

Cryptography, The Internet, and Grassroots Organizing

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IETF 116
Yokohama, Japan

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“Cryptography rearranges power”

–Phillip Rogaway

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Cryptography, the internet, and technology in general have the potential to rearrange power.

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Power for whom?

To what ends?

How do we, as people who create and maintain powerful technologies, understand systems of power?

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How does that understanding inform our priorities, threat modeling, and design choices?

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How does that understanding inform our priorities, threat modeling, and design choices?

How might we work toward building power for communities?

Protocol Design Paradigm Shift

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One Size Fits One: Protocol design begins with the unique needs of the population the protocol is meant to serve

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Full Compromise Security: Threat modeling is redesigned to center people's actual needs and lived experiences

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Full Compromise Security: Threat modeling is redesigned to center people's actual needs and lived experiences

Grassroots Optimization: Scale, efficiency, and accessibility are optimized for communities (not corporations and governments)

Cryptography, The Internet, and Grassroots Organizing

- Introduction
- Protocol Design Paradigm Shift
- Definition of Grassroots Organizing
- Lessons from History
- Lessons from the Current Landscape
- tigo: Trust Infrastructure for Grassroots Organizing
- Conclusion

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Definition of Grassroots Organizing

Grassroots organizing is a process by which people work from within marginalized communities to effect social, political, economic, and environmental change.

Project Cybersyn

Chile (1971–1973): Popular Unity
government envisions distributed
decision-making platform



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Grassroots Economy: Workers
speak straight to the government



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Grassroots Economy: Workers speak straight to the government

An Alternate Vision of the Internet

- Decentralized, worker-owned
- Secondary plan for households
- Destroyed in military coup (1973)



Operation Vula

South Africa (1986–1990): African National Congress (ANC) creates cryptography for grassroots organizing

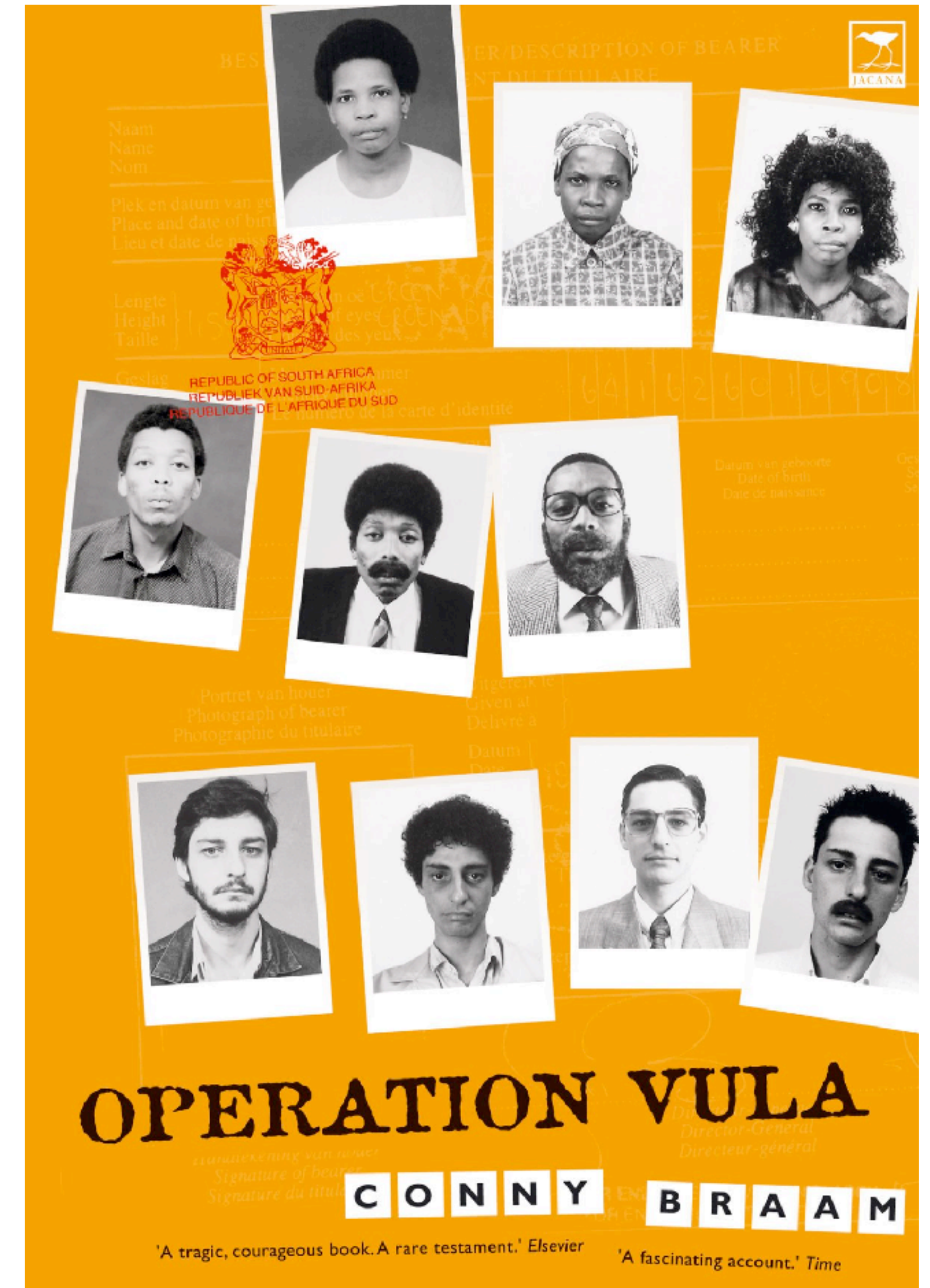


Image Credits: Jacana Media (2004), AP Photo/Udo Weitz, File (1990) via The Washington Post (2019)

Operation Vula

South Africa (1986–1990): African National Congress (ANC) creates cryptography for grassroots organizing

Requirements:

Asynchronous, Covert, Long Distance, Public

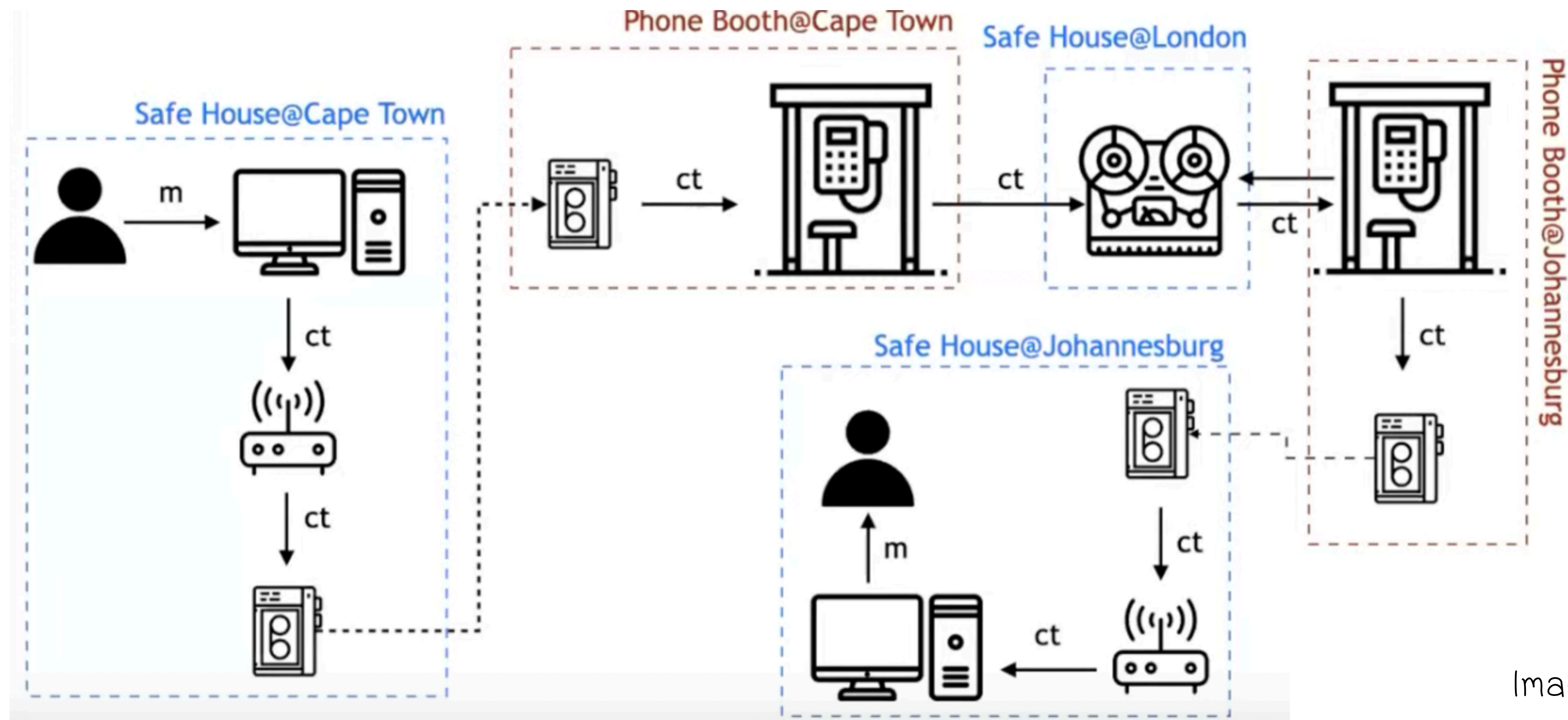


Image Credits: Kamara, CRYPTO (2020)

Operation Vula

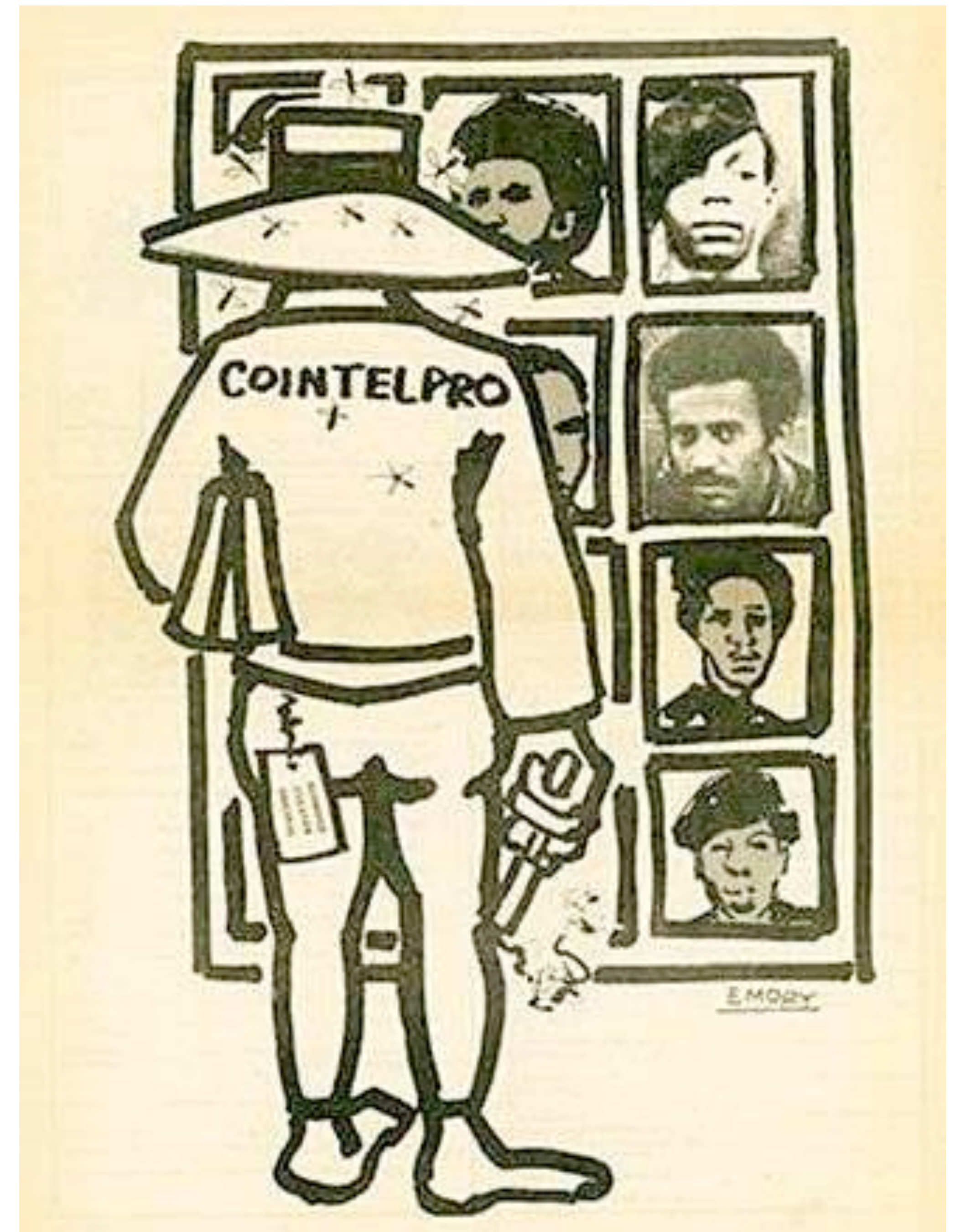
ANC Activist Tim Jenkin (1995): “I went to find out about
secure encryption algorithms...

All I discovered was that cryptology was an arcane science for
bored mathematicians, not for underground activists.

However I learned a few tricks and used these to develop a
system to meet our security needs.”

COINTELPRO

United States (1956–1971): Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) illegally & extensively surveils activists



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United States (1956–1971): Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) illegally & extensively surveils activists

Blurred Boundaries: Surveillance leads to assassination, incarceration



Fred Hampton (1948–1969)



Angela Davis



Mae Mallory



Ericka Huggins

COINTELPRO

United States (1956–1971): Federal
Bureau of Investigation (FBI) illegally
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Blurred Boundaries: Surveillance
leads to assassination, incarceration

The Church Committee Report (1975):

- Intimidation, manipulation, dragnet tactics
- No meaningful oversight & accountability
- Digital equivalents (Snowden 2013)

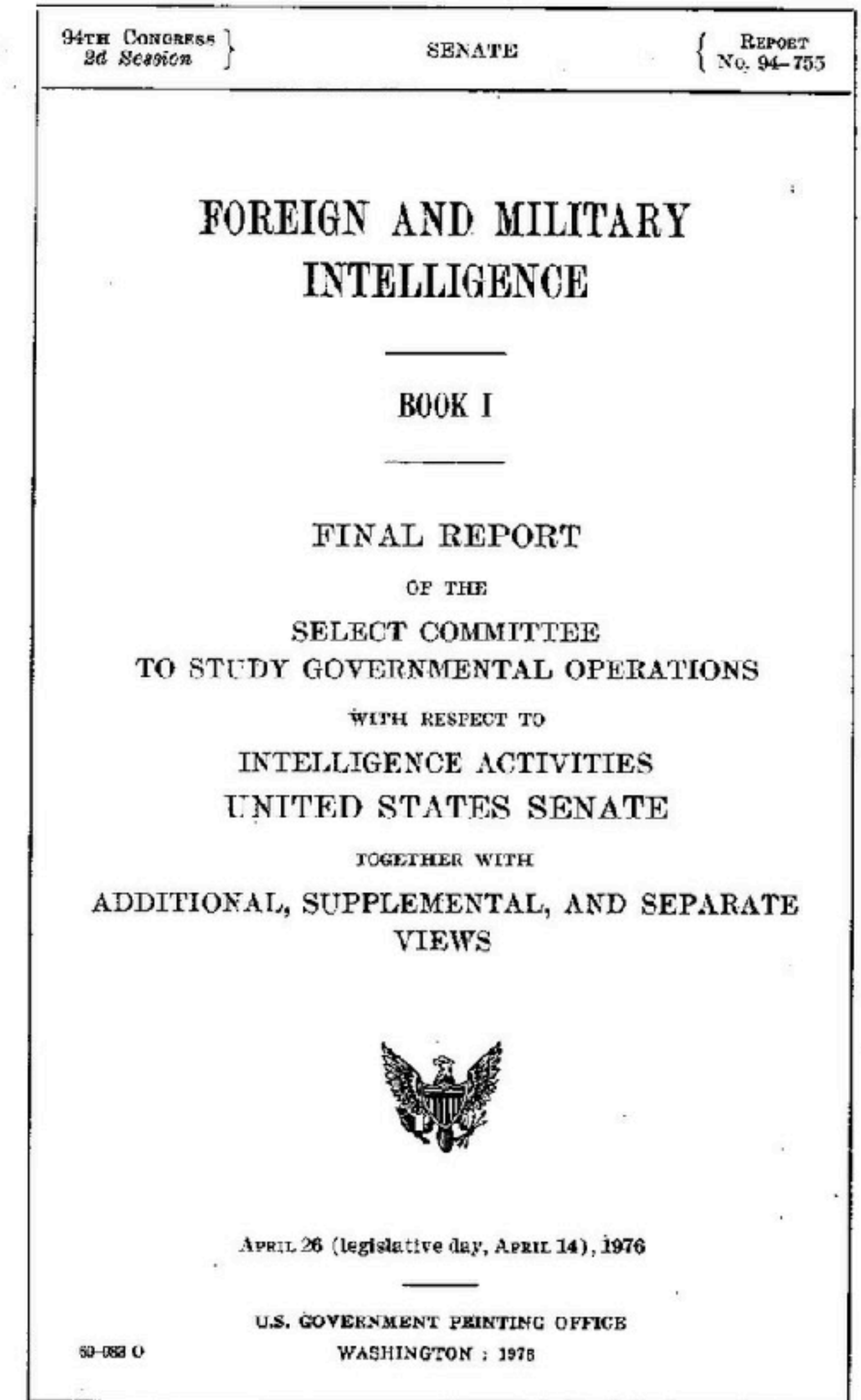


Image Credit: U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (1975)

The Arab Spring

Many Countries (2010–2012): Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, and many more with minor protests



Image Credits: CBS News (2012), Reuters (2012)

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The Role of Social Media

- Speed, Scope, and Scale (Rosenbloom 2021)
- Facilitator rather than direct or independent cause of change



Image Credits:
Amin Ansari
(2012), Anna Lena
Schiller (2012),
Wikimedia
Commons (2011)

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Inspired Countless Movements

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Modes of Suppression (Borradaile 2021; Boykoff 2007)

1. Direct Violence
2. The Legal System
3. Employment Deprivation
4. Conspicuous Surveillance
5. Covert Surveillance
6. Deception
7. Mass Media Influence
8. Censorship

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*Facilitated by
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*Decentralization,
Accessibility

Be Safe or Be Seen? (Lokot 2018)

Ethnographic Observation of Anti-Corruption Foundation Activists (Russia)

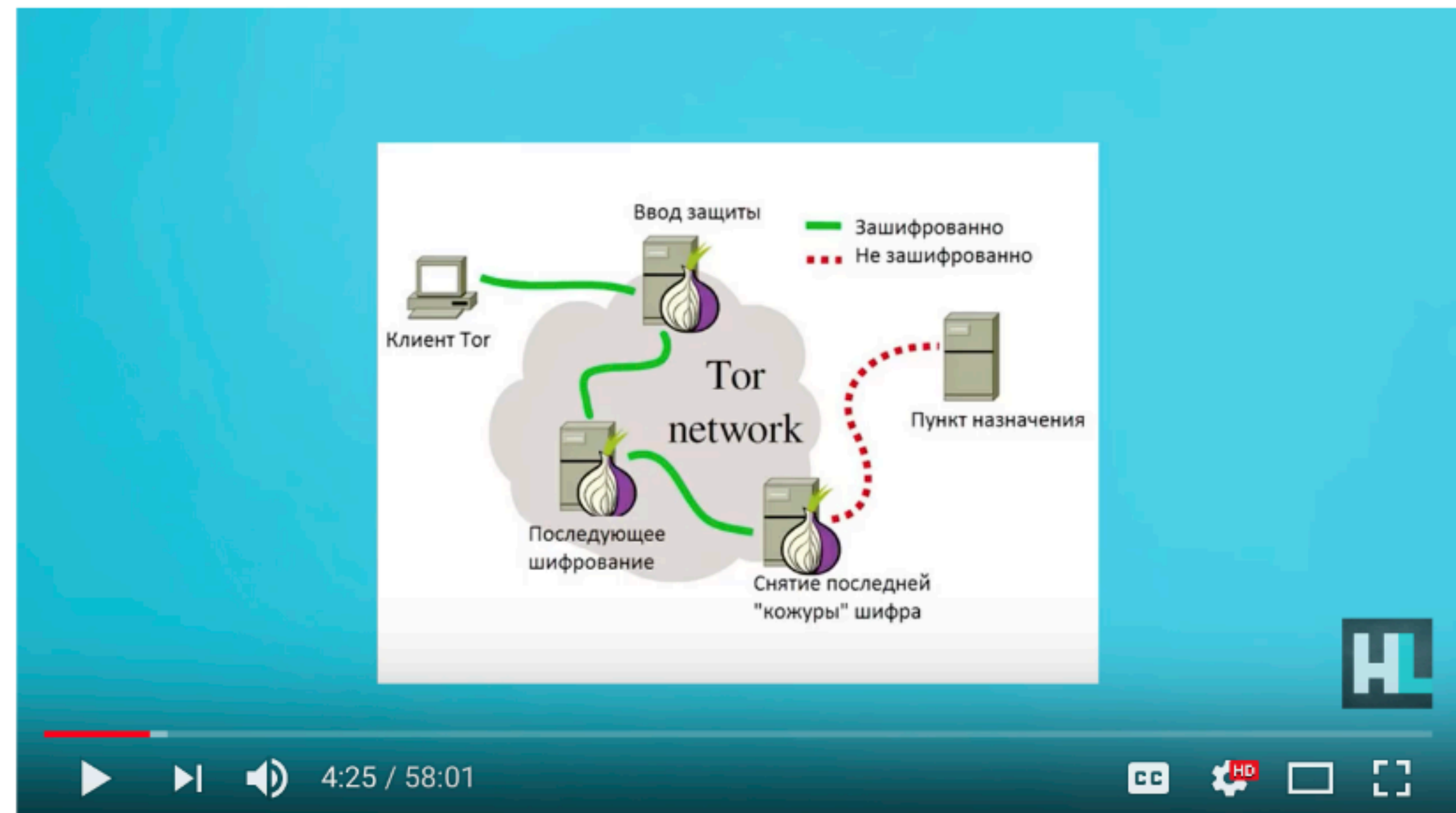


Image Credit: Evgeny Feldman/AP (2018)

Be Safe or Be Seen? (Lokot 2018)

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Conspicuous Security:
Tools and Education



Облако #002. Гость — Петр Диденко, «Общество защиты интернета». Tor, анонимность и обход блокировок

76,651 views

8.9K 3K SHARE ...

Figure 2. Screen grab from YouTube talk show "The Cloud," hosted by Leonid Volkov, explaining the basics of the Tor network. Episode 002 was devoted to online anonymity and circumventing website blocks.

Image Credit: Lokot (2018)

Be Safe or Be Seen? (Lokot 2018)

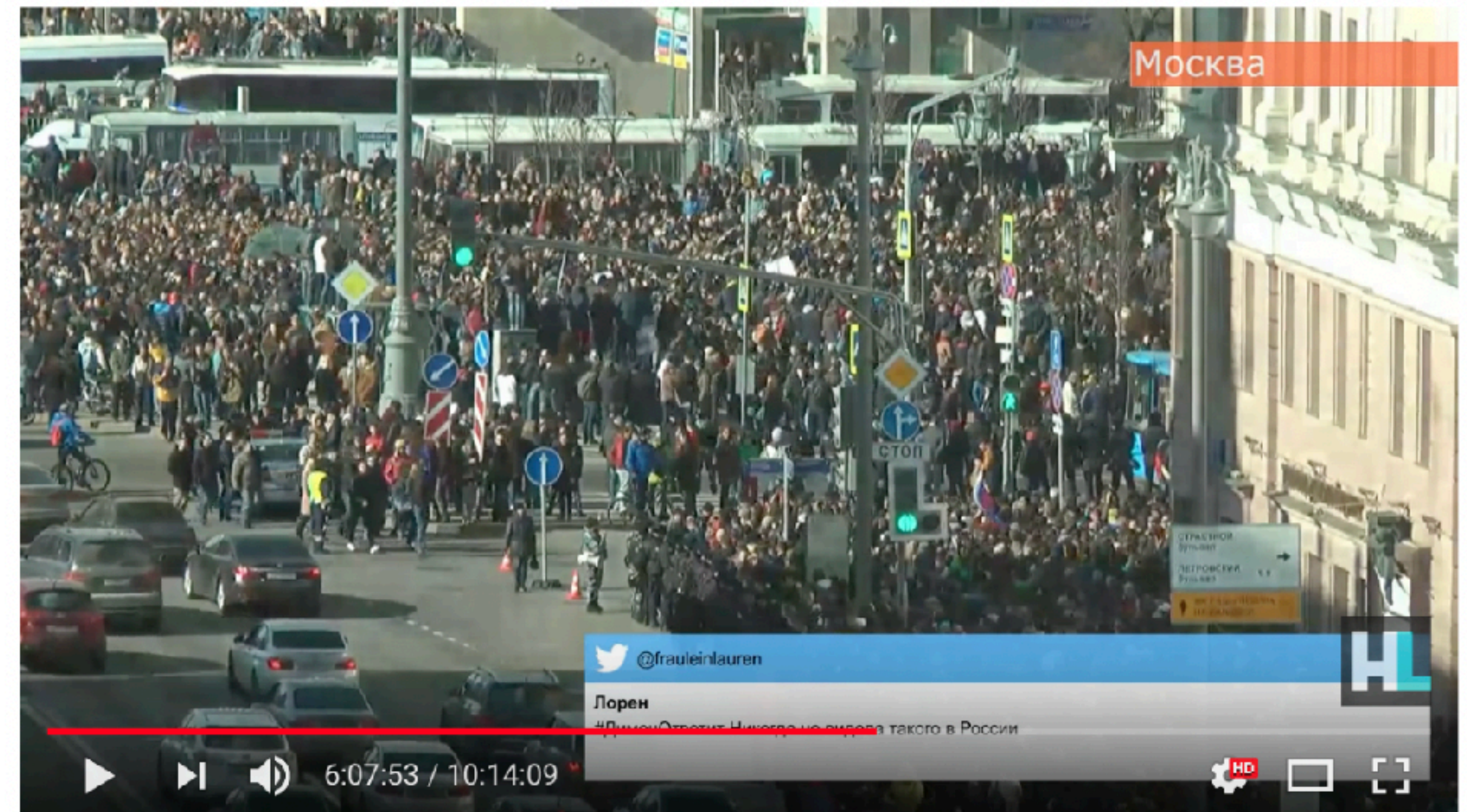
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Conspicuous Security:

Tools and Education

Strategic Visibility:

Transparency and Community



#ДимонОтветит. Митинги 26 марта по всей России. Прямой эфир

4,762,102 views

128K 17K SHARE

Figure 3. Screen grab of YouTube live stream syndicated by FBK during the March 26, 2017, anti-corruption protests in Russia.

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Hong Kong (ABJM 2021): Bigger public groups, smaller encrypted groups with rigorous onboarding process

Digital Trust is Physical Trust (Rosenbloom 2020)

Semi-Structured Interviews with 50 Black Lives Matter Activists (U.S.)



Image Credit: Tyger Williams/AP (2020)

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Dangers of Immediacy, Anonymity:
Lack of information integrity online



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Dangers of Immediacy, Anonymity:

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Direct Action Decision-Making:

Word of mouth, community evaluation



Image Credits: Jason Peters (2020), Matt Rourke/AP (2020)

Digital Trust is Physical Trust (Rosenbloom 2020)

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Dangers of Immediacy, Anonymity:

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Direct Action Decision-Making:

Word of mouth, community evaluation



Hong Kong (ABJM 2021): face-to-face preceeds phone-to-phone because
“standing on the front line together is very important for trust’ (P10)”

Digital Accessibility is Physical Accessibility (Bohdanova 2014)

Study of the role of social media and ICTs in the Euromaidan uprising (Ukraine)



Image Credit: Kostyantyn Chernichkin (2014)

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Physical IT Tents:

Internet access, equipment



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Ad-hoc groups of people with resources



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Led to Technologist-Activist Collaboration:

IT tents evolved into idea-generating spaces, development of new, needed tech

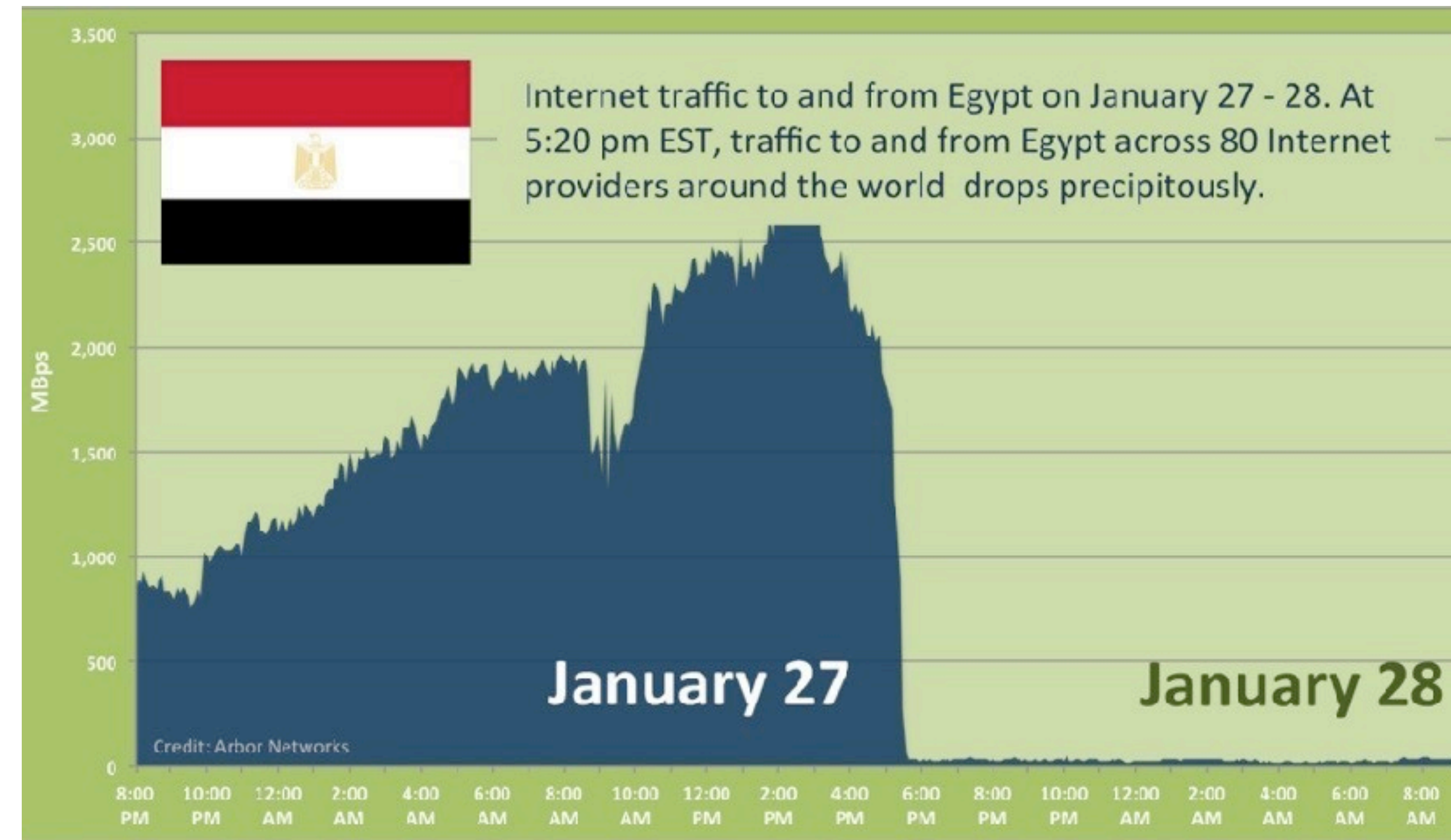
Circumventing Censorship and Accessibility Issues

Lower-Tech Fallbacks:

Audio transmission (Operation Vula)

Satellite phones + dialup (Arab Spring)

Word of Mouth (Black Lives Matter)



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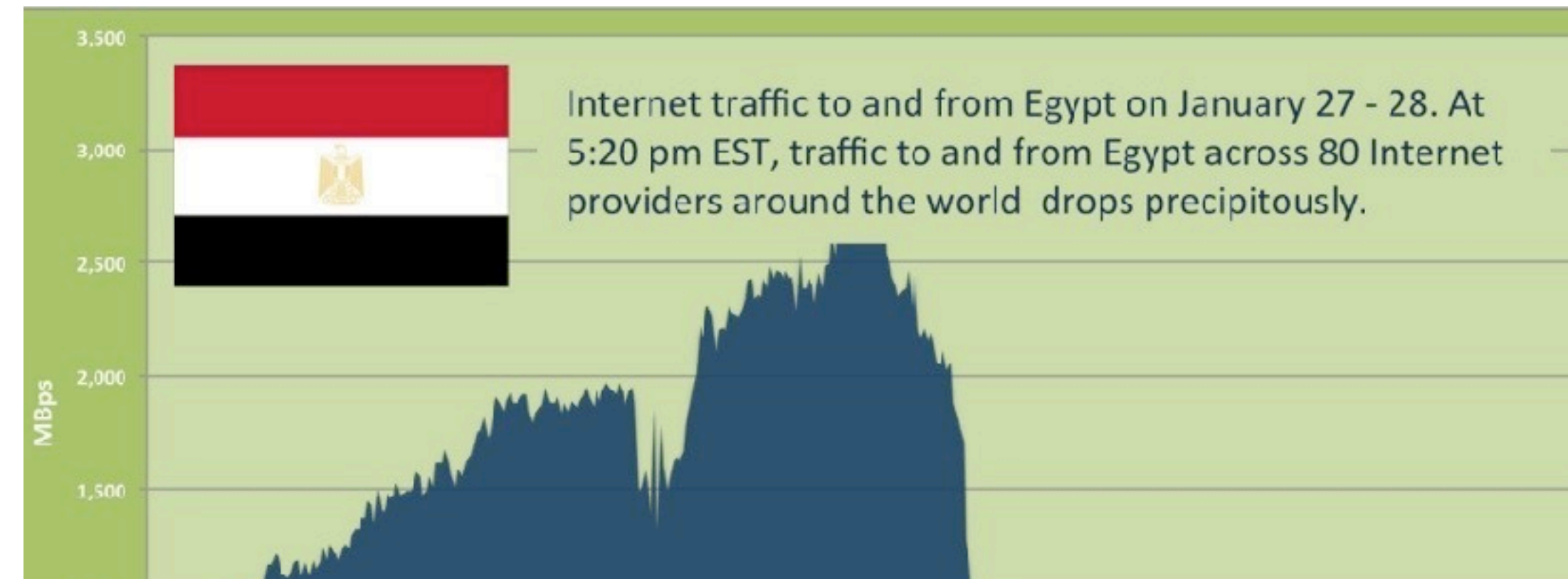
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Physical Pre-Planning:

IT tents (Euromaidan Uprising)

“Facebook Hill” (Standing Rock)



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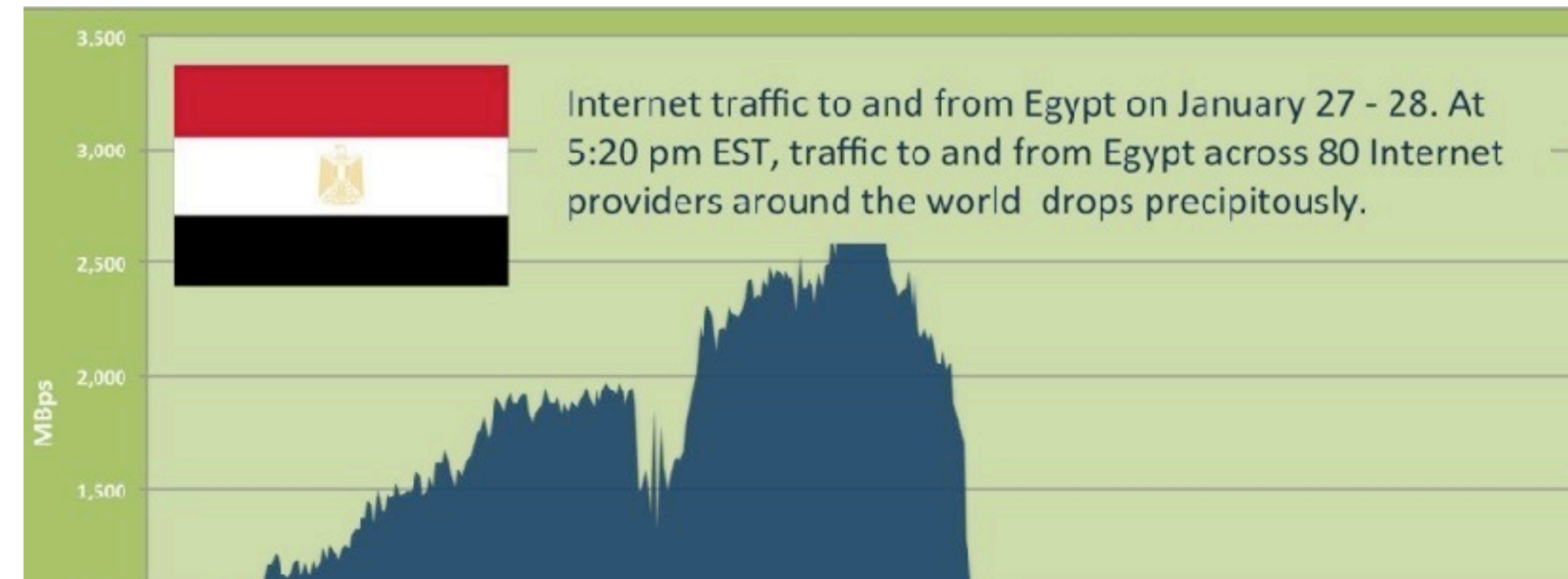
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Physical Pre-Planning:

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“Facebook Hill” (Standing Rock)

Toward Community-Based Networks: (Local) accessibility, physical ownership, increases effort required to obtain data



Device Compromise and Deletion (ABJM 2021)

Semi-Structured Interviews with 11 Anti-ELAB Protesters (Hong Kong)



Image Credit: Anthony Kwan/Getty (2019)

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Full Compromise Security:
Detection and mitigation

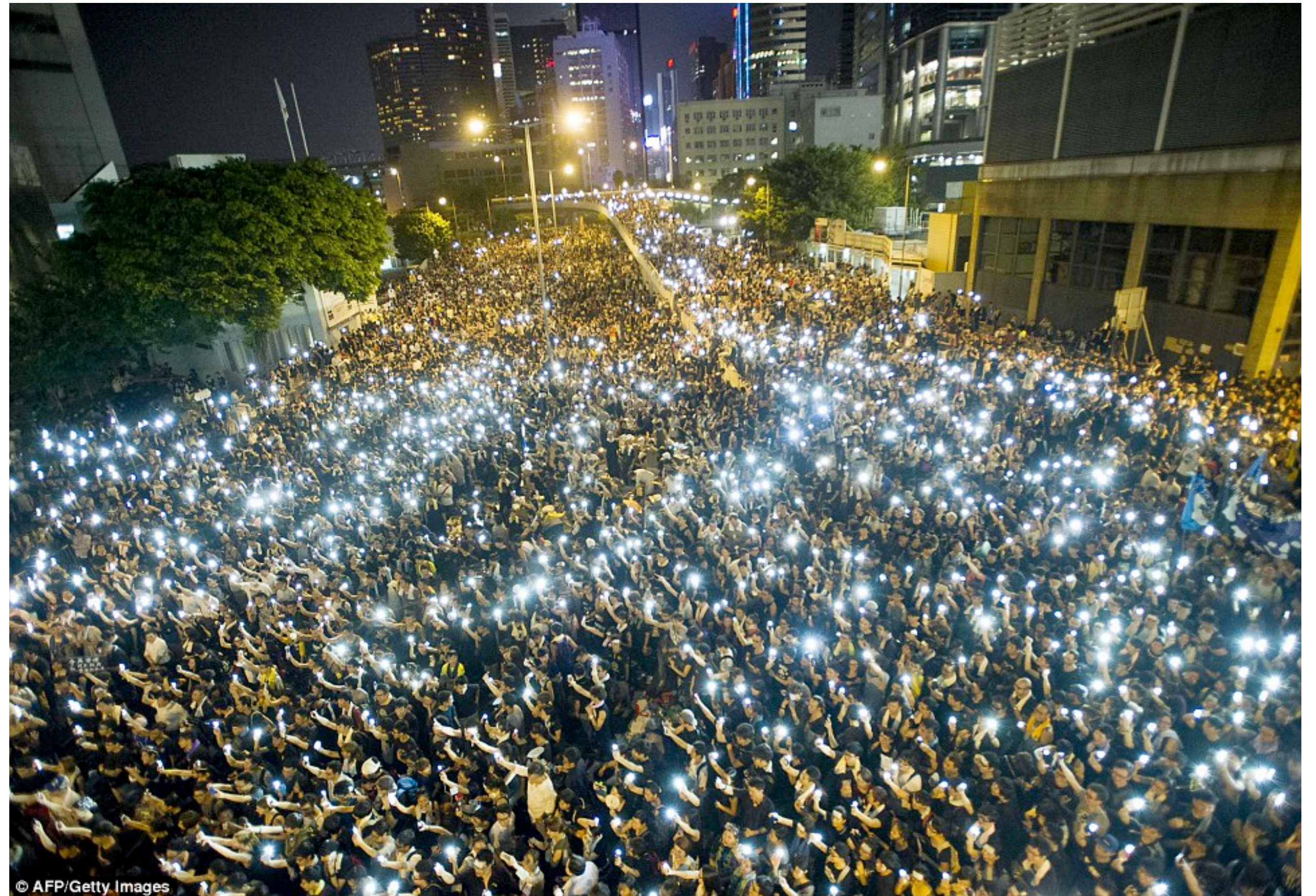


Image Credit: AFP/Getty (2019)

Device Compromise and Deletion (ABJM 2021)

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Full Compromise Security:

Detection and mitigation

Scheduled v. Remote Deletion:

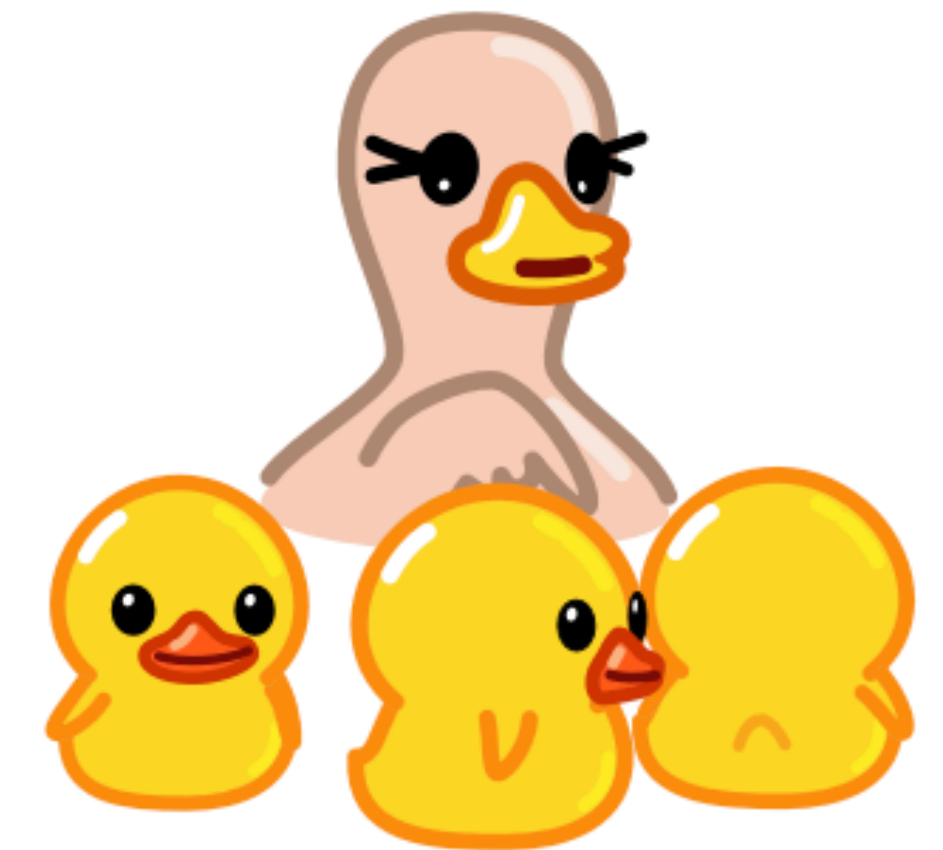
Arrest compromises contacts, logs



Private

Telegram messages are heavily encrypted and can self-destruct.

Why Telegram?



Social

Telegram groups can hold up to 200,000 members.

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Collective Security Culture (Borradaile 2021): Group reflex
to minimize information sharing, digitizing, and retaining

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tigro: Trust Infrastructure for Grassroots Organizing

How might we use cryptographic tools to adapt the existing trust and communication protocols of grassroots organizers from physical to digital spaces, without increasing the risk of surveillance, disinformation, and infiltration of grassroots movements?

tigro: Trust Infrastructure for Grassroots Organizing

One Size Fits One: Library of primitives (no bounded association);
applies (private) trust network information to any digital setting

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Grassroots Optimization: Individual device computation v. server computation over relatively small data sets

Establishing Security = Trust

Human trust as a core digital security concept

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Human trust as a core digital security concept

One Size Fits One

How organizers build and assess trust depends on:

- the person, place, or thing to be trusted (profiles, events, posts)
- the risk level associated with trust
- personal experience, collective security culture, etc.

Establishing Security = Trust

Human trust as a core digital security concept

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“Grounded” Cryptographic Protocols

Digital trust reduces to:

- physical interactions that establish “grounded pairs”
- qualitative trust measurements between grounded pairs

tigro Core Protocols

Ground Trust Ceremony

Like a key signing ceremony in spirit, but:

- Establishes a symmetric key linked to a physical meeting
- No PKI: digital activity is not linkable to a persistent identifier

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Grounded Annotation System

Allows grounded pairs to share digital annotations of arbitrary people, places, and things

tigro Core Protocols

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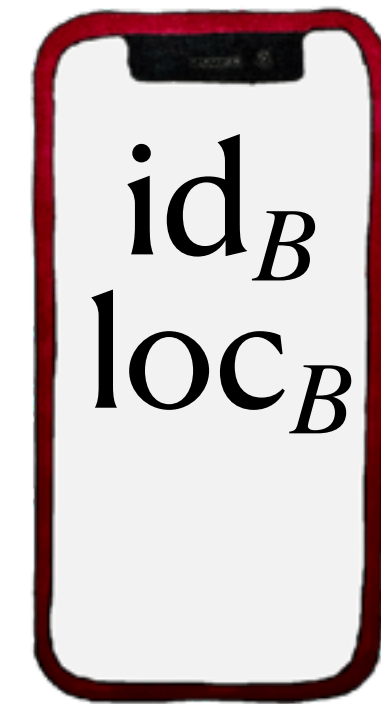
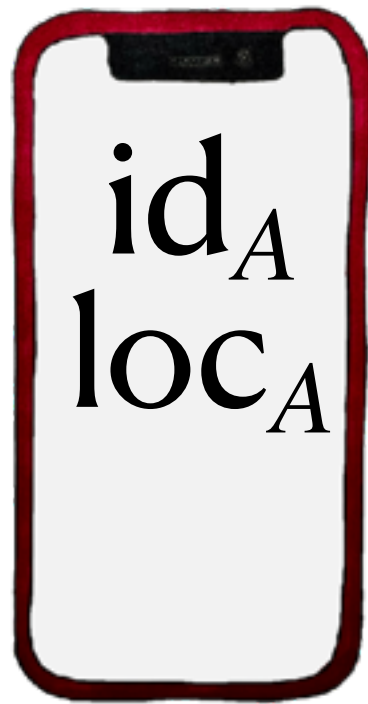
(Grounded) Trust Metrics

Quantify trust using social network analytics (eg. HTS algorithm)

Ground Trust Ceremony



Alice



Bob

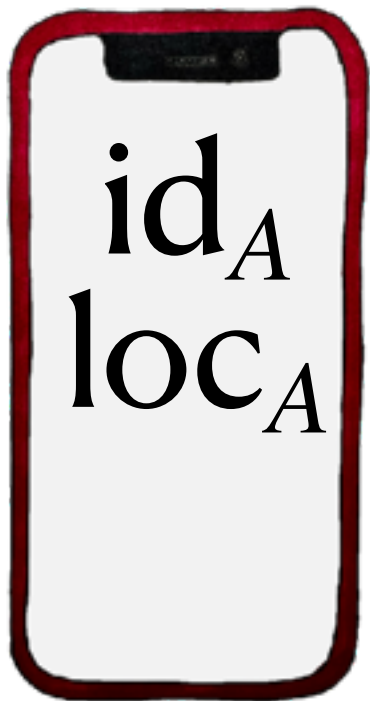
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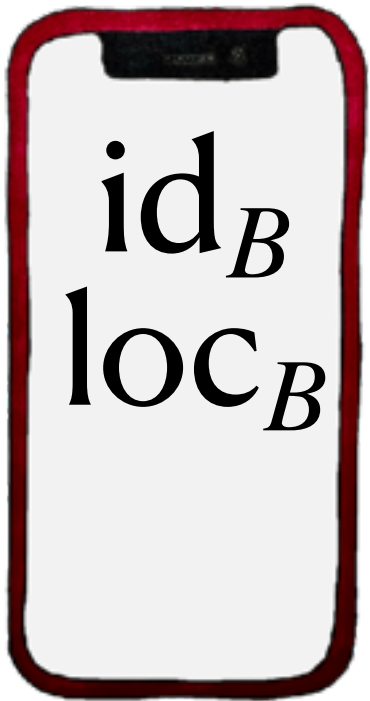
Grounded Key
Agreement
Ideal Functionality



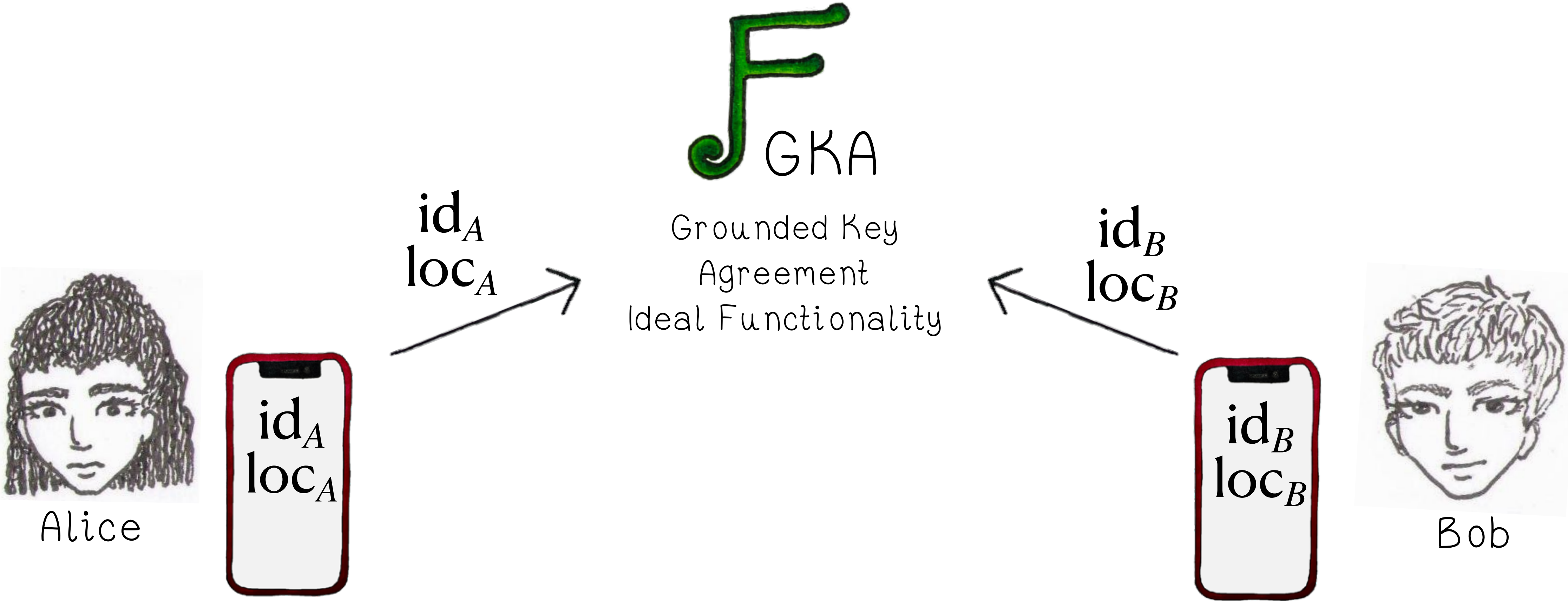
Alice



Bob



Ground Trust Ceremony



Ground Trust Ceremony

\mathcal{F}_{GKA}

Grounded Key
Agreement

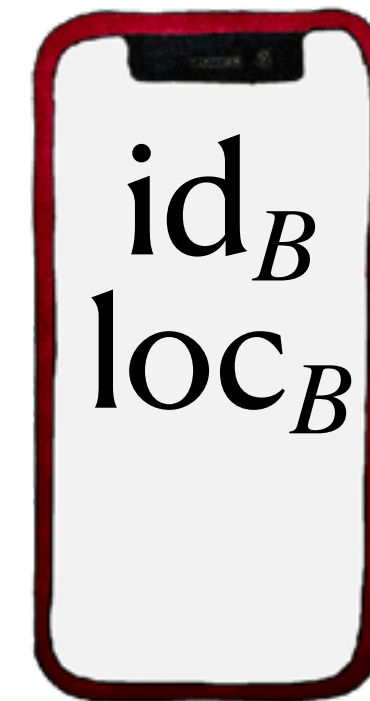
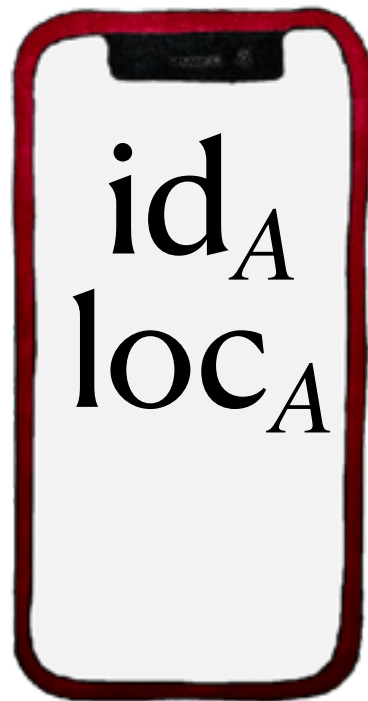
Ideal Functionality

if $\text{loc}_A = \text{loc}_B$:

$$k_{AB} \leftarrow_{\$} \{0,1\}^{\lambda}$$



Alice



Bob

Ground Trust Ceremony

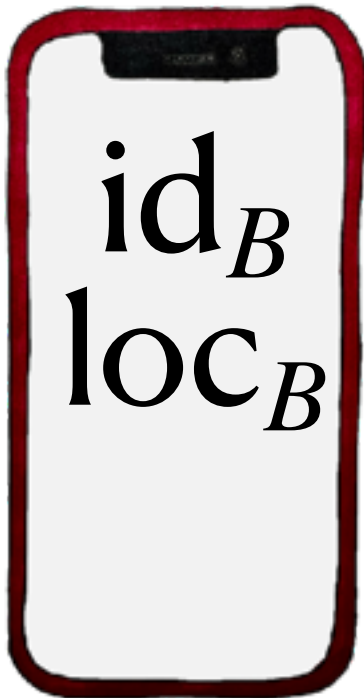
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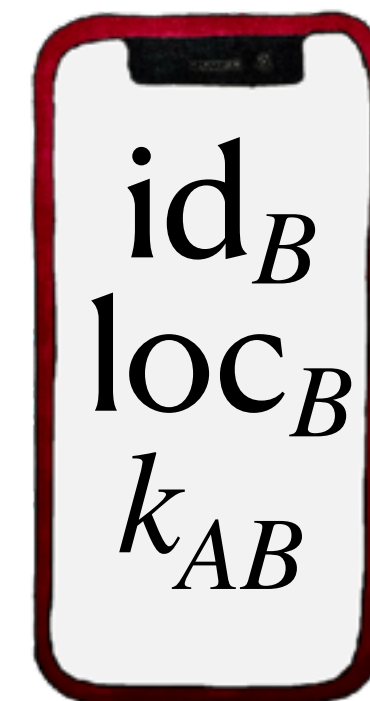
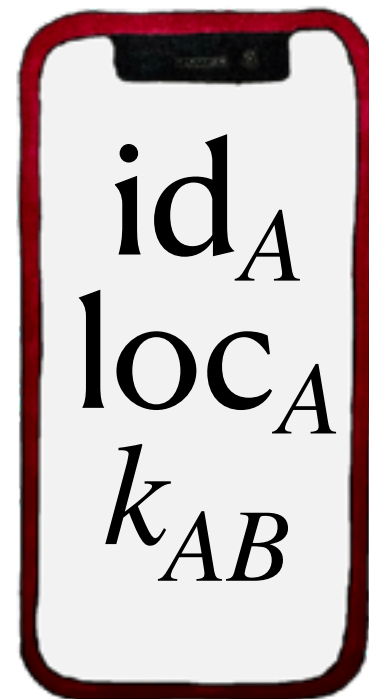
Ground Trust Ceremony

\mathcal{F}_{GKA}

Grounded Key
Agreement
Ideal Functionality



Alice



Bob

Ground Trust Ceremony

In practice, we can
replace the key
agreement ideal
functionality with
Diffie-Hellman over
QR code exchange.



Alice



Bob



Ground Trust Ceremony

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Alice



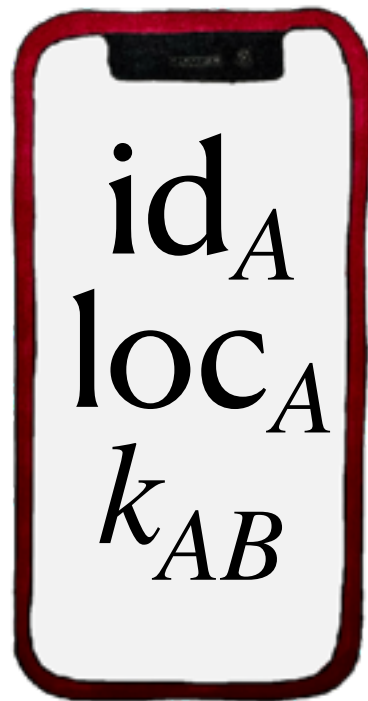
Bob

Alice and Bob can run further computations over an authenticated
Bluetooth channel.

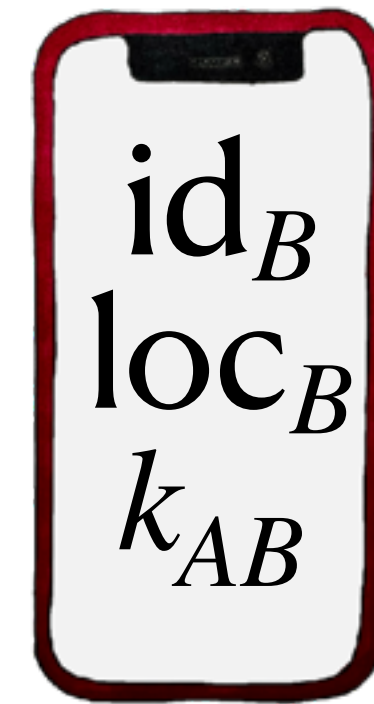
Ground Trust Ceremony



Alice



Alice and Bob now
share a key that is
rooted in their
physical interaction.

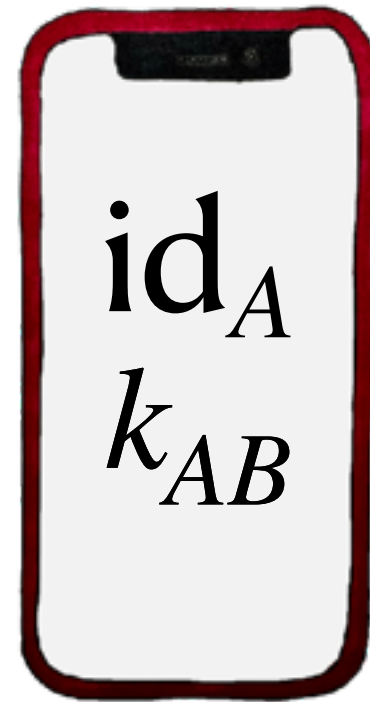


Bob

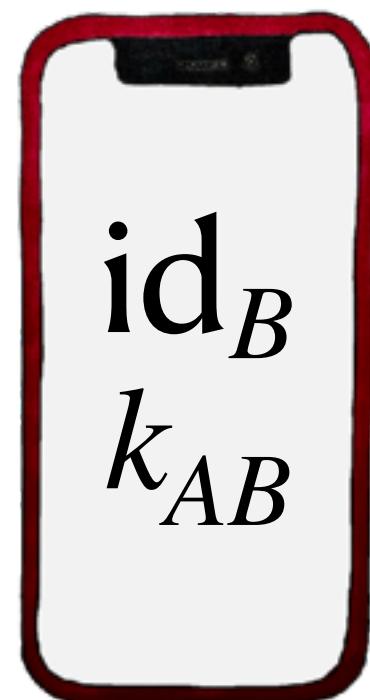
Annotation System



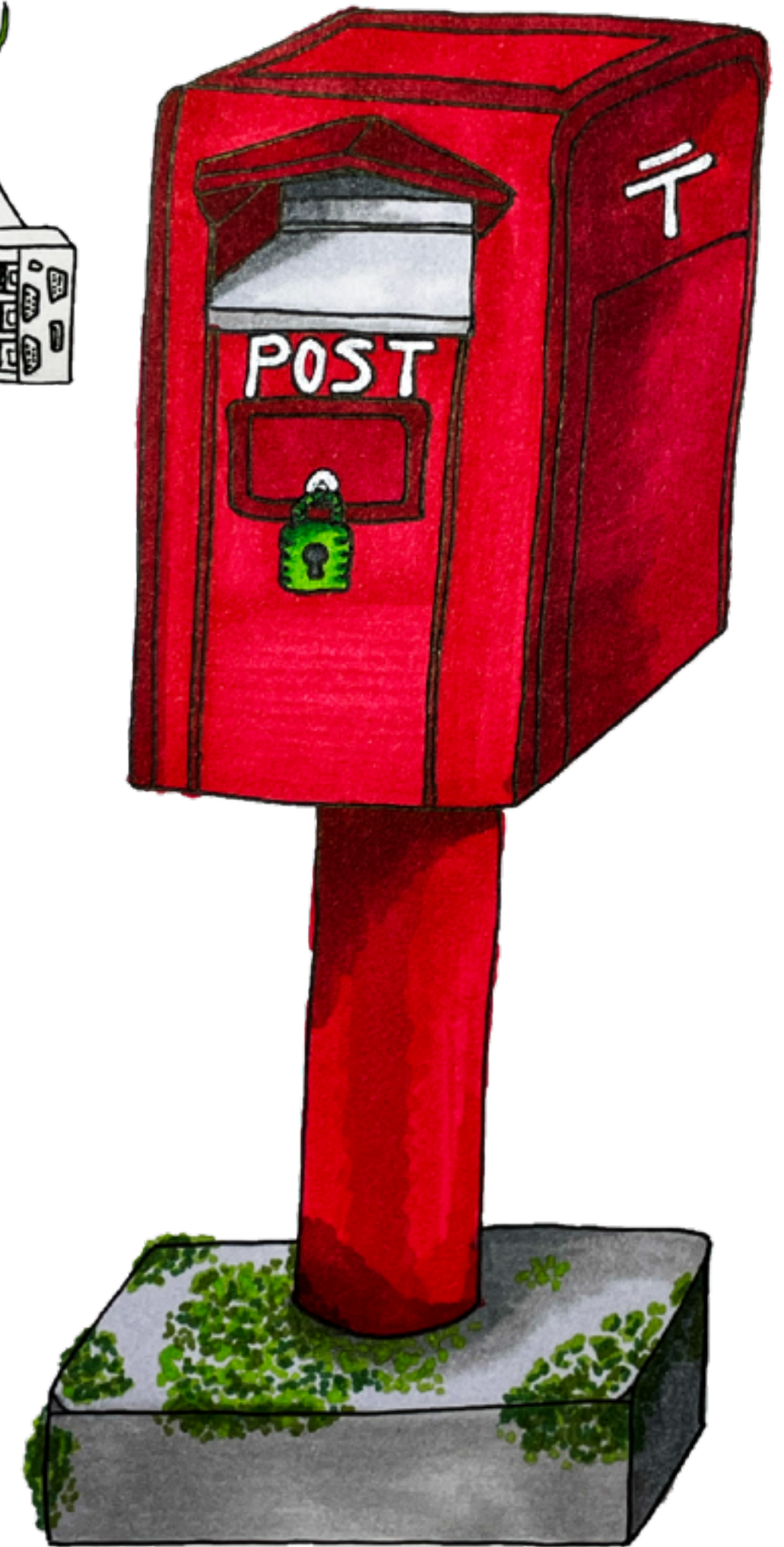
Alice



Bob



Tigro
Server

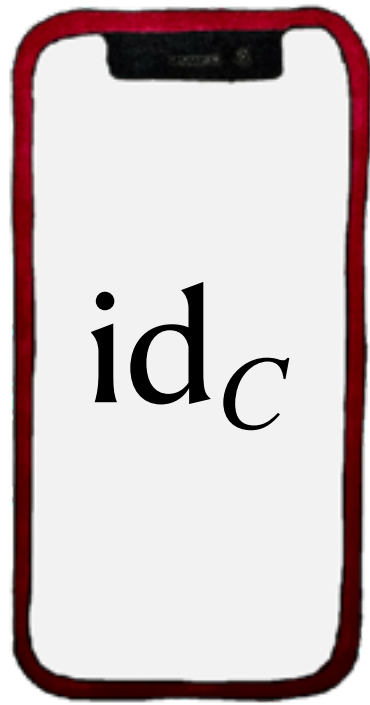
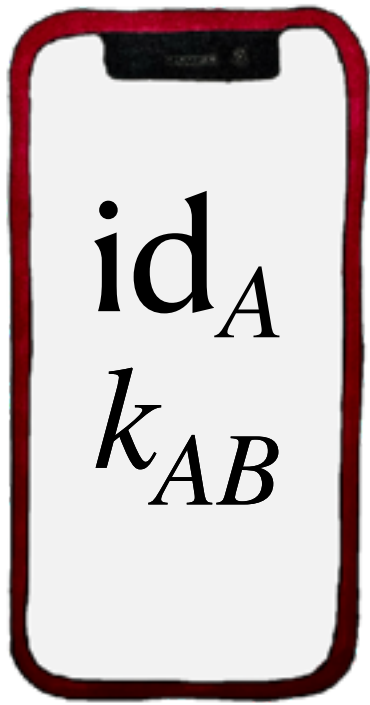


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

Annotation System



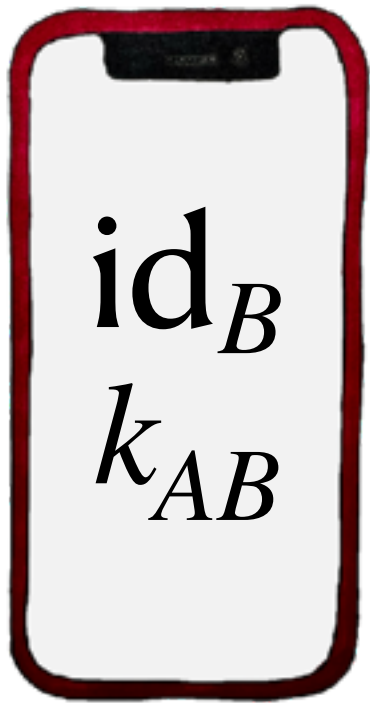
Alice



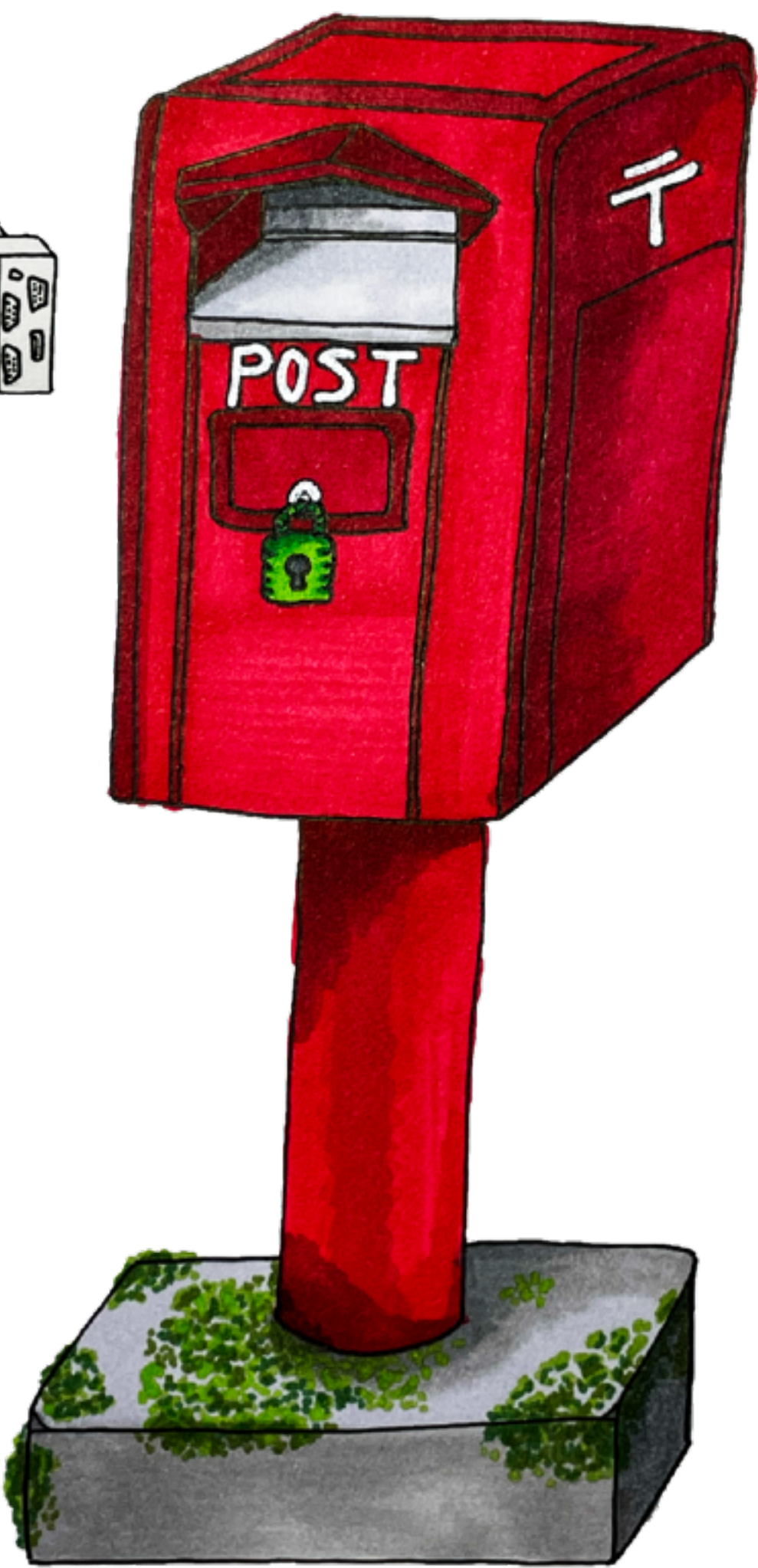
Charlie



Bob



Tigro
Server

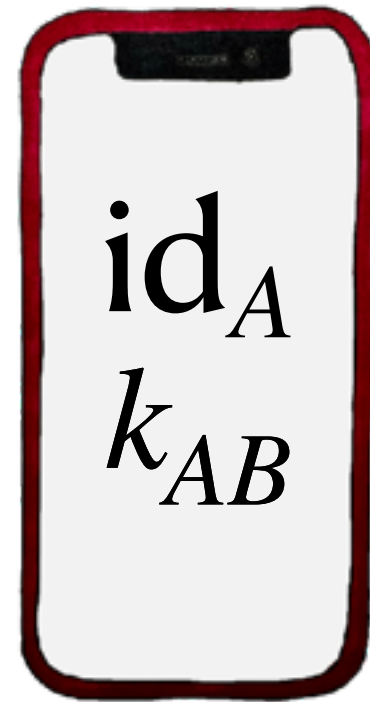


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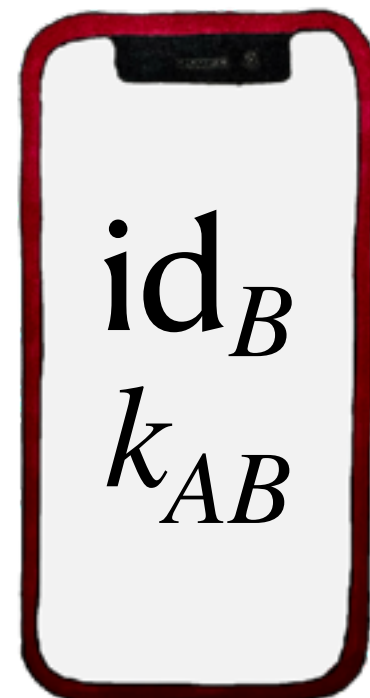
Alice



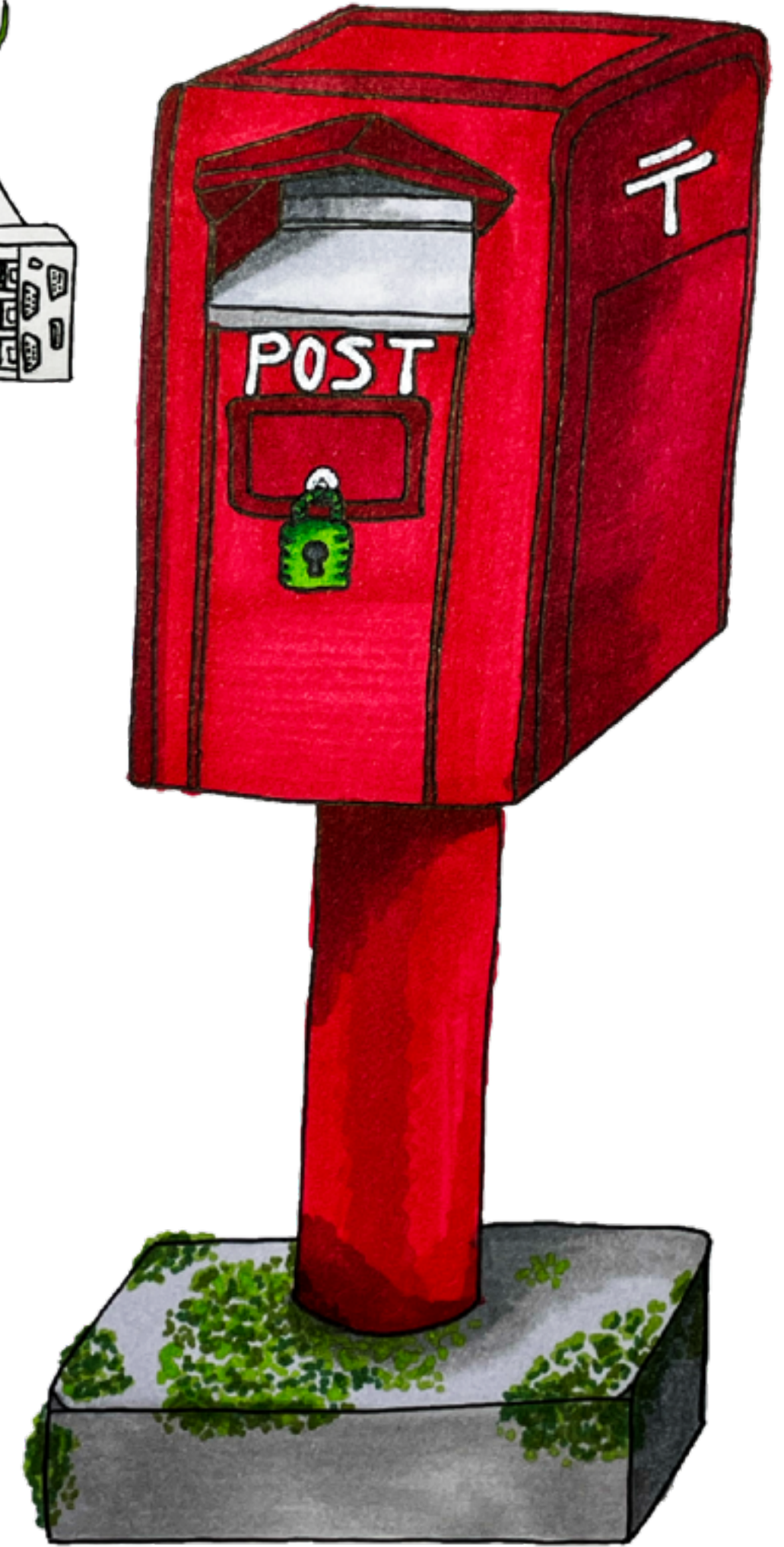
Annotate id_C :
I met them at a
mutual aid event.
They seem
trustworthy.



Bob



Tigro
Server

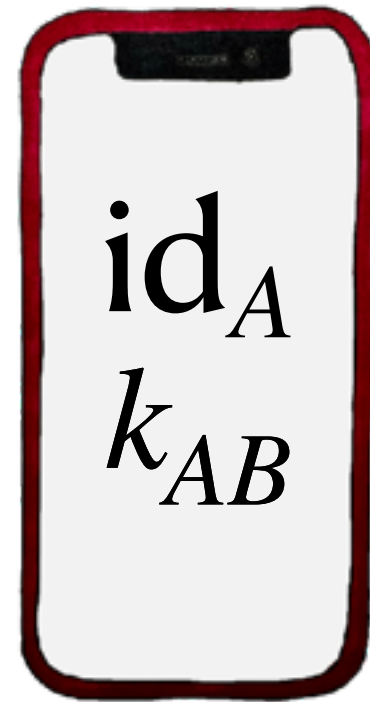


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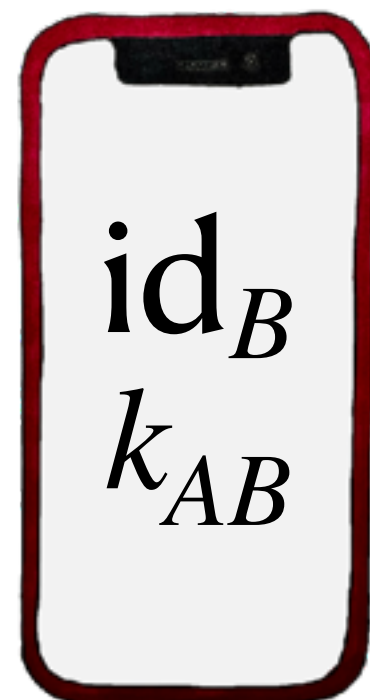
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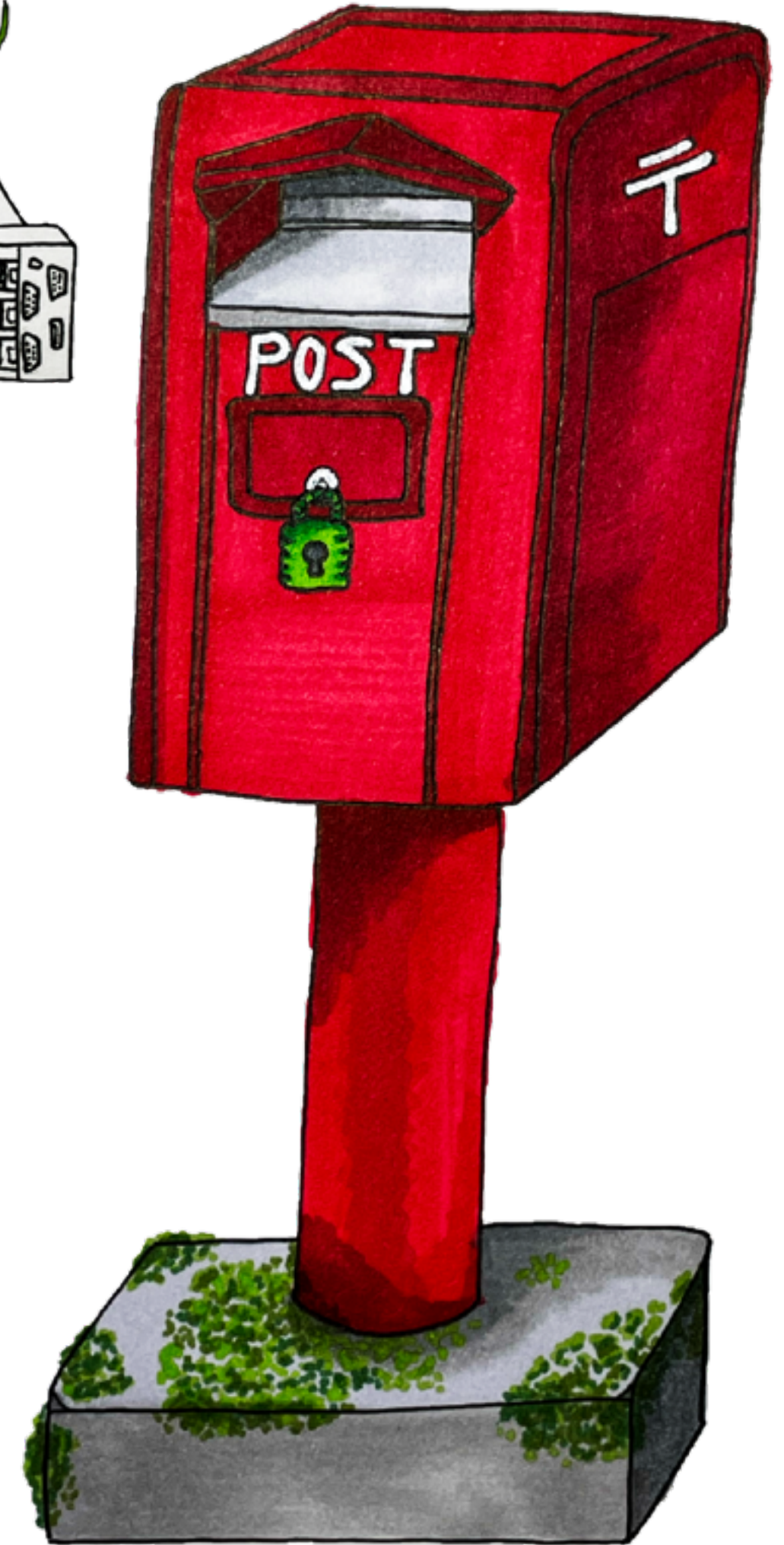
Annotate id_C :
This person
was agitating
at a sit-in.
Vibes were off.



Bob



Tigro
Server

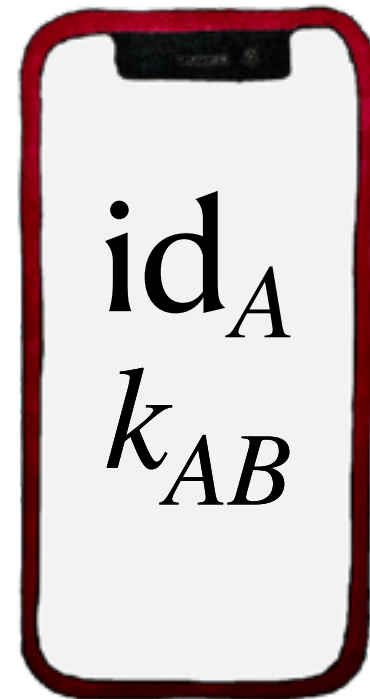


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

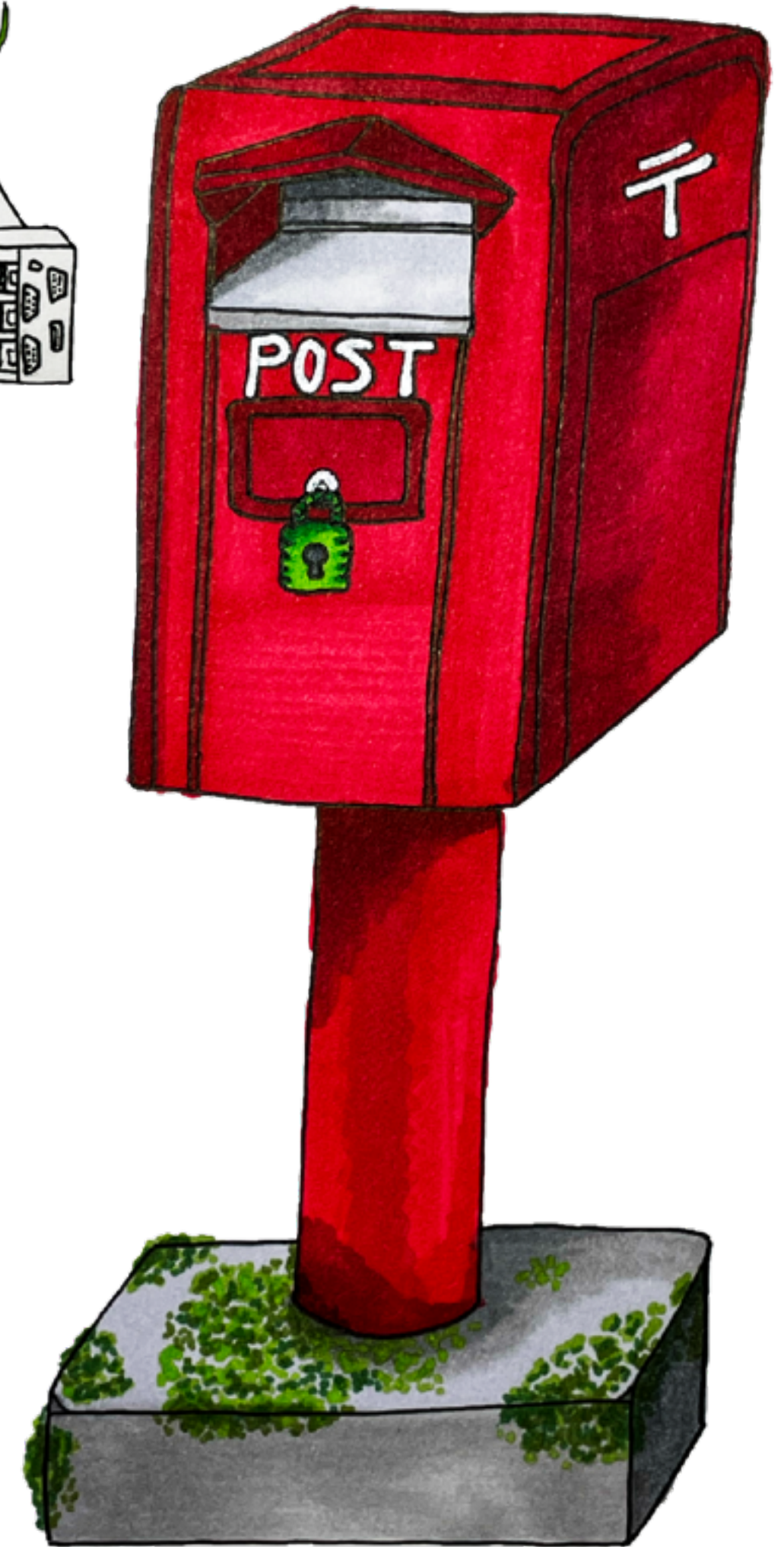
Annotation System



Alice



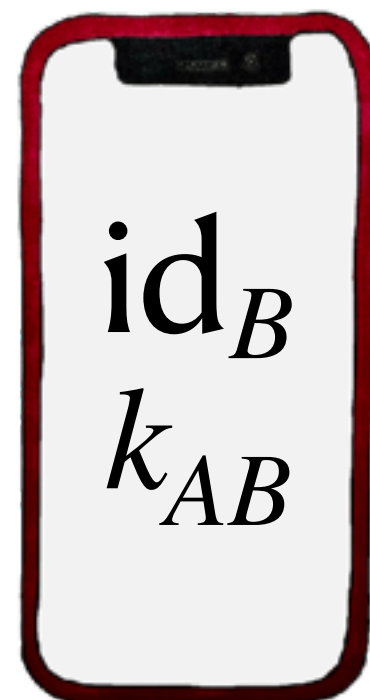
Tigro
Server



Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)



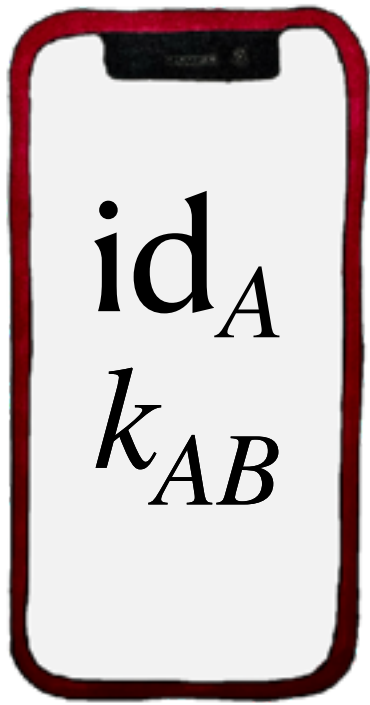
Bob



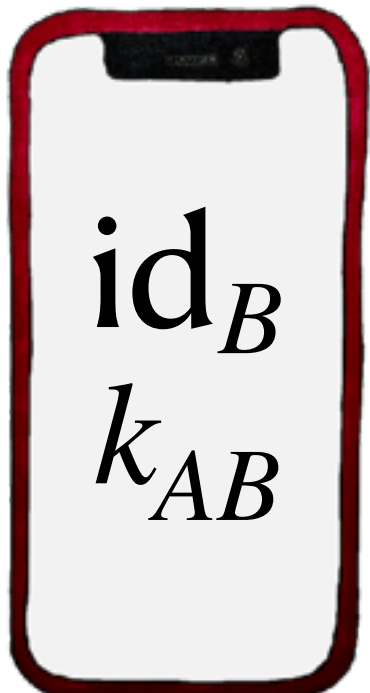
Annotation System



Alice



Bob



Tigro
Server



$[id_C, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

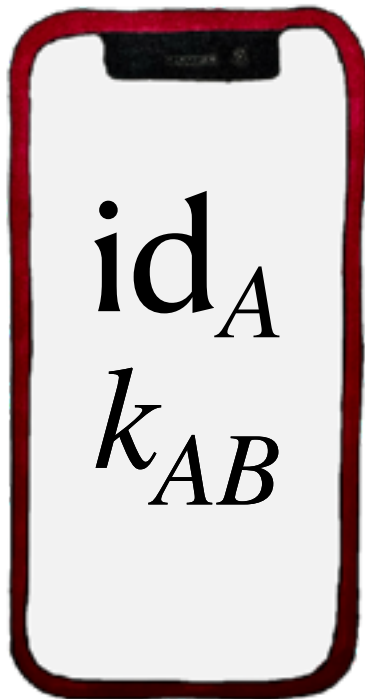


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

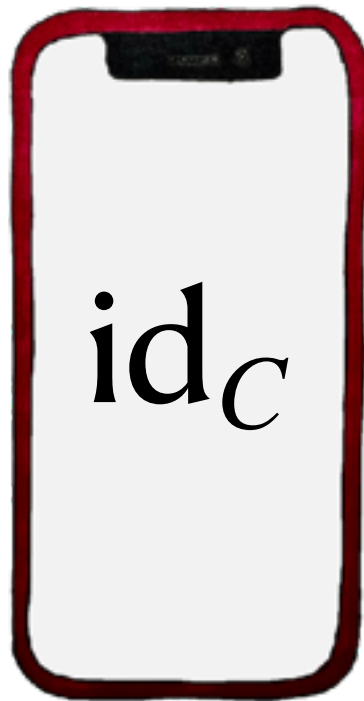
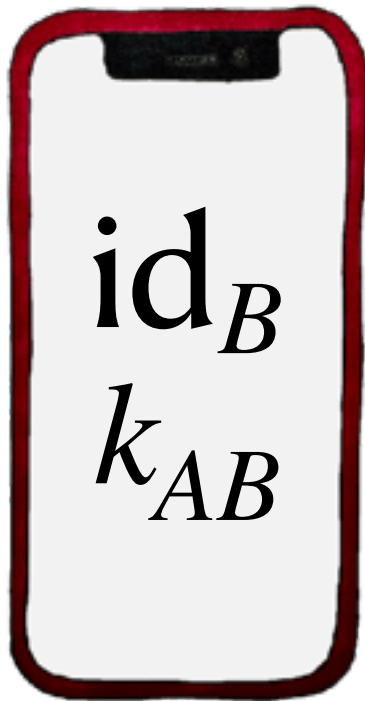
Annotation System



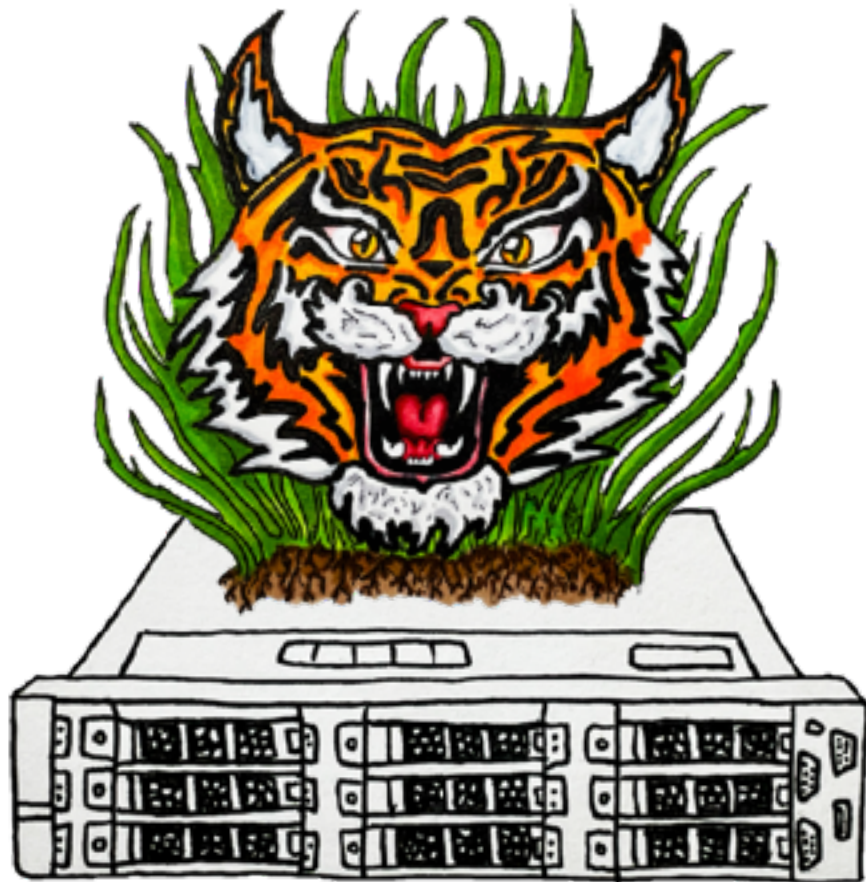
Alice



Bob



Charlie



Tigro
Server



$[id_C, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

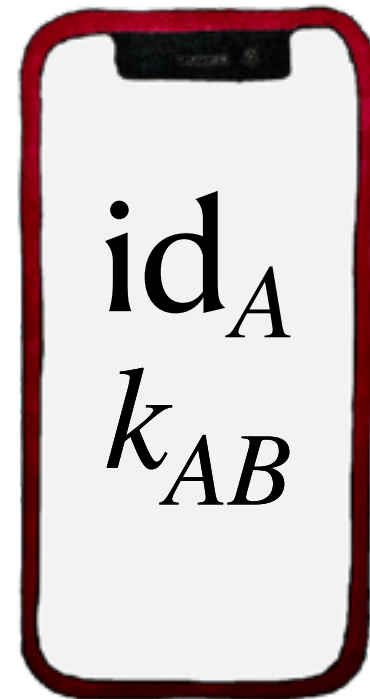


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

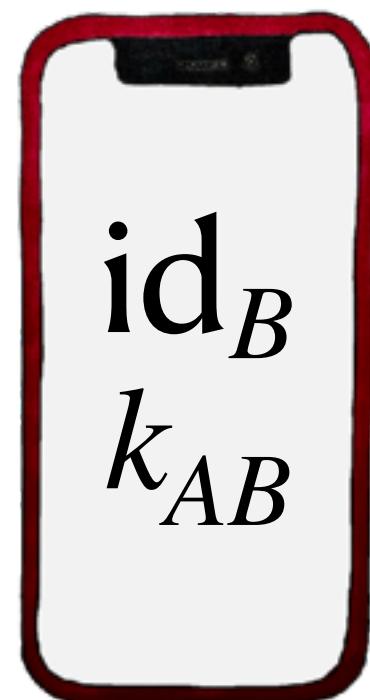
Annotation System



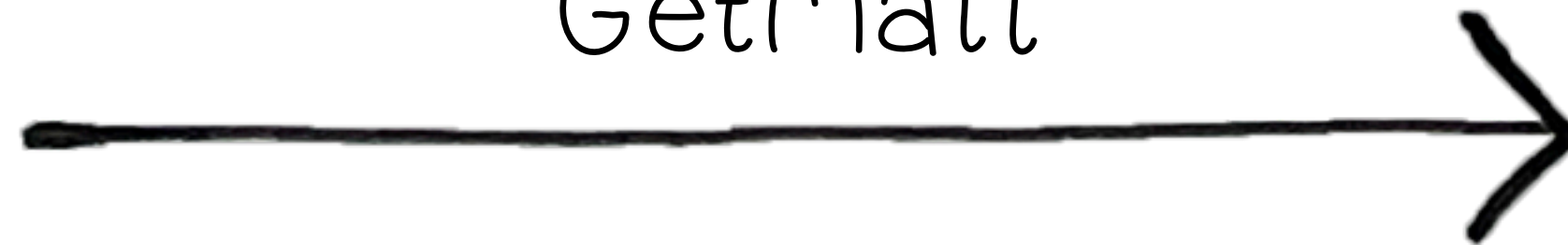
Alice



Bob



GetMail



Tigro
Server



$[id_C, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

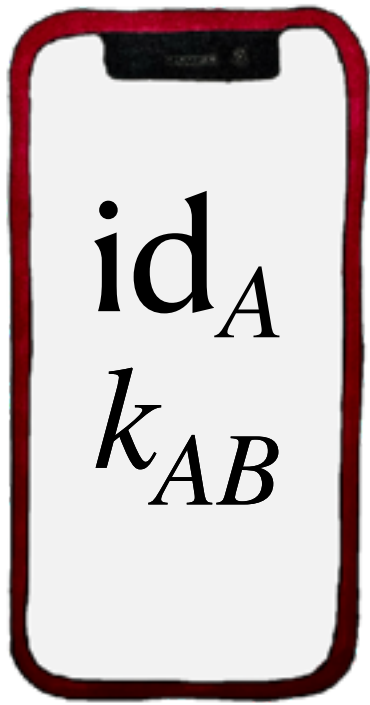


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

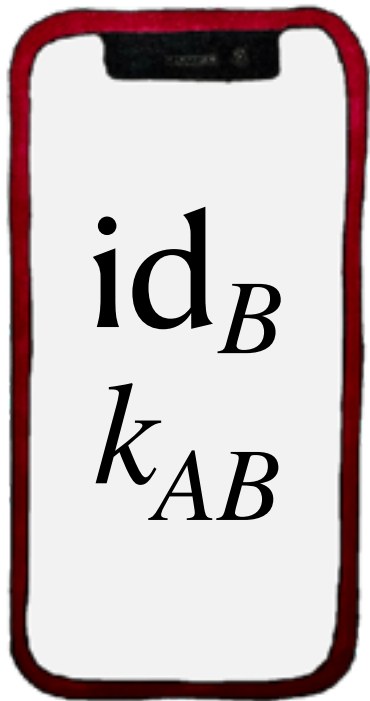
Annotation System



Alice



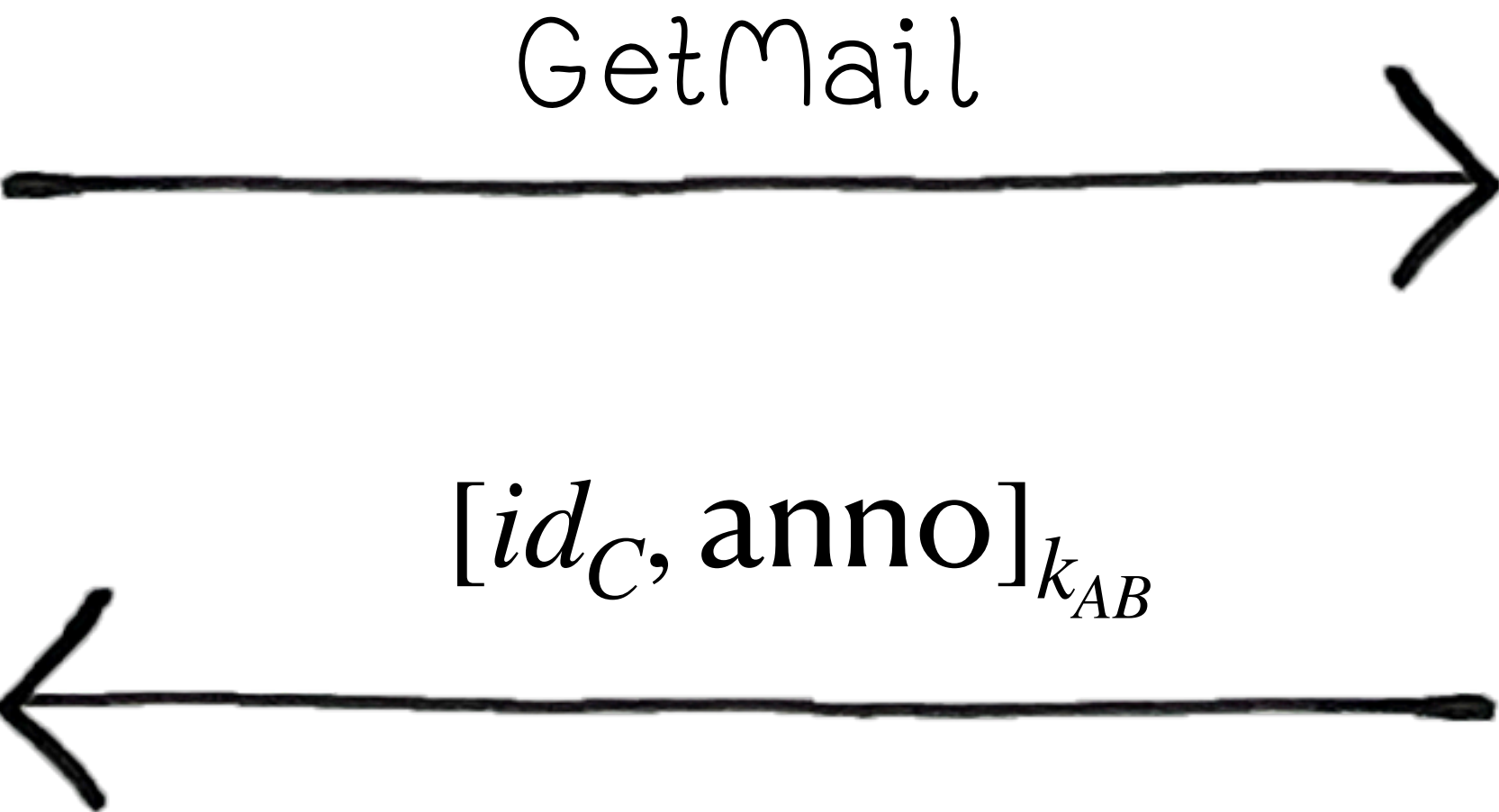
Bob



Tigro
Server



$[id_C, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

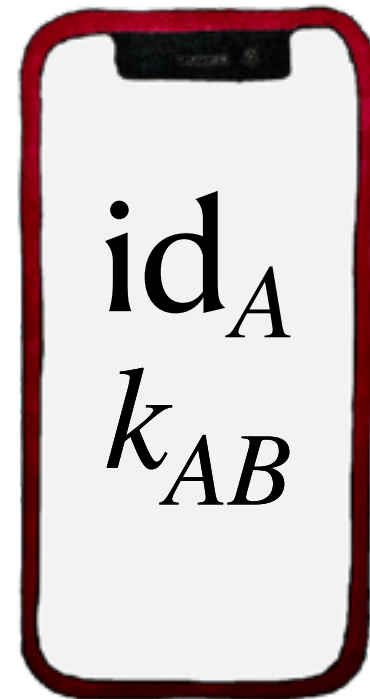


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

Annotation System



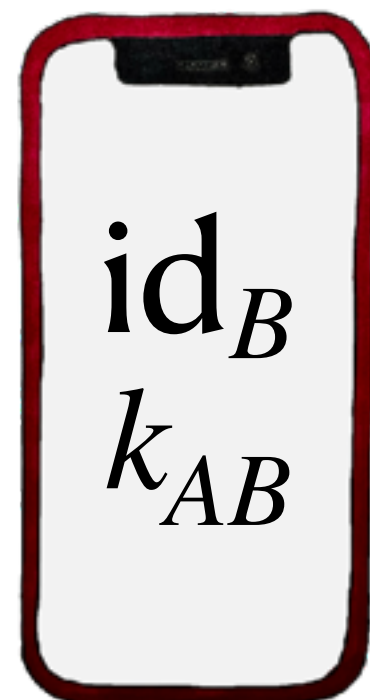
Alice



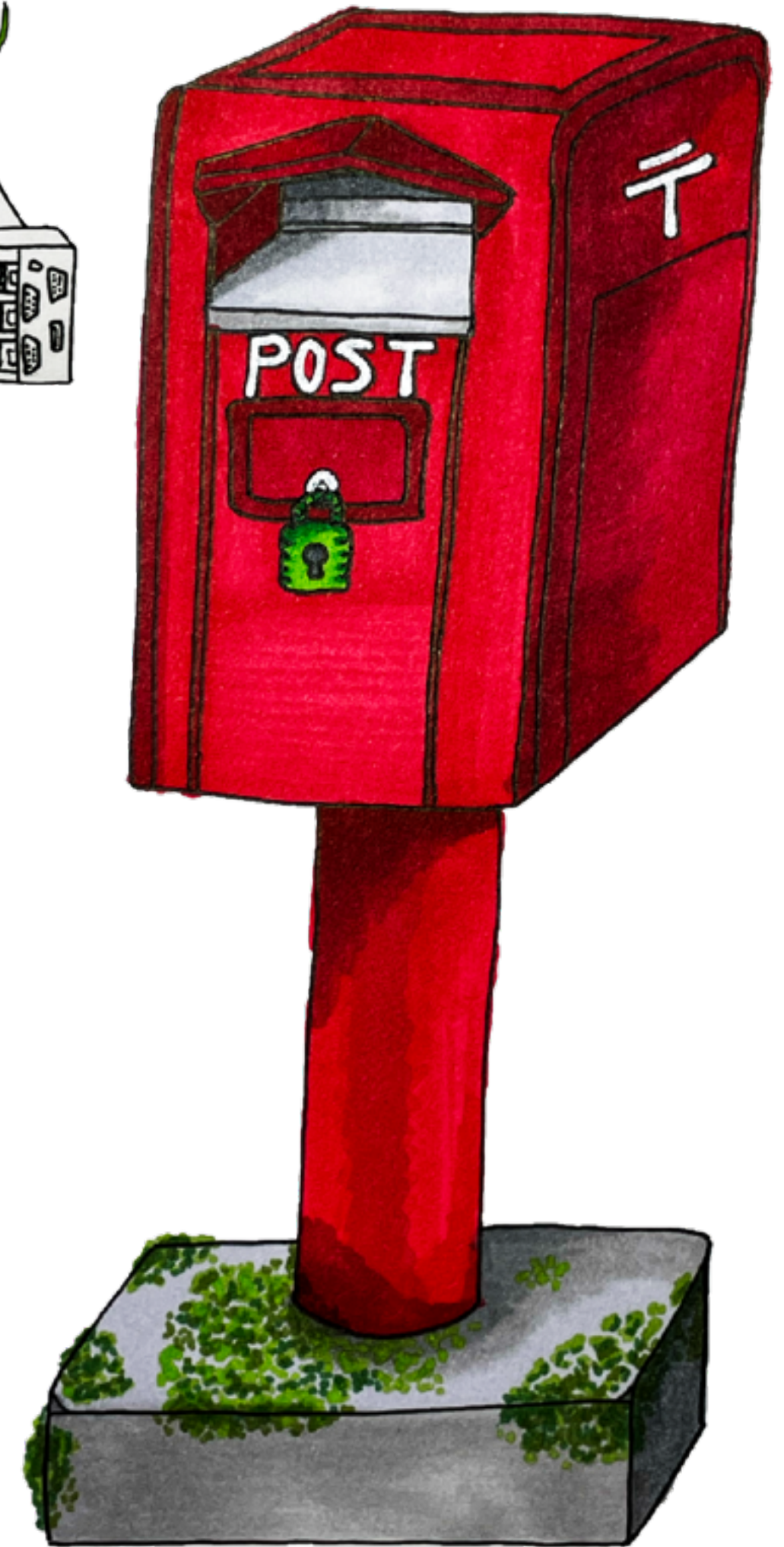
Event:
Protest
Organizer:
Eve



Bob



Tigro
Server

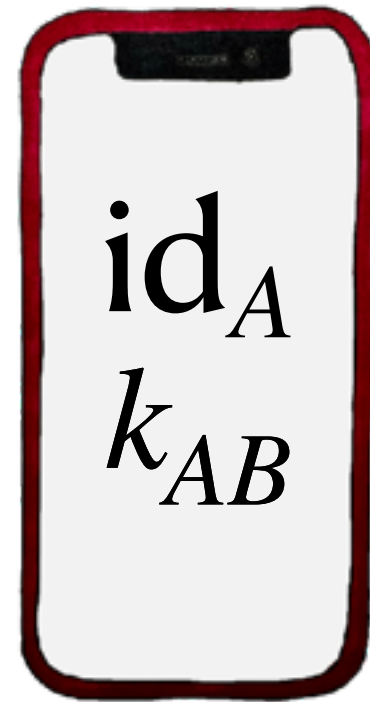


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

Annotation System



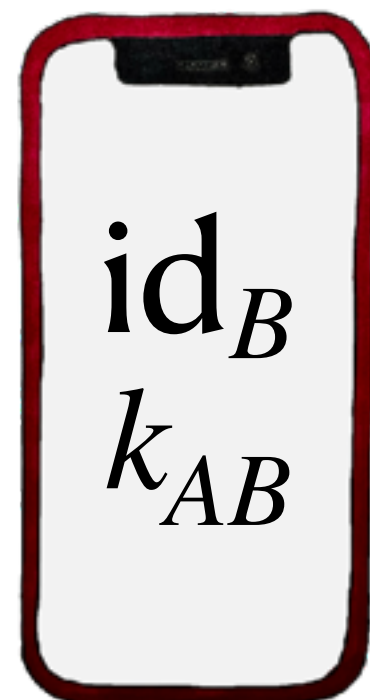
Alice



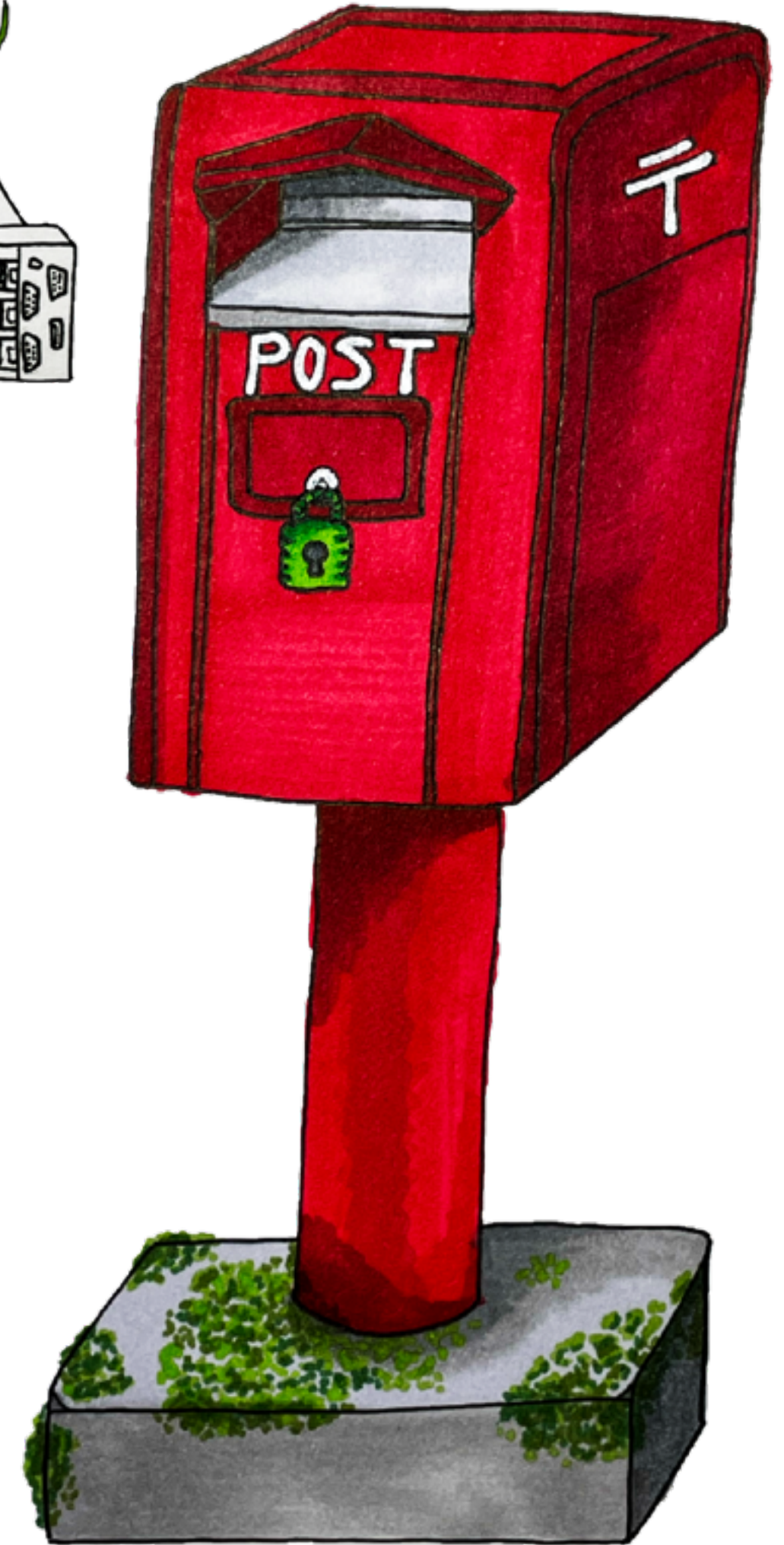
Event:
Protest
Organizer:
Eve
 oid_E



Bob



Tigro
Server

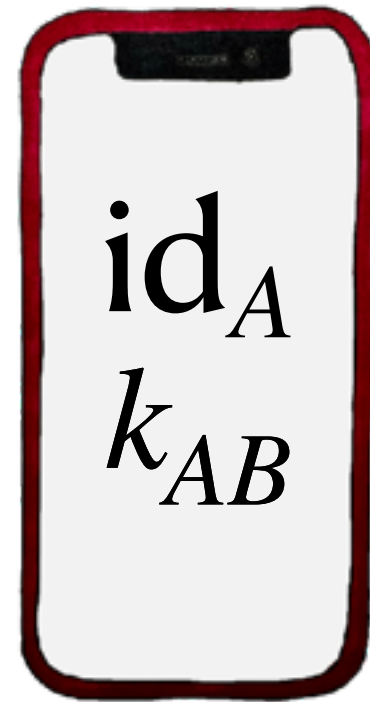


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

Annotation System



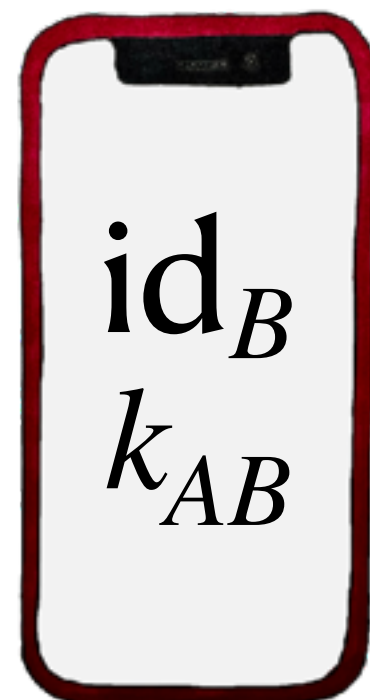
Alice



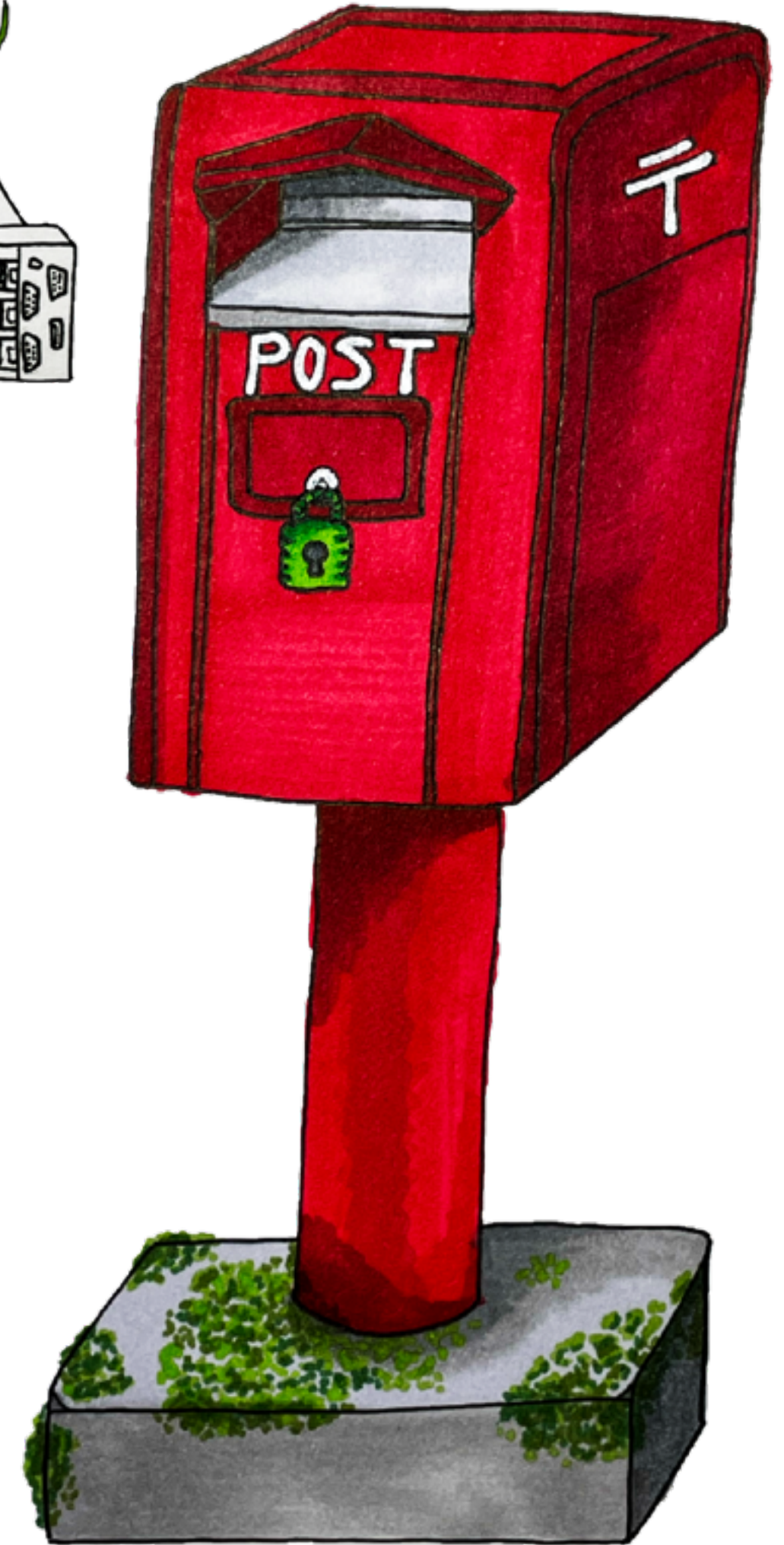
Annotate oid_E : This event is being organized by friends. Hope to see you there.



Bob



Tigro Server

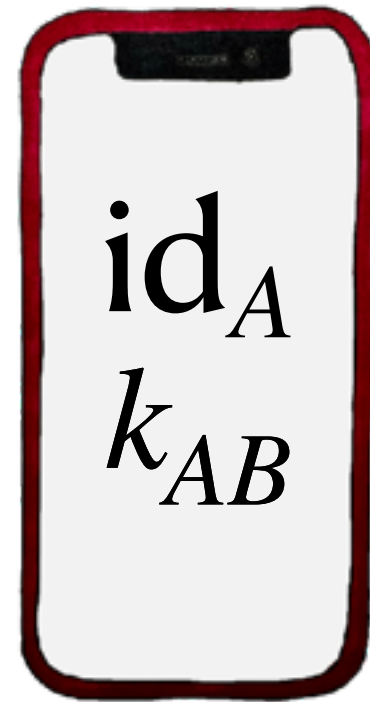


Shared Encrypted Mailbox (EMB)

Annotation System



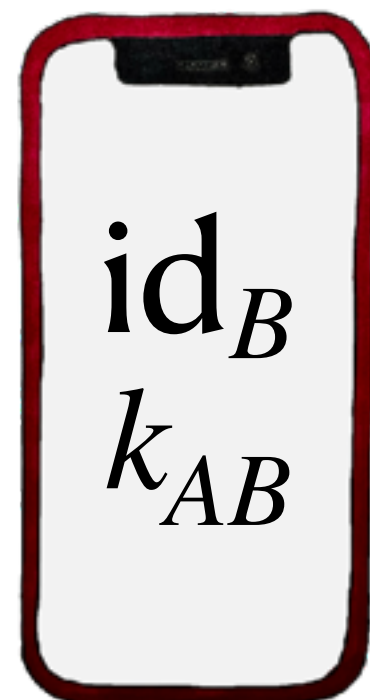
Alice



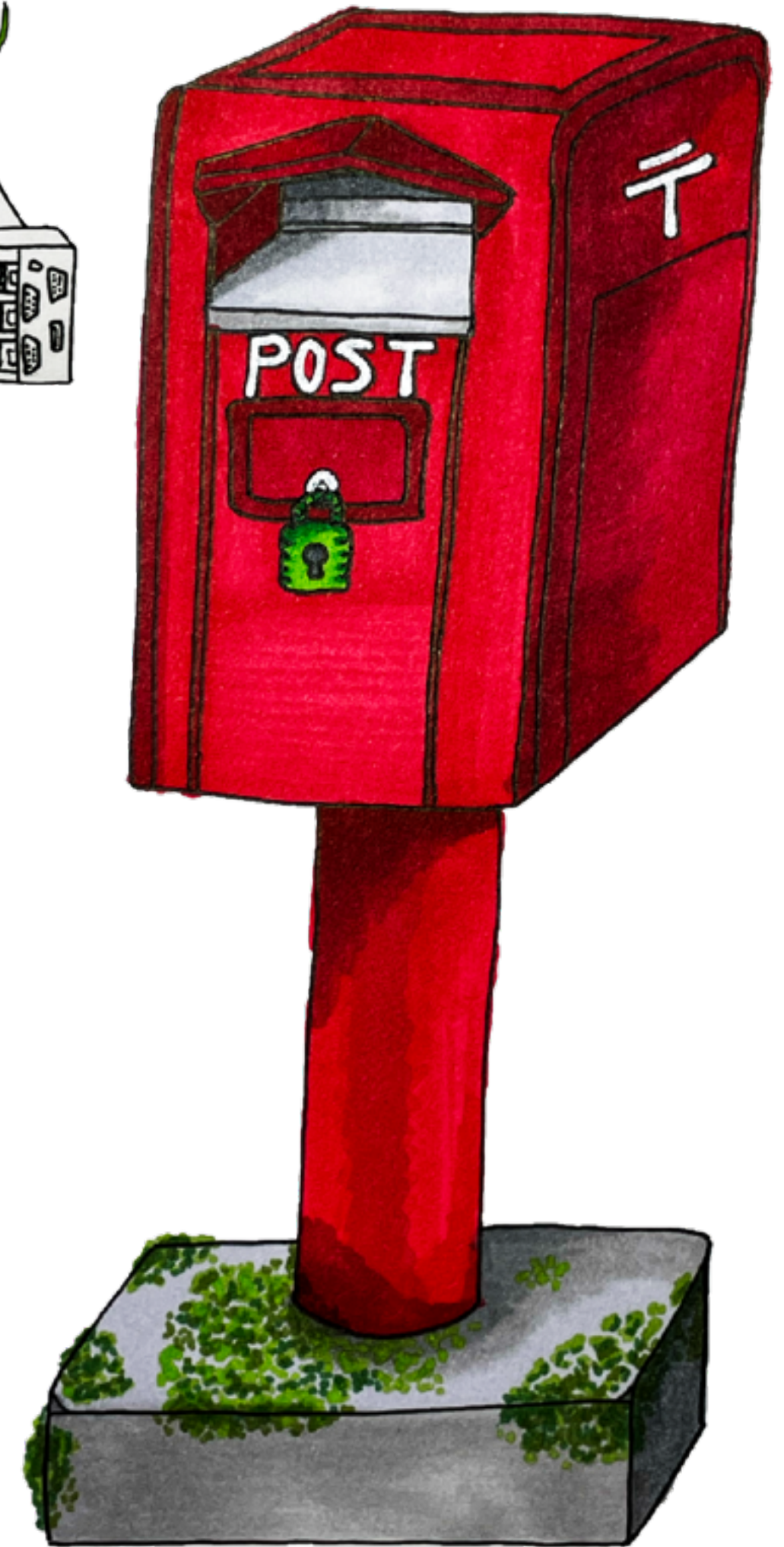
Annotate oid_E : No one I know can confirm the identity of Eve.
Proceed with caution.



Bob



Tigro
Server

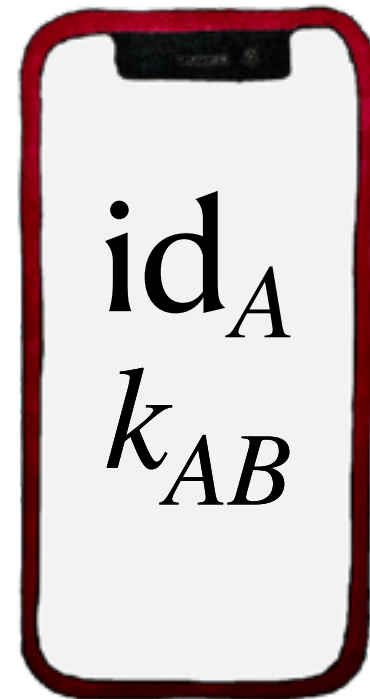


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

Annotation System



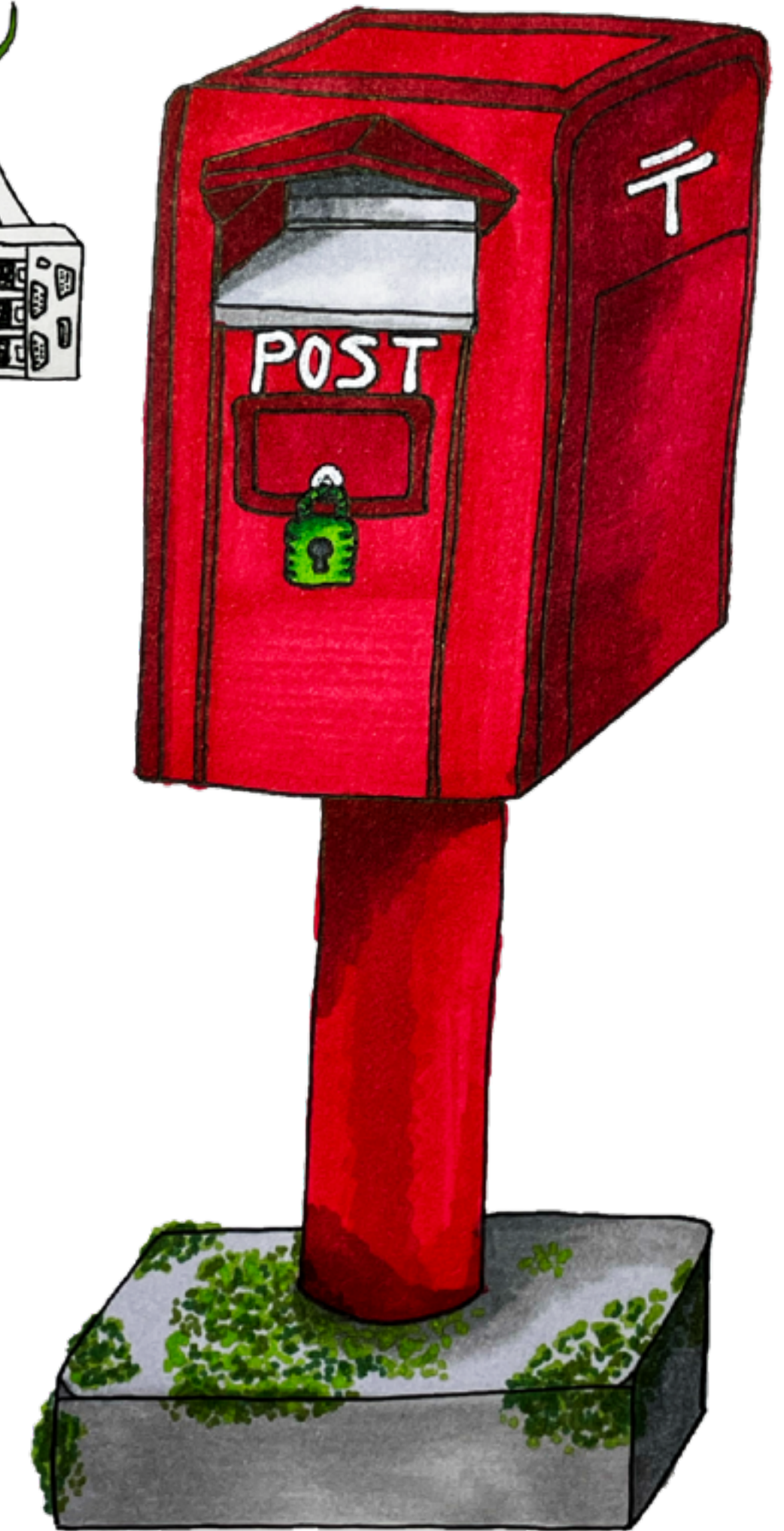
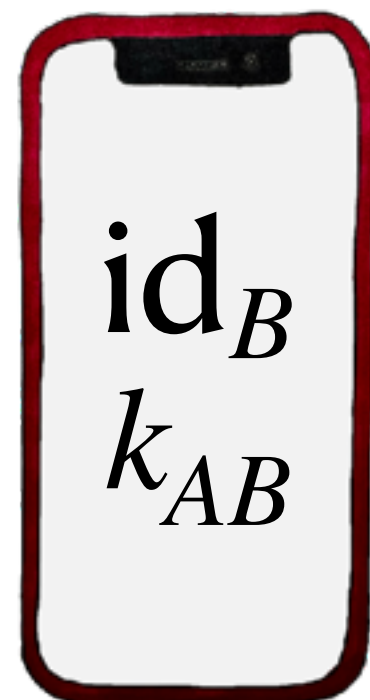
Alice



Tigro
Server



Bob

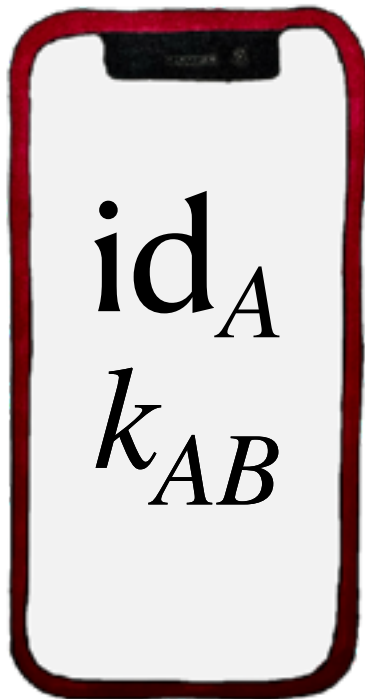


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

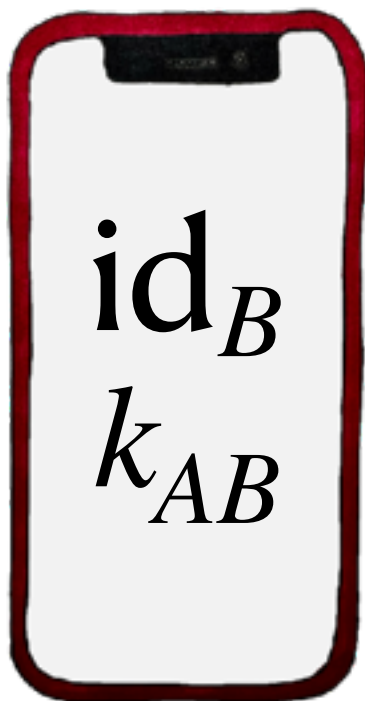
Annotation System



Alice



Bob



Tigro
Server

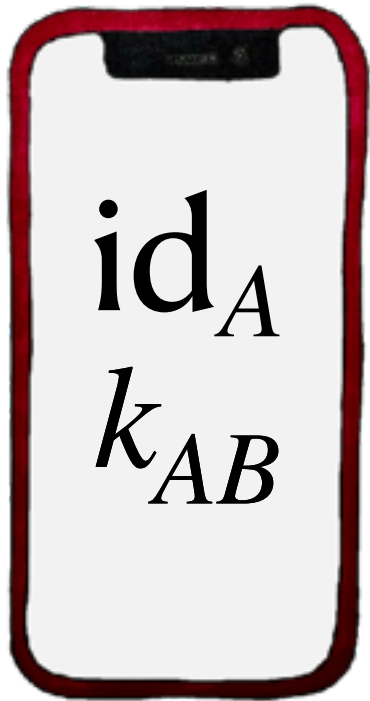


Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

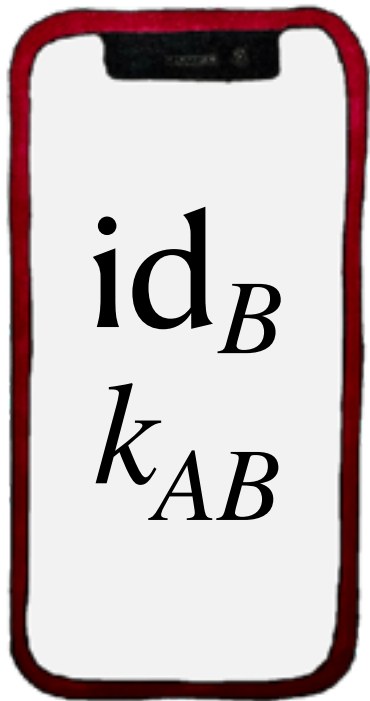
Annotation System



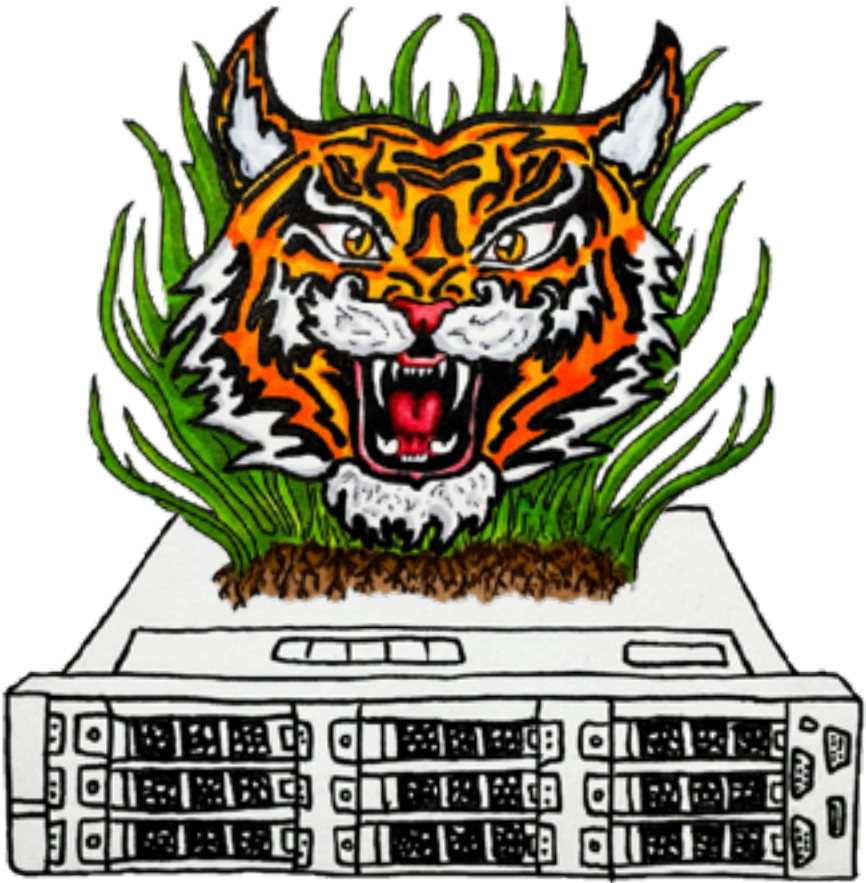
Alice



Bob



Event:
Protest
Organizer:
Eve
 oid_E



Tigro
Server



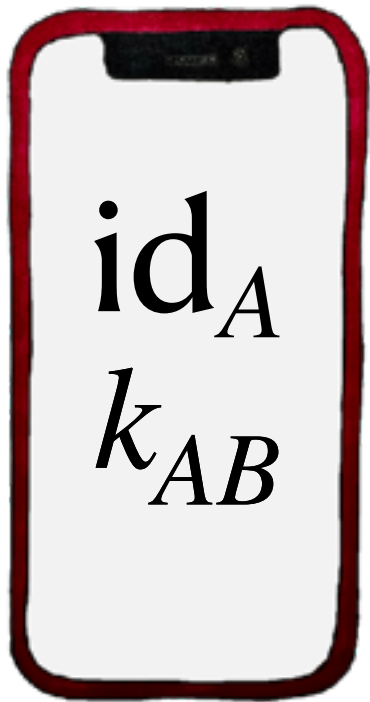
$[oid_E, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

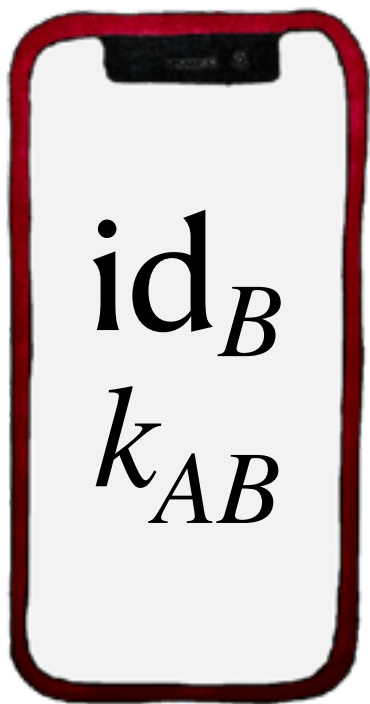
Annotation System



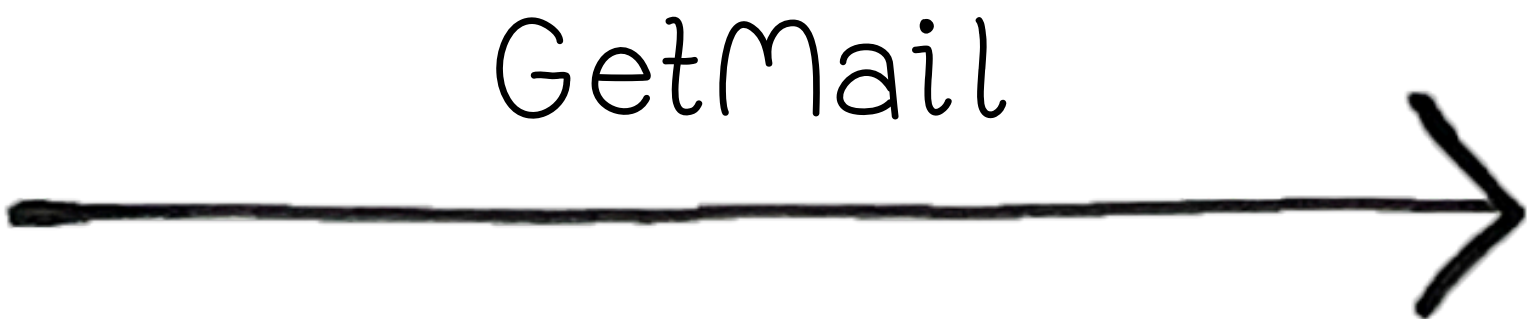
Alice



Bob



Event:
Protest
Organizer:
Eve
 oid_E



Tigro
Server



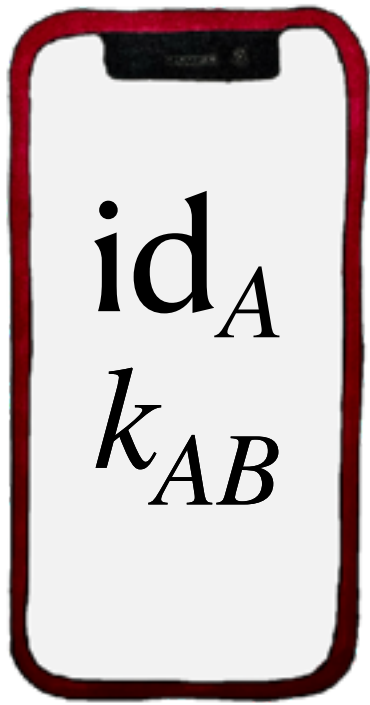
$[oid_E, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

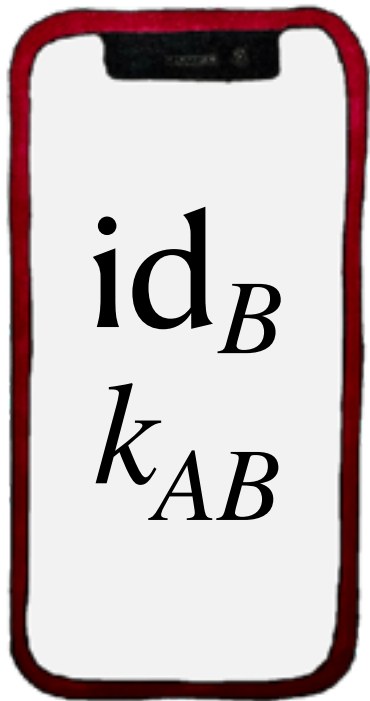
Annotation System



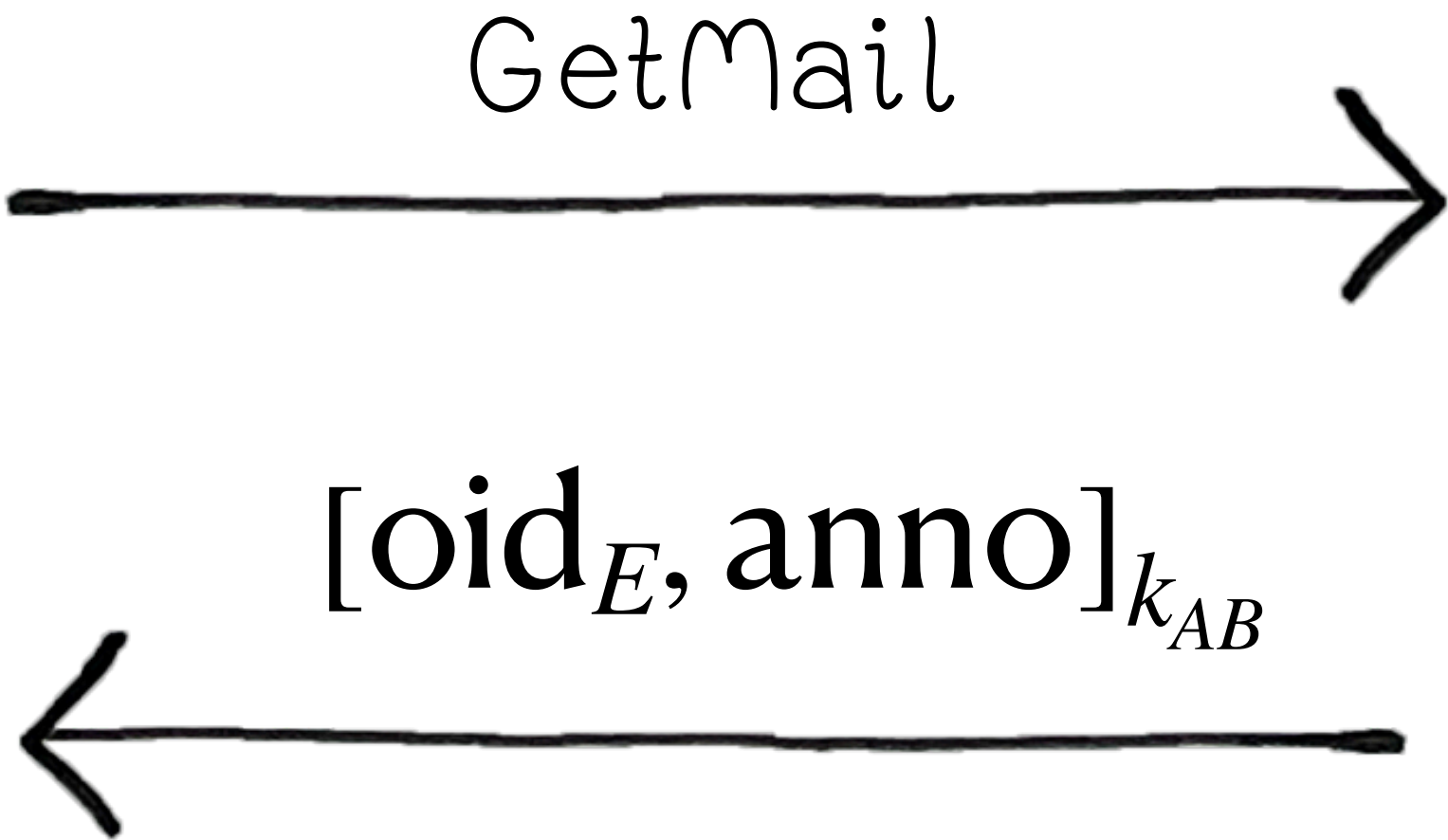
Alice



Bob



Event:
Protest
Organizer:
Eve
 oid_E



Tigro
Server



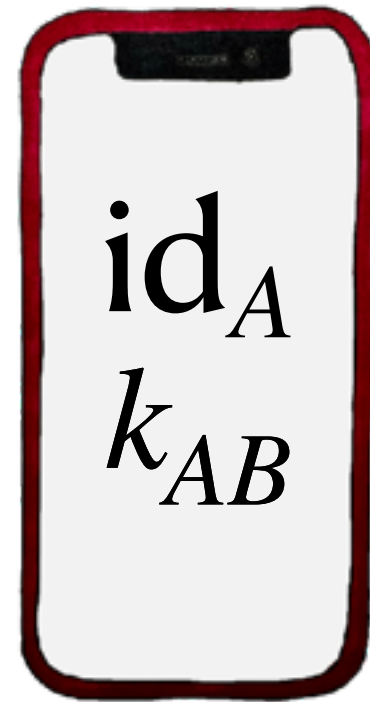
$[oid_E, anno]_{k_{AB}}$

Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

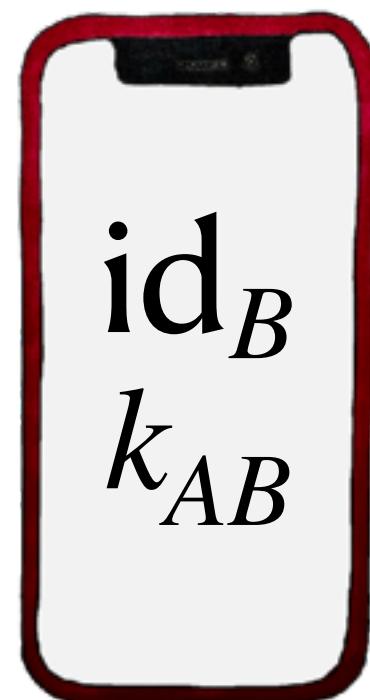
Annotation System



Alice



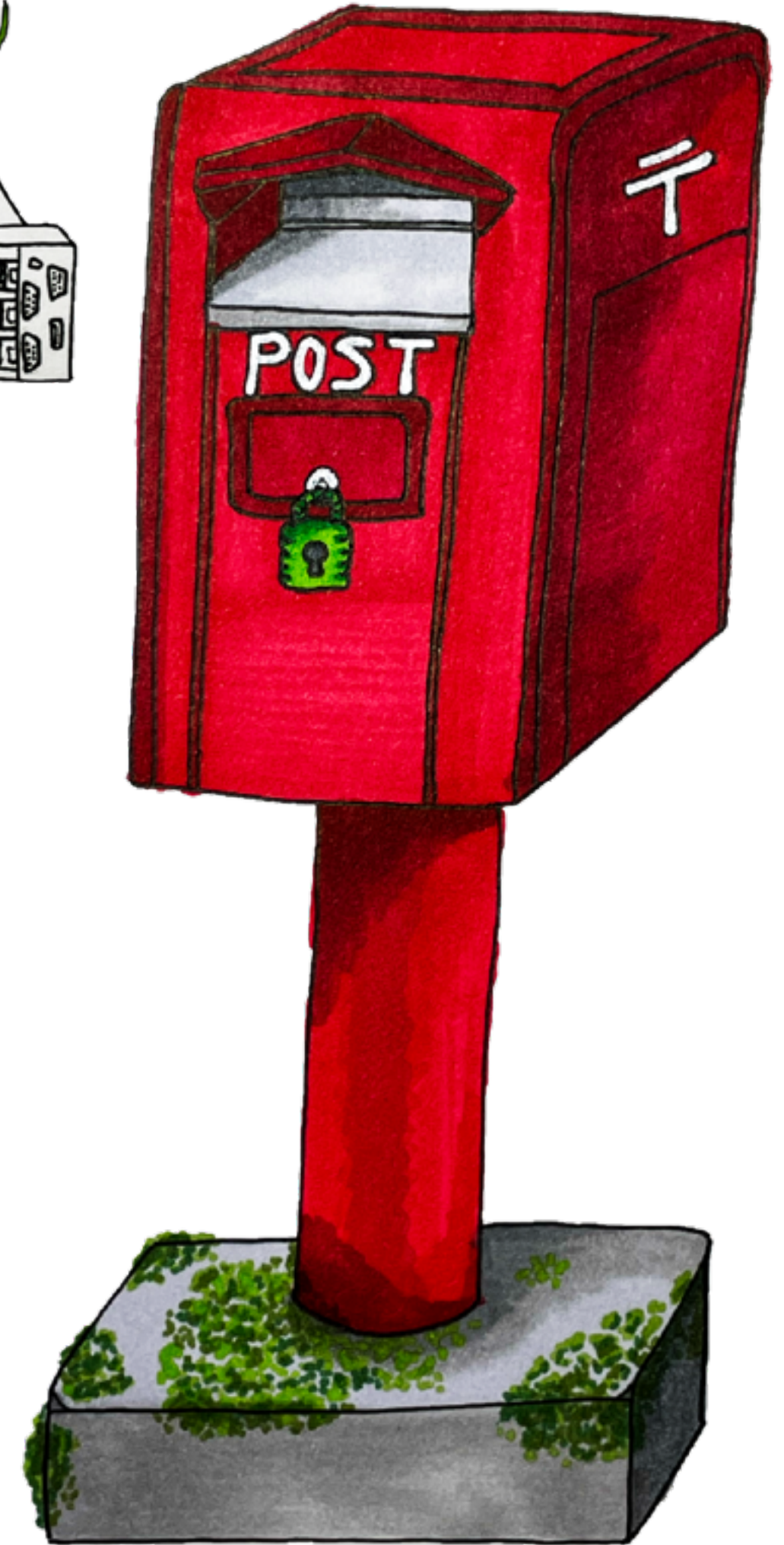
Bob



Alice and Bob
can digitally &
confidentially
share trust
assessments of
any person,
place, or thing.



Tigro
Server



Shared Encrypted
Mailbox (EMB)

Conclusion

“the way in which infrastructure is **designed and implemented** impacts people’s ability to exercise their freedom of assembly and association...

Endangering characteristics should be **mitigated**, or at least **clearly communicated** to the users of these technologies.”

– Internet Protocols and the Human Rights to Freedom of Association and Assembly (draft-irtf-hrpc-association-12)

Conclusion

“Who does [our work] serve?

Who holds power?

Who is trusted?

Who has meaningful choices?”

– Daniel Kahn Gillmor (2023)

Conclusion

“Who does [our work] serve?

Who holds power?

Who is trusted?

Who has meaningful choices?”

– Daniel Kahn Gillmor (2023)

What kind of world do we want to build with our work?

Thank you for listening!

Interested in **getting
involved** in the tigo
project? **Please find me!**

Or, email
**leah_rosenbloom@
brown.edu**



Resources

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