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### Questions and Answers

*An ethnography of evaluation in Afghanistan*

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## CRAFTING COHERENCE: ON WRITING AN EVALUATION REPORT IN AFGHANISTAN

### ***Abstract***

This article is about the writing of the evaluation report concerning the Dutch military intervention mission in the Southern Afghan province of Uruzgan. Whereas anthropological interest in writing usually focuses on the representative qualities of a text, this article builds upon literature that examines the production of the evaluation report and the socio-material work that goes into it. I explore the writing of this report in and across three layers: writing infrastructures, writing format and authorship. In these contexts, writing turns out to be an attempt to solve the tension between a heterogeneous input and a unity into which the input needs to be transformed. The tensions, heterogeneities and coherences that this case offers will be discussed in the last part of this article.

**Keywords:** *writing, infrastructures, format, authorship, coherence*

## INTRODUCTION

IN 2010, AN AFGHAN RESEARCH ORGANIZATION THAT I CALL HERE MEDIATING Research (MR) published an evaluation of the Dutch military presence in Uruzgan, a southern province of Afghanistan. The Dutch embassy had commissioned the organization to conduct a broad investigation of the effects of the Dutch presence between 2006 and 2010. The report was to be the culminating assessment of the Dutch civil-military operation in the province. Between the summers of 2010 and 2011, I worked as an evaluator trainee for this Afghan research organization. I joined five Afghan and two international colleagues on the Uruzgan team, assisting with the data collection through interviews and surveys, analyzing the data and helping the write-up of what was to become the *Four Years After* report.

In the beginning of the summer of 2010, the Uruzgan team went to the province to collect data and conduct interviews. Upon return, I was asked to start writing the report. After my supervisor had reviewed my first written sections, it was clear that I had a lot to learn in terms of the format, content or work protocol for evaluation writing in Afghanistan. Over time, I learned how to be a contributor amongst many, working my way through large amounts of text and struggling with technologies and infrastructures that often broke down. This article traces the process of understanding what it takes to write an evaluation report as an ongoing tension between the diversity of the input and the uniformity the writing aspires to.

Clifford and Marcus edited a seminal publication entitled “Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography” (1986) that put the topic of writing at the center of anthropological attention. They drew attention to the problem of representation in ethnographic texts and problematized the position of the author. Writing culture in the genre of ethnography, they argued, can ultimately not get at the “other”. Concepts of objectivity, authority and culture were problematized in an increasingly globalized, fragmented and post-colonial world. While the authors of the collection usefully presented the limits to, and the political dimensions of, representation, the text and author remained, however, stable entities: their coming into being as texts and authors did not inform the analysis.

This article, in contrast, investigates the process of writing the *Four Years After* report. It draws on work that has asked how the practice of writing is distributed over different actors and objects (Pontille, 2009; Denis and Pontille, 2015; Fraenkel, 1997; Callon, 2002), how standards and complexities are handled in knowledge practices (Lampland and Star, 2009; Law and Mol, 2002; Dugdale, 1999), and what the relationship is between infrastructures and social action (Jensen and Winthereik, 2013; Bowker et al., 2010). I build on this work in discussion with “Writing Culture”

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to argue that representation, text or author are not stable entities. Instead, their unity remains in tension with the heterogeneous input that informs them. When we situate text and author in the context of their becoming in the process of writing, the question arises what makes text and author possible – or what challenges them as units – in the first place.

Writing is one form of cohering heterogeneity. My point of departure is inspired by Callon's (2002) piece on writing devices as tools for managing complexity and simplification in two different companies. Complexity and simplification are terms that make sense in the context of management. On the one hand, companies rely on networks of and exchanges between different people and resources in order to retain a competitive advantage. On the other, companies need to be able to control and thus simplify these networks in order to work and grow effectively. The company's employees are constantly writing to overcome the tension between these two poles, connecting complexity to action. In the process they objectify their work relations and write themselves into a narrative that is constructed in and by writing tools. While Callon's terms – complexity and simplification – differ from the ones that I use — heterogeneity and coherence — the attempt to bring them together and overcome their tension through writing resonates with my case. In what follows, I will specify the writing spectrum through an investigation of writing's work of cohering across three realms: writing infrastructures, writing format and authorship. In these realms, writing as a process of cohering does not culminate into a single outcome. Instead, in each realm and each time, different tensions persist and the heterogeneity remains present in the resulting text.

### WRITING INFRASTRUCTURE

Writing requires writing tools. I did my writing in Afghanistan on a laptop I had brought from home. It was an old Macbook, one that wouldn't work without being plugged into the electricity network because the battery had stopped working. I considered buying a new laptop before going to Afghanistan, but didn't want to risk losing it to dust, dirt or bombs. This was a mistake as I very soon found out that Afghan workdays are constantly interrupted by power cuts and Internet disconnects. Sometimes the power cut was local; at other times rain, snow or human error had struck a regional power station or TV Hill — a mountain in Kabul with many transmission towers.

After a power cut it was always unclear whether and where I had lost text in the document, as my old computer would not backup automatically. I thought these problems were at least compensated by the fact that I had updated Microsoft Word to its latest version before I left. This too was a mistake. I was the only one in the office with this newest version and this was by no means an advan-

tage. While our collective document moved back and forth between versions and through email inboxes and on to flash drives, lots of odd changes occurred: sometimes the formatting would get messy with indents in the text, numbers were initiating lists that weren't there, margins disappeared, the text was invisible or images got lost. It wasn't clear whether these maddening mess ups were because of my divergent Word version, whether there was an inbuilt software incompatibility between the Word versions for my Mac and those for the PCs that all my colleagues used, whether it was a hardware issue of communication between Macs and PCs, or whether it was the result of the many viruses that inhabited the PCs of my colleagues and the flash drives that traveled freely between them.

No one really investigated this, despite the many hours lost to problems of this nature. I could have switched to a PC laptop provided by the office but the advantages of having the same Word version as my colleagues would have been outbalanced by the fact that this PC would be much more vulnerable to viruses and it would work much more slowly for me. My dictionaries, my documents and my body memory all worked so much better, faster and more enjoyably on my own old Mac than on a different laptop. It enabled a much better workflow for me.

Workflow was what all of us involved in the writing of the report wanted, but it was constantly shattered by a host of interruptions. Our collective document would advance and recede like tidal movements depending on the connections made and unmade by the material infrastructures that constituted the lifeline of our office. I would write a section on healthcare achievements, and a minute later a power cut would take away my paragraph on the increased numbers of Basic Health Centers and Community Health Workers. My colleague would have added text about government control in the districts, and a minute later, incompatibilities between software, hardware or viruses would have eaten up parts in the calibrations, jumbling the table's spacing, text and indicators. Often it was too much trouble to find out how exactly the text had changed. I would have forgotten about changes in punctuation, vocabulary, or the order of the text, and instead pick up again where the big recognizable chunks of text had gone missing.

Our deadline with the Dutch commissioners was at the end of summer 2010. Although work would be most productive when everyone was in the office, many of us were often absent. As the deadline approached, my supervisor was visiting family far away and our third co-author had gone back home to yet another part of the world. Time differences and "rest and recreation schedules" influenced our workflow and resulted in intricate schedules that sought to maximize our daily input despite geographic distances. In Kabul I would wake up to a newly drafted section from my supervisor that I would quickly revise before sending it to the third co-author, so he could contribute and send it to our supervisor again.

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A similar calibration had to be worked out between our colleagues in Afghanistan. There was a virus going around, making many of us quite sick. Moreover, as Ramadan had started in mid-August, the work schedule was cut in half and the pace slowed down substantially. Without coffee, tea, cigarettes, water and food in the day, many were unable to concentrate well beyond the morning hours. Furthermore, security was an ever present concern and determined who was working from where. Rumors of suicide bombers in the area of our office and home kept the neighborhood on lockdown for a few days in August. Getting words on the page was a fickle undertaking of connecting people and things in (virtual) space and time.

Language was another connection problem. Many of my Afghan colleagues didn't speak or write English fluently. Most of the internationals, including myself, didn't speak Pashtu or Dari, the Afghan languages most relevant to our evaluation project. Additionally, many internationals, including myself, were not native speakers of English. These differences in language fluencies impeded writing in several ways. As internationals weren't allowed or able to go to the places in Uruzgan that most interested the Dutch donor, we employed local Uruzganis to conduct surveys in these regions. The responses to these surveys went through several chains of translation. Internationals often had a sense that these *Chinese whispers* transformed the answers into ineffective, staccato information without any flavor for the specificities of the conversation, or good sense of what useful data looked like.

I also had trouble producing good text. I wrote a section about governance and rule of law in our report and had it corrected by a colleague, an intern with our organization who had just finished his undergraduate degree in International Affairs at a top university in the USA. He checked my piece for spelling, syntactic or grammatical errors but also brought to light my own illiteracy in the evaluation and development lingo. My young colleague, in turn, was quick and fluent, and therefore ended up writing large portions of our reports in spite of his sparse experience in Afghanistan and in evaluation work.

Electricity, software, hardware, Internet, security protocols, physical presence and absence, language or lingo deficiencies constantly interfered with getting our words on the page. In studies of infrastructure it is oftentimes stated that infrastructures are successful when they are invisible in the background or ready at hand for people to use (Star, 1999; Star and Ruhleder, 1996; Bowker et al., 2010; Graham and Thrift, 2007). Infrastructure is often understood as a kind of second nature built on top of first nature that enables people to engage socially (Bowker, 1995). In Afghanistan, however, infrastructure is anything but invisible or a background presence. Wires and sockets stick out rather than being carefully hidden away; streets are collections of potholes; electricity cuts out all the time; computer viruses hamper transmissions and people are often lost

in translation. That people and things were cut off from one another impeding the flow of words onto a page was not an exception, it was the rule.

Why did everything not fall apart? One international colleague would often roll his eyes and say “TIA: This Is Afghanistan”. He said this whenever anything, literally or figuratively, broke down. And it caught on amongst many of the internationals. It expressed annoyance and powerlessness, but also submission to chaos. It was accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders. It allowed for a breath after which the ambiguous investment in the job, the place, the friends, the colleagues, and the future would resume. TIA was an approach reserved for internationals, however. Another colleague, Afghan this time, would never say something like this. In fact TIA more likely sounded offensive to him as well as to other Afghans. My Afghan colleague’s convictions were more general in terms of time and space: “We live to solve problems”. I’ll call it WLTSP.

Maintenance and repair studies have made the helpful distinction that infrastructures might go unnoticed by many while being the object of attention and intervention for the mostly invisible expert workers involved in keeping infrastructures afloat (Denis and Pontille, 2013; Bowker et al., 2010). This does not apply to our office. Within our organization we were all supposed to fix things. My contract stipulated that “capacity building” was a job responsibility. This capacity building demanded that internationals train their Afghan colleagues in being better evaluators, which in turn implied a host of things including becoming better bureaucrats, administrators, and researchers. As a result, writing reports involved capacity building which included waging a war against computer viruses, raising awareness of what such viruses might do, and making sure that people were using compatible software programs. This surge in standardization and office health was complicated by a lack of money, adequate technology, a uniform, office-wide policy, and an ongoing practice of downloading music and porn, introducing new viruses. We may say that just as the concern for the sex life of the individual and the security of the population are joined in biopolitics, so are the virtual sex life and the security of the office joined in a sort of virtual biopolitics, or a concern not with the lifeline of society, but with the lifeline of the office, namely its infrastructure.

Maintenance and repair in Afghanistan were done in different ways. For my Afghan colleagues, the potholes, delays and nuisances were a part of life. They wouldn’t give attention to them. Daily maintenance and repair happened more or less automatically and mindlessly, making my Afghan colleagues the perfect candidates for the invisible workers usually brought to the fore in maintenance and repair studies. The internationals, however, were nothing but invisible. For my international colleagues and me, these interferences were not parts of life but of work. The assumed imperfections in Afghanistan that the development ethos trained us to attend to were considered hardships. And so, those that would roll their eyes and say TIA were allowed a break once every

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two months. If it wasn't through a special arrangement to spend time with partners outside of Afghanistan, internationals were allowed to go on R&R ("rest and recreation") every so often in Delhi or Bali or somewhere else exotic to recover from the taxing conditions in Afghanistan. Afghans weren't given the hardship bonuses internationals received and often only earned half, at best, of the money earned by an international intern or junior.

The continuous presence of breakdown produced new vulnerabilities, at the heart of which was the tension between two approaches: "This is Afghanistan" and "We live to solve problems", both of which understood cause and effect, continuity and interruption, and responsibility differently. As Jensen and Winthereik (2013) have noted in their own work on similar monitoring and evaluation infrastructures, the socialities that the infrastructures and their breakdown engendered became infrastructures themselves, enabling new connection across space and time. However, possibilities for connection were not distributed equally. Whereas TIA designated the internationals as experts of maintenance and repair, assuming clear distinctions between "us" and "them," means and ends, and normal and exceptional, "WLTSP" turned infrastructure not into a tool, but into an ethos of connecting and fixing blurred boundaries between normal and exceptional, and means and ends. However, means and ends shifted: whereas the ideology of capacity building would direct development efforts to infrastructures themselves, in daily practice it became the social organization around it that needed most attention and care. These attentions were themselves also unequally distributed with WLTSP stoically tinkering along, and TIA distributing efforts, remuneration and compensation according to particular designations of expertise and responsibility. Writing as a process, therefore, did not mean the same thing for everyone involved and neither did the aims, the message, or the actors of writing.

### FORMAT

My office is full of paperwork. There are old drafts of the report, reports written by other organizations such as one on informal justice in Uruzgan, a few assessments of development projects published by Afghan NGOs, and a copy of the previous *Three Years After* (MR, 2009). And there is other paperwork like the big maps of the area rolled up behind my desk, on the floor or on the wall, the minutes of our team meetings, timelines with deadlines and work planning, printed emails, Post-its with reminders of things to check or do, my notebook with the notes of the interviews that I conducted, questionnaires which are in the process of developing or are in the process of analysis; business cards, flight schedules, reimbursement forms and visa paperwork.

My computer offers a virtual expansion of these piles of paper that litter the office. There are reports I downloaded from the internet, such as the UNDP report on the Millennium Goals, the UNODC's 2010 Afghanistan Opium Survey, and a draft report on Uruzgan that my supervisor was writing for a think tank; there are some reports by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit written by a Dutch policy analyst, and a report by the Asia Foundation. My computer also stores large Excel workbooks with Uruzgan health and education data and logbooks of interviews. And my computer also provides access to the world beyond Kabul. I communicate with my home front, with colleagues in the office; I check the news and find, receive and send new document drafts, work schedules, and proposals for meetings.

Writing the *Four Years After* demands that different texts become incorporated into one document with its own typesetting and composition. While processing these texts, the body of texts and words swells, emails are written, reports are downloaded, notes are handed over and work schedules are designed. All texts are moved to different piles on the shelves next to my desk, into the garbage can, onto another person's desk, into the trash in my email box and into a file in my folder until eventually one day they are incorporated or excluded from the report.

What did this processing of text look like? My supervisor gave me the *Three Years After* report, as it was a good example of the format of the reports that our organization wrote. The idea was that I would replace the text with updated information. This entailed rewriting most, but not everything: the tribal and historical background sections didn't need revisions, as history doesn't change in evaluation logic.

The content of the other sections, roughly divided in "socio-economic developments", "reconstruction activities", "security", "government" and "international actors" had all changed over the past year. My co-authors and I divided the tasks. The style of these sections varied quite a bit. Certain sections, especially the security one, were written in a political analysis style. I may have had no experience in any evaluation writing, but this style was even more unfamiliar. I had read a few evaluation reports and interviewed a few "pro-government actors" during my 5-day field trip to Uruzgan. However, this didn't make me feel prepared to write sentences like:

Recent information suggests that the Taliban has changed their operation strategy over the last three months and stepped up their activities in terms of random attacks, anti-government and IMF [international military forces] propaganda (e.g., sermons at mosques) and intimidation (e.g., night letters), predominantly in areas under the control of the government and/or IMF, such as Tirin Kot, Deh Rawud, and Chora.

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Or:

There are several tribal rifts running through the Taliban (either along the lines of tribal confederations, sub-tribes, or between foreign and local Taliban) resulting in tensions and/or internal fighting.

I did not feel I had sufficient information to make these kinds of claims about the province and the Uruzganis. My two co-authors wrote the substance of those sections. I took up the socio-economic developments section. With the quantitative data our team had collected and analyzed, I could show in numbers certain changes compared to the years before and I could then take quotes from my interviews to qualify these changes. It was much easier for me to write sentences such as:

Despite the increase in health care facilities, the number of health care staff has changed from 89 to 124, but the percentage of female workers has stayed the same at about 19%. With 56 doctors and nurses in total there is one qualified health care professional per 10,000 people in Uruzgan (The OECD average is 3.2 per 1,000).

Or:

For a province where hardly any healthcare was available four years ago, the additional clinics, staff, resources, and capacity building clearly mark an improvement. Yet, for many provincial residents, specifically those outside the Dutch focus districts, there are still serious capacity limitations. The expectations of health care are usually higher than other public services. There are complaints about unqualified or absent staff or unavailable medication in the health posts and clinics.

My co-authors and I wrote chunks of text and then sent it around for review and comments. My supervisor sent back my piece on socio-economic reconstruction but she hadn't changed much in the text. However, whereas I tried to be careful with the choice of words and was very specific with regards to who said what, terms I had found vague or general like "key-actors", "pro-government" and "local perception" were written back in. Moreover, whereas I had tried to logically connect each paragraph to the one before and after building up to a message — as I had learned during my anthropological training — she had shortened my sentences and made each paragraph part of a bullet pointed list.

At the end of the section my supervisor had just revised, she inserted a piece on the position of women in Uruzgan. Now it was my turn to revise her work like she had revised mine. The piece was lengthy and copy-pasted from a report she had been writing for another Dutch think tank. The text raised a few questions for me. First, I didn't think it was very well composed. My supervisor shrugged and more or less suggested it should stay the way it was. I saw no development in the story and there was no point to it, both on the level of the text as a whole, and on the level of paragraphs and sentences. To me, the text seemed like the train of thought of someone who knew a lot and couldn't make up her mind about what was relevant.

My second issue had to do with the place the text occupied in the document as a whole. My supervisor had given the piece its own header in the socio-economic development section while I wondered whether it shouldn't instead be added on to the different subsections, including government, security, agro-economic development, education and health. Wouldn't the separation reinforce women as a special category, one that required special attention curiously located under "socio-economic", whereas a more integrated approach could tone down the extra-ordinary status the international intervention granted to Afghan women? Later in the writing process I asked the same question with regards to the separated sections of security, governance and international actors. These issues seemed to influence one another so profoundly that I wondered whether we should integrate them or at least spell out their connections. It turned out, however, that this was not what evaluation writing in this context is about: it was less about connecting information and more about collecting information. Moving text around would change nothing about the meaning that we were to distill from the report. Whereas the order of things in other contexts builds up to a particular analysis, here the format signaled the message.

Let me explain this a bit more. The report suggests where writing is, namely between its covers. Yet, in practice and according to a similar logic of inscription described by Latour and Woolgar in their study of laboratory life (1986), writing happens well beyond the paper copy: writing includes a lot of extra-textual text that requires much work to make it intertextual. These additional reports, interview transcriptions, quantified data, comments in the margin, track changes, emails, offhand statements, notes, and minutes of meetings are not to be discarded. We deal with this 'information' by working through them as we check things off to-do-lists. All the comments need to be addressed and their suggestions about composition, adding information, or changing the typesetting all have to be attended to. This information does not create a new form, as one would etymologically expect. This format of bullet-points, of keywords, tables, lists of content (with the usual suspects like "security", "government", "tribal background", and "reconstruction") collects information in a list. As Riles, Strathern and Green have noted about texts in the realm of policy and international de-

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velopment, this logic of collection does not follow an argumentative structure and follows different rules about what counts as knowledge compared to texts in social sciences (Riles, 2000; Strathern, 2006; Green, 2009). In anthropology, the string of words, sentences, paragraphs and sections rules incorporates information and metabolizes it with a minimal black and white aesthetic of words on a page. In the evaluation report, the aesthetic is grand and overwhelming, overruling the words, sentences and paragraphs in some sense by signaling a new instance of an evaluation message.

The format also makes single and multiple. This capacity to both create unity and coherence of the evaluation message while simultaneously being the plurality and heterogeneity of its elements reminds me of Dugdale's argument about how the negotiation of a healthcare leaflet settles in an oscillatory outcome between the singularity and the multiplicity of the object (1999). This section adds to her argument that this oscillatory outcome is crucially made possible by the format, by the aesthetic of collection, from the list that can only be singular if it is multiple at the same time.

### AUTHORSHIP

Lots of people contribute to the text, as the previous sections evidenced. My co-authors and I distributed the writing and revising of most of the text amongst the three of us. We read through each other's work, commented on it, changed words, deleted sentences, added paragraphs, and re-ordered layouts. We were assisted by our colleagues in the GIS department, by other regional teams, by our field office in Uruzgan, by surveyors in the field, and by other knowledgeable contacts or friends who helped us fill in gaps in the report. Questions about the text put chains of communication in motion, thereby producing information in emails or in telephone notes. We co-authors felt our way through the material that came from our field office and fit it into the report.

Reading, writing, commenting, revising, negotiating, sorting, weighing, deleting and ordering are all activities that are part of writing. As such, if we ask who the author of this report is, the answer could refer to many people. And not just to people: phones, computers and software also contribute to the coming into being of this report. In the logic of evaluation writing, however, being a contributor to the report doesn't mean one is an author. On the title page only the name of our organization appears. The correspondence between the evaluation organization and its commissioner, the Dutch embassy, will be insightful with regard to how the authorship took shape in the evaluation report.

Once the draft was finished and signed off by our directors, we sent it to the Dutch embassy. Embassy and military personnel read through it and returned it to us with lots of comments in the

margins. In an accompanying message, our embassy contact person explained that they found the report too sweeping at times. He referred to statements about the level of violence and stability over the past four years. In his view, our organization would have never come to statements that questioned a steady development towards stability if we had also spoken to people that “really know” the region well. The embassy also found our material too anecdotal sometimes, and wondered what sense it made to quote individuals if their opinions did not reflect those of the general public. Their contact person said that he didn’t want to put words in our mouth, but he did want to urge us to make sound and factually correct assessments as this is what he expected of an organization like ours.

One could have taken the Dutch comments as simply pointing to the difficulty of representing a place like Uruzgan where it is not easy to establish what is anecdote and what a general trend is. My supervisor was unhappy about the comments of the Dutch for another reason, however. She did not feel that our research ethics and protocols were taken seriously. Our organization had registered all sorts of opinions including critical ones and had wanted to represent them in the report, like a “true” evaluation organization was supposed to do. What we were asked to do now, she gathered, was to censor the report, give up our independence and write a positive, if biased, account of the Dutch efforts in Uruzgan.

The shift that was slyly made in this correspondence was one which equated anecdotalism and facts with bias and independence respectively. This shift moved the emphasis from an epistemological concern with representation (whether or not something was true) to a moral concern with the representer (whether or not s/he had come to her representations in a proper fashion). This shift had an effect on the text and on the type of author it made present.

First, the changes in the text. In response to the Dutch comments, we made a few amendments in the text. Sections in the introduction that had thrown off the donor because they were too ambiguous were framed differently. In the introduction of the first draft, we had spoken of “the uncertain future of Uruzgan after Dutch departure”, of “a security vacuum that the Taliban has been readily exploiting”, and that “the steady trend of improvement in Uruzgan may no longer be as smooth as anticipated”. In the new introduction, the Dutch were much more present as actors and in control, applying a well thought out intervention plan in the province that consisted of many well-received positive effects while anticipating inevitable, negative effects. This was not false or true; it was just a different way of framing the intervention and a narrative that inspired a different understanding of the Dutch mission. And so we worked our way through the Dutch comments in such a way that the new text both did justice to the assessment of our organization and to that of the Dutch (cf Bourgoin and Muniesa, 2016, for a similar negotiation of the representation, this time of a slideshow, as faithful to the ‘reality of the situation’). But our new document hadn’t

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only changed the Dutch actors; it had changed the composition of the author as well.

Scientific authors tend to remove themselves from their texts so as to make their work less particular and evade epistemological responsibility (Bazerman, 1988). In contrast, our organization built a significant presence in the report. This presence was, firstly, in the “authorial judgments”. If there was ever a knowing agent in the report, it would be the organization by name. “MR” took credit for the photos in the report; and on occasion MR “spoke to”, “shared the critique”, “currently had knowledge of”, “acknowledged”, “was unable to verify”, or “estimated”.

The author MR here emerged as a collective committed to basing information on the right sources and communicating the differences of opinion if there were any. Founding information on the right sources almost took a literal turn in the body of footnotes appearing at the bottom of the report’s pages. The final draft had twice as many footnotes as the previous one that the Dutch commented on. Many of the footnotes that were added made reference to other sources of information, oftentimes established analysts or NGOs. These references were mobilized as witnesses to the claims made in the text. The second type of footnote was an opportunity to display the organization’s solid grounding in and knowledge of the field. There were many footnotes elaborating on the intricate tribal structures explaining which tribe formally or informally allied or feuded with which other. A third type of footnote detailed the latest developments in alliances or rumors. These made clear that our organization wasn’t just writing down claims, but was well aware of the debates in which these claims were situated.

The authorship of this report was composed in a manner similar to what Galison (2003) describes for the scientific multi-authorship projects that he studied. He writes about instances of assigning authorship in specific projects where many authors are involved and frames this as two contrary forces trying to reach equilibrium. On the one hand, there is the heterogeneous input from many different types of writers. On the other hand, there is a necessity for epistemological coherence and unity. Here the tension is similar. There were writers, signatories, reviewers, readers, and editors, all with different skills and knowledge that were needed for the writing of this report. These different contributors needed to be managed in such a way that the unity of the text was not put at risk. In contrast to Galison’s argument, this unity was less an issue of content than it was of the moral standing of the authoring organization: the emphasis was not on the object of the representation but on the subject — the evaluation organization and its independence in the registration of Uruzgan’s affairs (cf. Green, 2009 who argues that international development expert knowledge is less about the content of the knowledge than about the social process through which the text is produced). For this independent author to be plausible, authoring contributions had to be highlighted or deleted: writers, revisers or authorizers had to be incorporated into the unitary voice of

the organization; witnesses had to be called upon in the form of other analysts or organizations; and evidence had to be displayed regarding the organization's vast collection of knowledge (cf. Biagioli, 2006 for the ways in which authors of novels are 'composed.').

The unity of the organizational author was, moreover, reinforced by certain iconic and linguistic means (Fraenkel, 1997). Firstly, the organization's logo depicts three figures holding hands in a circle, with the name of the organization featuring as another party to the circle. This symbolic expression of unity is iconically stamped onto each page of the report and is even magnified on the back of the cover. Secondly, there are two sections where the organization explicitly states its upright authorship. In the "About" section, in the first sentence the organization already claims to be "an independent Afghan non-governmental organization" after which follow its mission, commitments, areas of expertise and, importantly, a list of many commissioners and donors, among whom is the embassy of The Netherlands who commissioned this current report. In the "Acknowledgments", the organization again explicitly emphasizes "its commitment to independent and impartial research". It further makes clear that "findings in this report are the sole opinion of [MR] and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the Dutch government".

As we have seen in this section, authoring the report does not follow the logic of contribution. The diversity of the contributors instead needs to be reconciled into the unity of a singular voice to express the full morality of the author. This transformation into a responsible, independent, detached author happened through all sorts of verbal authorial judgments and iconic and linguistic interventions. Yet, the explicit stamp on each page — the explicit statements that the research organization represents — only its own visions or the authorial judgments formally unified the figure of the author. However, these explicit markers may fail to convince all those who read the report and rather raise the question which compromises — for instance from those who commissioned the report — they might hide.

## COHERENCE AND HETEROGENEITY

This article has followed three cohering processes involved in the making of an evaluation report. Rather than taking the *Four Years After* report as an object to be scrutinized for its success and failure to represent circumstances brought on as a result of the Dutch intervention in the province, the focus has been on different aspects of the writing through which the report has come into being. Attending to writing infrastructures, formats and authorship offer different ways of thinking about writing as a process of transforming heterogeneous elements into a coherence of sorts (cf

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Mol (2016) who asks how to think about coexistence and coherence through the case study of the dessert *clafoutis*, itself incorporating different worlds and techniques).

First, in writing infrastructures, dealing with frequent breakdown doesn't produce or rely on one coherent, integrated workflow. "This Is Afghanistan" (TIA) and "We Live To Solve Problems" (WLTSP) reflect different understandings about who is to be responsible, rewarded or compensated in the process of getting words on the page in the midst of recurrent breakdown. International staff are compensated for the hardships that working in Afghanistan are understood to involve, while Afghan staff are expected to be used to living with these hardships. While TIA draws boundaries around who is to be responsible and compensated as well as what is continuity and change and cause and effect, WLTSP instead does not refer back to coherence of standards and the world of under/development and in/security that these conjure up. Instead, it practically works towards solving things and getting things done, not referring back to an order of how things are but aiming for how things could be. As such, these typologies resonate with what Chunglin Kwa (2002) has termed romantic and baroque complexities. Romantic complexities come together in stable, structural metaphors that reality provides instances of (TIA). Baroque complexities, on the other hand, do not assume stable patterns of connection (WLTSP). Instead, people and things are in turbulence, doing and undoing patterns situationally rather than according to abstract criteria (Kwa, 2002, p. 46). As a result, writing does not mean the same for everyone involved, neither as a process nor as a final representation of concepts such as goals, means, or responsibility that are written into the report.

The writing format offers a second thought on coherence, bearing resemblance to the romantic and baroque distinction. In order for heterogeneities to become coherent, they do not have to change form (Strathern, 2006). Whereas academic work follows the premise that knowledge is developed and unfolds through words building up to sentences, to paragraphs and to sections, this is not the logic of the evaluation report. Instead of an aesthetic of black and white which presents a general abstraction of a stable reality out there, evaluation writing coheres through coexistence and juxtaposition in a logic of collection. The unity of the collection is itself the multiplicity of its elements. The format of bullet points, white lines, bolded keywords, tables and diagrams places information together that is not otherwise obviously connected. This relation between form and information suggests that form may be the content, that the collection may be the analysis, and that information is the end and means of evaluation writing.

Lastly, coherence can be a fleeting matter as the composition of authorship in the evaluation report suggests. This composition is in tension with those that contributed and the unity of a single, authoritative, independent, detached voice. The unity of the voice does not necessarily succeed in

relieving the tensions at the center of its composition. The stamp of coherence on each page, the explicit statements of independence in the report, and the authorial judgments everywhere in the text do not seem to be able to cover up the multiplicity of its origins and the material and literary practices through which it has come together. Their insistence may rather raise the suspicion that different voices speak here and that compromises – notably from the Dutch commissioners – have been crafted in the process of writing. In the subsequent travels of the report — most notably its presentation in The Netherlands later in 2010 — there were indeed questions about the independence of the author referring back to those explicit statements in the report. The editing, reviewing, revising, deleting, copying, signing and authorizing haven't produced a unit in which all the elements hang together felicitously. It is not a total chaos — an authorship that fails to persuade completely. Yet, the report cannot rid itself of a suggestion of compromise and this compromise is here the opposite of harmony.

This article has shown that the process of report writing is distributed over different actors and objects and “oscillates” between standards and complexities, coherence and heterogeneity. Writing is a way of connecting and collecting, of drawing the world into an encounter with writing tools. As such, the writing is not just about Afghanistan; it is also in Afghanistan. The report itself is the artifact in which these writing tools seem to hold together as a unit. Not necessarily for long, however. Infrastructural issues, narrative form and content, and the authority of the author are intended to make the report transportable — make it circulate and connect to different worlds. Yet, these circulations and connections may jeopardize the stability and unity of the report. Rather than reading the evaluation report for its representational successes and failures, this article advocates for the reading of a report as an event, as a physical moment of social-material interactions. Writing is thus analyzed as a swaying between processual activity of collecting heterogeneous elements on the one hand, and crafting a more or less coherent description of the influence of the Dutch intervention on security and development in Uruzgan, on the other. In this way we do not learn what a report is, not what a report does, but how the report (continuously) comes to be in tension between coherence and heterogeneous writing practices.