist' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003, p. 158), ethnography is at once an inter-subjective encounter *and* a scene for theory. I consider this point more closely in the final section, where I argue that 'failure' should be understood specifically as a concept-metaphor and explain further what concept-metaphors may be said to do for ethnography figured as an ensemble of social relations and knowledge practices.

In the paper, I draw on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Petén undertaken over a period of eleven months in 1999-2000, and on a subsequent stretch of research in August 2005. I understand multi-sitedness to stand for a reflexive awareness of the specific ethnographic and theoretical strategies through which anthropological knowledge comes into being (Marcus, 1998). Multi-sitedness calls for a

reconfiguration of the 'field' in and through which ethnographic practice is undertaken, so I take multi-sitedness to refer to both an itinerant form of fieldwork and a research practice that 'followed the people' (Marcus, 1998), and a theoretical practice that traces routes through vernacular discourses, thus 'following metaphors' (Marcus, 1998). More specifically, for the purpose of the present argument, I aim to follow 'concept-metaphors' (Moore, 2004), chief among them, that of 'failure'.

In Theory, *In Medias Res*

Analyses of 'governmentality'[2] have become increasingly influential and commonplace in recent years (Ferguson, 1994; Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Inda, 2005; Pels, 1997; Rose-Redwood, 2006; Rodgers, 2006; Trigo, 2004; Watts, 2004), as developments and re-workings of Foucauldian concepts such as 'discipline', 'biopower' and 'technologies of the self' become the subject of progressively more theoretically sophisticated and ethnographically imaginative deployments (Ong and Collier, 2005). Critical assessments of the field of Foucauldian scholarship can be noted (for instance, Rossi, 2004), but on the whole, Foucauldian analytics[3] continue to provide a rich terrain for the study of contemporary forms of power. This is apparent in the ways governmentality is invoked to describe an approach to the study of government that focuses on the relation between rule and ethical conduct (Barry *et al*., 1996), is concerned with 'rationalities' or 'mentalities' of rule (Dean, 1996), and refers to 'a power dispersed through the social body' (Pels, 1997, p. 176).

Foucault's interest in governmentality and the related analytical focus on the 'how-to-govern' problem (Burchell *et al*., 1991, p. 7) suggests the

importance of analyses that focus on practices, discourses and forms of knowledge in and through which institutions and subjects come into being. Further, this approach is specifically concerned with 'biopolitics', that is, with a form of power articulated 'at the level of living individuals and populations' (Dean, 1996, p. 20; Foucault, [1978] 1994). The subtle imbrications of 'life', 'knowledge' and mentalities of rule has led to suggestions that emergent objects of analysis might include 'ecologies of expertise' (Ong, 2005), in what Poblete (2001, p. 138) has persuasively argued are multiple and overlapping macro- and microphysical domains of power/knowledge (Poblete, 2001, p. 138).

Analyses of governmentality generally stress the Foucauldian emphasis on the productivity of power in its manifold permutations (Li, 1999; Ferguson, 1996; Mosse, 2005). In a refutation of Scott's (1998) damning analysis of high modernist schemes for the 'improvement of life' and drawing on Ferguson (1994), Li (2005), for instance, stresses the importance of shifting, if not reversing, the emphasis of inquiries concerned with failure. Contrary to Scott, Li (2005) argues that salient research questions for an analysis of governmentality should be concerned with positive objectives. In other words, the task is not to ascertain whether schemes succeed or fail, but rather, the analysis ought to centre on what schemes do, how they operate and what social relations might be established in and through them, notably when schemes are deemed to fail. Li's emphasis on the productivity of power (Li, 2005) sits well with Foucault's own work and might be read as an invitation to produce more precise deployments of Foucaldian analytics. Whilst I concur with Li (2005) that the questions posed by Ferguson (1994) through Foucault ([1978] 2004) are decisive for an analysis of governmentality, I suggest that this need not be coterminous with a move

'beyond failure' (Li, 2005, p. 391). Rather, vernacular understandings of failure constitute rich and varied interventions that require dedicated analysis. Further, whether understood through the vernacular, the theoretical, the imaginative or the empirical, 'failure' constitutes a 'concept-metaphor' (Moore, 2004) that is central to figuring processes of contemporary social change. In Moore's definition,

> concept-metaphors like global, gender, the self and the body are a kind of conceptual shorthand, both for anthropologists and for others. They are domain terms that orient us towards areas of shared exchange, which is sometimes academically based. Concept-metaphors are examples of catachresis, i.e. they are metaphors that have no adequate referent. Their exact meaning can never be specified in advance – although they can be defined in practice and in context – and there is part of them that remains outside or exceeds representation (Moore, 2004, p. 73).

Riles and Miyazaki (2005), exemplify this point well. Drawing on their research in the Japanese financial markets and their anthropological fieldwork with market participants and derivative traders, they argue that 'failure' is a key figuration through which the market is currently apprehended. They note that contemporary engagement with the market requires individuals to develop not only theories of the market, that is, theoretical pronouncements about the operations of markets. Equally important for these derivatives traders are theories of the *failure* of markets, and of the failure of theory in representing economic realities. Riles and Miyazaki (2005) point to the complexity, and it might be added, the reflexivity that vernacular theories of failure entail. For those engaging with markets, either as market participants, traders, and or knowledge workers, failure is an everyday occurrence. Further, as the failure of financial markets is so commonplace and frequent, people's

theories concerning the workings, operations and failures of markets are equally mundane. To the extent that this is the case, Miyazaki and Riles (2005, p. 4) argue that 'an ethnographic enquiry into market participants' apprehension of the failure of economic knowledge suggests that failure is apprehended not as a series of limits or gaps in economic theory to be filled in, as is assumed in the social studies of finance'. Rather, for the financial traders who are Miyazaki and Riles' interlocutors in the field, failure is figured as 'an endpoint', that is, an explicit retreat from knowledge. In short, failure in the form of an endpoint does not entail attempts at supplementing existing, and failing, knowledge, but rather, it corresponds to a retreat from knowledge.

In this view, 'failure' is a common-place form of contemporary experiences, as well as a way of making sense of globalising processes. As Miyazaki and Riles make clear (2005), being embedded in globalising processes often entails having to grapple with failure not only experientially, but also theoretically. While the financial traders in this study resolved to understand failure as the limit of knowledge, the analysis proposed by Riles and Miyazaki (*ibid*) points to the salience of an ethnographic focus on vernacular theories of failure more generally. The task seems to lie in understanding the different vernacular forms, inflections, rationales and implications of failure, as this is imagined and experienced in global/local contexts to figure globalising processes. At stake in this account is therefore a specification of exactly what the vernacular understandings of failure and related knowledge practices may be when failure is variously figured and mobilised by people and knowledge communities as disconnections, stoppages in flows, cuts in networks and knowledge endpoints.

In addition to this, the analysis of vernacular understandings of failure as a concept-metaphor which is mobilised to make sense of globalising processes can be connected specifically to governmentality. Analyses of contemporary forms of governmentality point to complex, systematic and discontinuous power-laden operations, arrangements and 'assemblages' (Ong and Collier, 2005) that are often linked to the emergence of specific regimes, notably those of neoliberal governmentality (Larner, 2000; O'Malley, 1998; O'Malley *et al*., 1997; Rose, 1996).[4] Neoliberal governmentality refers to forms of operation of power in late twentieth century Western liberal democracies and encompasses processes such as the 'de-statization' of the state (Rose, 1996) and the rise to prominence of non-state institutions in domains of governance and management of life. As summed up by Ferguson and Gupta (2002, p. 989), the 'de-statization of the state' is not strictly coterminous with a reduction of governmental intervention as such, and marks instead 'a new modality of government' which tends to operate through seemingly semi-autonomous non-state agencies (see also, Rudnyckyj, 2004). Further, as argued by Rose (1996), the 'de-statization of the state' entails the creation of 'docile subjects' whose moral outlook is increasingly directed towards autonomy, self-reliance and self-discipline. These are important interventions that in conjunction with recent calls for process-based analyses of local forms of neoliberal governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002) further refine, and perhaps complicate, ideas put forth by Foucault in the 1979 lecture held at the Collège de France on the subject of neo-liberalism and the Chicago School (Lemke, 2001). In the lecture, Foucault identifies two key elements that are specific to neoliberalism. On the one hand, Foucault notes an inversion of the relation between the state and the economy. In neoliberalism, 'it is the market form which serves as the organizing principles for the state and society' (Lemke, 2001, p. 200). The second

important trait is the systematic extension of economic rationality to the field of the social, the correspondent withdrawal of the state and the reconfiguration of ethics of 'self-care' for 'prudent subjects whose moral quality is based in the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits' of their acts (Lemke, 2001, p. 201).

Ferguson and Gupta (2002, p. 996) add that discussions of governmentality generally, and neoliberal governmentality in particular, tend to be ethnocentric, but ought not to be confined to Western contexts (see also Pitcher, 2002; Rankin, 2004). Through a detailed analysis of maternal health projects in India, they demonstrate that governmentality's operations are often marked by 'spatial and scalar assumptions' concerning the state. Specifically, they note how governmentality's operations relating to the welfare of the population function through 'verticality' and 'encompassment'. Whilst 'verticality' refers to the rationalities and practices that posit the state above society, 'encompassment' stresses the capacities of the state to encompass its localities (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). In addition to vertical encompassment of rationalities and practices at the level of the state, Ferguson and Gupta (*ibid)* note the increasing relevance of 'transnational governmentality' for an understanding of neoliberal governmentality's globalising impetus. These forms of governmentality trouble imaginings and practices of vertical encompassment and assumptions concerning, for instance, the centrality of the state in neoliberal governmentality. At stake here is not strictly the disappearance of the state, but rather, a change or shift in the form the state takes, as states – and not only nations – become imagined constructs (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; cf. Gupta, 2001; Stepputat, 2001). More generally, the task lies in reconnecting vernacular mobilisations of failure in their dense historicity and unfolding, with

governmentality's specific operations.

In view of the possible connections between these varied interventions, the analytical purchase of 'failure' is two-fold. First, 'failure' seems to capture very effectively multiple dimensions of contemporary globalising processes, in their varied forms and from the vantage point of the vernacular. Second, failure as a concept-metaphor connects globalising processes to specific 'projects of governance' (Valverde 1996, p. 358 cited in Perry and Maurer 2003, p. xiv), in effect re-constituting the place of failure within Foucauldian analyses of governmentality. These are particularly salient questions in northern Guatemala, where the region of Petén is undergoing a renewed wave of increased connectedness to global flows, as it lies within the boundaries of the Plan Puebla Panamá (henceforth, PPP), a new large scale multi-state development project supported by national and supra-national institutions. The primary objectives of the PPP are to improve the channels of communication and flow of resources between the USA and Central America. A further aim is to increase the levels of economic growth in the region, while also seeking to protect the biodiversity of Central America. Developments associated with PPP projects and initiatives have resulted in conflict and territorialised and deterritorialised struggles over the meanings of globalising processes linked to the PPP as an incipient form of globalising governmentality.

A striking consequence of such struggles over the meanings of PPP-associated reforms is a perceived crisis of legitimacy and a failure of governing of the large conservation scheme that is the MBR. This failure *in medias res* directs knowledge practices specifically towards making sense of contemporary modalities of rule in this rapidly globalising

region. The failure of global/local forms of governmentality is figured through vernacular discourses concerned with the perceived failure of the MBR. In effect, these declarations of failure are also challenges to the MBR as a global/local form of rule over territory and populations that is embedded in the histories of conflict, insurgency and state repression that engulfed Guatemala, and the region of Petén in particular, in the mid- to late twentieth century.[5] Such declarations of failure therefore expose the MBR as a form of rule over territory and populations characteristic of late counter-insurgent and immediate post-Peace Accords governmentality. Late counter-insurgent governmentality was, as it was founded, already fraying at the edges.

Transversing the Vernacular, Retracing Historicity

For most of the twentieth century, the region of Petén was considered to be a remote and vast extension of primary forest with a sparse population connected to global flows mainly through the *chicle* industry, i.e. the extractive economy of the sap of the *chico zapote* tree (Schwartz, 1990). More detailed analysis has portrayed Petén as a repository of Ancient Maya archaeological treasures, a peripheral and distant outpost of the Guatemalan state (Schwartz, 1990), an 'agricultural frontier' (Dary *et al*., 1998), a refuge from war (van der Vaeren, 2000), a fiefdom under direct control of the Guatemalan Army, a site of insurgency and state repression (Posocco, 2004; Stølen, 2007), and since the creation of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in 1990, a conservation area (Sundberg, 2003). During the mid- to late-twentieth century, landless migrants and war-displaced populations converged and moved across the northern region of Guatemala, often joining multicultural and itinerant guerrillas (Posocco, 2004). Following the Peace Accords between the insurgents of the

Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Guatemalan Government signed in 1996, Petén has become a land of manifold resettlements, dwelling and transit for multi-ethnic and multi-lingual populations (van der Vaeren, 2000; Posocco, 2004; Stølen, 2007). Recent arrivals include tourists and increasingly since 1996, personnel of multi-lateral and non-governmental agencies (Posocco, 2004; Sundberg, 2003), first engaged in post-conflict reconstruction activities, and later undertaking either conservation or development initiatives. An intensified form of involvement in global flows has occurred precisely through flows of foreign aid, to the extent that aid flows linked to conservation strategies have outlived and by far surpassed other funding streams, notably those post-conflict-related, in terms of both continuity and magnitude.[6] Petén is also increasingly a site of intense human traffic and transit between Central and South America to the South, and Mexico and the United States to the North, with indications that the trials experienced by migrants seeking to enter the United States illegally is gradually resulting in increasing numbers of migrants settling in Petén and other *departamentos* of Guatemala (Prensa Libre, 2006a).

Complex configurations of social life in the region have been the subject of further social change in the wake of Plan Puebla Panamá (PPP). First publicized by Mexican President Vincente Fox in 2000 and as purported by its architects (IADB, 2003), Plan Puebla Panamá consists of varied short, medium and long-term initiatives aimed at enhancing 'integration', 'social and economic development', and 'well-being' in the region between the South-Southwest of Mexico and the Central American Isthmus (IADB, 2003). Eight Central American countries are involved in PPP initiatives geared to addressing issues of sustainable development,

human development, prevention of natural disasters, tourism, trade, transport infrastructure, electrical grid infrastructure and telecommunications. The realisation of large infrastructure projects such as roads, dams and electricity grids is financed by the governments of the countries involved, the private sector, bilateral agencies and through loans from multilateral financial institutions. Several state-sponsored developments are planned for Petén (IADB, 2003) with significant implications for local populations.

From their very inception, Plan Puebla Panamá-related initiatives and reforms have been the subjects of academic and popular opposition and criticism (cf. Perrons, 2004, p. 286). This has particularly been the case in Petén, where a renewed wave of civil society mobilisation has sought to intervene in decision making processes, often seeking to halt reforms and initiatives. For instance, local activist networks took to the streets in 2005 to protest against what they perceived to be forceful incursions on resources such as land, water and maize. Facing widespread protests and popular mobilisation nation-wide, the Guatemalan Government delayed the implementation of the DR-CAFTA Free Trade Agreement, a key aspect of PPP reforms, and only ratified it on 1 July 2006 (Prensa Libre, 2006b).

Plan Puebla Panamá-related reforms and infrastructure projects, notably the proposed construction of a system of dams for the production of electricity on the Usumacinta River recently revoked, and the planned increase in transport infrastructure through the creation of new roads, have proved controversial and unpopular with segments of the local population. From outright opposition to the reforms to expression of

diffidence, suspicion and mistrust, the significance of these responses is multiple and complex. On the one hand, it is clear that PPP-related reforms in contemporary Petén entail rapid increased interconnectedness to global flows, that is, the PPP represents a considerable globalising impetus. On the other hand, vernacular responses to globalising processes unfolding in the region reveal that contemporary reforms are tied to complex and plural local histories of governmentality. Popular opposition to PPP-reforms has unfolded alongside institutional questionings of the legitimacy of established local institutions, management and governance of the area. From the perspective of Petén, what is increasingly seen to be failing, and is therefore the object of multiple declarations of failure, is governmentality associated with the management of the MBR. This is increasingly singled out as inefficacious and obsolete.

The MBR covers 21,000 square kilometers, equivalent to 68% of the overall surface of Petén (Grünberg, 2001), that is, roughly 21% of the surface area of Guatemala. Established in 1990 under the auspices of global environmentalist agendas, The MBR is paradigmatic of a late counter-insurgent and post-Peace Accords governmentality in the region. The establishment of the MBR was spearheaded by the United Nations Scientific Educational and Cultural Organisation 'Man and the Biosphere Program'[7] and sustained throughout the years by USAID funds channeled through the Maya Biosphere Reserve Project (MAYAREMA) (Schwartz, 2005). The 21,000 square kilometers of MBR territories fall into three categories, namely 'core areas', 'multiple use zones' and 'buffer zones'. Each category corresponds to different conditions for human settlement, human activity and, crucially, land use. Overall, the MBR includes eight core areas known as *zonas núcleo*, where no human settlement is permitted. Among these are the archaeological site of Tikal, the National

Park Laguna del Tigre and the National Park Sierra del Lacandón. In the buffer zones and multiple use zones human settlement and human activities such as agriculture and controlled logging are permitted, but they are subject to stringent regulation and monitoring.

The creation of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in 1990 was promoted by images of the World Heritage site of Tikal, also contained within the Biosphere boundaries. The complex administration, management and surveillance of the newly 'protected' territories were assigned to a government institution, the National Council for Protected Areas (*Consejo de Áreas Protegidas,* CONAP), especially created for that purpose. From the onset, CONAP's operations were aided by organisations global in scope, e.g. local and international non-governmental organisations (cf. Sundberg, 1998). The establishment and subsequent functioning of the Biosphere was supported and enabled by organisations such as The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International. Very influential, especially in terms of providing funds and technical expertise was the nominally 'cooperative', but mostly USAID-sponsored Maya Biosphere Project, known as MAYAREMA. MAYAREMA provided much of the financial assistance critical to the establishment of the Biosphere and funded the operations of the Guatemalan National Council of Protected Areas, CONAP for over a decade. With reference to this, Schwartz (2005) argues that the Maya Biosphere Reserve might have been an imposition to the local populations, but that 'integrated projects' such as the MAYAREMA initiative were at the time perceived to be participatory and therefore preferable to strict environmental protection/conservation strategies. In this view, the environmentalism espoused in MAYAREMA projects between 1991 and 1996 sought to realise a model of conservation that

combined the promotion of social and economic development for communities located within the boundaries of the Biosphere, especially through activities such as eco-tourism, community-based enterprises and controlled agriculture. According to Schwartz (2005), these aims were pursued alongside institutional capacity building in the form of financial and technical support to the institutions involved in the management of Biosphere territories. Funding for scientific research geared towards understanding time-series forest and land-use change complemented the MAYAREMA project.

Sundberg (1998) offers a rather different characterization of the operations of MAYAREMA, arguing that the establishment of the MBR coincided with a policy shift in global conservation agendas in Latin America and specifically with a move from conservation strategies centered on the realisation of 'natural parks', to more multifaceted and complex models that could, at least in principle, accommodate global and local concerns for conservation and environmental protection. This was to be achieved in conjunction with the pursuit of economic development viewed to constitute a pre-requisite for the realisation of poverty reduction initiatives. Sundberg (*ibid*) further notes how the convergence of environmentalist and aid organisations' strategies exerted ominous pressure on the Guatemalan Government of the time, to the effect that President Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo finally took charge of the realisation of the project. In short, as argued by Sundberg, 'in supporting the reserve, the Guatemalan government demonstrates its willingness to follow a global environmental agenda increasingly enforced by multilateral institutions' (Sundberg, 1998, p. 1).

These accounts make important contributions to an understanding of the processes leading to the establishment of the MBR. However, they leave unaddressed the broader political trajectory of the country in the 1990s, notably in relation to the history of violence and conflict that nominally came to an end with the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords in December 1996 (CEH, 1999). Over the thirty-six year long conflict, the region of Petén was the site of clashes between the Guatemalan Army and the Rebel Armed Forces/Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (CEH, 1999; Posocco, 2004), as the insurgent periodically sought cover in the forest, notably at times of severe Army repression. The establishment of the Biosphere in 1990 offered the opportunity to exert control over territory and populations of areas of northern Petén that were at the time sites of intense activity for the insurgents of the FAR-URNG (CEH, 1999; Posocco, 2004), as the guerrillas established camps of strategic importance in the relatively inaccessible area around the archaeological site of Piedras Negras. This enabled the insurgents, and later internally displaced populations (Posocco, 2008; Støler, 2007), to engage in intense traffic with the Mexican shore of the Usumacinta River, whilst maintaining distance from rural military outposts and the heavily militarised urban centers of central Petén.

The establishment of the Maya Biosphere Reserve might therefore be understood directly in relation to the operations of a late-counter insurgent rationality of rule in their sovereign concern with territory and biopolitical interest in populations, which sought to intervene in territories beyond the control of the state in that logic of ‘verticality and encompassment’ noted by Ferguson and Gupta (2002). The counter-insurgent rationality of the MBR was still evident in the thick historicity of the aftermath of the Peace Accords, when military techniques were

deployed to police the boundaries of the Reserve. In 1999-2000, in the course of multi-sited anthropological research in the region and whilst relatively uninterested in matters of environmental conservation, I was routinely reminded of how technologies of repression characteristic of the conflict were being restaged in and around the MBR. On one occasion, I received reports that three communities had been evicted from a core area of the MBR. Moved to a 'temporary' site, the municipal authorities had promised that sufficient water would be supplied with a water-carrier, until an agreement was reached as to a satisfactory resettlement. When I first visited, the representatives of the communities explained that they had been evicted from core areas, where, as they understood it, no human activity was permitted under the law. I was told the three communities had been settled there for four years. They had first fled their villages following a massacre and since then, they had moved across the land, looking for a place where they could plant and harvest maize, seeking to avert Army repression. As we talked, it emerged that many of the men had been guerrilla combatants, active in the files of the Rebel Armed Forces/Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity. Reports of communities being evicted from the Maya Biosphere were not unusual in 1999-2000, as 'invaders' multiplied through the intensification of Q'eqchi' migration from the highlands of Alta Verapaz in the direction of the lowlands of Petén. From the perspective of these communities of migrants, many of whom Q'eqchi' speakers, it was difficult to distinguish between late-counter insurgent and post-Peace Accords governmentalities In a core area of the MBR communities found that they could be at the receiving end of violence and displacement they understood to be analogous to what they had endured during the conflict.

With qualifications that apply to what I call the Maya Biosphere Reserve's counter-insurgent rationality, designation of Biosphere territories to specific zoning regimes seemed to a large extent to have been arbitrary, as the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) were keen to point out. Furthermore, the boundaries of the MBR, the criteria deployed in attributing core, buffer or multiple use status to different zones, and the conditions thus placed on social life were very directly questioned since the inception of the scheme: the Guatemalan state increasingly struggled to enforce boundaries – and in the process – led different constituencies to compete for access to 'protected' land (Sundberg, 1998, 2003). Ambiguity, arbitrariness (FLACSO, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Sundberg, 1998, 2003) and violence were determinants in the practices and processes of 'zoning' of the MBR.

The establishment of the Biosphere in 1990 heralded the formation of specific subjects deemed to possess, or indeed lack, environmental knowledge (Sundberg, 2003). The creation of the Biosphere can therefore be understood to be related to forms of late-counterinsurgent governmentality aiming to exert control over territory and populations in remote areas where insurgent groups operated and refugees sought refuge from Army incursions (see Posocco 2008). With the founding of the MBR, insurgent subjects, '*enemigos internos*' (internal enemies), guerrillas and refugees were slowly replaced and superseded by the fabrication of other subjects construed to be in need of intervention: *campesinos* to be technocratically trained into the new criteria of environmental knowledge, management and expertise, as Sundberg notes (2003) or *invasores*, the newly fashioned illegitimate occupier of MBR. Popular and institutional discourses increasingly identified this regime of governmentality with failure during my fieldwork in 2005. Attributions of

failure of the MBR may said to herald a shift away from the late-counterinsurgent regime of governmentality linked to the establishment of the MBR, and possibly both a re-entrenchment and reconfiguration of governmentality's operations in the region.

Vernacular Paradoxes of Failure

During a research visit in Petén in 2005 many everyday conversations seemed to be concerned with problems relating to the administration of the MBR expressed through negative articulations of the verb *cumplir*. A multiplicity of declaration of failures appeared in comments regarding the vulnerability of MBR boundaries to illegal migrants, drugs traffickers, grave diggers, antiquities smugglers and land-thirsty migrants, the detail depending on the unequivocal sense of distance that could be established between these figures of contraband and illegitimate appropriation and whoever happened to be my interlocutors. Among these vernacular declarations in their contrasting forms, some struck me as directly tied to knowledge practices with the potential to engender, in the very moment of utterance, an epistemic break. In other words, some declarations of failure seemed to have the potential to lead to the establishment - or consolidation - of the conditions of possibility for a restructuring of the system of governing of the MBR. This was particularly the case when failure emerged in governmental and non-governmental institutional contexts and was seemingly geared to establish the apparent unmanageability of the Biosphere. Suggestions as to the need to re-zone Biosphere territories (e.g. Schwartz, 2005) proposed that acting upon failure was a matter of necessity. In environmental policy discourse, 'to rezone' means to effect a change in the terms, conditions and practices of land use, but the emergence of the powerful trope *'rezonificación'* literally

introduced flexibility into what institutions had labored – and regularly failed - to figure and enforce as irrevocable arrangements and unmovable boundaries over more than a decade.

Biosphere boundaries were clearly implicated in a longer history of contestation of the environmental conservation scheme and histories of practices and imaginings that had *de facto* engaged in continuous re-zoning of the MBR since its inception. Among the numerous re-zoning imaginings that contested the boundaries of zones were the insurgents operating in the newly established core areas during the mid-1990s up until the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, the internally displaced populations and landless migrants settling in, or simply crossing, MBR territories illegally (Posocco, 2008; Stølen 2007). These practices of *de facto* rezoning repeatedly called into question the legitimacy of the system of governmentality of the Maya Biosphere Reserve and global environmentalist agendas advocating its realisation. However, the declarations of failure of the Biosphere, motivated by the apparent sudden realisation of its unmanageability, had a double effect. On the one hand, institutional calls for re-zoning of Biosphere territories seemed to obscure and limit, rather than enable, the projects of multiple and discontinuous constituencies of subjects involved in periodic de-facto re-zoning practices, seeking to ensure that any re-zoning would be carefully managed through the formation of institutional 're-zoning mentalities'. On the other hand, the attribution of failure to the Biosphere clearly heralded a shift towards the realisation of PPP-related projects, which the strict zoning regime of the Biosphere would hinder or deter outright. This was a first paradox of vernacular inflections of failure of the MBR, namely that the rationalities of rule dedicated to the forceful realisation of the MBR should now be at once signalling and conjuring up the

emergence of the conditions of possibility for a revocation of MBR boundaries, a re-zoning which might be understood in relation to the realisation of PPP-related reforms.

Other conversations in the field focused on the latest controversy, tactfully broached through indirect references and in deliberately vague terms, regarding *concesiones*. *Concesiones* technically referred to lawful exceptions such as those granted to the commercial activities of two controlled logging enterprises located within MBR boundaries, but the meanings of the term now extended to cover, in the vernacular, other *ad hoc* dispensations perceived to amount to illegitimate private contracts. Discourses of failure linked to calls for re-zoning of MBR territories could therefore be contrasted with this distinct inflection of failure attributed to the system of governmentality of the MBR that focused specifically on the issue of private contracts. I was alerted to this by Maya Q'eqchi' activists in the run up to the 9th August 2005, the date in which local indigenous rights associations acting with the support of numerous civil society groups, issued the 'Yaxhá Declaration'. The declaration denounced the failings of the MBR, and specifically the presence of a television crew filming the reality show *Survivor* for a US/global television network in the archaeological site of Yaxhá, in a core area of the Biosphere.[8] The activists vocally objected to a number of practices adopted by the television crew, notably the assemblage of *casas canadienses*, that is, chalet-style prefabricated buildings erected to house television crew and reality show contestants. At the heart of their objections, however, were the general restrictions on access to the site placed on local population and the specific difficulties they had experience when seeking to enter the site to perform *mayejak*, the ritual offering central to Q'eqchi' religious practice. For these activists, the

failure of the Maya Biosphere was linked primarily to the undermining of MBR boundaries associated with granting private contracts, '*concesiones*', to private interests groups such as the media conglomerate, and to the simultaneous sustained denial of access to core areas of the Biosphere to local populations. Further, their declaration of failure of the MBR was tied to the request for enforcement of these boundaries. Interestingly, the text of the 'Yaxhá Declaration' mobilised numerous instances were *cumplir* was articulated in the negative and included not only MBR regulations, but also the national Constitution, the Peace Accords, and the ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries for this purpose. The paradox here then refers to the manner in which, populations who had in the recent past contested the forceful imposition of MBR boundaries, found themselves in the position of advocates for MBR boundary enforcement.

The seemingly contradictory responses apparent in grassroots groups calling for the enforcement of what have historically been repressive zoning practices, on the one hand, and institutional agents calling for an overhaul of the zoning system due to its perceived 'unmanageability' on the other, reveal differences and discontinuities in the perception and conceptualization of failure attributed to the Maya Biosphere Reserve, and in vernacular discourses concerning how such instances of failures might in turn seen to be connected to contemporary globalising processes. Far from a univocal and consistent concept-metaphor, 'failure' as a negative form of the verb *cumplir*, with its diverse points of reference, therefore conjures up a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences of globalising processes in contemporary Petén. What exactly is being produced and how, however, is a matter of debate, even within frames of analyses that drawn on the analytics of Foucauldian governmentality. On

the face of it, vernacular discourses of failure could be taken to refer very simply to the failure of the Maya Biosphere as a conservation project. Failure, in this sense, is coterminous with 'project failure', that is, the failure of the project to realise its stated aims and objectives. However, as argued by Mosse (2005) in his critical analysis of a DfID development project, 'projects do no fail; they are failed by wider networks of support and validation' (Mosse, 2005, p. 18). In this view, 'failure in not the failure to implement the plan, but a failure *of interpretation*' (Mosse, 2005, p. 18, emphasis in the original). Mosse's analysis links failure of a development project in Western India to rapid changes in policy and donor priority and related 'instances of disarticulation between practices' (2005, p. 18). Mosse notes that 'the response to failure … is the re-articulation of project practice in favor of new policy models' (*ibid*). This might suggest that the attribution of failure to the MBR heralds very simply a shift in the rationality of governing in the region, as territories and populations are engulfed by changes in global policy priorities. Yet, whilst Mosse concludes that '"success" and "failure" are policy oriented judgments that obscure project effects' (2005, p. 19) this critique of instrumentalism grapples only superficially with failure understood as exceeding a focus on policy narrowly conceived.

Failure as Concept-metaphor

As the ethnographic analysis of the place of failure in globalising processes reveals, 'failure' is not strictly conterminous with a shift in policy or in the rationalities of governing in their complex their effects, though it might to some extent coincide with this. Failure does not exclusively refer to vernacular interpretations of shifts in governmentality's operations and rationalities, that is, failure is not,

strictly speaking, merely a local interpretation of global processes. Rather, failure constitutes a rich concept-metaphor that exceeds the narrow description of changes in policy rationales and interpretations in context, and refers more broadly to an ensemble of experiences and knowledge practices that far exceed the realms of policy, project management or ‘local’ interpretations, narrowly defined.

Vernacular declarations of failure reflect and refract the dense historicity of the global/local context as this emerges in people’s own accounts. In this view, 'failure' is better accounted for when deemed to constitute a ‘domain term’ (Moore, 2004, p.73) to which there correspond a plurality of discrepant interpretative strategies mobilised by subjects to make sense of globalising processes, their histories, and the instances of failure produced in and through them. As with concept-metaphors more generally, the exact meanings of failure ‘can never be specified in advance – although they can be defined in practice and in context – and there is part of them that remains outside or exceeds representation’ (Moore, 2004, p. 73).

Legitimating discourses underpinning the establishment and maintenance of the MBR have resulted in the extrication of the conservation project from historicity. They exhibit some of key characteristics of what Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak (1999) has termed ‘worlding narratives’, that is, colonial and postcolonial inscriptions which, far from merely describing a referent, instantiate the referent within specific colonial logics and figurations, typically through making the referent appear to originate *ex nihlo* within determinate temporal and spatialising logics which instantiate it, whilst simultaneously concealing its history of provenance and making. The analytical labor of failure is therefore partly

to bring into view the historicity of the MBR. Further, as a concept-metaphor, failure re-orients knowledge and experience. This framing of failure as a 'concept-metaphor' through which plural vernacular experiences and understandings of globalising processes emerge is consistent with – though not exhausted in - a Foucauldian understanding of 'governmentality' that sees techniques of rule as productive (Foucault, [1978] 2004), as well as with those theorists of governmentality that see failure specifically as constitutive of rule (see O'Malley *et al*., 1997; O'Malley, 1998).[9] From this perspective, failure appears as fully constitutive of governmentality and of modernity (Ferguson, 1999).

Declarations of failure of the MBR give a form to contemporary globalising processes and PPP-related reforms in contemporary Petén, as these seem to proceed through instances of failure such as the perceived collapse of the MBR, a system embedded in the regime of late-counter insurgent governmentality to begin with, and one increasingly engulfed in processes of globalising failure such as those which engaged the institutional perspectives as much as the Maya Q'eqchi' activists who released the 'Yaxhá Declaration'. Riles (1997, p. 378), following Rabinow, argues that 'rather than uncover the norms latent in the forms …anthropologists might instead seek to visualize the forms latent in the norms'. Here I have argued that failure is one such form of contemporary governmentality in Petén. Failure, as the form of the norm, is internally differentiated and plural and it is this internal plurality and diversity, this potential of the concept-metaphor to have no specific referent which has consequences for ethnography as both inter-subjective experience and theoretical reflection.

The analytical advantage of an approach to 'globalisation', 'governmentality' and 'failure' as concept metaphors is the explicit questioning of accounts which, in their epistemological reliance on representationalism, assume a direct, stable and unproblematic relationship between these terms and their referents. The analytical work of concept metaphors is to eschew representationalism and, invite instead analyses which consider concept-metaphors' performative valence and re-articulatory effects. From this perspective, concept-metaphors do the work of jolting domain terms, re-directing knowledge and reconfiguring experience in unexpected directions in the analytical and experiential practice that is ethnography.

How might such difference be understood? Felman (2003, p. 57), drawing on the work of philosopher J. L. Austin, argues that '[t]he act of failing … opens up the space of referentiality – or of impossible reality – not because *something is missing*, but because *something else is done*… the [Austinian] term 'misfire' does not refer to an absence, but to the enactment of a difference'. In this view, paradoxes of failure are not exhausted in representationalist logics, but may be understood to evade it and hence correspond to the enactment of a difference. In Moore's terms (2004), the open-ended character of failure as a concept-metaphor might be due to its status as catachresis (see also Prakash 1996; Spivak 1999). The limits of referentiality and the place of excess and incompleteness in the concept-metaphor constitute the grounds for the production of difference at stake in failure, as do the vernacular historical trajectories of articulation of modalities of rule that make up the local operations of neoliberal governmentality as failure, in its plural forms in the dense historicity of this locale. Complex sets of diffractions generated in and through local prisms are revealed herein, as ethnographic encounters

become axes along which analysis develops, as occasions for mobilising the apparatus of vernacular experience *and* theoretical reflection. Ethnography is also reconfigured as a result as a theoretical field that is inter-subjectively staged and activated. Ethnography therefore operates at the point the intersection where domains of knowledge and experience emerge and connect.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that an analysis of vernacular understandings of globalising processes through the prism of Petén reveals that 'failure' constitutes a central domain term that engages a plurality of interpretative strategies deployed by people and knowledge communities to make sense of, and give form to, processes of rapid social change and their impact on complex forms of social life in the region. In accordance with Foucault's analysis, governmentality may be seen to produce difference as failure, and do so in plural forms. In this view, failure is a modality of operation of rule fully within the scope of neoliberal globalising governmentality. Failure has to do with the articulation of globalising mentalities of rule such as those linked to the realisation of the PPP. Further, I have argued that, through the prism of Petén, 'failure' may be said to constitute a 'concept-metaphor' (Moore, 2004) through which people make sense of globalising processes. Conceptualizations of 'failure' inherent in globalising processes are multiple, discrepant, contradictory and, in many respects, context-specific. But as Miyazaki and Riles point out (2005), being embedded in globalising processes entails having to grapple with failure experientially and epistemologically. Whilst their interlocutors in the field resolved to deal with the failure of economic knowledge to produce accurate predictions through a retreat from specialist knowledge

and thus defining failure as an epistemic endpoint (Miyazaki and Riles 2005), perspectives from Petén reconfigure failure as an explicitly plural and internally differentiated form of contemporary rule, redirecting the flow of knowledge. Not an endpoint, then, but a jolting which disconcerts more familiar ‘rhetorics of scale’ (Tsing, 2000 cited in Perry and Maurer, 2003).

Notes

[1] Acknowledgements: A version of this paper was presented at the Royal Geographical Society–Institute of British Geographers International Conference 2006, in the session Globalising Failures sponsored by the Economic Geography Research Group. I am grateful to the participants for their feedback and to Rebecca Lawrence and Diane Perrons for their comments on early versions of this paper. The paper draws on anthropological fieldwork in Petén, northern Guatemala, over a period of eleven months in 1999-2000, and on further research undertaken in August 2005. The author is grateful to the Society for Latin American Studies, University of London Central Research Fund and the London School of Economics for their support at different stages of the research.

[2] In Michel Foucault's own definition, an analysis of governmentality is concerned with 'the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit very complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security' (Foucault, [1978] 1994, p. 219). According to Foucault, governmentality developed in the West during the course of a transition from the 'state of justice' of the Middle Ages to the 'administrative state' in the fifteen and sixteen centuries (Foucault, ibid). This resulted in the rise to prominence of governmentality's peculiar exercise of power in the form of sovereignty and discipline. From this point on, according to Foucault, 'government' increasingly depends on the formation of a range of government apparatuses intimately linked to the establishment of 'a whole complex of knowledges [*savoirs*]' (Foucault [1978] 1994, p. 219-220).

[3] With reference to the 'analytics of governance', Dean (1996, p. 20, author's own emphasis) points out that 'an *analytics* is a type of study concerned with an analysis of the specific conditions under which particular entities emerge'.

[4] It should be noted that Dean (1996, p.174, note 1) suggests a distinction between neo-liberalism and advanced liberalism. The latter refers specifically to Rose's (1993) formulation of 'advanced liberalism' understood in relation to the 'advanced psychiatric society'.

[5] For a full chronology and analysis of the Guatemalan conflict, from its inception in 1954 with the CIA-sponsored overthrow of the democratic government of Jacopo Arbenz, through the years of violent state repression and episodes of genocide in the early 1980s, to the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords between the Guatemalan Government and the insurgents of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity in December 1996, see CEH (1999). For a discussion of the conflict from the perspective of Petén , see Posocco (2004).

[6] Such a sense of intensification in global connectedness depends on a view of the region as remote and disconnected from national and transnational processes and dynamics. Popular and academic accounts of the history of Petén have contributed to such a view (Schwartz 1990, Soza 1970), and in the process, have led to the consolidation of heroic narratives of colonization of the region. Despite the ubiquity and resonance of these accounts reinforcing a sense of the exceptionality and

peculiarity of Petén vis-à-vis the national context, the subaltern histories and experiences of transient populations, for instance, or a discussion of the strategic place occupied by Petén in the history of the Guatemalan conflict (Posocco 2004) suggest that far from being isolated and disconnected, Petén has been intensely connected to national, regional, transnational and global circuits. As one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper has rightly pointed out, Petén was in fact connected to global trade in natural resources since the nineteenth century and probably before that, given that colonial and imperial relations have been a part of Petén since the Spanish conquest. In the 1960s, Petén was shaped by World Bank lending to expand the cattle industry; foreign investment in timber; and US increases in the quotas for beef from Central America. Furthermore, in the 1970s Petén witnessed renewed Word Bank investment in the form of funds for the construction of the airport in Santa Elena. In view of this, conservation and development may be more adequately characterised as a consolidation and not, strictly speaking, as an intensification in global flows.

[7] The UNESCO program aimed to promote a model of conservation seeking to combine the preservation of biodiversity, economic development and respect for local cultures. The appeal to nature, culture and economic development, made of the Maya Biosphere a complex project that pursued the seemingly un-reconcilable goals of preserving the tropical humid forest and the important archaeological remains scattered across it, in accordance with the cultural prescriptions of a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic population encompassing numerous Ladino and indigenous identities as well as other migrants with multiple histories of migration and conflict-related displacements.

[8] For further analysis of this incident, see Posocco (2008).

[9] I owe this insight to Rebecca Lawrence. Note, however, that O'Malley *et al.* (1997) see failure as coinciding with resistance, whilst here I argue failure coincides fully with rule.

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