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‘The Market Is Far Away’

Global connections and economic remoteness in rural Ukraine

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Abstract:

This paper examines the role of the ‘global market’ in the exacerbation of economic remoteness in rural Ukraine. Based on a case study of a British-sponsored project that set up a sewing centre in a rural community in Odessa province, I explore how unequal access to the global economy is determined by the type of market sought and the type of product designated for production. The approach looks critically at ‘the market’— as both a western-oriented ideological construct and set of practices — that serves to distance the community from centres of global economic importance, both in a temporal and spatial sense.

Keywords: economic remoteness, global market, Ukraine, rural

Brega, a village in Odessa province, Ukraine, has not always been a ‘remote’ place. During Soviet times, it was part of a thriving agricultural region, with the nearby ports in Reni and Izmail, both on the Danube River, acting as market hubs that transported local produce throughout the vast Soviet Union.

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[1] My sincere thanks to Rainer Hillebrand and two anonymous readers for their helpful comments to earlier versions of this paper.

Those days are now long past. The fortunes of the region, and the village in particular, has undergone a drastic turnaround since the collapse of the USSR. In the decades since Ukraine independence in 1991, the ports have operated at only a fraction of their capacity, the huge cranes on the docks stand like rusty dinosaurs, monuments to a bygone era. Evidence of the decline is everywhere: sections of the main road that connect this region to the provincial capital of Odessa, some 300 km north, are riddled with craters and potholes so large and deep that in certain places cars can barely pass, despite some crucial parts being repaired in the last year. Many other minor roads in the area are now impassable by ordinary vehicles, exacerbating the isolation of communities. Poor communication and transport links to the rest of the country are signs of the region's economic remoteness; while untended gardens and deserted fields are a testimony to the vast number of people who have left the region in search of work.

The dismantling of Soviet-era agricultural collectives created massive unemployment within the villages in the region. While 95% of Brega's working population had been employed by the collectives, the new enterprises that were formed in their place retained only a minute proportion of this workforce, leaving the vast majority—over 90% of the original collective labour force—without work. Hardest hit were the unskilled or less skilled workers, many women.

It was in these conditions that local elites welcomed foreign development workers into the village in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Their hope was that these outsiders would help bring investors and an international market for local produce. The British government's Know How Fund (as it was known at the time) introduced a number of projects in the village. One, specifically aimed at women, tried to tackle the problem of high female unemployment through the creation of non-agricultural work: producing handicrafts for the market. In line with general development thinking at the time, the aim was to generate rural incomes from the non-agricultural sector (e.g. see McCullough et.al 2008,pp. 21-22; p. 41).

Using the sewing project as my case study, I examine the role of 'the market' in the creation of economic remoteness.[2] I show how the type of production encouraged and the chosen market of engagement were contributing factors to the region's global economic isolation. In other words, 'the market' as exported to eastern Europe by development workers, served as a 'distancing device' that has exacerbated the village's isolation. Such economic remoteness was recognised by villagers themselves, as evidenced when the village Mayor—speaking through a translator – told British Embassy Officials visiting Brega in 2003, in order to follow up on the project's progress, that 'the market is far away.'

The following section provides a discussion of Brega's acquired position as 'remote' post Ukraine independence. The village's remoteness is multi-faceted although my concern here is with its economic dimensions and the role of the foreign development project in increasing this remoteness. The next section looks more theoretically at the nature of remoteness in terms of 'the market.' Since market-led development projects rely on participation in a global market, remoteness, I suggest, can be understood as a form of exclusion from involvement. In the two sections thereafter, my focus is on the ways in which the market, as evoked by the development workers, exacerbated the remoteness of the region through the creation of spatial and temporal forms of distancing. The conclusion returns to the condition of

[2] This research is based on approximately 15 months' anthropological ethnographic fieldwork in Brega based primarily on participant observation methods carried out mainly between the years 2000-2004 (covering all months and seasons) with an additional month's fieldwork in 2014. For reasons of anonymity and in accordance with anthropological practice, the name of the village is a pseudonym. In addition, I have not identified the specific administrative district to which Brega belongs. Instead, I speak of the 'region', meaning the three administrative districts of Bolgrad, Izmail and Reni. All three are important to Brega although in this paper my attention is on the two port towns that, from an economic perspective, have more sway (Bolgrad's influence on Brega is more in terms of cultural connections).

remoteness and the role of the market in the creation of uneven global development through different forms of connectivity.

The Return of Remoteness to Brega

With a population of approximately 2400 in 2014 (which represents a decline of 20% since I first stayed in the village in 2000), Brega is located in the southern-most part of Ukraine, Odessa Oblast, close to the Romanian border and the Danube River to the south and also not far from the border with Moldova to the west. It is part of an agricultural area that has traditionally produced grains and grapes for wine production.

While it is true that the region has a long history of geographical and socio-cultural remoteness—located as it was at the periphery of both the Ottoman and Russian empires—incorporation into the USSR in 1944 brought a change of fortunes. The region was integrated through a set of overarching Soviet economic and social policies, with infrastructural connections to Chisinau and Odessa opening up the area to the rest of the Soviet empire (Kaneff and Heinz, 2006, p. 8). At the same time, the port towns of Reni and Izmail, on the Danube River, were transformed into thriving economic centres with crucial strategic importance connecting the area to other international trading partners in far-reaching corners of the Soviet empire in Central Asia, Russia and Europe through the vast transport network that connected sea and land. Thousands of tons of cargo were handled daily through their rail-port complexes as well as catering to large numbers of travellers through their passenger terminals (see Samokhvalov and Samokhvalov, 2006, p. 19 for the Reni case). The transport infrastructure also meant that agricultural production from the region—grains, dairy produce, meat and vegetables—could be sent to Odessa and to other parts of the USSR (Samokhvalov and Samokhvalov, 2006, p. 20).

Brega benefited from the region's strategic importance in the Soviet system with the two district townships providing access to the market for agricultural produce from the village

collectives. The two district capitals were also local centres for educational, health and other services, as well as gateways to other central nodes of the Soviet empire.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the reconfiguration of the social landscape, with some areas improving their connectivity to new centres of importance, while others, including the region that is the subject of this paper, were transformed into hinterlands.[3] Brega's present multifaceted remoteness, which includes both physical as well as socio-cultural dimensions, can be directly connected to the collapse of the USSR and the particular way in which the rebuilding of a new independent Ukraine state has occurred.

Physical remoteness is a consequence of infrastructural and communication isolation as an impoverished (and corrupt) Ukraine nation-state has been unable - at least until very recently - to maintain, let alone develop links between this southernmost part of the nation to the rest of the country. The region is difficult to access despite being only 300 km from the provincial capital of Odessa (see also Schlegel 2016).[4] The village council has no internet facilities and relies largely on communication technologies that date back a few decades. Indeed, in contrast to globalisation trends in other parts of the world, this region has not been characterised by faster and more efficient transport, distances are not 'shrinking' or revolutionised by new forms of technology. Instead there is a discernible sense of desolation,

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[3] See Humphrey (2014) for a Russian case; also Paasi (1995) for a Russian-Finnish example. It is also worth highlighting that not all regions in Ukraine are newly 'remote'.. The Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, for example, has found access to the global market through industrial production (see Kalantaridis' (2000) study of the relatively successful garment industry which has found a Western market) and through rural entrepreneurs who capitalise on the opportunities arising from close proximity to the western border (see Kalantaridis, Labrianidis and Vassilev 2007). There is, in short, considerable variation between regions, and indeed between villages within the same district (Allina-Pisano 2007, p. 35).

[4] At least in part, market exclusion is a consequence of poor infrastructure and high transport costs (Bird and Shepherd, 2003, p. 591; Tobgay and McCullough, 2008).

with Brega's growing geographical isolation resulting in distances to centres having apparently increased.

Remoteness is also of a cultural and political form: the rural population in the region is comprised primarily of Moldovans, Bulgarian and Gagauzi, that is, ethnic minorities in a nation-state dominated by Ukraines and Russians. Brega is made up of Bulgarians (over 90 percent), who, like other inhabitants in this part of the Odessa province, are Russian speakers. Since migrating to the area in the early 1800s, and becoming incorporated into what was then the Russian empire, the Bulgarian inhabitants retain close cultural and historical ties to Russia, which is partly through their bilingual abilities as Russian-Bulgarian speakers.[5] Language has become a highly politicized and contentious issue since independence (and arguably also before this time) and their use of the Russian language which remains the lingua franca of the region brings with it a range of challenges in a country where only Ukrainian is given legal status as the national language. As divisions in the country following the on-going war in the east strengthen, the issue of language compounds the increasing political marginalisation of the region's population.

In all above respects this region and its people are remote from the newly independent Ukraine state. The role of the state is, undoubtedly, a central player in throwing light on these cultural, political and physical forms of remoteness (Tsing 1993). However, my concern here is to focus on the role of the market rather than the state (to the extent that these two can be

[5] Besides language, closeness was grounded on a number of additional factors, including: on a perceived shared history against the common Ottoman enemy (Bulgarian migrants were given sanctuary - and land rights - in the Russian empire after fleeing the Ottomans) and on religious closeness following the new migrants' adoption of Russian Orthodoxy. Such historical-cultural ties were reinforced through increased mobility during Soviet and post Soviet times, that gave villagers opportunities to study, travel and work in various places in the Soviet Union. Strong labour migration connections to Moscow and other parts of Russia since Soviet times remain today and provide an additional reason for close affiliations to Russia.

analytically distinguished) in the creation of remote places. Much less attention has been given in the academic literature to how markets are implicated in the creation of 'remoteness,' which is surprising given the dominant—some say hegemonic (Dilley 1992, p. 1; Johnston and Filho 2005)—role of 'the market' in the global economy in the past three decades.[6]

A whole range of markets were affected by the collapse of the USSR and although the process of dismantling socialist markets was gradual, the process of re-building has been equally slow. Economic downturn was largely a consequence of both ports' change of circumstances: from privileged and strategic transport nodes in the Soviet empire, the district capitals and their surrounding regions have spiraled into decline through the running down of the infrastructure and the closure of port and rail facilities with their associated markets (this was especially true for Reni and to a lesser degree Izmail). Regional efforts that attempted to improve the economic situation through the establishment of a 'Special Economic Zone' were largely unsuccessful, receiving little support at the national level by politicians based in the capital reputedly finding (regional) transnational border trading a potential threat to the integrity of the new and increasingly unstable nation-state (Samokhvalov and Samokhvalov, 2006, p. 23). Economic activity in the townships remains a mere shadow of its Soviet heyday and is largely confined to their administrative roles as district capitals. This has implications for the region as a whole: as a decline in population (through outmigration),

[6] Economic/management studies contribute much to discussions through their focus on the role of entrepreneurs, as market operators, who play an important part in rural postsocialist reforms (e.g. see Kalantaridis, Labrianidis and Vassilev 2007). My position, however, adopts a quite different stance: it problematises 'the market' as both a concept and form of practice. Unlike the economic-based approaches which assume, as a starting point, the desirability of market engagement, my intention is to critically examine the role of western oriented concepts/practices and the way these concepts/practices are mobilised in local (postsocialist) contexts and can serve as devices for social exclusion.

poverty and unemployment have negatively affected all villages in the region that once supplied agricultural produce to Reni and Izmail, and beyond.

Regional contractions in economic activity—as across the former USSR—were also triggered by the liquidation of the village collectives. In Brega, five new private agricultural enterprises were initially established in the place of the two Soviet collectives. This resulted in the shedding of many workers and led to massive unemployment. There is a gender dimension to this unemployment since it was women who were the first to be sacked from the collectives and were least likely to be reemployed in the new enterprises which operated with a much-reduced workforce. However, this generalisation needs to be qualified: women with professional skills — for example, the accountants (all of whom were women) — were less hard hit than the vast majority of unskilled female workers. Nevertheless, the community was deeply affected by the lack of work and this was a common topic of conversation. Maria, a middle-aged woman once working for one of the two Soviet agricultural collectives in the village as an unskilled labourer (pruning vines, weeding, etc.) and unemployed since the late 1990s, told me, 'I've been working since 1965 and I've never known it like this, when there isn't work in the village.' Her neighbour added, reflecting the bewilderment people felt at the time: 'It's unbelievable that there's no work in the village…up until now there's always been work.' The 'disappearance' of work and reduction in the workforce was accompanied by a corresponding reduction in the variety of crops grown by the enterprises which now concentrate on the production of various grains that are less labour intensive and demand less watering (the irrigation equipment was stolen more than a decade ago and has not been replaced). Harvests are sold either to the government or to large private buyers from Ukraine. A portion is handed over to the villagers as annual rental for the use of their privatised, although still jointly worked, land.

In the context of drastically reduced employment opportunities, combined with the withdrawal of the new agricultural enterprises from the provisioning of households with

subsidized food produce, a 'retreat' to the household was a survival strategy adopted by families for subsistence purposes. The involvement of households in the production of cash crops was hampered and then largely eliminated, as the once government-sponsored market[7] was replaced initially by private buyers - mostly from neighbouring Moldova - but then totally lost. Given the poor road access to the rest of Ukraine via the main road leading north, the bulk of the trading opportunities was with local buyers from Moldova (to the West). Once the newly established international border between Moldova and Ukraine was operationalised, trading opportunities were stifled through creating additional communication and transport barriers, therefore presenting new administrative and political hurdles to the development of economic activity in the region.

Thus, while the growing physical, cultural and political remoteness described earlier are contributing factors to the region's economic remoteness, the latter is also a consequence of the loss of an entire Soviet economic infrastructure that had guaranteed a state market for local produce through connecting the region to all corners of the vast erstwhile USSR. The Soviet markets of past times, which provided economic security for both the village collectives and individual households, have been mostly dismantled and lost, in some cases they have been replaced by private and government buyers from within Ukraine.

It was under such conditions of uncertain local and national markets that village political elites welcomed foreign development workers into the community. Their hope was that connections with such outsiders would help bring investors and a sorely needed market for local produce in a situation where other markets were by no means secure or established. An international market promised, in addition to higher financial rewards, a potential way to

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[7] This arrangement began in the late 1980s during Soviet times and continued into the early 2000s. Cash crops were grown on collective/agricultural enterprise land. Individual households reaped the profits after paying the collective/enterprise a 'rental fee' for the land and for assistance offered through use of its machinery.

expand employment opportunities. The British Know How Fund (part of the British government's assistance program) introduced a number of projects into the village; all were channeled through a NGO formed especially for the purpose.[8] The creation of a sewing centre was the biggest project in terms of financial commitment and Luda – a former school teacher in the village - headed this initiative. Also, unlike some of the other projects, it represented a collective endeavour aimed at incorporating the community - rather than individuals or individual households - into the global market. Funding came from the 'small grants scheme' that was managed and administered by the British Embassy on behalf of the Know How Fund as well as from the village council which provided the renovated space for the sewing centre. The stated aim was to encourage income generation and create non-agricultural work in the village through the production and sale of handicrafts, while at the same time curtailing steeply rising migration to the cities (especially to Odessa).[9]

The sewing centre was established in 2001 and two local teachers were employed to train 18 women who showed interest in learning the craft of embroidery. Most of the women were young and unemployed. A smaller number had employment (four were school teachers and one a veterinary doctor who worked for one of the agricultural enterprises) although their meagre salaries were insufficient and the women were looking for ways to supplement their incomes. The funding was for one year, after which it was hoped that the sewing centre would be self-financing through the sale of the items produced. Development officials working for Know How made trips to the village from their base in Odessa, and twice that year a

[8] The Know How Fund sponsored various small-scale agricultural projects such as household irrigation schemes. This support was mostly in the form of advice, rather than financial assistance.

[9] According to an information pamphlet produced by the Know How Fund, the scheme's emphasis was on small grants for local community-based-development, as part of 'The Farm and Rural Community Support Project.'

consultant was flown in from Britain to provide much-needed guidance as to what should be produced—from simple bookmarks to the more complicated embroidery of toilet bags and clothes. The women were not paid, but the long-term goal was that once the training period ended, the centre would receive orders and the women an income.

Despite the development workers' good intentions and the project's noble aims, a market was not found for the items produced. As discussed below, 'the market,' as evoked by the development workers, was 'far away' in terms of its physical location and in terms of the form that production took. This market also conflicted with local perceptions of appropriate forms of engagement in the global economy. Within two years of being established, the sewing centre had closed. No market was found for the produced items. The two most talented sewers left Brega for Odessa, some of the other younger members of the group followed, becoming part of a mass exodus of villagers in search of employment. Almost two decades later no trace of the sewing centre remains. The building has been taken over by the village council and the mayor as office space, while the majority of the women who once worked in the centre no longer live in the village. The failure of the project exacerbated the community's decline, driving even greater numbers of younger women to Odessa in search of work. Rural migration continues today as a result of an ongoing lack of employment opportunities, as well as the war in the east of the country: young women are most likely to migrate to Odessa, young men are migrating mostly to Russia to avoid being conscripted into the Ukraine army, not wishing to take sides in the conflict.

While the fate of the sewing centre is not a unique case (the success rate of development projects in general is low (Edelman and Haugerud 2005, p. 2)) my concern here is not to focus on the failure of the project—the whys and hows. Nor do I work within accepted economic paradigms covering market development, searching for answers in explanations of 'agglomeration-based development strategies' (e.g. Hamaguchi 2009) or in explanations relating to local shortages of economic agents, capital or skills (e.g. Kalantaridis, Labrianidis

and Vassilev 2007). Instead, my intention is to look at the way in which 'the market'- as a political-ideological construct - was exported to a particular east European site. That is, I am turning my critical gaze on 'the market' as a western concept and set of practices. My focus is on the way 'the market' is mobilised and its effects locally in contributing to local exclusion and remoteness. Further, when I speak of 'the market' my focus is the 'global market,' rather than with any local or national markets in which Bregans engage. The sewing project was a local attempt to connect globally and it was this market that the Mayor referred to as being 'far away.' It was also this international market on which foreign development workers operating in Brega had their sights, in their attempts to incorporate villagers in the global economy (they showed little interest in developing any community projects that engaged with local markets).

Economic 'Remoteness' and 'the Market'

There are a number of features of remoteness, implied above, that bear highlighting.[10] While geographical, cultural and political elements play a role in understanding economic remoteness, my focus here is with the role of 'the market,' and the remoteness that is associated with the (lack of) engagement in international economic activity. Thus, the condition of remoteness is much more than just geographical, cultural and political, nor can it be seen as completely detached from these other forms of remoteness (Ardener 2012). The relative nature of the concept is also notable, evident in the village's changing position from a strategic and economic centre of the international socialist economy to its present isolation. It reminds us that 'remoteness is not a static condition—it is always being made, unmade and transformed' (Harms, Hussain and Shneiderman 2014, p. 362). Further, community members

[10] I follow Humphrey (2014) in distinguishing remoteness from the concepts 'marginality' and 'periphery.'

did not passively accept their present disconnectedness from the capitalist global economy, but actively sought to readdress and transform their position—as evident through their willingness to be involved in a foreign development project.

It is, however, the importance of power when exploring conditions of remoteness that appears particularly pertinent. This seems especially relevant when considering the relationship between economic remoteness and the market which are bound in a single 'field of power' (Harms, Hussain and Shneiderman 2014, p. 365). I now develop this point further by taking a closer look at some of the features of 'the market.'

Although capitalism has a long history of global penetration and incorporation, this process has arguably accelerated in recent decades, lubricated by technological advancements (communication and transportation technologies) and neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatisation that both extend the reach and involvement of the market, and create new sites for its expansion.

The power and ability of the market to 'integrate' can be attributed not only to its global dominance but also its multivocality as a symbol. 'The market' functions as a means of communication and coordination which brings together producers and consumers from diverse parts of the world, and provides a global means for the exchange and distribution of resources, services and goods. In providing a "'model of'' as well as a ''model for'' social reality' (Dilley 1992, p. 21; see also Carrier 1997, p. 15), the market both justifies and guides government (Carrier 1997, p. 24) and development policies. It is the wide range of referents and functions that makes 'the market' a powerful multivocal or polysemic symbol (Dilley 1992, p. 21) as well as a fundamental organizing principle with global application.[11] In

[11] One consequence of the market's polyvalency is that it is also often ambiguous and has internal inconsistencies (Carrier 1997, p. 22) which contributes to its broad sweeping integrative powers across a range of situations and contexts (Dilley 1992, p.19).

Dilley's words, the market provides an 'interpretative schema' as a 'metaphor for making sense of the world,' (Dilley 1992, p. 22). Thus, 'the market' serves as a 'powerful *generalising* concept' (Dilley 1992, p. 19, italics in original) with broad reach, connecting producers and consumers in global webs of exchange and distribution. In this sense 'the market'—both as a physical place as a site for exchange, and a conceptual space or set of abstract notions—provides a stage for global connectivity and interdependency (Dilley 1992, pp. 12-13),[12] with vast parts of the world integrated into a web of economic-oriented networks.

Number, intensity and depth of connections, as well as the type of activity, play an important role in shaping and identifying global 'centres' (Sassen 2006; also Eskelinen and Snickars 1995, p. 3). Further, such connections are not carried out on a 'level playing field'; producers and consumers do not operate under the same conditions or have the same knowledge, opportunities or global positioning. The field is uneven and distorted by a range of variables including, most importantly for our purposes, ideological and political associations.

While markets as platforms for exchange are far older, 'the market' of global capitalism is a historically grounded cultural construct, with long associations to western culture (Carrier 1997, p.19). It has become a particularly powerful symbol since the Cold War when rhetoric associated 'the market' with the West, in moral opposition to 'the state' which was associated with socialism (Dilley 1992, p. 7; see also Carrier 1997). It was during this time that the market became a political icon of 'the West' and a key essentialising feature that represented far more than economic exchanges, but a whole way of being in the world (Smollett 1993, p. 10). As Carrier (1997, p. 32) notes: '…the market becomes emblematic of the West, which

[12] Similarly, Carrier (1997, pp. 47-49) uses the analogy of language - more precisely a 'lingua franca' - in order to discuss the market's function as a means of 'communication' between consumers and producers.

itself becomes reduced to little more than the market.' Such a 'conflation' of the market with the (modern) West (Carrier 1997, p. 30) was confirmed with the 'victory' of the 'free market' following the collapse of state socialism across eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989/91 (respectively). Since this time 'the global (capitalist) market' has been exported to eastern Europe as part of a larger modernisation programme designed to develop the region and incorporate postsocialist states into the global capitalist economy. The market was presented as the solution to a range of problems: from establishing a more democratic society, to addressing a variety of social and economic ills. The market as metaphor—as well as a blue print for social change—became the dominant driving force behind postsocialist reforms designed to transform east European countries into 'free' capitalist economies.

Development projects were an important means by which the market—as an ideology as well as practice—was disseminated across eastern Europe, in much the same way as it had been disseminated to previous targets of Western aid in other parts of the world (e.g. Africa and South America). Market-led strategies of development gained momentum in the 1980s, underpinned by what we recognize today as neoliberal policies that involved a withdrawal of the state and a cutting back of the public sector, thus 'freeing' market activity from government intervention, and giving domination to "competitive" markets which were supported through deregulation (see Hart and Padayachee 2010; Tacoli 1998, amongst others). The focus of much international development work has moved away from emphasizing the state's role (and the building of public infrastructure), to the creation and functioning of markets (Hart and Padayachee 2010, p. 59).

No longer bounded by the nation-state as the main economic unit (Hart and Padayachee, 2010), market-led forms of development have contributed greatly to the integration of markets transnationally, while development policies uphold objectives aimed at 'participation in the world market' (Edelman and Haugerud 2005, p. 17). Tacoli (1998, p. 156) writes that, for the 'Third World,' market engagement is seen as '…a crucial factor in

the development of rural areas, reflecting the global trend towards market-led strategies' (see also Bush 2007). Development strategies were export-oriented (Tacoli, 1998, p. 150) and global competition was the ultimate goal (Bryden, 2010, p. 251).

The redevelopment of eastern Europe along such lines was carried out through various mechanisms: through loans from financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF (always conditional, demanding the fulfillment of various policies designed to create and develop a market based economy in line with the Washington Consensus); through EU conditions for accession; through the home governments once their reformed legal and political institutions were operational; and through a variety of other institutional bodies—NGOs, think tanks and, of course, Western governmental aid agencies. Thus, it was not simply that the market itself was deeply rooted in Western traditions, but its export to the postsocialist world was guided and in the hands of various figures working for Western-based and/or Western-oriented institutions. Connections to the market were controlled through such middlemen who often acted as 'gatekeepers' and could either facilitate or deny access. Development workers were at one of these 'frontlines;' that is, central figures in the exporting of 'the market' from the 'developed' to 'developing' world. They constituted one group which has—at least as presumed by those receiving the aid—access/control over 'the market.' This brings me to the issue of the market as a distancing device—in other words, the ways in which the global market contributes to the exacerbation of economic 'remoteness.'

Since market-led development is driven by a belief in the market as a solution to social problems through *participation in the market,* then participation becomes a means to *inclusion and integration*. Conversely, non-participation in market activities is a source of exclusion or remoteness. However, below I suggest that the situation is more nuanced; there are different forms of connectivity that implicate different degrees of participation/non-participation and inclusion/exclusion. If exclusion describes a total lack of involvement or

participation in global market activity (in Ferguson's (2009) terms a 'disconnection'); 'remoteness', I suggest, describes a limited and limiting degree of access to, and participation in, market activity (a topic I return to in the conclusion).

For the present, economic 'remoteness,' is defined in terms of distance from 'the market.' It denotes a particular relationship with economic centres of wealth and power. This is irrespective of whether we define 'the market' as a physical place or abstract principle (actually it could be either or both) since the condition of 'remoteness' can be physical and/or conceptual in nature and is often both. As part of a 'field of power' (Harms, Hussain and Shneiderman 2014, p. 365) economic remoteness implicates engagement in a global market system which gives central positioning to the West while other places are valued and located in terms of this ideological and physical centre. Unlike other cases of remoteness which may not be conceived as in a periphery-centre arrangement (e.g. Saxer 2016), in this case the global model does operate along such lines, giving value to places in terms of the nature of their connectivity (or lack of it) with a (Western) physical and/or conceptual centre. So, remoteness in this instance is intricately bound up with the notion of centres as part of a conceptual ordering of the global economy (Harms, Hussain and Shneiderman 2014, p. 365; see also Ardener 2012, p. 532). It indicates asymmetric power relations that reflect global and regional disparities. The condition of 'remoteness' thus expresses an aspect of modernisation that is aquired through the expansion and development of the global market.

I view economic remoteness as established in two ways: spatially and temporally. The following two sections deal with each, in turn.

The spatial distancing of Brega

Brega's economic remoteness was exacerbated through the search for a market that was targeted to Westerners and/or located in the West.

The close association between 'the West' and 'the market' was an important driving force in the search for an international market. The envisaged market—by both Know How officials and local women—was explicitly aimed at two groups of Western consumers. Firstly, the idea was that the embroidered items could be exported to Britain and sold to consumers searching for exotic rural handicrafts. This option was less favored by Jane, a British consultant and expert in 'market production' who visited Brega for two days, during the course of the project's first year. She feared labour costs would make it difficult for Ukrainian crafts to compete with similar goods produced far more cheaply in Africa and Asia. She urged the Odessa project team to check if there were any Free Trade breaks, although she stated that she didn't expect Ukraine to be on the list of countries which receive such privileges because 'they aren't poor enough.' Secondly, another market was anticipated in Odessa, one that was aimed at Western tourists - more specifically, at passengers from cruise ships looking for local souvenirs of their trips. Odessa was already a well-established tourist destination, dating back to Soviet times when it attracted visitors from all over the USSR. The hope was that the port of Odessa would now become a destination for Westerners on cruises. The head of the sewing centre in Brega, Luda, speculated that besides western tourists, 'Ukrainians with money' might also buy the items. She was referring to wealthy Ukrainians who may wish to acquire the items as presents for their foreign guests or business associates as mementos of their visit to Odessa. It was evident to all the local women that no 'home' tourists would buy the items; tourists from the former Soviet Union did not value the type of embroidered items that the Brega women were being asked to produce. As an Odessa based Know How official accompanying Jane on her Brega trip explained to Jane, with the supportive nods from the Brega women, 'embroidery isn't valued in Ukraine.' There was simply no culture of appreciation for such objects (see following section). At the same time, such a market aimed at foreign tourists was still very much in its early stages of development; numbers of Western tourists were relatively small and the tourist 'infrastructure' (shops,

suitable accommodation, etc.) was not well established. Much like the hoped-for market in Britain, the Odessa foreign tourist market also seemed unattainable.

Despite such potential challenges, the market being sought was firmly directed towards westerners—either in the West (in this case Britain) or tourists in Ukraine.[13] At the same time these potential markets were seen as being controlled by Westerners who were believed to be points of entry. It was for this reason in the first place, that Brega officials warmly welcomed British operatives in the village. The Mayor told me that Brega was the only village in the region willing to work with the foreigners. In contrast to other neighbouring village leaders who were much more suspicious and less welcoming of western intervention in their lives (see also Wedel 1998, p. 7), Brega political elite were more open because they believed that western development would bring capital, investment and access to an international market.[14] Foreign contacts were highly valued and local project leaders attributed to these contacts considerable importance not so much in terms of the advice and guidance that they offered but as potential gateways to the imagined global market. In this sense, the value of foreigners was in their presumed connections rather than any particular skills they might have in traditional craft production. One of the agricultural enterprise leaders emphasized that it was not knowledge and techniques—i.e. 'know how,' as the aid agency's name implied—they expected to receive from the foreigners. Rather, the foreigners

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[13] The market centre presumably shifts with context and situation. Other places in the West can take on the role as 'centre' in other instances.

[14] The 'pro-reform' position of the village was directly due to its leadership who, while by no means supporters of a 'wholesale' reform process, were long term advocates of reforms to the agricultural sector. There were various reasons for this – ethnic, political opportunism, to name just two. While this aspect cannot be discussed here in any depth, what is important in this context is that the fate of the reforms can be largely attributed to the stance taken by village leaders, who – as in other cases in eastern Europe – played a crucial role in how reforms were implemented locally (see also Allina-Pisano 2007 and 2008; Stenning, Smith, Rochovska and Swiatek 2010).

were valued for their perceived access to money and the market: 'They have some money and more importantly can lead us to investors'.[15] In short, the British sponsors were viewed as a resource, potentially providing connections to the market and thus able to undo the predicament of economic remoteness.

In sum, the market was seen as located *in the West* and aimed *at Westerners* who were perceived as having controlling access and were mobile representations of it. It was in these senses that the bond between 'the market' and 'the West' was an important driving force for Brega's involvement with a foreign development project. Whether as gatekeepers (such as the development workers) or as consumers (in the West or as tourists), Westerners were seen as providing possible connections to the market.[16] Through such associations the remoteness of the market was reinforced; the targeted 'market' was indeed situated spatially 'far away' from the village, designed as it was for a distant world of imagined Western consumers.

The temporal distancing of Brega

Temporally too, the market served as a means to compound the economic remoteness of Brega. In this respect, it is the products made by the women that helped create a temporal dislocation with the contemporary present and thus introduce a degree of remoteness.

The items produced by the women were embroidered handicrafts, in accordance with the overall goals of the project that included the aim of: 'reviving' and developing cottage

[15] During a conversation with Luda, it became clear that she also saw me as a possible resource for the same reason: I was a westerner and thus had an assumed access to this market.

[16] See also Sampson (1996, p. 138) who notes in the case of Albania how foreigners were seen as a key resource; and Wedel (1998, p. 24) who makes a similar point for the case of Poland.

industries in the area; and developing non-agricultural businesses in the rural region.[17] So, for example, the women were asked to produce a small embroidered bag with a long shoulder strap. During Jane's two day visit to Brega, she provided a sample that had been produced under her guidance while working on a previous project in India. Jane explained that she had helped Indian women develop the bag and it had been successfully sold in Britain. She believed that the Indian success could be replicated in the Ukraine context, with local embroidery providing the decoration on the bag.

Meeting with the women at the sewing centre, Jane passed around the sample bag so that the women could inspect it closely. Their reaction, which was politely hidden from Jane, was one of disgust. One woman whispered to the woman sitting next to her 'it looks like a shepherd's bag, you know, the kind they take with them when they go out in the fields!' The women within hearing range nodded knowingly in agreement.

Such a negative reaction can be understood when we recall the significant changes socialist industrialisation brought to the lives of rural inhabitants, not only across the USSR, but more generally across eastern Europe. As in the case for capitalism, so also for socialism, modernisation was driven by grand evolutionary ideas that distinguished 'rural' from 'urban' and attributed to the former either: negative value—as the place of 'traditions' and the 'pre-modern' (Tovey 1999, p. 100) or sometimes positive value as a place of nostalgia and the place of 'romantic relics' that satisfy a deep desire for the 'good old days' and rustic lifestyles

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[17] The 'revival' of Ukraine national traditions was a particularly ill matched aim given the ethnic make-up of the village, the majority of whom were Bulgarians who had no idea how to embroider in the 'Ukraine' style. That is, the women were being taught a skill that was alien to them given their ethnic heritage. Further, embroidery was a craft that had died out one generation earlier. At the same time there is a clear nationalist agenda to such activities, which aimed to 're-educate' ethnic minority women and convert them into 'Ukrainians'. Contemporary observations suggest that such nation-building activities have attained greater success in post-Maidan times, with craft work gaining increasing value – at least in urban/tourist sites.

(Nadel Klein 1991, p. 503).[18] In either case, 'the rural' is known as a place 'of the past,' an anachronism that serves to portray how far we have moved away from this condition (Nadel Klein 1995, p. 126).[19] Much like the temporal signifiers 'primitive' or 'traditional' that Fabian (1983: 30) recognises as devices that temporally separate a contemporary 'us' from a backward 'other', so in this case 'rural' represents a 'spatialised conception of time' (Fabian 1983, p. 147), it is a political-ideological concept that serves to designate difference and temporal distance.[20] As ideological sites of 'tradition' and of the 'pre-modern,' rural places are seen as appropriate locations for the production of 'traditional' crafts. In this sense, the production choices made by the development workers were significant; the items the local women were asked to make aligned them, conceptually and temporally, with a 'backward' rural lifestyle that is an important signifier in both socialist and capitalist modernist narratives. The choice of handicraft production is essentially the commodification of what are perceived to be 'anachronistic' lifestyles. In their involvement in such production, 'rural' inhabitants are placed in particular relations that separate them from our contemporary present, in an act of temporal distancing.

While both capitalist and socialist modernisation narratives understood 'the rural' as backward vis-à-vis more urban lifestyles, the different ideological/political agendas produced different effects on the ground based on different paths of development. Capitalism, relying largely on market-led development, aimed for economic growth and personal prosperity.

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[18] See Kaneff (2004) for a socialist example; see Nadel Klein (1995) for the capitalist case. Both reveal how the rural provides an 'internal Other' against which the respective modernisation agenda's of the two systems can be legitimated.

[19] It is precisely because the rural is seen as 'backward' that such sites are also the target of development projects.

[20] Importantly, such a temporal relegation of backward 'others' to a zone separate from our own contemporary present is a means to exert and justify domination – both economic and political (Fabian 1983).

Socialism, relying on the redistribution of state resources and investment, aimed for a classless and equal society. In the latter case, resources and services were allocated to rural areas in order to bring forms of production, educational levels and life styles in alignment with urban areas with the aim of reducing class inequalities, while land reforms aligned agricultural production with industrialisation practices. Socialist development in rural areas thus produced a very different type of rural inhabitant from their capitalist counterparts. Although ideological and material inequalities still existed, socialist redistribution significantly increased the quality of life and bought about real improvements in terms of health and education, while the collectivisation and mechanization of agriculture allowed agricultural workers' conditions to be on par with their urban factory counterparts. People in socialist rural regions came to identify themselves with industrial forms of work. [21]

Little wonder then that Brega women were uncomfortable when they were asked to produce items that identified them with what they associated with 'the rural.' Fifty years of Soviet modernisation had resulted in these village women no longer seeing themselves as 'rural' or 'from the fields,' and they took issue with having to produce such items. The art of embroidery had died out at least one generation earlier. While they were willing to learn the embroidery skill, some of the items they were asked to produce did not fit comfortably with their own perceptions of themselves and their lives. Although they lived in a village they did not associate themselves with 'rural' lifestyles in the way that capitalist development workers relying on Third World experiences/models (incorrectly) assumed they would or should. [22]

Thus, such endeavors to conjure up a potential market in the West for products that signify the 'backwardness' of the rural overlooked fundamental historical, social and geographical

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[21] Although there are notable exceptions—e.g. Poland—where land was not collectivised.

[22] The women did not always agree and speak with one voice, however in this instance there was general consensus.

features of this area. Craft production ignored, for example, the existing—although admittedly rundown—local infrastructure that could have been re-developed to establish new markets using local assets, skills and resources that were already present in the port townships of Izmail and Reni. It also ignored the previous 50 years of socialist industrialisation that gave inhabitants opportunities to be educated and to specialize in forms of agricultural production that took the local women far away from the traditional rural lifestyles imagined by Western development workers informed by capitalist notions of development.

In addition to the actual nature of the product—hand embroidered objects—that signified a temporal dissociation from the present, the blending of elements in the making of the products contributed to the creation of items that were aimed at an international market with global significance. Thus, the women were trained to embroider in a 'traditional Ukrainian' style—that is, they were taught cross stitch. However, in a nod of acknowledgement by the Know How officials based in Odessa to the ethnic Bulgarian roots of the embroiderers, the items produced also incorporated a few Bulgarian features—i.e. the use of a wide range of colours rather than the reliance on a more limited range of coloured threads (primarily white, also red and black) that was more typical of 'Ukrainian' embroidery. Further, items were developed through transferring methods and ideas from one project site in one part of the world to another site in a very different part of the world, in this case, India. Thus, the items produced by the women were a mix of Ukrainian and Bulgarian techniques and materials (a Ukraine cross stitch and Bulgarian-coloured schemes), adapted from models developed in India, in order to meet the anticipated demands of British (tourist) consumers. The products merged all these characteristics from different countries and traditions.

In this way, the rural-urban distinction characteristic of an evolutionary modernisation agenda continues (despite post-modernist critiques), but it now operates on the global stage. 'Cultural fertilisation'—to borrow a term Jane used to describe the deliberate mix of ideas taken from different locations around the world in order to produce a good that was seen as

generically ‘rural’ in order to find an appropriate foreign/tourist market—reduces the rural product to an essence that combines fragments from India, Bulgaria, Britain and Ukraine. The products, which collapsed temporal (and spatial) elements, represented a universal ‘rural’ Ukrainian handicraft designed to be attractive for the global market of western consumers.

The nature of the product the women were encouraged to make—based on traditional ‘anachronistic’ embroidery skills that represent a bygone era and way of life—was the basis for incorporation into the global market and assigned to them a particular positioning within this economy. The production of the embroidered items was intended to incorporate its makers and their region into a world economy as a deterritorialised and detemporalised rural Other who is indeed ‘far away’ from the centre of the intended market in the ‘modern’ West.

Conclusion

The incorporation of Ukraine into a global economy where exchange and distribution is driven largely through market activities, has required the replacement of a whole infrastructure of connectivity that, at least in the case of the Brega region, has resulted in its repositioning from one of economic (and strategic) centrality, to one of greater remoteness.

There are many ways in which Brega can be seen as ‘remote’ and many complex reasons for it taking this trajectory over the previous two decades. My focus in this paper, has been to highlight one aspect of this constructed remoteness: ‘the market’ as evoked by development workers (as well as at times by local officials), and driven by capitalist understandings of modernisation, serves as a ‘distancing device’ that helps reinforce, and indeed amplify, the economic remoteness of Brega. Such remoteness was created in two ways: spatially - by locating the market centre in the West, aimed at Westerners and granting control/access of this market to Westerners; and temporally - through the production process and nature of the object local women were asked to produce that attributed to them an anachronistic

positioning in the modernisation project. Thus, the type of global market Brega women were encouraged to engage in was of a particular kind. It was a market that linked 'first' world consumers and 'second' world producers in relations that ultimately reinforced the former as at the centre of market activity, and the latter in various degrees and distances of remoteness. In this sense, the vision of 'the market,' as exported to Brega, sought to engage and incorporate the local community into a world economy but in terms that banished the village, and the region, to a global 'rural' hinterland—far away, both in time and space, from the market centre in the West.

While increasing isolation and economic remoteness have been a feature of Brega's postsocialist experiences—and this is by no means an isolated case in either Ukraine or the former socialist world—circumstances vary according to regional specificities: history, geopolitical factors, cultural and ethnic orientations. Different possibilities for engagement in the global economy are determined in terms of a wide range of variables; some of which may be within the control of communities, many more of which are outside their control. Such variation and possibilities reminds us that the neoliberal trend towards global market integration (Hart and Padayachee, 2010, p. 54; see also Dilley 1992, p. 13) that underscores development projects is not an equalizing process but creates hierarchies, privileging certain locations both in terms of space and time. Market integration is accompanied by uneven development (Hart and Padayachee 2010, p. 54) and globalisation 'is not simply a process that links together the world, but also one that differentiates it' (Ferguson 2009, p. 318). Although by no means inevitable, remoteness is an increasingly common global condition. Specific circumstances of economic remoteness may vary from place to place, and can be found in different locations—urban or rural—but it is by no means a unique condition. Such remoteness serves as evidence of the type of uneven development that is so characteristic of global capitalism.

Nor is development a linear process: it can go 'backwards' and 'unravel' (Ferguson 2009). Ferguson's (2009) discussion of Zambia provides a poignant example of global 'disconnection'—partly at least as a result of new communication technologies that have no need for the country's chief export of copper. It is a story of decline and of national exclusion from the global economy. Such a disconnection, Ferguson reminds us, does not lie outside the global economy, but reveals a particular relationship of 'non-membership' that is very much embedded in processes of global capitalism. Economic integration involves 'not simply new forms of connection but new forms of disconnection as well' (Ferguson 2009, p. 317) that de-couple local resources—human and material—from the global economy (Ferguson 2009, p. 316).

Much like the Zambian case, Brega has also been excluded, although the circumstances are significantly different. Once integrated into an extensive socialist 'global' economy that challenged and competed with a capitalist one, Brega's new remoteness is a result of the collapse of the Soviet system and its associated economic infrastructure. Local attempts to establish connections with the capitalist global system have not been, to date, particularly successful. At the same time, the case provides insights into different possible forms of connectivity that reveal a need for a model with greater nuance than that suggested by Ferguson (2009). My material suggests that – while neoliberal development is founded on an assumption that exclusion and poverty are a result of the lack of engagement in the market - particular forms of inclusion in the market can also be a way to create remoteness. In the case described, at least, the villagers were given an opportunity to engage in the global market, but such access was limited to participation on the basis of their perceived association as 'rural' and therefore 'backward.' So 'exclusion' (or 'disconnection' in Ferguson's terms) and 'remoteness' are distinct forms of (dis)connectedness from the global economy. 'Exclusion' designates places/inhabitants fully disengaged from the global economy; 'remoteness' locates places/inhabitants as peripheral but nevertheless participant in the

global market. Both forms of dis/connectedness imply a relationship with the world capitalist system: the former on the basis of 'non-membership' (Ferguson 2009, p. 317); the latter offers 'part or limited membership.'

It is worth emphasizing that economic remoteness in Brega was exacerbated through the community's attempted inclusion in the market, an inclusion of a restricted kind that sought to re-imagine the people and place as a capitalist 'rural periphery.' This is what, most likely, the mayor had in mind when he commented on the market being 'far away.' It was 'far away' because the community is both spatially and temporally remote from the global economy and access is difficult. Yet the mayor's phrase has a second, more implicit meaning, evident in the views of the women who engaged in the production of handicrafts, an activity that did not fit comfortably with their own contemporary lives. From their perspective, it is the market itself which is 'far away,' distant and even irrelevant. In this latter reading the value of the market as 'centre' is inverted and becomes a 'periphery' because it does not resonate with their own contemporary lives in a 21st century postsoviet world. Such a reading underlines Ardener's point that remoteness is a matter of perspective (2012) [23] and that 'the centre of the world for some is the remotest periphery for others' (Eskelinen and Snickars 1995, p. 1; and Paasi 1995, p. 254). Indeed, the sewing project failed in part because of the way the market—as concept and place—was evoked by development workers, an evocation that did not fit comfortably with local imaginings. Yet the effects of this imagined market were very real: the failure of the project contributed to the exclusion of the community from the global economy. The consequence is, at least in part, due to the political-ideologically loaded nature of 'the market' (as both concept and in practice) and the particular way it was exported to and mobilized in the community. It highlights a need to turn away from problematising the

[23] See also Eskelinen and Snickars (1995, p. 1) who remind us that relations between centre and periphery are complex and dependent on perspective.

target of development (in this case rural people), and instead turn our critical attention to western concepts/practices and the way they are implemented locally, in order to understand how local exclusion and remoteness are amplified.

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It has been almost two decades since Know How tried to help the village find a niche in the global market. Since then no other foreign aid agencies have worked in the village, nor has any successful pathway to a global market been found. The only available means to economic integration has been through particular individuals who have found global connectedness through migration. Such successes explain the few infrastructural improvements in the village itself: for example, the number of houses connected to gas has increased giving more inhabitants' access to running water, some have even installed bathrooms. Such advances are a result of the increasing wealth of particular households, which are, at least in part, reliant on remittances sent by migrants from abroad (sometimes to the West, but more often to Moscow). Individual opportunities for engagement in the global market can bring some financial rewards and global connectedness. However, it comes at a high human cost to the community and its citizens: individuals must leave Brega, abandoning family and disrupting neighbourhood and local relations.

Despite individual successes, the community as a whole has struggled to find global connections and made little headway collectively with respect to countering its economic remoteness. No non-agricultural sources of income have been successfully developed, while the number of those actively employed in the large scale agricultural enterprises has stabilised and remains at only a small fraction of the population. Economic remoteness has been compounded by an entire generation excluded from engaging in forms of production for the market, having reached pensionable age without having had employment for the last two decades plus of their working lives; and by a younger generation which has escaped the

village to find work in the cities of Ukraine, Russia and further afield, thus potentially condemning the community to continuing remoteness into the foreseeable future.

Yet, remoteness is, as noted above, not a fixed state, but constantly under review (Harms Hussain and Shneiderman 2014). Triggered by recent external factors – political instability and the war in the east, the perceived need to secure the borders while under the increasing orbit of the EU – there are some initial and small signs that the economic fate of the region is being reconfigured, once again. The fear of losing territory in this ethnically most diverse of all regions - where both ethnic Ukrainians and Russians are a minority – means that politicians in the capital are finally giving some attention to the region after three decades of neglect. Supported financially with EU funding, reports indicate that in the last year sections of the one main road, that connects this region to the rest of Ukraine, are under repair.[24] In addition, work has recently been completed in dredging the Izmail port and has also begun on Reni's port.[25] New investment in the ports indicates the growing strategic importance of the region to Kyiv as a result of territorial loses in Crimea and the war in the east of the country.[26] Remoteness is being challenged as a result of nation-state territorial fears, rather than market developments. It is too early to say if postsoviet economic remoteness will be reversed in the longer term, and whether this can be done simply by improving the

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[24] See for example: *In the Odessa region opened a bridge on the road Odessa-Reni*, 2018, available at: https://ukropnews24.com/in-the-odessa-region-opened-a-bridge-on-the-road-odessa-reni/, accessed 28 November 2019.

[25] See, in the Izmail case: *USPA finalized dredging works in the port of Izmail*, 2019, available at: https://latifundist.com/en/novosti/43447-ampu-zavershila-dnouglubitelnye-raboty-v-portu-izmail and for Reni where investment lags behind and is still being sought: *Investment projects in Reni port*, available at http://investinports.com/en/invest-projects/reni/,both accessed 28 November 2019.

[26] See for example: *New regional marine security department to protect Ukraine's maritime border from Izmail to Mariupol*, 2018, available at: https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/538408.html, accessed 28 November 2019.

communications infrastructure and border security. Only time will tell whether the rising strategic importance and investment in the port and road infrastructure will translate into economic gains and whether the rural villages will benefit from this, or whether it will simply exacerbate internal inequalities within the region, between the newly strategically important port townships and their increasingly impoverished surrounding rural communities.

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