Insights from an Anthropology of Domestic Space and Lassa Fever Research in Guinea

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Introduction

- Explore the importance of the house and domestic space and the darkness, beyond human experience.

- Document the experience of living with *Mastomys Natalensis*.

- Investigate human-rodent shared daily lifestyles.

- How light, darkness and seasonality orchestrate human-rodent cohabitation.

- Importance for public and global health.

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**Shadowlands and dark corners**

*An anthropology of light and zoonosis*  
— Ann H. Kelly, Almudena Marí Sáez

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light, Lassa fever, Ebola, multispecies ethnography, global health, West Africa  
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‘Domestic’ shape

“We are a family, because rodents have an interest of living with us. They live with us. The rodent makes his home in your house”  field notes, November 2013.
‘Domestic’ shape

• Construction & Aesthetics: mud, concrete, thatch, zinc.
• Household Distribution: sleeping hut, kitchen huts, store huts, shower, concrete house/multiple rooms.
• Furnishing & Objects: bed, table, pots.
• Proximal Cultivations.
Shadows and dark corners

- Light Mediated House Encounters:
  - Night: Rodent are more active while inhabitants sleep, creating noise investigating dirty dishes and leftover food, and licking people fingers.
  - Day: Closed doors create shadows and dark corners between which rodents move.

- Seasonal House Inflection:
  - Rainy season: house is more often closed, people work in the farms, people use more the inside space, less food stored inside.
  - Dry season: people are more present in the village, they repair the houses, and they store more food store inside.
Rodent consumption

“During our first days in Faranah, while the laboratory technicians were performing rodent necropsies, a boy brought a rat in his hands: ‘my father told me to give you this’. When asked when he killed it, he explained: ‘This morning I opened the door of the kitchen and I saw the mouse running. I threw a stick and killed the mouse. We usually eat them but my father told me that I should give it to you’, field notes, November 2013.”

“While one can identify places where rodents are likely to burrow and breed, the landscapes of hunting and play do not map cleanly onto categories into domestic, bush, or agricultural spaces. Mice, as the boy says, ‘are everywhere’, p. 37.”

- Rodents are pursued opportunistically: household maintenance, surprise in the kitchen, clearing land, playing.

- Small rodent hunting is province of children.
Rodent Control

- People use locally preventive measures like acute poison, Indomethacin and cats.

- Immediate benefits from controlling rodents included: protection of food and belongings, peaceful nights and children not being bitten by mice at night.

- Rodents returned after few weeks after treatment.

- The treatment required the cooperation of the entire village to be efficient.

- Empty houses are a focus for rodent concentration.
Conclusion

• Complexity of human rodent interactions.

• Risks of infection and the viability of preventative measures: e.g. Include children in public health campaigns.

• Holistic rodent control.

This research leads us to further investigations.....
Rodent-human cohabitation

Project Details

Lassa Fever in Guinea and Sierra Leone: rodent-human cohabitation and disease control (LAROCS 2)

Applicants

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Thanks