



## Introductory Note by the Editors-in-Chief

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This issue of *kritisk etnografi* – Swedish Journal of Anthropology is a *Varia*, that is, an open invitation to scholars from all disciplines to contribute with papers “that use ethnography critically to discuss topics that have a potential to bring broad audiences into engagement with anthropological perspectives”. We are now happy to present a selection of papers that in different ways make use of ethnography and ethnographic analysis to address a range of different topics in a variety of regions of the world. Through a systematic and creative use of data the authors address theoretical problems, epistemological challenges, and empirical issues.

In her paper, Christina Garsten takes us on a “tour” into the intricacies of think tanks in the USA. In a characteristic anthropological mode, we are introduced to the higher echelons of politics and the systemisation of politics, through personal encounters and participant observations. As readers we get the feeling of how personal aptitude, speeches, texts, and even furniture and architecture, are all brought together to convey, in this case conservative, political messages.

For a long period of over a decade, Anja Karlsson Franck has been following the lives of Burmese labour migrants in the city of George Town (Malaysia). In her paper, she explores the role of humour in the relations she established between herself and the migrants. In their conversations jokes were used to highlight their exposed situation, or to just let off steam and to mock the authorities, as well as to establish and negotiate their relations with the researcher and her research; in this manner, humour and jokes came to be epistemologically “productive” as they brought in nerve and energy into the conversation. As Anja remarks, though humour and jokes are often constitutive in ethnographic fieldwork, yet remain surprisingly undertheorized.

Christina Hansen has a long experience of being an activist and a researcher simultaneously, also working in the same town as she lives. Drawing on these experiences she completed her dissertation “Solidarity in Diversity: Activism as a Pathway of Migrant Emplacement”. In the paper published here, she makes use of the same long-term fieldwork and develops further on ethical and epistemological challenges (and promises), that come with her different roles, and of doing fieldwork “at home”. By reflecting upon how her own and others’ positionality is negotiated, the paper provides transparency on how ethical concerns have impact on research.

In a way Torbjörn Friberg’s paper is the most conceptual piece amongst the papers in this issue, as it starts out with the tension between modernism and primitivism. The paper takes its point of departure in Ghassan Hage’s dialectics of anthropological critique in which he argues that modern ethnographers who encounter ‘primitivist’ worlds become equipped

with potential critical thinking about matters of modernity. Friberg makes the case that today many modern projects are also inspired by (the creativity of) primitivism. How can Anthropology then keep a critical gaze on modernity if we are unable to step outside it into a 'primitive' sphere from where we can contemplate modernity? With the help of ethnography from his work with innovation politics in the Öresund Region, Friberg thoroughly explores these questions and offers some tentative solutions.

Taken together, the papers point to the strength of critical ethnographic analysis where authors reflect upon the production of the material as well as the ethnography, both as a means for analysis and as a method. They also show the potential breadth and depth of ethnography. The approach is not bound to any place, time, or any specific theoretical framework. It is a tool equally apt to describe and explore specific settings as well as theorize these settings in relation to broader contexts, be they socio-political, epistemological, ethical, and/or theoretical.

The Bricolage section is used to give room to texts, papers, and reports that fall slightly outside the theme of a special issue. This time the space is allotted to an article by William (Bill) Arens who passed away in 2019. Bill was an honorary doctor at Gothenburg University and worked closely for several years along with the Department of Anthropology. The text published in the Bricolage section was discovered after his demise and graciously offered to us by his wife Diana Antos Arens. The text has not been published before. It is written in Bill's characteristic way of being professional, serious, and humoristic at the same time. He talks about his experiences of being an American in Sweden in the paper, but more importantly the paper discusses images of Sweden that have circulated for decades, even centuries. As Sweden has once again surfaced during the Covid-19 pandemic, in international (and especially North American) press as either a worst-case scenario, or for others, the only sane voice in crazy times, we found Bill's article profoundly and surprisingly relevant and timely in its scope. Associate Professor Ulla-Britt Engelbrektsson who was a dear friend of Bill, has been kind enough to write an introductory text note in memory of Bill.

Since the journal was launched in August 2018 with the inaugural issue that dealt with "The Public Presence of Anthropology" (Vol 1, No 1, 2018) and developed around Didier Fassin's Vega Symposium in 2016, we have worked hard to consolidate the journal's publication and dissemination. The second issue, which was also a double issue, was themed "Comparative Municipal Ethnographies" (Vol 2, No 1-2, 2019) focused on the anthropology of local politics across the world. The first issue of 2020 inquired into "The Anthropology of Wellbeing in Troubled Times" (Vol 3, No 1, 2020), and was developed around Paul Stoller's 2013 Vega Symposium. The issue before this one focused on ethnographic practices in applied contexts, "Putting Swedish Anthropology to Work" (Vol 3, No 2, 2020). Two issues will be published in 2021; the first one being this, the *Varia* issue, and the second, currently in press, explores "The Social Life of Water" with Professor Karsten Pearregaard and Professor Paula Uimonen as guest editors.

As Editors-in-Chief of *kritisk etnografi* – Swedish Journal of Anthropology we would like to emphasise that we welcome suggestions and proposals, papers, and shorter pieces from colleagues at Swedish universities and beyond.

Spread the word! Aux plumes! Fatta pennan!