kritisk etnografi

SWEDISH JOURNAL OF ANTHROPOLOGY **2023, 6(1)**

ISSN: 2003-1173

kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology

About

kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology is owned and published by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (*Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi*). The journal is peer-reviewed, online, and publishes original research articles, as well as reports from Swedish anthropological community. *kritisk etnografi* aims to foster responsible scholarship with global scope, local relevance and public engagement.

Websites

www.ssag.se | www.kritisketnografi.se

Design, layout and typesetting

Christoffer Järn, Kph Print AB

Address

kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
c/o Prof. Sten Hagberg
Dept. of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology
Thunbergsvägen 3H,
PO Box 631
SE-751 26 Uppsala
Sweden

Email

editors@kritisketnografi.se

URN

http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497380

ISBN

978-91-88929-33-4

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Introductory Note by the Editors-in-Chief

Sten Hagberg | Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University
Jörgen Hellman | Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Gothenburg

The thematic focus of this issue of *kritisk etnografi* – Swedish Journal of Anthropology, is the future of diversity. It is composed of papers presented at the 2022 Vega Symposium that awarded Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen with SSAG's Medal in Gold. Eriksen's article is a fascinating journey; starting from Alta in Norway in 1979 to today's agendas, the author aligning his argument to the fact that the widespread belief in global homogenisation can be misleading. It is important to retain an interest in new, emerging, or formerly unmarked forms of diversity as well. Such an interest in diversity, Eriksen recommends, could well be developed and applied in the spirit of the intellectual quest that has animated anthropology for generations. Alf Hornborg embarks on a different track, reflecting upon the homogenisation of diversity. He argues that the global loss of biological diversity is not only paralleled by the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity, but also related to it in complex ways. The propensity toward abstraction and decontextualisation – fundamental to modernity – is epitomised in the artifact of all-purpose money. The peculiar semiotic properties of the money artifact continue to undermine both the cultural and biological diversity of the biosphere from which it emerged. Veronica Strang looks into the potential for creating new constellations of human/non-human relations in river catchment areas. It draws on ethnographic research in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK, and engages with current debates about human and non-human rights in relation to water. With a stronger focus on equality and diversity, Strang suggests, we can move toward more sustainable practices in interhuman and interspecies relations and address the major challenges of the current environmental crisis. The article by Paige West, encourages us to think about the future of multiple forms of diversity, and what is happening to that diversity today in the face of mass extinctions, climate change, and mass dispossessions tied to extraordinary capital accumulation by global elites. West and her colleagues in Papua New Guinea aim to foster Indigenous self-determination with regard to socio-spiritual-ecological relations during a time of overheating. Their work foregrounds the desires for system longevity decided upon by local people, and together we try to do what we can to make lives better while we still can.

In the Bricolage-section, Sten Hagberg explores the interaction between street level struggle and social media activism by looking at the 2014 popular insurrection and the 2015 resistance against the coup in Burkina Faso. By looking at memory making and memory marketing, his analysis throws light upon the way in which images and video-clips shared online by the Burkinabe people soon came to constitute grassroots representations of the "new Burkina Faso."

Contact: Sten Hagberg ✉ sten.hagberg@antro.uu.se • Jörgen Hellman ✉ jorgen.hellman@globalstudies.gu.se

Ulf Hannerz contributes to the Perspectives-section with a critical overview of Swedish anthropology as it was prior to 1960, mostly under the label "general and comparative ethnography." He identifies the major scholars and discusses some more important publications. There is a certain emphasis on the weakness of contacts within and between academic centers. This article may well become a mandatory piece for anthropological education in Swedish universities.

Our journal *kritisk etnografi* is an independent journal run by researchers, and as such, it presents a tangible alternative to the business model of commercial publishers. 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) developed around Didier Fassin's 2016 Vega Symposium, we have worked hard to consolidate the journal's publication and dissemination. The second issue, which was a double issue, was themed "Comparative Municipal Ethnographies" (Vol 2, No 1-2, 2019), edited by Sten Hagberg, and 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 second issue of 2020 focused on ethnographic practices in applied contexts, "Putting Swedish Anthropology to Work" (Vol 3, No 2, 2020), guest edited by Lisa Åkesson and Maris Gillette. Two issues were published in 2021. The first one was a Varia issue, and the second explored "The Social Life of Water" with Karsten Pearregaard and Paula Uimonen as guest editors. The double issue of 2022, with guest editors Maris Gillette and Cristina Grasseni, asked the question: Is Europe skilling for sustainable food? The question was addressed in a handful of articles and also in a report on the *Food Citizen?*-project.

As Editors-in-Chief of *kritisk etnografi* – Swedish Journal of Anthropology, we would like to emphasise that we welcome proposals for thematic issues, individual papers, and shorter pieces from colleagues at Swedish universities and beyond. And to recall, *kritisk etnografi* is a scientific peer-reviewed open access journal, free of any charges, published by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (SSAG).

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The Future of Diversity

kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
VOL. 6, NO. 1
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497381

Threats to diversity in the shadow of Anthropocene overheating: A biosemiotic perspective[1]

Thomas Hylland Eriksen | Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo

ABSTRACT: There is currently a growing concern with the ways in which globalisation leads to a reduction in diversity. Biodiversity is declining in many areas, and the standardising forces of states and markets lead to perceptible cultural loss. This effect is evident not least in the accelerated disappearance of languages in our century. Moreover, biocultural worlds comprising people living with their environments in sustainable ways are threatened by infrastructural developments, the marginalisation of indigenous groups, and other standardising processes. At the same time, many scholars have argued that the increased mobility and communication entailed by global modernity creates a plethora of new forms of diversity in the realm of culture. Some biologists similarly argue that introduced species may lead to ecological diversification rather than simplification. For more than a century, anthropologists have warned about the obliteration of 'traditional cultures' owing to the spread of modernity, while the concern with reduced biodiversity is no less urgent. These questions, which are as old as modernity itself, deserve to be raised in a new way. By exploring parallels and similarities, but also differences between the two forms of homogenisation, which are largely due to the same causes, new theoretical perspectives may emerge. In addition, the very assumption of reduced diversity needs to be examined critically. Perhaps the widespread belief in global homogenisation – terms such as the Homogenocene and the Plantationocene have been suggested to supplement the Anthropocene – can be misleading. It is therefore important to retain an interest in new, emerging or formerly unmarked forms of diversity as well, in the spirit of the intellectual quest which has animated anthropology for generations, that is the study of the relationship between similarity and difference.

Keywords: Biodiversity, cultural diversity, homogenisation, globalisation, Indigenous peoples

Preamble: Alta, Norway, 1979

As early as the 1960s, the Norwegian state laid down plans to dam the Alta river in Finnmark country, in the far north of the country, in order to build a hydroelectric plant. The main political parties in the county were favourable to the plans, which signalled a desire to contribute to economic growth in the region, but resistance was perceptible and vocal from the beginning. Sámi organisations, in particular, were concerned that the damming of the

[1] This is a revised and expanded version of the Vega Lecture, given at Stockholm University on 25 April 2022. I am humbled and grateful to have received the Vega Medal and would like to express my gratitude to the Swedish Society of Anthropology and Geography for the honour and the wonderful hospitality making the day a memorable one. I am also grateful to my colleagues Paige West, Alf Hornborg, and Veronica Strang for their stimulating and not least diverse contributions to the symposium.

Contact: Thomas Hylland Eriksen ✉t.h.eriksen@sai.uio.no

river would disturb the annual reindeer migrations and salmon fishing, both of which were significant elements of the traditional livelihood among the indigenous people. In 1978, the Popular Movement against Development of the Alta-Kautokeino River (*Folkeaksjonen mot utbygging av Alta–Kautokeino-vassdraget*) was founded in the town of Alta. In the following year, the Movement announced that it was prepared to engage in civil disobedience in a bid to thwart the plans of the insensitive Labour government in distant Oslo.

The resistance against the dam reached a climax in the autumn of 1979, when Sámi activists organised a much-publicised hunger strike in front of the parliament building in Oslo. Thousands of demonstrators gathered at a billabong called Stilla along the river, some chaining themselves together to make their removal by the police difficult (they were collectively known as *lenkegjengen*, the chain gang). Many were locals, a fair number of them Sámi; but there was also an important contingent of environmentalists from other parts of the country and internationally.

I shared the environmental engagement of the activists and would have gone to Alta if it had been practically possible. But I was just 17 and in my last year of school. Instead of making the long trip north, I co-organised a local demonstration of support in my hometown, painting banners and producing leaflets on a mimeograph machine. We were not arrested, and the march through the small, conservative coastal city could not by any stretch be described as a baptism of fire, but it was nonetheless a formative experience. It has later occurred to me that my recent and current work on the destructive consequences of overheated globalisation could be seen as a continuation of my early engagement in this conflict. It would take many detours to reach this point – for years, I did research on ethnicity in Mauritius and Trinidad, migration in Oslo and creolisation everywhere – but with hindsight, the continuity can easily be traced.

In spite of several years of resistance from the Movement and other elements of civil society, the state and its hydroelectric company NVE (*Norges Vassdrags- og Elektrisitetsverk*) finally had its way. The dam and the power station were built. It might seem, thus, that the battle was lost. However, the Alta conflict was, retrospectively, a victory in disguise, marking a watershed in Indigenous politics in Norway, with repercussions in the Arctic and beyond. Transnational alliances were strengthened during the conflict, not least with Indigenous peoples in Canada and Sámi in neighbouring Sweden and Finland, and there was considerable international media attention to the affair, largely sympathetic to the plight of the Sámi. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, questions concerning Sámi self-determination were raised with some success, and schoolchildren were eventually taught the history of oppression and internal imperialism, much as American pupils were taught about the transgressions of settler colonialists towards Native Americans. The old policy of Norwegianisation was critically interrogated and in some respects abandoned. North Sámi, the largest of the languages, was recognised in school and public administration. In 1989, a Sámi parliament – with admittedly restricted powers – was inaugurated by King Olav V, who took the opportunity to apologise to the Sámi people for past injustices. North Sámi is now an official administrative language in seven municipalities in Finnmark and Troms counties.

Looking back at the Alta conflict after more than four decades, one cannot help being struck by the fact that it raised issues which were marginal at the time, politically as well as academically, but which are now addressed with great urgency and engagement, not least

in anthropology.

The central issue concerned Indigenous rights to land and self-determination. Awareness of the consequences of stateless peoples' enforced integration into the state became more widespread beyond the academic and activist spheres. A study of Indigenous perspectives on the conflict, cleverly titled *Dam a River, Damn a People?* was written by the anthropologist Robert Paine (1982); a more comprehensive analysis of the political process was Trond Thuen's *Quest for Equity* (1994).

Scalar clashes between local communities and the nation-state were also at the forefront of the controversy. Decisions taken in distant Oslo had profound consequences for communities in Finnmark, raising issues regarding democratic participation and levels of political integration, but the affair was also a poignant reminder of the map/territory problem, later analysed in Scott's influential *Seeing Like A State* (Scott 1998).

A third family of issues, important not least to non-Sámi environmentalists, concerned technocratic rule versus ecological conservation as guiding values. In the present era of climate change and rampant environmental destruction, these questions are arguably more relevant than at the time of this conflict.

Finally, the concept of biocultural diversity was used by Sámi intellectuals to indicate the dangers of applying a clunky Cartesian dualism. Eventually, this concept slowly trickled into the vocabulary of the UN system in the 1990s and has later become a focal point for NGOs such as Terralingua (Maffi and Woodley 2012), although conventions on biodiversity continue to separate nature and culture. Sámi herders and others pointed out that their relationship to their surroundings were qualitatively different from the logic of domination typical of the modern state and capitalism. By invoking cultural values, they also hinted at the existence of a cosmological difference between Sámi and mainstream Norwegian society. These issues have stimulated much anthropological theorising and ethnographies in recent decades, while the political impact has been limited. At COP16 on biodiversity, one of the proposals consists in fencing off ten, 20 or 30 per cent of 'nature' in order to allow its recovery. This way of reasoning represents the exact opposite of a contextual, holistic approach shared by anthropologists and scholars in the humanities.

It may also be appropriate, before we proceed, to point out that several of those who engaged in civil disobedience in Alta were respected university academics. Nils Christie (1928–2015) was a well-known professor of criminology, and the philosopher Arne Naess (1912–2009), would later become internationally recognised as the founder of deep ecology. Both were excellent scholars, but also politically engaged citizens. Perhaps it can be said that all outstanding research has an existential dimension in that something important is at stake for the researcher on a personal level, which could be a moral or political engagement or just relentless curiosity. This may explain why so much of the most exciting anthropological research in the 21st century is framed within the context of environmental destruction and climate change, that is Anthropocene effects.

21st century: Anthropocene effects as a game-changer

It is far from obvious that social anthropologists should be engaged in research on Anthropocene effects. After all, the very term *anthropology* signals a focus on *anthropos*, the human being. It forms part of the *social sciences*, the study of human social life, social organisations, and institutions, and it also dips its feet ever so often into the warm waters

of *humanities*. It is therefore a matter of some interest that the growth in anthropological research dealing with the interface between humanity and the rest of nature has been massive since the turn of the millennium.

Throughout the 20th century, environmental anthropology existed, but it was never a central mainstream concern in the discipline. The human *Umwelt* – the ecological environment – usually entered anthropological research in the guise of material resources used in human society or as ritual or totemic symbols, not as a subject of study in its own right. This stands to reason, in so far as anthropologists are trained to study humans, not insects or lichen. At the same time, a major intellectual challenge in the discipline in the present century, reflected in the current explosion of ecologically informed anthropological research, consists of attempts to expand the discipline in order to reconceptualise humanity as an integral part of the biosphere.

The explanation of this shift is easy to discern. Anthropology has always been informed and inspired by events and current concerns – for recent examples, it can be mentioned that the Covid-19 pandemic (from 2020) and the Syrian refugee crisis (from 2015) rapidly led to research endeavours and a flurry of publications. The considerable interest in ethnicity and nationalism in the latter decades of the slightly slower 20th century was similarly a result of the very perceptible shift from class politics to identity politics across the world. A decade or two earlier, feminism produced a heightened and lasting awareness of gender, and historical processes such as the marginalisation of Indigenous groups and the aftermath of the Second World War, giving birth to decolonisation, the civil rights movement, and the Cold War, stimulated important work among anthropologists keen to understand not only what it entails to be human, but also how the individual life-world is shaped by large-scale events in the outside world, often ultimately motivated by a desire to use knowledge to make the world safe for difference, to paraphrase Ruth Benedict (speaking at Franz Boas's funeral) – less unequal and saner for humanity, now encompassing the biosphere.

In this century, the towering concerns are caused by the acceleration of acceleration, global neoliberalism, changes in climate, and threats to the environment. The concept of the Anthropocene is suddenly ubiquitous. The term was originally coined by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and, independently, the late biologist Eugene Stoermer. Crutzen is also the co-author of a much-cited article, co-written with his colleague Will Steffen and the historian John McNeill (Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill 2007) on social aspects of climate change. The current popularity of the concept does not merely signal an increased engagement with climate and the environment, but also a view of human life as being planetary in its entanglements and seamlessly integrated with that of other species. In this shift lies a radical potential for rethinking what anthropologists and other social scientists do, whether we mainly try to understand the world or the human condition. Many of us, whether or not we approve of the term Anthropocene, grapple with this shift, trying to reshape anthropology in order to come to terms with what some speak of as a more-than-human world inhabited mainly by non-humans, or what others would prefer to see as an ecosystem pounded and destabilised by greed, inequality, and capitalist growth. Perhaps post-humanism is an appropriate label.

Although the prophets of doom in the latter half of the 20th century were proven wrong, environmental challenges are now affecting human lives worldwide in such momentous ways that they can no longer be ignored. Changes now take place so fast that

researchers and even journalists find it difficult to keep up the pace. In my own work, I have proposed the term *overheating* to describe the increased rhythm of change since around 1991 (Eriksen 2016). In a simultaneously published book, McNeill and Engelke (2016) speak of 'the great acceleration' since the Second World War, but it would also make sense to talk about an *acceleration of acceleration* since the end of the Cold War around 1991. In the overheating years of the last three decades, world trade has tripled, tourism has quadrupled, and the amount of plastic in the ocean has grown by a factor of five. Scientific papers, gray papers and media tell us every day about the various ways in which environmental destruction has exploded, along with a massive growth in consumption, trade, and mobility, with anthropogenic climate change as the cumulative effect and paradoxical crowning achievement of the present era of overheated globalisation lacking a thermostat or governor, to use the language of cybernetics. The availability of abundant and powerful energy thanks to fossil fuels, a blessing for humanity since the early 19th century, has now become its damnation and our self-inflicted recipe for catastrophe.

Since the early 19th century, humanity has been able to exploit enormous amounts of energy; at first just in the shape of abundant surface-near coal deposits, subsequently through the harnessing of oil and gas for the betterment of humanity. The fossil fuel revolution enabled humanity to support a very high and fast-growing global population with seemingly insatiable desires for consumption. Yet the cost of taking out fossil fuels grows as the low-hanging fruit has been used up. At the same time, production relying on fossil fuels is inherently destructive (Hornborg 2019), in a dual sense since we are simultaneously eating up capital which it has taken the planet millions of years to produce and are undermining the conditions for our own civilisation by altering the climate and ruining the environment on which we rely. The short and the long-term mirror each other, as do the large and the small scale. Coal and its close relatives, the salvation of humanity for two centuries, has become our damnation, and there is no easy way out. The lesson from cultural history may nevertheless be that lean societies, decentralised and flexible, with less bureaucracy than farming, fewer PR people than fishermen, are the most sustainable in the long term. As the archaeologist Joseph Tainter remarks towards the end of his important survey of civilisational collapse: "Complex societies […] are recent in human history. Collapse then is not a fall to some primordial chaos, but a return to the normal human condition of lower complexity" (Tainter 1988: 198). Contemporary human civilisation, with its reliance on growth in production and consumption, is anything but sustainable, no matter how one views it.

Diversity loss

Many of the effects of overheated globalisation can be described as homogenisation, simplification, standardisation, and diversity loss (Eriksen 2021). The parallels between the warnings from biologists about the loss of biodiversity and anthropological advocacy for cultural diversity are striking. In both cases, modernity – or globalisation if you wish – is the key cause of loss. This is a dual track worth pursuing because the main causes of loss in both cases are the same. Additionally, loss of diversity, whether cultural or biological, can be understood as a single phenomenon, resulting in a flatter world with less complexity and fewer options. It nevertheless needs to be kept in mind that it is far more difficult to study the loss of cultural diversity than the loss of biodiversity. The latter can be studied quantitatively, while culture is not easily counted and measured. Laments about the loss of

cultural diversity owing to what we now speak of as the forces of globalisation are older than anthropology itself. As early as 1839, the renowned medical scholar and psychologist James Cowles Prichard gave an address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science; during the address, Prichard spoke of the recent extension of 'the progress of colonisation' and its detrimental effects on local cultures, concluding that:

> A great number of curious problems in physiology, illustrative of the history of the species, and the laws of their propagation, remain as yet imperfectly solved. The psychology of these [native] races has been, but little studied in an enlightened manner; and yet this is wanting in order to complete the history of human nature, and the philosophy of the human mind. How can this be obtained when so many tribes shall have become extinct, and their thoughts shall have perished with them? (Prichard, quoted in Graber 1970: 1293)

Nearly two centuries later, cultural diversity still seems to be thriving. However, we should bear in mind that homogenisation has taken place in important areas even if diversity flourishes elsewhere, as described by Scott (1998) and spoken about somewhat tongue-in-cheek by Geertz (1986), who said, famously, that cultural differences 'will doubtless remain – the French will never eat salted butter. But the good old days of widow burning and cannibalism are gone forever.' (Geertz 1986: 105)

This kind of statement needs to be problematised since diversity cannot easily be measured, and the topic will need more space for a full exploration than afforded in this lecture. It may nevertheless be sobering to consider Ulf Hannerz's reminiscences from his fieldwork in Kafanchan, Nigeria in the 1980s, where he points out that more than 40 years ago:

> the tendency among academics and other intellectuals back in Europe and North America was fairly generally to assume that increasing global interconnectedness would necessarily involve homogenisation, greater uniformity – a loss of a large part of the world's cultural diversity. That had been an ingredient in much modernisation theory prevalent in the mid-twentieth-century social sciences, and it was still there but took on another form in radical critiques of "cultural imperialism" a couple of decades or so later.
>
> […]
>
> But that was not what I saw. Cultural diversity was alive and well, although taking on some new forms. (Hannerz 2022: 3)

As to biological diversity, the verdict in the professional community is more unequivocal. The fear of irretrievable loss, not entirely unlike Prichard's concern, inspired intellectuals and explorers to campaign for the establishment of national parks in the 19th century. Seeing nature not as an adversary to be overcome by civilisation, but rather as a treasure threatened by that very same civilisation, a broad palette of engaged citizens – in the US they included the artist George Catlin, the essayist Henry David Thoreau, the naturalist John Muir and Abraham Lincoln himself – were early conservationists seeing unspoilt nature as inherently valuable, now in need of active protection.

Since the incipient environmentalist movement and the parallel concern among early anthropologists to document 'vanishing cultures,' the visibility of human footprints and global cultural homogenisation have accelerated dramatically. The threats are by now massive and ominous, both with regard to biological and cultural diversity. The main causes are the expansion of state and market forces, and the outcome can be described, in both cases, as a *loss of flexibility*. Whenever an insect species vanishes, or a language loses its last native speaker, the biosphere loses options.

Bateson and biosemiotics

A promising methodology for studying these dual, related, similar processes towards simplification and homogenisation is offered in the emerging field of biosemiotics, which views the biosphere – human as well as non-human – as a *semiosphere*, a system of communication defined by the ongoing, continuous exchange of signs. Biosemiotics offers a way of interpreting and studying nature, culture, and their mutual entanglements by reading the way organisms influence each other through a continuous process of communication, or semiosis.

One of the immediate ancestors of biosemiotics was Gregory Bateson (1904-80). Although he was trained as an anthropologist, Bateson's initial intention had been to become a biologist like his famous father William Bateson. He was converted to anthropology on a train to Cambridge in the company of Alfred Haddon, another natural scientist who had made the shift to anthropology (Lipset 1982). In his *Anthropology and Anthropologists*, Adam Kuper (1996 [1973]) remarks that Bateson did not quite fit into 1930s British anthropology, at the time dominated by the towering figures of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, separated by their opposing views on structure and the individual, but united in their concern with the mechanisms of social integration and indifference to ecology.

Bateson was different, given his consistent interest in relationship, process, and the internal dynamics of living systems (Wardle 1999). He would soon contribute to founding, and also made influential contributed to psychiatry and general systems theory. Among his most powerful concepts are those of schismogenesis (self-reinforcing, usually destructive relationships), flexibility (uncommitted potential for change) and double bind (irresolvable dilemmas resulting from errors in communication). Developing Bertrand Russell's theory of logical types, which states that a class cannot be a member of itself since it is of a different logical type, he wrote about meta-communication among humans and animals. A dog playing with another dog, or with a human for that matter, may display the same kind of aggressive behaviour as a dog intent on attacking and inflicting injury, but by wagging its tail and only pretending to bite, it sends off the meta-message that it is just pretending. In later work on dolphin communication, Bateson similarly looked for logical types and different registers of communicating.

As a contributor to biosemiotics *avant la lettre*, Bateson is essential. In 'Cybernetics of the self' (in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972), he shows that if an alcoholic takes recourse to willpower as a means to stop drinking, he is bound to fail, since the problem is relational and systemic. The alcoholic thus has to give up his erroneous epistemology according to which he is 'the captain of his soul,' accept that he is a part of something larger than himself, dependent and entangled.

Explaining the epistemological difference between individualism and a cybernetic view

of an action, Bateson goes on to write:

> Consider a man felling a tree with an axe. Each stroke of the axe is modified or corrected, according to the shape of the cut face of the tree left by the previous stroke. This self-corrective (i.e., mental) process is brought about by a total system, tree-eyes-brain-muscles-axe-stroke-tree; and it is this total system that has the characteristics of immanent mind.
>
> More correctly, we should spell the matter out as: (differences in tree)– (differences in retina)– (differences in brain)– (differences in muscles)– (differences in movement of axe)– (differences in tree), etc. What is transmitted around the circuit is transforms of differences. And, as noted above, a difference which makes a difference in an idea or unit of information.
>
> But this is not how the average Occidental sees the event-sequence of tree-felling. He says, "I cut down the tree" and he even believes that there is a delimited agent, the "self," which performed a delimited "purposive" action upon a delimited object. (Bateson 1972: 444–5)

Through his refusal to distinguish between the material and the immaterial (the tree and the axe belong to the same system of signification as the man's intentions), Bateson successfully transcended Cartesian dualism, and would later inspire Deleuze and Guattari to develop the concept of the assemblage. This radical move, familiar to Batesonians and biosemioticians, could have important implications for methodology in an anthropology determined to move beyond mere *anthropos* as its empirical focus.

The Batesonian concept of mind, expounded in *Mind and Nature* (1979), is a necessary condition for this endeavour to be possible: Mind does not end at the skin, but is a property of the living systems of which you and I form part. The fiction of the bounded individual with their exclusive, limited mind can be challenged from many directions, not all of them ecological. Medical scholars may point to our reliance on the human microbiota, the millions of bacteria existing in a symbiotic relationship with the human organism, while cognitive scientists have shown that most of what people think they know is in fact collective knowledge, most of which exists outside our individual minds (Sloman and Fernbach 2017). No individual has adequate knowledge of the 30,000 parts that make up a Toyota car, and yet these cars are assembled without a fault every day on the assembly lines in the vast factories of Toyota City. Pierce argued against Cartesian dualism and the atomistic *cogito* in the latter decades of the 19th century, showing that systems of signification were by definition shared and relational, with profound implications for ideas of personhood and mind.

Although it is rarely applied to contemporary issues, biosemiotics may illuminate some fundamental, and disconcerting, aspects of the high-speed contemporary world. Jesper Hoffmeyer (1942–2019) offers some useful concepts. Hoffmeyer was inspired by the philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce, the founder of semiotics, and by Bateson. He had a degree in biochemistry, worked as a biologist at the University of Copenhagen, and collaborated with philosophers, literary scholars, and social scientists. His first book in English, *Signs of Meaning in the Universe* (Hoffmeyer 1997; see Hoffmeyer 2009 for an academic study based on his doctoral dissertation), explains biosemiotics as a scientific approach to living

systems which interprets relations in nature as systems of signs. The method is the same as that employed by Umberto Eco in his essay about the blue jeans as a semiotic powerhouse brimming with signs, some directed at the surroundings, some communicating – in unpleasant ways – with his body parts. After reading Eco, it is impossible to see a pair of jeans as a mere item of clothing; and having read Hoffmeyer, you can no longer look at an ordinary shrub without being alert to the insects, the undergrowth and the structure of its twigs and leaves.

Biosemiotics does not reject Darwinian evolutionism, but studies communication and connections rather than competition and struggle. When a fox becomes aware of a hare in the vicinity, its reaction and eventual attack forms part of a semiotic chain which also includes the flight of the hare and cues given by the physical environment, such as hiding places. Hoffmeyer proposes the term *semiotic scaffolding* to indicate how the surroundings provide incentives and constraints to the communicating creature. In the same way as intellectual input from unexpected quarters give us the possibility to think differently, an organism – be it a slug or a chimpanzee – may flourish or wither depending on the options provided by its surroundings.

In one of his most authoritative statements, Hoffmeyer said: *Semiotic freedom may in fact be singled out as the only parameter that beyond any doubt has exhibited an increasing tendency throughout the evolutionary process.* What did he mean by that?

Semiotic freedom

Every organism has a certain degree of semiotic freedom, meaning the ability to do something differently. A plant could stretch toward the sunlight or direct its roots to the most nutritious and well-watered soil, or it could respond differently to signs in its surroundings. Non-vertebrates, Hoffmeyer assumes, act mainly on the basis of instinct, and therefore the term 'gift,' implying intentionality or at least consciousness, is misleading when used about insects and their mating practices. Vertebrates, and especially mammals, are forced to take decisions at the spur of a moment; whether to pounce or wait, fight or flee, go right or left. Their capabilities are shared throughout the species, but do not give detailed instructions as to how to act in a given situation. In this sense, antelopes and cats are like you and me, but of course, nothing is quite the same as anything else, and an interspecies comparison reveals an uneven distribution of semiotic freedom. The ability of metacommunication is more easily observed in apes and dogs than in sheep and crocodiles; and even the alleged 'chimpanzee genius' Nim Chimpsky developed a vocabulary of maximum 125 words, less than an average human one-year old. So, differences that make a difference exist, but mind, in Bateson's sense in *Mind and Nature*, is distributive. Organisms do not stop at the skin, but at the frontier of their *Umwelt*, to use a concept from another precursor to biosemiotics, namely the ethologist Jakob von Uexküll (see Schroer 2021).

A dog can play with its owner and pretend to bite her; in other words, it is capable of meta-communication by placing its actions in scare quotes, as it were, signalling that 'hey, look, this is play, I'm only joking.' The relationship between humans and dogs releases greater semiotic freedom – more alternatives, more flexibility, more depth or nuance in meaning – than the relationship between a pine tree and the blueberry bushes growing beneath it, although an exchange of signs takes place in the latter case as well. By drawing on this kind of relationships, Hoffmeyer describes an evolutionary process toward ever

greater complexity: more communication, more relationships, a denser forest of signs communicating ever more content at several logical levels. This development is an outcome of specialisation, which in turn is a result of the need to find vacant niches in ecosystems which are becoming increasingly crowded. In the realm of culture, the enormous variation in language, customs, technologies, cosmology, and kinship which can still be witnessed today is the outcome of a process of gradual cultural differentiation which began soon after the emergence of anatomically modern humans about two hundred thousand years ago.

Biosemiotics makes it possible to erase the conventional distinctions between mind and matter, humans and animals, and the conscious and the non-conscious, dualisms which have characterised Western thought for centuries. What matters is that which takes place *between* entities, not *within* them. It is possible to study any form of life, from the mycorrhiza networks connecting fungi and plants to a philosophical treatise, using the same toolbox. This is not an option to be ignored at this historical juncture, when Anthropocene effects are transforming life on the planet, human and non-human alike, at an astonishing speed.

When Hoffmeyer claimed that there had been an increase in semiotic freedom throughout the evolutionary process, he meant that there is more semiosis, more communication, more complexity in the natural world than ever, notwithstanding its temporary reduction owing to intermittent mass extinctions in the distant past.

The urgent question concerns whether the process towards greater overall semiotic freedom continues, or if the homogenising forces of globalisation currently, lead to its reduction.

Until the present, there has been an overall increase in complexity, flexibility, and semiotic freedom both in the ecological and the cultural domains. This process is currently being reversed owing to the homogenising forces of globalisation in both domains and their permutations. A relevant empirical field in this regard is arguably the growth, change and homogenisation of food systems. Food is perhaps especially relevant in this context, in so far as it contains elements of both culture and nature; eating can be seen as the transformation of something natural into something cultural.

Food systems and flexibility

Recall Bateson's (1972) definition of flexibility as uncommitted potential for change. Of 350,000 globally identified plant species, 7,000 have been used by humans as food, and people have eaten (or tried to eat) parts of many thousand more. In the Anthropocene today, 75 per cent of the food eaten by human beings is composed of just 12 crops and five animal species. Should one or two of them fail, the outcome may well be crisis or famine. Had we instead distributed investment more broadly and evenly, the risk would be less. A peasant who grows a bit of maize, some legumes and some tubers has more options in the long term than one who has shifted to dependence on a single crop for cash, subsistence or both.

There are more than 4,000 kinds of potato in the Andes, but only a minuscule proportion of the total number of varieties is grown on a large scale. The 1845–49 Irish famine, the result of a devastating potato blight, reduced the Irish population by 25 per cent through starvation and migration, and in the following decades, another million left the island. At this time, the Irish, who had shifted recently to monocrop cultivation of that New World tuber, grew just one kind of potato, the Irish Lumper. Had there been a greater diversity of types, some would likely have been resistant to the fungus; and had the Irish

been less dependent on the potato as a staple, their food system would also have been more flexible. Through an ironic twist of fate, the highest mortality rates occurred in areas where Gaelic was widely spoken. In other words, a lack of diversity in one domain led to reduced diversity in another.

The banana crises of the last century are structurally comparable to the Irish potato blight, although people deprived of bananas naturally do not usually starve to death, and the banana crises also differ in being global in compass and consequences (Lakhani et al. 2022). The most popular banana variety in the early 20th century was called Gros Michel. Developed through many years of trial and error, refinement, and experimentation, it was well suitable as an export article. Its taste was mild and sweet, it could be ripened on board ship, and came with its own robust wrapping. Thanks to Gros Michel and the new refrigeration technology, the banana republic became a possibility since exports from Central America to the United States grew exponentially. United Fruit Company could for decades control Central American countries such as Guatemala through indirect rule.

Eventually, Gros Michel was confronted by the same problem as the Irish potato fields. When one plant (technically an herb) was attacked by the lethal fungal infection known as Panama 1 (*fusarium oxysporum*), the fungus could easily spread to other plants, which were genetically identical. Panama 1 began to wreak havoc on banana plantations worldwide in the early 20th century, and by 1960, Gros Michel had practically gone extinct.

Rather than opting for greater diversity, the global banana industry made the same mistake again, by replacing the dying Gros Michel cultivar by the Cavendish banana, also an attractive and easily marketable variety. However, in recent years, the fungal infection known as Panama 4 has begun to kill off Cavendish plants. Monoculture creates vulnerability by reducing flexibility.

This kind of standardisation characterises the global food industry and is not chiefly the domain of bananas or potatoes. There exist many varieties of avocado, but the one you buy in the shop is likely to be of the Hass kind, developed through creative crossbreeding by the mailman and part-time gardener Rudolf Hass in the 1920s. Nearly all vanilla – 80 per cent of it grown in Madagascar – originates from a single Mexican variety.

In general, people eat more grains and less legumes than we did a couple of centuries ago. There are exceptions, the most significant being the soybean, which was confined to its native East Asian habitat for centuries. In our time, the soybean is widely perceived as an environmental ruffian on a par with the oil palm. A great deal of forest in Brazil and elsewhere has been cleared to grow soy, usually to feed cattle, salmon, and other domesticated animals later to be eaten by humans. Soy products are also popular among humans, ranging from the ubiquitous Kikkoman sauce (as common in Hatfield as it is in Hartford) to tofu, miso, margarine, and ice cream.

The expansion of soy is a key to understanding the conditions for the phenomenal growth in meat production in the contemporary world. The bean is rich in protein and easy to produce on an industrial scale. After the soybean expansion, which began in the 1960s but has taken off exponentially in the present century (Song et al. 2021), the porcine population of the world has doubled (to a billion), while the poultry population has increased sixfold (to more than 22 billion).

As is the case with the banana, the avocado, and the potato, the genetic variety of the soybean is limited, and its main consumers also display a dramatically reduced variation. At

the time when Cincinnati was the pork capital of the USA in the mid 19th century, a great diversity of pigs could be observed in its streets, farms, and slaughterhouses (Blanchette 2020). By now, the vast majority of pigs worldwide belong to the Large White race, whether they are produced in a Danish factory or a Chinese one. The very large, and growing, number of chickens now mostly belong to one of three varieties (Saladino 2021). More than 95 per cent of the cattle in the USA, moreover, belong to the Holstein race, a highly productive and docile breed which can be traced back to a handful of bulls.

Diversity creates resilience, and as every stockbroker knows, it is very risky to place all your eggs in one basket. The simplification and standardisation affects both nature and culture. The message from biosemiotics and ecology is that this standardisation is impoverishing and dangerous in removing diversity and reducing flexibility.

Genetic diversity in food crops has been reduced deliberately for the sake of increased productivity. Millions of lives have been saved in this way, and the Green Revolution, begun in earnest in the 1960s, enabled a fast global population growth with no accompanying mass famines. The unintentional side-effect is, nevertheless, a severe reduction in diversity. The homogenised, factory-like efficiency of the plantation is economically profitable and can be a blessing for the poor, at least in the short term, but it has ecological side-effects, known and unknown, as well as reducing the range of options for the future. Regarding culture and language, one may well claim that if everybody learns English, we can all communicate with each other, but there will also be a number of things that will forever remain unsaid. Language is being platformised like the ecosystem of the monocrop plantation. The linguistic equivalents of the rainforest ecosystem are forced into oblivion when language evolves along the same lines as the plantation.

* * *

As I noted at the beginning of this lecture, laments about the loss of cultural diversity have long been common among Europeans, often under the influence of Romantic yearnings for pre-modern authenticity. Sometimes, Indigenous and other 'exotic' peoples have been paraded, literally or in writing, as precious specimens from a human zoo or a reservation, effectively being denied the possibility to engage with modernity, to soil their authenticity with creolising influences and foreign languages, to get a haircut, an education and an office job. They have often been taken hostage to the self-contempt of uprooted, urban, alienated dreamers. Yet this valid objection should not detract from the lived realities of autonomy loss and reduced flexibility, both for people affected – which, ultimately, are most people on the planet – and for the global semiosphere. The loss is indisputable, both as regards biodiversity and cultural diversity.

Biosemioticians often see themselves as a countercultural force by rejecting Cartesian dualism, liberal individualism and the ethos of competition which permeates Darwinism in most of its interpretations. Yet, support for a systemic, holistic, relational, processual view defending complexity and diversity may sometimes come from unexpected quarters. *The Origin of Species* (Darwin 1859) is frequently seen as a celebration of competitive individualism or, somewhat uncharitably, an admittedly unconscious ideological defence of libertarian capitalism. However, another reading of the book is possible. To me, the main message from *Origin* is not that competition overrules cooperation, or that the unit of

selection is by necessity the individual, but rather an ecological, holistic view of life. In the final paragraph of *Origin*, the great Victorian biologist emphasises that the most important implication of his theory is that all life is interconnected:

> There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (Darwin 1859: 490)

Earlier in the book, Darwin has devoted many pages and a great deal of enthusiasm to the wonders of the geometrically perfect beehive and the conundrum of the sterile working-ant. Although he framed his findings in the language of mid 19th century English liberalism, emphasising competition rather than complementarity, the first edition of *Origin* is not a story about progress, but about shared origins and the way in which all life is ultimately one.

If the default outcome of accelerated, overheated globalisation is an impoverished, inflexible, upscaled, and ultimately dangerous monocultural world, Darwin's vision may in fact be enlisted in support of the opposition. Like the biosemioticians, his view was relational and processual, and appreciated not only the 'grandeur' of the outcomes of the evolutionary process, but also the fact that survival will require diverse solutions. It is necessary to take into consideration the entire *Umwelt* – environment – rather than single species or 'cultures.' It is necessary to look for fundamental causes underlying immediately visible symptoms. In our day and age, this is a lesson from ecology, biosemiotics, and anthropology of increasing urgency – and perhaps it is also, retrospectively, a lesson from the Alta conflict. If the TINA (There Is No Alternative) doctrine is to be countered by the realisation that survival requires diverse solutions, anthropologists have to think outside of the box and work outside of their cosy seminar rooms in order to promote, in an efficient way, the superior TAMA doctrine: There Are Many Alternatives.

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kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
VOL. 6, NO. 1
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497384

The homogenisation of diversity: Processes selecting for biocultural generalism in the Anthropocene

Alf Hornborg | Professor Emeritus of Human Ecology, Lund University

ABSTRACT: This paper is an experiment in applying an evolutionary perspective to the semiotic selection processes inherent in modernity, globalisation, and capitalism. The ongoing global loss of biological diversity is not only paralleled by the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity, but also related to it in complex ways. The social condition of modernity promotes cultural homogenisation as unremittingly as capitalism promotes biological monocultures. However, whereas globalising capitalism has also encouraged the spread of biological generalists such as rats and dandelions, the homogenisation of cultural values and worldviews has progressed in tandem with an ecological specialisation of the human species, increasingly reliant on a handful of domesticants. Modern humans can thus be characterised as cultural generalists but biological specialists. Cultural selection processes in modern societies inexorably benefit the ideas, artifacts, and personalities that are least dependent on context, whereas the ecological niche of modern humans is alarmingly narrow and specific. Following Eriksen's example in applying Hoffmeyer's concept of 'semiotic freedom,' we must conclude that, for most of the world's population, modernisation and globalisation have meant a loss of complexity, freedom, skills, and semiotic depth. The propensity toward abstraction and decontextualisation that is fundamental to modernity is epitomised in the artifact of all-purpose money, which promotes and mystifies global social asymmetries. The peculiar semiotic properties of the money artifact continue to undermine both the cultural and biological diversity of the biosphere from which it emerged.

Keywords: cultural selection, semiotic freedom, modernity, decontextualisation, all-purpose-money, evolution, diversity, generalism, specialisation, homogenisation

Introduction

In this article, I will discuss the relation between processes of biological and cultural homogenisation under globalised capitalism. The discussion is very much a response to Thomas Hylland Eriksen's (2021) stimulating essay on 'The Loss of Diversity in the Anthropocene: Biological and Cultural Dimensions,' published last year in *Frontiers in Political Science*. Eriksen follows Charles Mann (2011) and others in observing that modernity and economic globalisation are detrimental to both biological and cultural diversity. Indeed, the extinction of species and the extinction of languages are equally apparent and alarming. In promoting agricultural as well as mental monocultures, the logic of globalised capitalism appears to lead to both ecological and cultural homogenisation. However, whereas the loss of biological diversity is widely recognised as an incontrovertible and undesirable development, the loss of cultural diversity is frequently contested or, even when accepted as a fact, viewed

Contact: Alf Hornborg ✉ alf.hornborg@hek.lu.se

as something that we have no reason to deplore.

Some would argue that transnational communication and migration generate new forms of diversity, but this begs the question what we mean by 'diversity.' Eriksen is clearly right to observe that there is now "a shared global grammar for the effective expression of uniqueness," that people are prone to "attune themselves to a transcultural conversation about cultural difference," and that "it remains indisputable that the new diversity is *different* from the old." Most anthropologists working in the field will have reflected over how some individuals are more easily approached than others, in part because they are more comfortable with conversations about the particularities of their reified 'culture' or 'tradition' – in short, more modern. Of course, what people refer to as their 'culture' or 'tradition' is undeniably transformed by being experienced as such. Few anthropologists alive today have experienced the kind of incomprehensible encounters described by Lévi-Strauss (1955) in *Tristes Tropiques*, with indigenous people with whom no communication was possible. On viewing recent video recordings of previously uncontacted indigenous people in Amazonia, we can perhaps imagine how profound such incommensurability could be. In his book *The World Until Yesterday*, Jared Diamond (2012) has published a 1933 photograph of a New Guinea Highlander who "weeps in terror at his first sight of a European." Of course, nobody is suggesting that this kind of 'diversity' is something to feel nostalgic about, but the point here is not about evaluating degrees of cultural difference, merely to establish analytically that cultural diversity is not what it used to be – that something significant has been transforming the phenomenon that we refer to as 'cultural diversity.' One of the things that globalisation has taught people all over the world is to cognitively detach themselves from the specificity of their experience and to think about it – to objectify it – in terms of culture. To acknowledge this shift is intended not as a normative but as an analytical observation.

If the new diversity is different from the old, as Eriksen observes, we need to understand how and why. The modern categories of 'culture' and 'tradition' clearly exemplify what Anthony Giddens and other sociologists refer to as self-reflexivity. They are simultaneously examples of conceptual abstraction. To abstract is to decontextualise – to eliminate the particulars. To use abstract language is thus structurally related to the 'disembedding mechanisms' that Giddens (1990) identifies as diagnostic of the social condition of modernity. A central disembedding mechanism, says Giddens, is money, which – like other symbolic tokens – "can be 'passed around' without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle them…" (Giddens 1990: 22). At the core of the modern condition, it seems, is an inclination to transcend specific contexts in favour of the general, whether in terms of how we think and talk, how we exchange things, or how we relate to people and places. Historians such as Richard Seaford (2004) have traced this inclination to the appearance of coined money in ancient Greece. Sociologists have emphasised that it became pervasive much later, with 19th century modernity. From the perspective of the average person, it meant that a premodern attachment to specific things, people, and places was widely superseded by more abstract reference-points in the form of *categories* of things, people, and places. By and large, specificity and uniqueness gave way to increasing standardisation and generalised interchangeability.

While painting history in such broad brushstrokes may raise objections among many anthropologists, the general tendency over the past three centuries toward more abstraction, commodification, and mobility seems incontrovertible. There have been countless

observations on this modern logic, from 19th century Romantic poets, through classical sociologists such as Max Weber and Georg Simmel, to more recent perspectives such as George Ritzer's (1993) concept of 'McDonaldization.' To many observers, the growing global convergences can be traced to the expansion of 'Western' dominance. In his bestseller *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari asserts that:

> [t]oday all humans are, to a much greater extent than they usually want to admit, European in dress, thought and taste. They may be fiercely anti-European in their rhetoric, but almost everyone on the planet views politics, medicine, war and economics through European eyes... Even today's burgeoning Chinese economy, which may soon regain its global primacy, is built on a European model of production and finance. (Harari 2011: 313)

Indeed, modern rationality has historically been promoted by the expansion of Euro-American power since the 19th century, but its global logic is not geographically defined but transcultural and transhistorical. It is propelled by the artifact of general-purpose money and the concomitant 'idea of the self-regulating market,' as Karl Polanyi (1944) called it, which accompanied and buttressed that expansion. What we think of as modern capitalism is the aggregate logic generated by general-purpose money, which induces people to pursue the best deals they can on the world market, exchanging their labour time for products representing as low-wage labour and as lax environmental legislation as possible. If artifacts have agency, money is the paradigmatic example. In making everything exchangeable, it focuses our attention on considerations of market price, which in turn inexorably increases global inequalities and environmental degradation.

Eriksen has asked us to consider what the relation is between cultural and biological homogenisation – between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biological diversity. Given fairly stable conditions, the diversity of species in an ecosystem tends to increase, as new, specialised niches are continuously generated through competition within populations and interaction between species. When conditions are severely disrupted, however, specialisation is a disadvantage and generalists are more likely to survive. The radical environmental changes resulting from global capitalism over the past few centuries have led to the extinction of countless species, only a fraction of which have been recorded. Throughout the world, they have been supplanted by generalist species such as rats and dandelions, which seem to thrive almost anywhere. This process is indeed analogous to the disappearance of languages and other locally shared, integrated systems of meaning. We might use Richard Dawkins' (1976) concept of 'memes' as the cultural counterpart of genes and suggest that generalist memes such as cheeseburgers and milkshakes tend to displace intricately designed ones, such as Japanese tea ceremonies or traditional manioc processing in the Amazon. In this general sense, the reduction of both biological and cultural diversity can be derived from capitalism. To analytically identify the parallels between these two processes, however, we shall follow Eriksen's (2011) suggestion and apply the conceptual tools of semiotics, which have the merit of transcending the domains conventionally classified as 'nature' versus 'society.'

As Ernst Gellner (1983, cited by Eriksen 2021) proposed, the new kind of diversity produced by modernity evokes the concept of 'entropy' rather than organised patterns of differences. Given that culture is a socially negotiated and to some extent collectively shared

system of meaning, the disembedding mechanisms of modernity indeed suggest the very antithesis of such shared meanings. The individualised, modern 'diversity' invoked by many recent culture theorists is a phenomenon more appropriately studied by psychologists than by anthropologists.

We can probe deeper into the mechanisms through which the memes associated with modernity are being selected for in globalisation. Processes of selection are common to the survival of both genes and memes. In its most elementary form, the Darwinian theory of natural selection has been criticised for being tautological. If restricted to the observation that those individuals who are best equipped to survive are most likely to survive, the theory does not provide much of an explanation. But when complemented with information on genetic variation and selective pressures, the simple algorithm of natural selection can indeed help to explain why species evolve and in which direction. Gregory Bateson (1972), who was both an anthropologist and a biologist, proposed that an explanation is a description mapped onto a tautology. By way of illustration, the tautological assertion that the 'fittest' will survive assumes great relevance when applied to an ancient population of proto-giraffes with genetically varying neck-length on a drought-afflicted savanna. It helps to explain why genes for increasingly longer necks became more and more common among the ancestors of modern giraffes.

Perhaps, then, tautologies do not deserve their poor reputation. After all, they *are* always true. Indeed, those individuals who are best equipped to survive are most likely to survive. Having seen how they help explain selective processes in nature, we can ask how they might help explain such processes in society. Are cultural memes as exposed to selective pressures as genes? To begin answering the question, we need to consider the well-established anthropological insight that cultural phenomena – anything that conveys meanings – are always dependent on *context*. This is as evident from phonemes to myths. But then, how shall we understand the inclination, in modernity, toward disembedding – that is, *de*contextualisation? In modern society, ideas, commodities, and people tend to be mobile, often moving great distances. In other words, they are expected to shift contexts. Modern money organises continuous exchanges of goods and services, regardless of context. Similarly, modern science and other expert knowledge is designed to be universally applicable, again regardless of context. Finally, even the modern person complies with the same pattern: she is designed to offer her services regardless of context, disembedded from kin and place, at home everywhere and nowhere, versed in the art of socialising with strangers. The fundamental logic of modernity should thus be that *the ideas, artifacts, and personalities that gain the widest distribution are those that are least dependent on context*. We can now posit an algorithm and a selective pressure that is as fundamental to the trajectory of modern society as natural selection is for biological evolution. While the explanation of evolution accepted by biologists includes a tautological reference to the 'survival of the fittest,' we can suggest that *cultural* selection in processes of modernisation can be represented in terms of the tautological insight that 'that which is most likely to spread is what spreads' (Hornborg 2011). The ideas, objects, and persons that are most easily moved from one context to another can be expected to be favoured by the logic of cultural diffusion. We are more likely to encounter cheeseburgers – and the people who eat them – than Japanese tea ceremonies.

Referring to Jesper Hoffmeyer, Eriksen suggests that the long evolutionary movement of life on Earth toward more biological complexity can be understood as an increase in

'semiotic freedom,' which Hoffmeyer defines as "the *depth of meaning* an individual or a species is capable of communicating" (Hoffmeyer 2005: 222; emphasis added). Hoffmeyer explains that this concept of 'freedom' refers to freedom from being determined by the constraints of natural laws. He exemplifies by comparing a microorganism's capacity to detect molecules of nutrients in its immediate environment, on the one hand, with a bird pretending to have a broken wing in order to distract a fox from its nest, on the other. Both are examples of communication, widely defined, but the difference in terms of 'depth of meaning' is enormous. The behaviour of the bird is a very specific and seemingly arbitrary mode of communication in the sense that it cannot be derived from biochemical or other natural laws. Hoffmeyer proposes that the biological evolution of complexity should be understood in semiotic, rather than morphological, terms. Citing the palaeontologist George Simpson, he concedes that humans are not more morphologically complex than ancient species of fish living four hundred million years ago, while human speech is immensely more complex – in terms of semiotic depth – than any other mode of communication that has emerged in the history of life on Earth. Persuaded by Hoffmeyer's approach, which urges us to rethink human language and culture in an evolutionary context, Eriksen proposes that the homogenising effects of globalisation suggest that this development toward greater complexity is now being reversed. Here I would like to quote Eriksen at length:

> Thousands of mutually unintelligible languages, unique religions and customs, kinship systems, cosmologies and economic practices produced a world of a fast-growing number of differences. What seems to be happening today as a result of frantic human activity across the planet is nevertheless a reduction in semiotic freedom, a loss of flexibility and options. This seems to be the case both with respect to the nonhuman world and that of culture and society. (Eriksen 2021)

The pervasive loss of indigenous languages, traditional ecological knowledges, and crafts – and their replacement with standardised outlooks and practices geared to modern technology – is nothing less than a systematic *deskilling* of most of humanity. We should recall that the much celebrated technical, scientific, and artistic expertise of modern society is reserved for a small minority of its population, while its overwhelming majority is compelled to perform tasks that are very rarely conducive to creativity. Semiotic freedom, in other words, is a matter of highly uneven global distribution. Moreover, whatever expertise is encouraged in modernity tends to be dependent on advanced technologies, which means that it is defined by those technologies rather than by the inherent skill of a human being. The outlook and worldview of modern people will thus tend to be permeated by the abstract rationality of technology, which might seem unobjectionable if it were not for the fact that access to modern technology is contingent on the abysmally uneven distribution of purchasing-power – or money, for short. It is not a coincidence that the *absence* of money and advanced technology is central to the concept of 'indigenous people': Marshall Sahlins observed that indigenous societies almost always contrast their own cultures to "the white man's 'living in the way of money.'" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021: 58) If anthropological sympathies for 'the indigenous' seem nostalgic and dystopian, it is because anthropology, as a profession, has learned to view modern society from the outside – from the perspective of the *non*modern.

We can further explore this evolutionary perspective on globalising modernity by

considering the relation between Hoffmeyer's concept of 'semiotic freedom' and what the biologists call 'generalism.' Although at first sight equivalent, because both concepts suggest flexibility, semiotic freedom and biological generalism are different parameters. If semiotic freedom is a measure of the complexity of meaning that is communicated, it may well be associated with specialisation, rather than generalism, if viewed from the perspective of an individual or population. Conversely, as well understood by epidemiologists, semiotically very simple microorganisms tend to be biological generalists. As mentioned, under fairly stable ecological conditions, competition generates a tendency toward specialism, but when conditions rapidly change, generalists have an advantage (Dennis et al. 2011). Highly specialised, endemic species are attuned to unique sensory stimuli requiring sensitivity to very specific kinds of information regarding their ecological niche. The connection between semiotic and ecological specialisation was established long ago by the Estonian zoologist Jakob von Uexküll through his concept of *Umwelt* (Uexküll [1940] 1982). This tendency toward specialisation is what has generated the intricate complexity of rainforest ecosystems, for instance, but it is also what makes specialised species so vulnerable to extinction, while generalists like rats and dandelions are able to survive major changes in ecosystems. Neither rats nor dandelions are dependent on specific and complex semiotic contexts. This not only makes them into survivors, but also into successful colonisers.

If we apply these perspectives to cultural processes, we discover that the relation between specialism and generalism is paradoxical and not as clearly geared to ecological viability as in biological processes. To begin with, the unique semiotic freedom with which humans are equipped – through their capacity for language and culture – has made us into a generalist species, in the sense that we have been able to adapt to a great diversity of ecological settings from deserts and tropical rainforests to high mountains and the frozen Arctic. In this sense, semiotic freedom has indeed meant flexibility, from a species perspective. But from the perspective of individual human groups, it has encouraged specialisation, vulnerability, and a *loss* of flexibility. By and large, cultural diversity increased over hundreds of thousands of years, up until the turn toward modern homogenisation that Charles Mann dates to the 16th century. The rapid reduction of cultural diversity over the past few centuries has in part been a response to biological processes such as epidemics and environmental change in the form of deforestation, monocultures, and loss of biodiversity, but the primary impetus underlying all these processes has derived from a globalising social system pursuing the logic of general-purpose money.

Money is a peculiar semiotic phenomenon. Unlike all the other kinds of signs discussed by Hoffmeyer – whether bird song, animal scent, or human words – money is a sign without a referent. It can mean whatever its owner wants it to signify. In this sense, it is certainly a source of freedom and flexibility, but it can hardly be seen as a means of communicating, to use Hoffmeyer's expression, a greater 'depth of meanings.' All other semiotic codes are composed of several characters, like the letters of the alphabet or the nucleotides of a DNA molecule, which generate meanings by being variously combined. Money is unique in having *one* single character. It thus cannot communicate meaning. Given how pivotal the logic of money is to modernity, globalisation, and the loss of diversity, it is puzzling to find the field of semiotics largely uninterested in the semiotics of money. It is paradoxical that the unique symbolic capacity of the human species, which has granted it unprecedented levels of semiotic freedom, has finally yielded a sign that is so devoid of meaning that it systematically

undermines both the cultural and the biological diversity of the biosphere from which it emerged. It is as if money represents a threshold, where the evolutionary increase in semiotic freedom reaches a point at which it is reversed. As has often been observed, for instance by Ivan Illich (2013), it represents a threshold also in other, related ways, by turning efficiency into *in*efficiency and rationality into *ir*rationality.

Although this is not the space to elaborate the argument, it will suffice to say that a semiotic understanding of the cultural and biological repercussions of general-purpose money would be essential for any attempt to *redesign* money – that is, gaining mastery over the fetishised artifact that has become our master. I know it sounds ridiculously utopian, but in the long run it appears to be the only possible way of safeguarding our semiotic freedom (Hornborg 2019).

We must finally reflect on the crucial difference between biological and cultural generalism in terms of how they relate to material metabolism. Biological generalism increases the chances of physical survival under conditions of sudden ecological disruption. It is a strategy for enhancing the range of energy sources accessible to a species. But human malleability – our biological capacity for cultural diversity – has different implications depending on the level at which it is considered. At the level of the species, as we have observed, it has favoured a generalist colonisation of a wide range of ecosystems, but at the level of particular populations culturally attuned to specific contexts and livelihoods, it has until historically recent times promoted specialisation. To the extent that such cultural specialisation has implied vulnerability to rapid change, this is only in part a consequence of physical environmental disturbance. The loss of cultural diversity under the influence of globalised modernity has not so much been a matter of human populations failing to survive a competition for physical resources as of the socially organised dissolution of their systems of meaning. This is the essence of the existential Holocaust propelled by the expansion of capitalist modernity.

The transition to modernity can be viewed as a shift to cultural generalism in the sense that human outlooks are no longer as geared to specific contexts. In Hoffmeyer's terms, we have become semiotically shallower. In terms of material metabolism, for the global majority, modernity has actually narrowed the range of ecological resources. Modern people tend to derive most of their energy from a mere handful of industrially grown cereals, root crops, and species of livestock – a few domesticated strains of plants and animals that will thrive regardless of context. Paradoxically, then, our cultural generalism has favoured an increasing ecological specialism. This is a crucial difference between cultural and biological generalism – between modern customers at McDonald's and the flexibility of omnivores such as rats. The dependence of most of humanity on the narrow ecological niche of fossil-fuelled, monocultural food production has not only increased our own vulnerability but simultaneously radically reduced biological diversity.

Although affluent consumers in the Global North will object that their culinary diversity is vastly greater than that of their premodern ancestors, we should again remind ourselves that this capacity to access edibles from all over the planet is contingent on their privileged purchasing power, whereas most people in the world have no choice but to resort to a very restricted selection of foodstuffs. More significant, from an evolutionary perspective, is that very few people have retained the skills and know-how required to derive their nourishment from the landscapes that they inhabit.

For two centuries, proponents of modern development have asserted that indigenous, nonmodern people represent cultural idiosyncrasies that must succumb to the progress of modernisation, in part because they are inflexible – much as highly specialised biological species may become vulnerable to extinction. However, if for some (of many possible) reasons our global food system should fail, the tables would be turned – and the inflexibility of modern civilisation would become disastrously evident. In having become completely dependent on the industrially produced groceries that we can purchase in supermarkets, most of us are entirely incompetent at deriving our subsistence from the natural environment.

Given that supermarkets have become our ecological niche, consumer behaviour can be understood as a form of specialised foraging. It is specialised because it relies on a very complex, and increasingly fragile, global system of provisioning. It is noteworthy that the concept of 'consumption,' regardless of the type of commodity, is metaphorically based on eating. Much of what I have said so far is clearly illustrated by McDonald's fast-food restaurants. What Ritzer called 'McDonaldization' is literally about eating. Wherever we are in the world, we can have the same cheeseburger. Such globalised food habits require very little in terms of semiotic context, but they inexorably diminish both biological and cultural diversity. Most disturbingly, they have made us so dependent – so specialised in our reliance on industrial food production – that many people would be at a loss without it. The spectre of a global breakdown evokes the horrors of Cormac McCarthy's dystopic novel *The Road*; the novel depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which humans resort to cannibalism. After all, it has been estimated that out of the total global biomass of terrestrial vertebrates, a stunning 36 per cent now consists of human bodies (Bar-On et al. 2018). Cannibalism would be the logical endpoint of a trajectory toward *zero* 'semiotic freedom.'

There have been efforts to formulate rigorous paradigms for biocultural theory, focusing on the coevolution of genes and culture. Such efforts risk pitfalls such as projecting gene-culture coevolution in early prehistoric humans into the recent millennia of 'anatomically modern humans,' which is to deny the overwhelming autonomy of culture vis-à-vis biology. There are limits to the analogy between biological and cultural homogenisation, but as Eriksen has recognised, there are formal correspondences – and even causal connections – between them that can be understood in terms of semiotics. The common denominator that links biology and culture is indeed the evolution of communication. The disembedding mechanisms of modernity – such as money, abstraction, and mobility – have selected for both the genes and the memes that are least dependent on context. Rats, dandelions, and modern people are comparatively free to shift between different contexts, but from the perspective of Hoffmeyer's definition, they do not represent an increase in *semiotic* freedom. It is thus paradoxical that modernity, which tends to be celebrated as a condition of freedom from place and tradition, can simultaneously be understood as a *loss* of 'semiotic freedom.'

Many anthropologists no doubt continue to feel a fundamental ambivalence about modernity. It is difficult to deny the attraction of homogenising modern values such as democracy, non-violence, freedom of speech, and human rights, but neither can we deny that modernity over the past two centuries has brought humanity autocracy, violence, and repression at unprecedented scales. The enduring question that this symposium raises is whether the widespread material benefits of modernity tend to obscure its distributive as well as existential deficits. The special sensibility of anthropologists to local, indigenous systems of meaning compels us to acknowledge that the loss of cultural diversity is as draining

and possibly damaging as the loss of biological diversity. I very much appreciate that the recipient of this year's Vega medal has perpetuated, rather than dismissed, this perennial concern of anthropology.

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kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
VOL. 6, NO. 1
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497386

Relating to the river: New bio-cultural diversities in human engagements with water

Veronica Strang | Professor, School of of Social Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford

ABSTRACT: This article considers the potential for creating new constellations of human-non-human relations in river catchment areas. It makes use of the author's ethnographic research in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, and engages with current debates about human and non-human rights in relation to water. Drawing on concepts of pan-species democracy, it explores how the rights and interests of diverse human groups, and non-human species, might be encompassed and approached more equitably in the decision-making processes that shape societies' engagements with water. It suggests that, with a stronger focus on equality and diversity, we can move towards more sustainable practices in interhuman and interspecies relations and address the major challenges of the current environmental crisis.

Keywords: water, non-human rights, bio-cultural diversity, re-imagined communities, river catchment management

Introduction

It was an honour to be included in the Vega Day symposium, and to be able to celebrate Thomas Hylland Eriksen's many sterling achievements with a lively discussion about diversity. My short essay contributing to this discussion focuses on how diverse human societies engage with the non-human domain, most particularly in relation to water. It takes as a basic premise that interspecies relations are social and material, and always political, in that they are, in one form of another, relations of power. It is these power relations that decide what happens to water flows; who gets what water resources; who gets to form the dominant narratives about water and the environment.

Part of the dominant narrative with which we are all familiar is a dualistic vision of (male) culture and (female) nature, in which the non-human domain occupies a separate ontological space: human and non-human; us and them. This supports an anthropocentric perspective which presents the non-human domain as a set of assets or resources, there primarily to provide 'ecosystem services'. It allows us to prioritise human needs and interests, and to externalise the costs of our activities to other species and ecosystems.

Not everyone separates human and non-human beings in this way. One of the great privileges of being an anthropologist is that we study diverse ways of understanding the world. In doing so, we engage with cultural beliefs and values about human-non-human relations which do not automatically divide the world dualistically, into 'culture' on one side, and 'nature' on the other. There are many that present visions of an undivided world,

Contact: Veronica Strang ✉ veronica@veronicastrang.com

Figure 1: Parrot drinking from water feature in Adelaide Botanic Garden, Australia.

in which all living kinds co-exist in relatively equal reciprocal partnerships. Such indivisible worlds can be found, for example, in the belief systems of Māori *iwis* in New Zealand; the Amazonian tribes of South America; the !Kung San in Africa; the First Nations of the Americas; the Sami groups and the Inuit communities inhabiting the arctic regions, and amongst the indigenous people with whom I work in Australia.

An ancestral land and waterscape

Figure 2: Map of Cape York, Australia.

For the purpose of comparison, let us consider a couple of tiny ethnographic examples. The first is from my research with several indigenous language groups in the community of Kowanyama, on the Mitchell River in Far North Queensland. This is an area of Australia

that was not settled by European colonists until the early 20th century. Many indigenous communities – though displaced into mission reserves or providing free labour to cattle stations in order to remain on their homelands – continued their own cultural lifeways, hunting and gathering, and conducting rituals at their sacred sites in a sentient cultural land and waterscape inhabited by ancestral beings. Thus, when I went to Cape York to pursue my doctoral research in the early 1990s, this was still a highly traditional community with elders keen to teach me about their customary beliefs, values, and practices so that I could provide politically vital cultural translation to others.

Figure 3: Rock art Rainbow Serpents, Chillagoe National Park.

I was therefore introduced to a cosmology in which the world was created by totemic ancestral beings in multiple, often non-human forms. In the story time, or Dreaming, these beings emerged from the great Rainbow Serpent, who personifies the generative powers of the waters held in the land. The ancestors emerged into a flat, empty landscape, and made all of its features, and all of its living kinds, including their human clans of descendants. Having done so, they 'sat down' back into the land, where they remained as a powerful ancestral presence, watching over their human progeny, providing them with resources, and protecting their interests.

Thus, the waters held in the land represent a spiritual, non-visible, non-material domain from which life is continually generated. Replicating the hydro-theological cycles of the ancestral beings, the Rainbow Serpent produces each human spirit, sending it into the world, and into its mother's body, usually from sacred water places in clan land. It is this watery 'home' that each spirit must be ritually returned to when they die, to be reunited with or reabsorbed into the ancestral forces in the land, with some part of the spirit entering the celestial realm.

In an indigenous cosmos, the sky – or what we might describe as the atmosphere or climate – is not a separate domain, but the upper part of a non-material domain containing ancestral powers. This is nicely illustrated by a view of the Milky Way as a sky river/celestial serpent containing totemic ancestral beings, much like those held in the waters in the land. I

mention this particularly because it demonstrates another contrast with dominant narratives that treat 'climate change' as if it was somehow ontologically detached from earthbound environmental changes: a conceptual separation that discourages joined-up thinking about the causes of climate change.

Figure 4: Kunjen elder Alma Wason at sacred site on the Mitchell River.

In an Aboriginal cultural land and waterscape, the generation of each person's spirit from a sacred site in clan land locates them in a set of social and spatial relationships in which they have obligations to their kin group and shared rights to clan land and resources. The Rainbow Serpent is also the source of customary knowledge, which Aboriginal people call The Law. This provides a vast lexicon of ecological knowledge and an authoritative holistic template for every aspect of traditional lifeways. This knowledge is passed on intergenerationally, through songs, stories, rituals, and artworks.

Clearly this is a highly conservative worldview. It suggests that human lives will replicate those of the ancestors, and it is therefore unsurprising to find that the Law contains a requirement to 'care for country,' and to regulate resource use carefully. This means a range of measures primarily concerned with keeping the use of all other species low-key enough that they can always regenerate. For example, young people are taught to harvest yams, always replacing the main root so that there is an uninterrupted supply; they must gather materials such as bark or spear rods from trees in such a way that this does not endanger the tree itself. These tenets also entailed keeping human populations under control using traditional methods of birth control.

Engaging conservatively with ecosystems also meant making sure that rivers and streams were never impeded. People might make small fish traps and weirs, but it is fundamentally against the Law to interfere with the proper flow of water through the environment, or to compromise its well-being. This vision of order made the activities of the early European colonists very shocking, as they set about drilling down into the hidden ancestral domain to tap the aquifers, redirecting streams into mining, and extracting gold

by using cyanide, which then leached into and poisoned watercourses. It has also influenced indigenous responses to the more recent construction of large dams able to stop the river entirely, and the contemporary redirection of over 70 per cent of all freshwater flows into industrial agriculture.

What I hope this brief ethnographic sketch provides is a sense that Aboriginal Australian worldviews, like those of many indigenous groups, rest on a belief that the non-human domain – the land, the water, and everything it contains – is not a passive object upon which humans act, but an active and reciprocal partner: the co-creator of a shared lifeworld with humankind, which must be protected and treated with respect. These values enabled indigenous Australians to maintain a sustainable way of life for many millennia. In effect, they exemplify the kind of common ownership of resources and circular, non-growth-based economies that characterised human societies for much of human history, prior to the emergence of agriculture about 10,000 years ago. Described by Jared Diamond as humankind's 'worst mistake' (Diamond 2005), agriculture introduced forms of intensified resource use that often led to rapid growth and expansion, and which set many societies on a more instrumental trajectory, prioritising human needs and interests in ways that became increasingly unsustainable.

Indigenous models of environmental engagement therefore provide us with a helpful contrast with the ways of thinking about and engaging with the non-human domain imported by European colonists into Australia, which have led – within a mere two centuries – to widespread environmental degradation across the continent, and severe impacts upon its aquatic ecosystems.

The unsettling effects of 'settlement'

Figure 5: Cattle mustering in Cape York.

Over several decades I have also conducted research with the different water users living along the Brisbane River in south Queensland: the farmers, manufacturers, miners, recreational groups, government agencies, and domestic water users. Greater diversity in

people's engagements with water has come with a shift from a primarily rural population to an urban majority, and with the growth in tourism and recreational use of the rivers and marine areas. There has therefore been a growing divide between extremely utilitarian perspectives and rising concern about environmental issues and the need for conservation. Thus human-environmental relations in Australia are more nuanced and complex than can be communicated in a brief example.

However, the most dominant narrative still conforms to the tenets established by the early colonists who came to 'settle' the continent and make it 'productive' in European terms. Until relatively recently Australia's economy depended largely upon its agricultural and extractive industries, and Queensland has a history of extreme commitment to land clearance and development, and a utilitarian view that land and water are there to support these activities. This was accomplished via the construction of roads and fences, tree-felling, and new forms of property tenure and ownership. Thousands of water bores were drilled into the artesian basin. A mining boom was followed by wider extraction of materials for 'development', increased industrial water use, and the establishment of a major port in Brisbane, which has since undergone massive urban expansion.

Figure 6: Irrigation channel, Cape York.

Early settlement set the scene for the highly instrumental developments that followed. The comprehensive introduction of sheep, cattle, crops, and other non-native plant and animal species displaced native flora and fauna. There was a rapid move towards the overuse of water for irrigation, which resulted in widespread soil salination. The soils released by brutal land clearance and the importation of hard-hooved cattle, and the dumping of heavy metals and other industrial waste into the rivers, caused extensive pollution of waterways and marine areas. The engagements with land and water imposed by European colonists therefore embodied all of the key factors that compromise aquatic ecosystems. This approach established the anthropocentric positionality that I described earlier, and the belief that non-human beings and the material environment are there to provide 'ecosystem services' for human society.

Figure 7: Wivenhoe Dam, South Queensland.

The last century brought a further imposition of major water infrastructures to redirect water flows into irrigation schemes and to provide domestic and industrial water supplies to the urban areas spreading rapidly across the floodplains. These infrastructures also aimed to protect their inhabitants from the floods and droughts to which Australian rivers are prone, but they tended, in practice, to worsen the impact of these, while also causing widespread environmental problems.

This brief cross-cultural comparison therefore illustrates how indigenous bio-cultural arrangements, which had maintained a reciprocal and equal – and therefore very sustainable – partnership between human and other living kinds for millennia, were forcefully displaced by a mode of engagement based on visions of nature as other and human exceptionalism, which brought with it unsustainable material developments and environmentally damaging practices. It is a familiar story, and one that certainly resonates with many experiences of colonisation around the world. This is obviously a highly simplified comparison, but it serves to highlight a reality that there is a wide continuum of possible modes of engaging with the non-human domain.

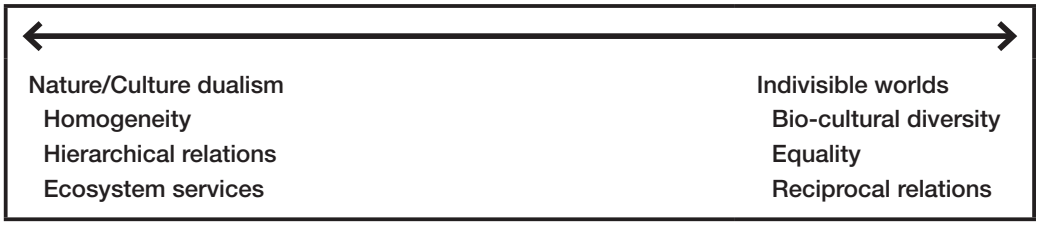

Figure 8. A continuum of possible modes of engagement with the non-human domain.

At one extreme are relationships that are ontologically divided, which assume differential power relations between human and non-human beings and ecosystems, and which permit exploitative instrumental relationships that prioritise human needs and interests and externalise the costs to the non-human domain. At a polar opposite, people envisage

indivisible worlds and relative equality with other living kinds; respect non-human needs and interests, and therefore tend to maintain sustainable values and practices over long periods of time.

However, the latter is a minority view: the hegemonic exportation of an anthropocentric neo-liberal narrative around the globe, via processes of colonisation and through transnational economic networks, exerts a homogenising force on cultural groups, demanding that they assimilate and adopt similarly exploitative beliefs, values, and practices. It is matched, in material terms, by the homogenising impact of introduced plant and animal species which, in replacing native habitats and species, have led to mass extinctions and a critical loss of biodiversity.

This loss of bio-cultural diversity must be a matter of deep concern, and it calls for three key actions: first, it requires a paradigmatic shift in thinking to recognise an indivisible world of all living kinds; second, it demands a serious commitment to undertaking the protective actions towards other species and ecosystems that naturally arise from a rebalancing of human-non-human relations; and third, it needs some creative thinking about how to initiate practical changes that will make real differences to what human societies do in relation to the non-human domain.

It is therefore vitally important that all societies learn from the culturally diverse lifeways that persist in the contemporary world. There are still many that exemplify ontological and practical alternatives to homogenising and destructive anthropocentric practices. Obviously, we cannot replicate traditional lifeways in larger societies, but we can listen to and learn from the tenets and values that support more sustainable practices.

This is not a new suggestion by any means: indigenous lifeways provided inspiration for the early Romantics and for the conservation movement emerging in the 1960s. Today earlier romantic visions have been replaced by more fully informed understandings of indigenous people's beliefs and values, and these continue to inspire counter-movements which share common concerns. These include national and international conservation organisations committed to preserving cultural and biological diversity, and similarly local and global movements seeking social and ecological justice. Increasingly, their efforts to draw attention to human and non-human inequalities have ignited the concerns of wider populations, who have begun to realise that mass extinctions, loss of bio-cultural diversity, and the environmental changes arising from unsustainable practices will bring – are already bringing – increasing chaos to our lives.

Even in Queensland, which can reasonably be described as quite far to the political right, there are emergent critiques of exploitative human-non-human relations and the intrinsic anthropocentricity that underpins these. All around the world, people are now seeking ways to shift the balance towards ecocentricity, or at least to rebalance human relationships with the non-human world so that our actions accommodate the needs and interests of all living kinds.

Contraflows

In the last century, indigenous communities around the world have become increasingly vocal in national and international debates about environmental issues. Many are battling for rights to engage with their homelands in ways that uphold their own beliefs and values, and are openly critical of the exploitative activities of more powerful groups. There have been

Figure 9: Standing Rock protests, USA.

some successes. For example, indigenous communities in Ecuador and Bolivia have persuaded their governments to give constitutional protection to Mother Earth, or *Pachamama*.

In New Zealand, where indigenous people comprise over 15 per cent of the population, Māori efforts to assert indigenous rights and values have been notably successful. Some legal protection for forests and rivers has been gained by establishing their rights as living ancestors, or *Te Awa Tupua.* In 2017, the Whanganui River was declared to have personhood, and given legal rights equivalent to those of corporate 'persons'. There is now a co-management arrangement that enshrines in law the role of two representatives, *To Pou Tupua,* to act and speak for and on behalf of the river, to promote its health and wellbeing, and to be involved in assessing any plans that might affect it.

Figure 10: Whanganui River, New Zealand.

Other international efforts to see rivers such as the Ganges and the Atrato River in Colombia recognised as persons, with concomitant legal rights, intersect with wider counter-movements concerned with establishing non-human rights. There is now growing pressure on the United Nations to make a declaration of non-human rights similar to that made to protect human rights in 1948. There are related calls for the International Court of Criminal Justice to define ecocide as an international crime, so that the transnational corporations currently avoiding responsibility for their destructive activities can be prosecuted under international law.

In 2016, the UN established a High Level Panel on Water (HLPW) to develop some new Principles for Water to underpin its Sustainable Development Goals. They asked me to assist them with a report on diverse cultural and spiritual relationships with water, and this led to further involvement in writing these principles. As a (very tiny) cog in the UN machine, I saw this as an important opportunity to bring ideas about bio-culturally diverse relationships with water into the discussion, and to promote the alternate ways of conceptualising the non-human domain that indigenous groups exemplify.

In working with international bodies such as the UN and UNESCO, who have to make multiple political compromises to keep an international dialogue going, I am keenly aware that academic expertise is usually quite homeopathic in its level of impact. The report of the High Level Panel (United Nations 2018a) is couched in uncontroversial language. Non-human rights are not mentioned directly at all, although there is an explicit aim to protect water sources, and to seek more equitable, transparent, and inclusive approaches, which implicitly leaves the door open to seeking greater equity in human-non-human relations. More promisingly, high priority is given to the need to recognise cultural diversity in ideas about water. So, we might say that there are some useful undercurrents in the language.

Another small step in the right direction came with the UN's more general report on water in 2018, which focused on the need for 'nature-based solutions' (United Nations 2018b). While this report maintained conventionally dualistic notions of nature and culture, it at least signalled a conceptual shift away from an entirely objectifying vision of a passive non-human domain. This is important, because it presented a relationship in which the environment is positioned as a more equal 'other': an active, co-creative partner to be worked *with* in ways that encompass more than human needs and interests. In essence, we might see this as a small but meaningful shift along the continuum of possibilities towards more egalitarian, indivisible, and sustainable ways of thinking about human and non-human beings.

Figure 11: Ruimte voor de Rivier, the Netherlands.

These changes in thinking are also illustrated in the Dutch government's 'Room for the River' project. This focuses on literally making more room for the river, by shifting dikes further away from the riverbanks; removing infrastructural impediments impeding the normal flows of the water; restoring much of the floodplain and improving the environmental conditions of the surrounding catchment areas. I mention this example particularly because it underlines a longstanding need for more holistic approaches in river management which recognise that human relationships with rivers are also relationships with their entire catchment areas and all of their diverse non-human beings and materialities: their geological formations, their soils, their earth-bound and meteorological water flows, and all of the wild and domesticated non-human plant and animal species that they support.

Further progress came with a 2021 UN report that focused squarely on the need to embrace diverse cultural values in relation to water (United Nations 2021). We might reasonably interpret this as another step in the right direction.

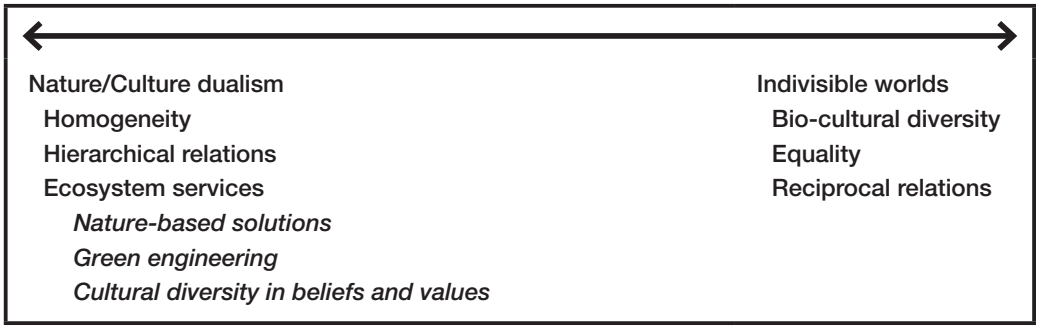

Figure. 12. Steps forward in a continuum of engagement with the non-human domain.

However, though they carry important weight, such international endeavours are slow, and time is not on our side. How can we translate this movement into real and urgent progress towards supporting bio-culturally diverse and therefore more sustainable engagements with water and the non-human domain? And how can new approaches be employed in a range of diverse cultural contexts, while also respecting their highly specific cultural dynamics?

Figure 13: Floods in South Queensland.

I would like to suggest some ideas about how we might achieve this. First, we need a different starting point. We need to reject anthropocentric dualism and recognise that non-human beings and ecosystems are not merely passive subjects: they are active participants in and co-creators of the lifeworlds that we all inhabit. Working on water readily brings home a reality that we are not dealing with a passive, amenable element. But all organisms, elements, and environments have capacities to act upon us and each other in myriad ways, whether it is by crowding out native species; by digesting and recycling soils; by consuming potential scrub growth; or for that matter infecting us with corona viruses. Accepting the indivisibility of shared human and non-human lifeworlds opens up new ways to engage with other living kinds.

Social scientists will be familiar with a classic text by Benedict Anderson entitled *Imagined Communities,* in which he explored the way that we all mentally envisage the various social communities to which we belong. We locate ourselves imaginatively in family and kin groups, professional communities, social groups, recreational communities, political groups, online communities, and so forth. Taking the idea of 'imagined communities' as a starting point, I have proposed a wider, more inclusive notion of 're-imagined communities', in which – as well as thinking about the different human communities with whom we interact – we also consider the biodiverse non-human communities that co-create the shared lifeworlds that we inhabit.

This is a multi-scalar concept that can and should be applied at micro and macro scales. But a river and its related ecosystem is a useful scale at which to begin. How might we, in contemporary industrialised societies, re-imagine communities to encompass the bio-culturally diverse living kinds inhabiting river catchment areas? And how might we strive to engage with them in ways that are egalitarian and inclusive? The next logical question is therefore concerned with inter-species or pan-species democracy. How can the needs and interests of non-human beings be democratically represented in decision-making processes? Who will speak for and promote their interests, and how might this be practically incorporated in formal and informal processes of governance?

There is a need for effective and systematic human representation of other species' and ecosystems' needs and interests. It is therefore useful to draw on models such as the Whanganui River case, with its formal role for the *To Pou Tupua* to speak for the river. To some extent this role resonates with the aims of many river catchment groups around the world, who have long sought to promote the interests of their local waterways and their resident species. However, as well as upholding ontologically separate views of nature and culture, most such groups are peripheral to decision-making. While they might influence debates about what happens to the river and its surrounding areas if they are sufficiently vocal, their views rarely challenge or supersede dominant narratives.

This is to some extent a structural problem. Water governance reflects the dualism that I noted at the outset, in that it generally positions underfunded environmental agencies quite separately from much better funded and more influential agencies concerned with economic and social issues. The same siloes pertain in academia, with well-funded 'natural science' disciplines and conventional 'ecosystem services' thinking at the centre of decision-making while chronically underfunded 'arts and social sciences', with their more critical perspectives on paradigmatic norms, sit on the margins. However, as we already know, this business-as-usual scenario is not sustainable. There is a need to rethink governance, first to

Figure 14: Sewage flows into the Thames River.

remove the nature-culture divide and incorporate – with a good measure of equality – a more diverse range of knowledges; and second, to employ these diverse forms of expertise to consider human and non-human interests and support a re-imagined community of all living kinds.

Figure 15: Kunjen elder Nelson Brumby.

If we are willing to prioritise the need to uphold bio-cultural diversity, there are many people with expertise who could speak for non-human needs and interests. In some countries indigenous communities have a wealth of traditional ecological knowledge to bring into the discussion. Many river catchment areas have other groups with extensive local knowledge, such as farmers, fishers, and recreational water users, or conservation groups: people who live and work with the river and have intimate knowledge about what is going on with the catchment's non-human inhabitants.

Figure 16: Local expert Malcolm Frost with Moggil Creek catchment group, Brisbane.

And, in Universities, along with the social sciences and humanities who can elucidate human needs and interests, there are many natural scientists with expertise about the non-human communities in river catchment areas. Soil scientists can tell us how soil microbes are affected by the human and non-human activities taking place; geologists and hydrologists can describe how particular landforms act upon catchment processes; biologists can speak for the multiple fauna – the insects, the fish, the birds and mammals – that depend upon the river and its environs; and botanists can consider the interests of diverse plant species.

It will be obvious where I am heading with this. There is a need to remove the dualisms and anthropocentric hierarchies that separate culture and nature, and to embrace bio-cultural diversity in encompassing all of the human and non-human communities in river catchment areas. And there is a concomitant need to remove the intellectual dualism and hierarchies within the government and academia, and to seek equality and diversity in the forms of expertise that are brought to bear on decision-making processes.

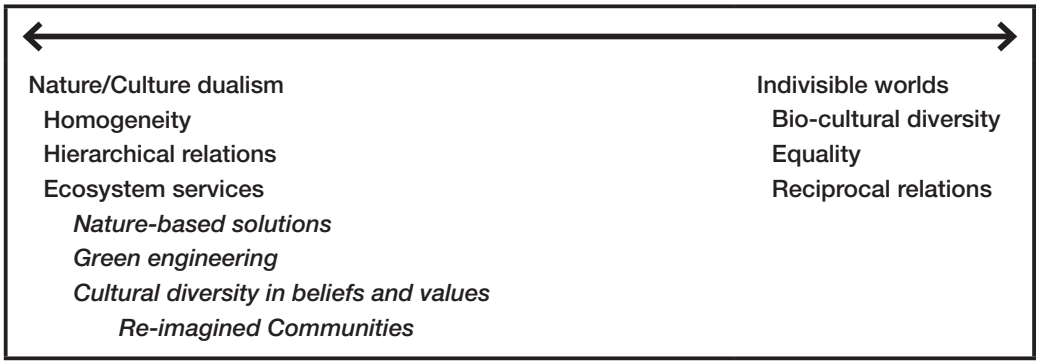

Figure 17. A progressive continuum towards sustainable lifeways.

I believe that this would achieve the genuinely interdisciplinary exchanges of knowledge needed to make better decisions for all of the human and non-human communities in river catchment areas, and on a larger scale, regionally, nationally, and globally. With new constellations of relationships giving proper support to bio-cultural diversity, it is surely possible for humankind to move towards more sustainable lifeways in which all living kinds can co-exist and flourish.

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kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
VOL. 6, NO. 1
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497387

Conservation as homogenisation? Socio-spiritual-ecological futures and collaborative relations

Paige West | Claire Tow Professor of Anthropology, Barnard College and Columbia University

ABSTRACT: By juxtaposing the ethics and practices associated with the creation of Marine Protected Areas with the ethics and practices associated with Indigenous-epistemology based socio-ecological projects, and based on over twenty years of collaborative work, this paper investigates the role of anthropology in contributing to Indigenous self-determination and asks what true collaboration between variously-situated actors might look like in the future.

Keywords: Reciprocity, Anthropological practice, collaboration, Indigenous self-determination, Marine Conservation, Melanesia

Introduction

It is such an honour to be here with you all today and to share the stage with these extraordinary thinkers to celebrate the work of Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen. I think of what we do as scholars as relational, something I'll return to throughout this talk, and I've been thinking with the work of Professor Eriksen, Professor Strang, and Professor Hornborg for over two decades now. Doing this has been a privilege, indeed so many aspects of my journey as an anthropologist have been a privilege. And things like this, speaking with and thinking with colleagues, like all of you, about our work and what we, as scholars, can bring to bear on some of the most pressing issues of our time, is just incredible. I know some of you, but for those of you who I don't know, I'm going to take a minute at the outset of my comments to tell you about my work and to contextualise it in the themes of the symposium.

My training as an anthropologist started in 1991 in the Master's program at the University of Georgia and ended in 2000 when I completed my Ph.D. at Rutgers University. During that decade, examinations of globalisation, modernisation, and transnationalism came to dominate anthropological inquiry. For example, from 1980 to 1990, there were only 1,270 papers and chapters which used the phrase "anthropology of globalisation"; by the next decade, 1991 to 2000, there were 16,000. And between 2001 and 2010, my first decade as a faculty member, there were 95,200. So, much of my scholarship has been framed through engagements with questions about the articulations between the local and the global, and all of my scholarship has been focused on Papua New Guinea.

In my initial work, carried out in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s, I asked what happens when external, and international, ways of understanding, narrating, and managing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their biophysical surroundings come into

Contact: Paige West ✉ cw2031@columbia.edu

contact and conflict with Indigenous ways of understanding, narrating, and managing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their biophysical surroundings (West 2006). I asked this question specifically focused on terrestrial environmental conservation projects in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea that were located on the sovereign territory of Gimi-speaking peoples.

There are many nuanced ethnographic answers to this question, but a few key points are as follows. The globalised ideologies and practices of conservation worked to materially disenfranchise Indigenous people and to discursively cast them as unable to properly value the biodiversity on their lands. These ideologies and practices located Indigenous peoples in a colonial, racist, narrative that hinged on ideas about so-called primitive, child-like, natives needing to be brought into the modern by well-meaning conservation actors. These ideologies and practices also worked to remake *in situ* socio-ecological actions and relations which had been in place for thousands of years and which did not result in the decline of biological diversity but in fact contributed to its endurance, in ways that resulted in increased pressures on women's labour, disrupted local social relationships, and more extractive pressure on plants and animals. They also created conditions whereby people who had been full of pride about their ancestors and their socio-spiritual relations with their ancestorial lands, felt ashamed of them. And finally, the lenses and languages through which Indigenous practices were seen and articulated worked to generify them, to make them seem commensurable with many other 'elsewheres' for conservation practitioners, and the solutions that were thus found worked as a kind of virtual reality machine – bringing the visions of the conservation practitioners into being through their conservation interventions and in this, they worked towards homogeneity.

My second large project was driven by my Gimi-speaking friends' and collaborators' questions about why external actors who wished to conserve biological diversity through economic development interventions never paid attention to local development projects, like coffee production; and why the business people who did pay attention to coffee production seemed to see the coffee they produced in their villages as a marker of primitivity and poverty when they saw the coffee they produced as a marker of them as a key node in global commodity chains. These questions pushed me to think more carefully about production, distribution, and consumption, and how semiotic messages and ideologies come to have economic value in the global marketplace (West 2012).

As I was doing all of this work and writing about it, I was lucky enough to be constantly challenged by my colleagues from Papua New Guinea, most of whom are ecologists, biologists, and environmental activists. Initially they saw me, as a young white American woman with a faculty position at a rich university, as someone who was replicating the very histories of dispossession that I was theorising and critiquing in my scholarship. Because of this, they pushed me by asking: What does your scholarship do for people in Papua New Guinea? And how are you going to work to change the unequal conditions that you illuminate with your research? Because of these questions, since the mid-2000s, I've been working with colleagues from Papua New Guinea to redress some of the dispossessions that have come from the globalisation of Euro-American conservation ideologies and practices and to redress some of the histories of dispossession associated with anthropological research (West 2016).

Today I want to tell you about some of my current work as a way to think with you about the future of multiple forms of diversity, and what is happening to that diversity today

in the face of mass extinction, climate change, and mass dispossession tied to extraordinary capital accumulation by a small number of global elites.

In my current work I ask, is there any way to contribute to the longevity of systems that people want to continue into the future without transforming them and making them less unique? In other words, can people contribute to the long-term health of ecological systems without importing ideologies and practices into them that increase homogeneity?

Relations towards diversity

In 2008, I met my long-term collaborator John Aini, a fisheries management scholar from Lovangai, or New Hanover Island, PNG, who is also the founder of the NGO Ailan Awareness. *Ailan* means "Island" in Melanesian Tok-Pisin, the creole language spoken in Papua New Guinea. By the time we met, John and I had come to the same conclusions about environmental conservation: most conservation projects don't work in PNG, and one of the reasons is because they fail to take into account the existing, and dynamic, relations between humans and the non-human inhabitants of the same systems (Aini and West 2014). Together over the past 14 years, we have developed a methodology for fostering local consensus building around ecological and social futures that starts from the premise that if conservation matters to communities at all, it is because people maintain both their livelihoods and their socio-spiritual connections to the world through their relations with their biophysical surroundings. This methodology was developed during conversations with elders where we came to understand what Eriksen (this issue) would term their "biosemiotic" approach. The elders who advise us, see all of the physical and metaphysical entities in their world in communication and cooperation. Once we came to understand this, the form that our practice took with regard to biodiversity was radically altered. Through Ailan Awareness we have worked with communities to help them develop socio-ecological revitalisation plans based on Indigenous ecological practices, anthropological methods for research and understanding, and collaborations between elders, young people, and outsiders. Our work supports communities in developing projects focused on reviving non-flourishing systems. These systems can be ecological, social, political, economic, or some intersection of any or all of these. The systems are always assemblages, to use Deleuze and Guattari's Batesonian inspired term (Eriksen, this issue). They are made up of people, creatures, processes, ancestors, and spirits.

New Ireland, where we work, is one of the twenty-two provinces that make up Papua New Guinea. It is a marine province that is comprised of several large islands like New Ireland Island, Lovangai / New Hanover, and Lihir, as well as numerous island groups like the Saint Matthias Group, the Tabar Group, the Tanga Group, and the Feni Islands. There are 2,43,000 residents who speak 23 unique languages with 45 different dialects. New Ireland also has a long colonial history that includes missionisation, blackbirding, and forced relocations.

Today New Irelanders depend on a mix of fishing, marine gleaning, horticulture, and income from extended family members working in business and commerce, mining, oil palm plantations, and tourism. Today 75 per cent of the population lives adjacent to, and relies upon, the marine environment and coral reef systems for their income, for the food they eat, for their recreation, for their ritual needs and obligations, and for a whole host of other relations that make up daily life.

Papua New Guinea is located in the extraordinarily biologically diverse ecoregion that international conservation organisations have termed "the Coral Triangle" which includes Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste (Hughes et al. 2002). The marine environments surrounding Papua New Guinea are some of the healthiest and richest in this region (Huber 1994). They are home to more than 2000 species of tropical fish and 500 species of coral. To date, Papua New Guinea has yet to suffer from the extreme effects of overfishing, industrialisation, and extensive commercial agricultural runoff that have destroyed nearly 25 per cent of the reefs in neighbouring countries (Allen 2007; Asaad et al. 2018).

Indigenous people make up the vast majority of the residents of New Ireland, with only about eight per cent of the population born outside of the province. Internationally, while Indigenous peoples consume only two per cent of the global yearly commercial fisheries catch, per capital consumption of marine species in Indigenous communities is 15 times higher than in non-Indigenous communities (Cisneros-Montemayor et al. 2016). This means that while outside forces may be driving fisheries declines globally, locally the health of reefs and marine species is crucial for Indigenous life. To date, the dominant methodology for attempting to achieve sustainable harvests for communities and for maintaining reef health both internationally and in Papua New Guinea has been the creation of Marine Protected Areas or MPAs (Carr et al. 2019).

Externally designed and demarcated MPAs are often driven by the interests of outsiders, and organised and facilitated with a focus on the use of reefs and species that assume purely instrumental relations between people, plants, animals, and entire ecological systems. While the acknowledgement by some conservation organisations in the past decade that communities living in Papua New Guinea depend on their reefs for subsistence and livelihoods is crucial for any conservation success is important, by simply seeing instrumental value in ecological systems, these organisations continue to miss a larger context. People across New Ireland have deeper relations with their biophysical surroundings and the other beings that inhabit them than can be captured by the facts of subsistence and livelihoods (Collins 2021; Otto 1998).

Even though we were both coming to our collaboration with a lot of experience, during the first few years of our collective work, John Aini and I carried out a very large province-wide ethnographic investigation into the question of systems change. We had both seen external actors come to Papua New Guinea with extant ideas about declining biodiversity and models for understanding what actions and events were causing that decline and what methods might reverse it. All of these models were derived from work elsewhere and, when put to work in Papua New Guinea, they got things wrong, they missed nuance, they imported erroneous assumptions, they created projects that failed, they dispossessed local people in myriad ways, and they made assumptions about what changes should matter to local people. We wanted our work together to start from a point of listening, so we set out to talk to as many people as we could through multiple forms of surveys, interviews, focus groups, listening visits, and participating in local life, with four questions in mind: 1) What are the changes that you are observing in your social and ecological life that you are concerned about?; 2) Why do you think these changes are happening?; 3) What would you like to see done about them?; and 4) Who would you like to see address these changes?

We then sat down with people from New Ireland, analysed the data, and concluded

that there are a whole host of systems that people want to see flourish. These systems are social, ecological, spiritual, economic, and political. They are often the combination of some of all of these things. Some are ancient and some are not. And they are populated by beings that are in constant forms of communication and exchange and that communication and exchange or lack thereof, results in stability or instability in the systems. To use the terms laid out by Eriksen, these systems are biosemiotics in nature. And people in New Ireland often have robust theories of causality – having asked themselves and others "why" things are changing and / or not flourishing quite a bit.

Since analysing the data from that initial work, John and I have worked together with people from villages around the province and with the elders I mentioned earlier who advise us to create local sites that help the environment flourish and that are an alternative to MPAs, to create programs to strengthen the local socio-spiritual-ecological system (referred to as the *Malagan* system), to create a site for cross-generational education at a school, and to foster a new generation of people who are interested in this kind of work.

I'll spend some time on the alternative to MPAs because that gives you some insight into our methodology. We call these *Vala* Areas.

In the Tungak language *Vala* describes a form of socio-spiritual practice whereby people with deep ritual knowledge and experience call on that knowledge, their relationship with their ancestors, their ecological knowledge, and their relations with certain marine species to create favourable conditions on a reef. These favourable conditions are both material, insofar as they increase numbers of desirable and useful species, and relational, insofar as they smooth relations between living persons, living non-human creatures, spirits, and ancestors. The practice of *Vala* is both this socio-spiritual practice and the material practice of placing markers crafted from specific plants onto the reef to indicate to others that the area has been ritually enhanced and protected and that there are prohibitions against, and rules for, using it. Because of the socio-spiritual work of *Vala,* anyone who fails to adhere to the restrictions which were placed on the reef by the ritual expert, is in danger of falling ill or dying. Areas or places become *Vala* through this combination of practice, demarcation, and the local understanding that an area has been 'worked on' by a ritual expert. But they only become *Vala* through relational negotiations, conversations and agreements about causality and solutions. So *Vala* is what the place becomes, the method by which it becomes it, and the social processes that allow for it to become.

The *Vala* Plans we facilitate are made by a collaborative community effort, each uniquely designed to address a problem identified by the community with near-unanimously approved solutions. These plans draw on a combination of the *Vala* practices I just described, and research conducted by Ailan Awareness staff and outside researchers, that allows for the contextualisation of causality whereby local causes can be nested within multiple scales of ex situ causes.

I'll give two examples of the *Vala* work.

In one site, people saw the bay in which they fish for both local use and commercial species becoming less healthy. Key species were declining and there were a number of local theories of change. Working with colleagues from the site, interns from the national fisheries college, engineers from the local government, and ecologists from the University of Papua New Guinea, we did a socio-ecological study to understand what was happening. We found that a logging road built in the late 1980s had eroded and that the physical changes from this

erosion were changing the nutrient balance in the bay and that people were coming from adjacent areas and fishing in the bay without permission from local elders. We also found that a huge number of young people had left the site to work elsewhere, and that elders were worried that they were not able to train the young to carry out important practices that work to enliven and keep healthy the local reef system. We worked with people to facilitate a plan of action that included repairing the structural problems with the road, instating a *Vala* area in the bay with strict protocols and rules, creating a program for getting young people excited about learning what elders wanted to teach, and facilitating some difficult conversations between elders and young people.

In another site we worked with elders who were having trouble controlling the taking of appropriately sized species from their local fringing reef area and keeping people from other islands off of their reef. They set up a *Vala* area and then working with us they revitalised local fish traps. They drew on their own existing knowledge, archival research that I and my students at Barnard and Columbia did and reading translations of texts focused on fish traps in other places across Oceania.

Our other kinds of collaborative work grew out of our initial collaborative work and the methodology we use for it.

In 2012, a group of elders, traditional leaders or *Maimai*, and master carvers came to John and me and asked us to work with them to think about the longevity and liveliness of the *Malagan* system. *Malagan* is the name for a complex system of ceremonies, rituals, and customary practices in Northern New Ireland that includes the carving of extraordinary wooden objects. Since then, we have worked with elders to think about *Malagan* carving techniques and what needs to be done to strengthen the conditions whereby these practices, and the entire socio-ecological and spiritual matrix that they are a part of, continues into the future. Here, we partnered with the American Museum of Natural History and the US Ambassador's fund for cultural perseveration and created a digital archive of *Malagan* objects housed at the museum which were repatriated to the master carvers and their families through a gift of iPad tablets from the Tow Foundation. These carvers used this as an impetus to create lineage specific carving schools that are getting young people interested in the more esoteric aspects of *Malagan* as well as in learning to carve.

Additionally, in 2009, we cofounded the *Ranguva Solwara Skul*, a school dedicated to teaching at the nexus of Indigenous and scientific knowledge. The school functions like what we would call a sleep-away camp in North America. When we have the funding for it, we bring young people together with elders and outside researchers to conduct week-long projects focused on teaching about reef health at the nexus of local expertise, scientific expertise, and pedagogical techniques that get kids excited about both the environment and the things that their grandparents and community elders know about the world. This is also tied to a project we have with a group of *Maimai* focused on strengthen traditional leadership.

From the beginning of our collaboration, we have worked with the PNG National Fisheries College to host interns who want to move from fisheries management degrees into NGO work. These students work with John and I each North American summer to do a range of projects that teach them different aspects of how NGOs work. We have also worked with interns from my university. Some of these students have come to PNG to volunteer with Ailan Awareness but the majority of them have done work towards bio-cultural revitalisation through archival research, through designing digital repatriation programs,

and through other various tasks that support both Ailan Awareness and other local NGOs and Community Based Organisations (CBOs).

Finally, in late 2019, we received a grant that was going to allow us to expand our *Malagan* work. Women leaders came to us in 2017 and asked us to work with them on documenting and revitalising women's dances, women's songs, and women's epistemic practice around biodiversity. This work was stalled by the Covid19 crisis but our wonderful funder, Synchronicity Earth, allowed us to repurpose that entire grant to facilitate Covid education across New Ireland. We worked with the local nursing college and the local hospital to take health care workers to remote islands to talk with people about Covid prevention and to try and dispel some of the misinformation about the pandemic.

Conclusion

Our approach in everything we do follows an ethical guideline that we have developed with the elders who serve as our advisors. It is based on three action-based practices: 1) Step up, 2) Mobilise resources, and 3) Step back.

Stepping Up: For us this means that we go where we are asked to go when communities or community members invite us to meet with them and to talk about their concerns over socio-ecological and socio-spiritual loss. We do not impose ourselves on communities who do not invite us.

Mobilising Resources: Once we have a relationship with a community and we understand what their needs and desires are with regard to socio-ecological and socio-spiritual revitalisation, we work to find the resources and tools that allow for the plans they make to come to fruition. We utilise the expertise we have in-house, we call on and draw on the expertise of our colleagues across the globe, we work with interns from Barnard College and Columbia University as well as from schools in Papua New Guinea, and we seek funding from foundations to bring community plans into being.

Stepping Back: We believe that once we have provided our expertise and resources that communities must own their projects or enact sovereignty over them. We have watched too many NGOs micromanage community-based projects in a way that seems to indicate that the project 'belongs' to the NGO and not the community. While we provide on-going visits and spaces for discussion and plan revisions and refinement, at a fundamental level we believe that all our work belongs to our partners, not to us. We rely heavily on the work of community elders in this part of our process. We believe that entrusting the projects to elders both creates conditions for their longevity and strengthens local respect for elders.

Our work together focuses on fostering Indigenous self-determination with regard to socio-spiritual-ecological relations during a time of overheating (Eriksen 2016) and the acceleration of acceleration (Erikson, this issue). We are not naïve about the state of what people might call 'biodiversity' and 'cultural diversity'. In many places in the world the complex assemblages between creatures, systems, human understandings, and cross-being communication are changing in ways that tend towards homogeneity. In New Ireland the gain in momentum of 'acceleration' has brought the worst of marine and coastal climate-related transformation. The water, already the warmest water in the world, is getting hotter. Thermal expansion has resulted in sea level rise that has affected drinking water, food production, settlement location, and other aspects of people's daily lives. Changing weather patterns, and the increased intensity of storms, have affected everything. Yet, the systems of

relationality, the biosemiotic assemblages, if one is to use the language of this issue, that the people we work with care about, while changed, are still there. Our work foregrounds the desires for system longevity decided upon by local people and together we try to do what we can to make lives better while we still can.

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kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
VOL. 6, NO. 1
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497388

Memory making, memory marketing: Mobile films, social media, and popular struggle in Burkina Faso

Sten Hagberg | Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University

ABSTRACT: This article examines the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance in Burkina Faso as "critical events," in the sense of the term as suggested by Veena Das (1995), to explore the interaction between street level struggle and social media activism. More specifically, I seek to understand the way in which images and video-clips shared online became vehicles of political change in Burkina Faso. The images and video-clips shared online by the Burkinabe people soon came to constitute grassroots representations of the "new Burkina Faso." Once the days of the revolt were over, DVDs and CDs with video-clips and images were copied, multiplied, and sold by petty vendors in the streets of Ouagadougou, alongside more professional productions documenting this particular period of Burkinabe history. Taken together, I argue that such a documentation was part of memory making and, by extension, memory marketing of the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance, and furthermore articulated the political legacy of the late President Thomas Sankara. In this vein, the critical events of the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance changed the manner in which politics was practiced, while being inscribed in the *longue durée* of Burkinabe popular struggle.

Keywords: Burkina Faso, political anthropology, street protest, social media, revolution

Introduction

On 30-31 October 2014, a popular insurrection ousted Burkina Faso's president Blaise Compaoré from power. This insurrection – at the time referred to as "a revolution" (Hagberg et al. 2015; Sangaré and Vink 2015) – was a major democratic breakthrough in a country hitherto characterised by a semi-authoritarian regime (Hilgers and Mazzocchetti 2010) or a double-façade democracy (Hagberg 2010). After 27 years in office, President Compaoré had finally crossed his Rubicon when he decided to modify the Constitution, so that he could stand for a new term, and, in practice, enjoy a lifetime presidency. Faced with such a blatantly autocratic attempt to monopolise power, the Burkinabe people rose up and said no to the president and his regime after a massive mobilisation of civil society organisations, labour unions, opposition parties, as well as ordinary citizens who felt that "enough is enough." A few weeks after the fall of Compaoré, a one-year political transition was agreed upon so as to prepare for democratic elections in the country. Retired diplomat Michel Kafando was appointed Transition President, and in turn, he appointed Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Yacouba Zida, the second-in-command of the notorious Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP), as Prime Minister.

Contact: Sten Hagberg ✉ sten.hagberg@antro.uu.se

In September 2015 however, just a few weeks away from the planned elections, a coup d'état took place. The RSP coupists took the president, the prime minister, and the government hostage. The coup was condemned by most Burkinabe, civil society organisations, trade unions, and political parties, as well as by the international community. Once again, the Burkinabe people rose up and mobilised against this autocratic attempt. Resistance mounted in Ouagadougou and elsewhere in the country, and just a few days later, it became perceptively clear that the coup would fail. The regular army sided with the Burkinabe people, and troops started to move towards the capital. Many feared a military confrontation, but the regular army initiated negotiations with the coupists. After intense nightly negotiations, an agreement was reached that included the disarming of the RSP. The Burkinabe resistance had paid off.

In this article, I examine the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance as "critical events," in the sense of the term as suggested by Veena Das (1995). According to Das, critical events are those events that have instituted new forms of action which have redefined traditional social and political categories. Critical events mark a change in the manner in which politics is practiced . My take on critical events is to explore the interaction between street level struggle and social media activism. More specifically, I seek to understand the way in which images and video-clips shared online became vehicles of political change in Burkina Faso. Images and video-clips shared online by the Burkinabe people soon came to constitute grassroots representations of the "new Burkina Faso" where "nothing shall be as before" (Hagberg et al. 2015, 2018). And once the days of the revolt were over – the insurrection lasted just a few days, say, no more than four days (Hagberg et al. 2015), and the resistance against the coup itself lasted only for a week (Hagberg 2015) – DVDs and CDs with video-clips and images were copied, multiplied, and sold by petty vendors in the streets of Ouagadougou. At the same time, more professional productions of Semfilms and their Ciné Droit Libre, as well as freelancing photographers also documented this particular period of Burkinabe history.[1] Taken together, such a documentation was part of memory making and, by extension, memory marketing of the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance. Furthermore, these critical events articulated the political legacy of the late President Thomas Sankara who was killed in 1987, in the coup that brought Compaoré to power. In this vein, these critical events of the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance changed the manner in which politics was practiced, while being inscribed in the *longue durée* of Burkinabe popular struggle.

Beyond the specific case of Burkina Faso, I also discuss the relationship between popular struggle and social media, which has become very important in contemporary history, especially since the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 (Bayat 2015; Honwana 2013). Today any political protest against the powerholders is simultaneously orchestrated on social media. Donald Trump's tweets are just one extreme example of how politics is articulated in parallel – in the streets, as it were – and on social media (Hart 2020). The implication of Facebook in the Brexit referendum in the UK is another example (Hall 2022). And Russia's war in Ukraine is certainly being fought both on the battlefield as well as on social media. That said, social media activism and street level struggle have become so intrinsically interwoven that

[1] The film "Une révolution africaine : les dix jours qui ont fait chuter Blaise Compaoré" is a masterpiece in its own genre. It describes protesters and activists in the midst of struggle of the Burkinabe October revolution 2014. The film is a joint venture by the Collectif Ciné Droit Libre TV (Sangaré and Vink 2015).

we have hard time figuring out what is going on, how, and where. Protesters share images and video-clips, comments, and battle cries on social media that are in turn integrated into the struggle. Combatants' fighting spirits are galvanised by photos and films taken by young protesters and instantly shared on social media. With great bravery and commitment, the young protesters take the initiative to express their yearning for a different future, both in the streets and on social media (e.g., Bayat 2018; Hagberg et al. 2015; Honwana 2013; Kirwin et al. 2022).

This article seeks to understand how the interaction between street level political protests and social media activism impacted the political actions in Burkina Faso in 2014-15. Even though the distinction between street level and social media protests is blurred due to many street activists simultaneously being online activists, it is my contention that social media activism cannot replace street level politics. Furthermore, the article aims to contribute to the growing scholarship on the anthropology of revolution. Following the Arab Spring and the subsequent worldwide upheavals in its aftermath, "a small but growing number of anthropologists" began to systematically focus on "political revolutions as cultural processes" (Thomassen 2018: 160). Anthropological accounts of revolution and protests parallel some empirically grounded qualitative research in political sciences (Bayart et al. 2008; Mueller 2018; Siméant 2014). Throughout the article, I analyse the use and abuse of images and video-clips as a way to understand the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance in Burkina Faso, not only as political, but also as cultural processes. I relate these critical events to the legacy of former President Thomas Sankara (1983-1987), notably the flourishing Sankarism. More recently, the Sankarist legacy was clearly articulated in the September 2022 coup perpetrated by Captain Ibrahim Traoré.

Methodologically, the article builds on my long-term research engagement[2] with the interplay between political culture and radical change, so as to produce comparative ethnographic knowledge about power and politics as practiced in different societies and countries (Hagberg 2019b, 2021). The article is first and foremost based on ethnographic fieldwork, including participant observation in the streets of Ouagadougou. Moreover, I did online participant observation as the critical events unfolded, combined with informal interviews with colleagues and friends in Burkina Faso, and I also carried out fieldwork[3] together with a team of Burkinabe colleagues, in the weeks following the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance (Hagberg et al. 2018).

In this article, I publish images referred to in the analysis, and this requires ethical considerations.[4] Even though anonymised, I have chosen to publish some images of dead bodies, because these images are available, well-known, and more importantly, played a crucial role. It was when images like these were spread on social media that the struggle reached a point of no return. As shocking and as disturbing as they are, these images were so central to the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance that I have chosen to reproduce them here. In a sense, their publication in this article may well be part of memory making.

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[2] Since 1988, I have been conducting research in Burkina Faso, totalling more than 8 years of ethnographic fieldwork.

[3] My analysis is furthermore based on collaborative research carried out with Ludovic Kibora, Adjara Konkobo, Siaka Gnessi, Sidi Barry, and Firmin Nana.

[4] Some photos were taken by unknown protesters who instantly published them on Facebook, while others were taken by me. One photo was taken by professional photographer Paul Kabré in Bobo-Dioulasso.

The article is organised as follows. In the next section, I describe what I conceptualise as two critical events – the 2014 popular insurrection and the 2015 resistance – in some detail, as they both articulate some essential facets of the prevalent political culture in Burkina Faso. In the third section, I narrate how images and video-clips were used in the heat of popular struggles. The fourth section focuses on the marketing of memories, that is, how a street market of images, posters, and films emerged, and were soon shaping the manner in which people were referring to the critical events. In the fifth section, I broaden the perspective to look into the upsurge of attempts to document the Burkinabe social and political transformations; locally produced books, homemade video-clips, and engaged researchers (including myself) trying to contribute to the understanding of memory making of recent struggles. To conclude, I argue that the cross-fertilisation of mobile firms, social media, and popular struggle all considered together, narrates a particular story of contemporary socio-political transformations in Burkina Faso. While the critical events analysed here were unfolding in the streets of Ouagadougou, they were simultaneously occurring online, by way of comments, images, and video-clips. It was in the streets however, that people got wounded and killed, and where people were immediately exposed to the violence of the security forces (RSP).[5]

Insurrection and resistance in Burkinabe political culture

The 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance have to be situated in the larger context of Burkinabe political history and political culture, as they are aligned to past struggles for radical political change, for instance, the uprising against President Maurice Yaméogo on 3 January 1966, or the Democratic and Popular Revolution led by President Thomas Sankara between 1983–1987, or the human rights movements against impunity in the wake of the assassination of journalist Norbert Zongo in 1998, or the 2011 army mutinies (Hagberg et al. 2015). The timeline of revolts and uprisings shows the continuity of the efforts, and even though the Burkinabe people display tremendous endurance and resilience against power abuse, they arrive at a moment when "enough is enough" (Hagberg 2002; Harsch 2017). For a long time, Compaoré's presidency seemed to be the exception, as he succeeded in staying at the helm of power for 27 years, but his regime came to an end after the 2014 insurrection.

Captain Blaise Compaoré came to power in a bloody coup d'état on 15 October 1987 in which President Thomas Sankara was killed. The assassination of Sankara and his 12 companions is today epitomised as a turning point. Sankara was a charismatic revolutionary leader who embodied integrity and dignity.[6] He cleaned up the country, as it were, and gave the country a new name, and, even more importantly, gave it pride and respect. He successfully combatted widespread corruption and punished bad governance. In doing so however, he also made enemies. In one of his speeches, Sankara said: "You can kill Sankara today, but tomorrow thousands of other Sankaras will be born."[7] Today, the popularity of Sankara is massive among the Burkinabe youth; he has become a role model for the African youth more generally, because in contrast to many presidents, he was a leader not

[5] While many activists were simultaneously in the street and online, social media activists and observers were definitely less exposed to the violence of security forces.

[6] There is a body of scholarly work on Sankara and his legacy (e.g., Harsch 2014; Peterson 2021; Somé 1990). The publication of Thomas Sankara's speeches are also published on a regular basis (e.g., Sankara 2008).

[7] "Tuez Sankara aujourd'hui, demain naîtront des milliers d'autres Sankara."

serving himself but his people. Therefore, the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance are integrated into the public memory making and memory marketing of the late Thomas Sankara, including the building of a Memorial at the very site where he and his comrades were assassinated.

After a few years of severe and bloody political repression and violence (assassinations, tortures, extra-judicial jailing, etc.), Compaoré initiated a process of democratisation in 1990 to end the long period of the state of emergency in the country (Otayek et al. 1996), and the following year a new Constitution was adopted. Compaoré was elected in 1991, 1998, 2005, and 2010, always receiving an overwhelming majority in the first round. Yet, even though the paragraph 37 of the 1991 Constitution defined a limit of two seven-year terms for the president, totalling 14 years in office, the Constitution was first modified in 1997, waiving the two terms limitation so as to allow Compaoré to continue as president. In 2001, the Constitution was modified once again due to massive popular protests after the assassination of Journalist Norbert Zongo (Hagberg 2002; Santiso and Loada 2003); the president's duration in office was then limited to two five-year terms, totalling 10 years. Despite the new constitutional change of 2001, Compaoré did present himself as "a new candidate" in 2005 (Hilgers and Mazzocchetti 2010; Hagberg 2010). According to the provisions of the law, he was thus able to run for a new term, renewable once. In 2010, he obtained 80 per cent of the votes in the first round. According to the Constitution, this would be Compaoré's last term. And yet much political debate over the next two years that followed, focused on whether the president would manoeuvre to be able to stay in power (Hagberg et al. 2018: 21; Hilgers and Loada 2013). One such attempt was to create a second chamber – a Senate – to pave the way for Compaoré's regime to stay on, but popular protests made the president stop the process despite the fact that all senators had already been appointed (Hagberg et al. 2015). Hence, the political opposition mobilised against life presidency, including brandishing the red card against a new term for Compaoré during a mass meeting at the National Football Stadium in May 2014 (Hagberg et al. 2018). Furthermore, civil society revived itself with the creation of organisations like the Balai Citoyen, and the Front de résistance citoyenne, etc. (Degorce and Palo 2018; Hagberg et al. 2018). And finally in January 2014, a major challenge to Compaoré's power materialised when three of his closest collaborators – Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, Salifou Diallo and Simon Compaoré[8] – left the Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (CDP) to create the Mouvement du Peuple pour la Progrès (MPP).

On 21 October 2014, the Burkinabe government finally decided to send a Bill to the National Assembly to modify the Constitution so that Compaoré would be allowed to run for a new term. At the same time, the Bill would definitely lock paragraph 37 of the Constitution for further modifications. Accordingly, Compaoré would be allowed to stay on for another term, while the Bill would simultaneously block against such a situation occurring in the future. For most people however, this meant in practice a life presidency for Compaoré, considering the regime's track-record of modifying the Constitution. Once the government's decision was announced, mobilisation and protests spread like wildfire in

[8] MPP's president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, had been Prime Minister and president of the National Assembly; its 1st vice-president, Salifou Diallo, had been Secretary of State to the Presidency before being promoted to Minister of Agriculture; and its 2nd vice-president, Simon Compaoré, was the Mayor of Ouagadougou from 1995 to 2012.

the country. On 27 October, several thousand women took to the streets of Ouagadougou to march against the proposed constitutional changes; they went out with spatulas and broomsticks demanding Compaoré to step down. The next day on 28 October, a record-high turnout was witnessed when hundreds of thousands of protesters – some even claim the figure was one million people – took to the streets to protest against the Bill (Hagberg et al. 2015).

On 30 October, when the Bill was to be voted by the National Assembly, Ouagadougou was filled with protesters. At a given moment[9], the protesters succeeded in entering the courtyard of the National Assembly. They soon sacked, looted, and set the building on fire. The Burkinabe national television was attacked as well as the residences of key powerholders of the Compaoré regime (Hagberg et al. 2015, 2018). Once the popular uprising was launched, the regime made attempts to seek compromises: first, the government announced that the Bill had been withdrawn; second, the public was informed that the government and the National Assembly had been dissolved in the hours following the attack on the National Assembly; and third, in a TV speech to the Nation on the same evening, Compaoré promised to step down by the end of 2015. Despite these attempts, protesters demanded the immediate resignation of the president. On 31 October around 12 o'clock, Compaoré finally resigned after an ultimatum had been pressed by protesters who had gathered in front of the HQ of Chief of Defense Staff in central Ouagadougou, where negotiations between senior army officers and a number of civil society leaders were ongoing (Hagberg et al. 2015: 211). Instantaneously, there was a void in power as it were, and the army assumed power to avoid further looting and to control the volatility of the revolt and the overall situation.

For a few weeks, a military transitional government led by Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Yacouba Zida of the RSP (Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle) was in charge. It was later replaced by a civilian-military transition regime, because the country's "social and political forces" (*les forces vives de la Nation*), except those belonging to Compaoré's party CDP, had quickly negotiated a one-year political transition to prepare democratic elections and pave the way for a "new Burkina Faso." Three weeks after the popular insurrection on 30-31 October 2014, a Collegium put in place by *les forces vives de la Nation* appointed retired diplomat – Michel Kafando – as Transition President. Once formally installed, Kafando in turn appointed Isaac Yacouba Zida, who had been *de facto* Head of State for the three-week military transition, as Prime Minister. Initially, Zida was seen as "the man of the RSP" in the Transition Regime. In December 2014, however, he publicly declared that justice would be sought for all victims of the Compaoré regime, many of whom had been killed by RSP soldiers (Hagberg 2002; Hagberg et al. 2018; Frère 2010; Chouli 2015). In other words, the second-in-command of RSP had aligned himself with the Burkinabe people's claims for truth and justice. Yet the RSP troops did not accept this new wave of revolutionary change from their former commander. Over the course of the following year, RSP troops provoked "troubles" several times – a euphemism for essentially trying to capture and maybe even kill the prime minister – before they finally perpetrated a coup d'état.

The September 2015 coup aimed to stop the democratic process launched since the fall of Compaoré. The coup d'état however, failed. Once again, the Burkinabe people stood up against these "phantoms of the past," as one civil society leader put it. After a week of

[9] Protesters had attacked from different sides and at around 9:20 in the morning they finally succeeded in entering the National Assembly, when the police had to focus on saving MPs from the excited mob (Hagberg et al. 2015: 209-210).

grassroots struggle, civil disobedience, and popular resistance, the RSP coupists finally gave up when the regular army supported the cause of the Burkinabe people and threatened to attack the RSP with heavy artillery (Hagberg 2015). The popular resistance was key to turning the situation against the coupists, despite attempts of international actors, notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to strike a compromise with the coupists (Saidou 2018).

In the remainder of the article, I explore the use and abuse of smartphone images and homemade video-clips in these critical events of Burkina Faso in 2014-2015.

Images and video-clips in revolution and resistance

The social media explosion that we have experienced in the last decade blurs the boundaries and contours of familiar conceptions of the world, especially key social, spatial, and temporal distinctions such as "us"/"them," "here"/"there," "now"/"then," etc. What was quickly called the Arab Spring – or the Facebook revolution – did impact the ways in which politics and popular mobilisation were carried out (Bayat 2015; Honwana 2013). In many African countries, protests and social movements took on new forms, and civil society organisations and movements rejuvenated. Earlier and older social and political activists working through underground tracts were replaced by bloggers, social media activists, and rappers. In Togo, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Burundi, Senegal, Mali, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Sudan, to mention a few, street protests have come to dominate news reporting and social media flows. Sometimes it even becomes difficult to figure out what originates from traditional media and what comes from social media.[10] Among the different platforms currently used in political and social struggles in West Africa, Facebook is one main channel, WhatsApp is another, and Twitter is a third.[11]

Let me illustrate my point with an example. In September 2017, I suddenly started to receive a flow of images and video-clips on WhatsApp from a Togolese friend in Uppsala. He is a bus driver who has been living in Sweden for more than 30 years. He sent me all these pictures and videos because he wanted "to inform me" that "we have to do something." In Togo, protesters were brutally oppressed by security forces as the opposition wanted to return to the 1992 Constitution and stop President Faure Gnassingbé from running for another presidential term. My smart phone was soon filled with horrific images and shaky video-clips that allegedly documented what was going on in the country. I have not (yet) visited Togo and am by no means a seasoned observer of politics and culture of the country. Still, I think my friend's actions in sending images and video-clips from ongoing social and political protests exemplifies something significant in how activist-citizens' images travel across the globe. To some extent, the "revolution," as it were, may nowadays be perceived and experienced far away from the real social and political struggle, and violent repression. While those who are outside of the country are for sure, not exposed to violence and repression comparable to those in the country, the new connectivity that social media allows for, blurs clear-cut social, spatial, and temporal distinctions. Therefore, we need to critically analyse

[10] This is of course not a particularly African problem, and it has accentuated in the so-called Trump-Bannon doctrine (see Hart 2020).

[11] In December 2020, there were more than 233 million Facebook subscribers in Africa (Boakey 2021).

the production and sharing of images and video-clips as new forms of political action.

In the following section, I highlight different themes of the images and video-clips that documented the two critical events of the 2014 popular insurrection and the 2015 resistance against the coup in Burkina Faso.

Instant information

The first and immediate use of social media was to show the world what was going on. On the morning of 30 October 2014, an assault was launched on the National Assembly and it was destroyed by thousands and thousands of mostly young protesters just before the Bill on Constitutional change would have been voted upon. Protesters then marched to the luxury neighbourhood Ouaga2000 where the presidential palace is located. There, the RSP soldiers shot live rounds, killing two young men and wounding many others. Another group attacked the house of François Compaoré, the young brother of the president. One young man was killed on the Boulevard just outside François Compaoré's "bunker."[12] These killings were quickly documented by other protesters, and soon photos of dead bodies were published on Facebook. These were detailed pictures of young, visibly unarmed, children who had been shot to death by the RSP. In contrast to other armed forces, the RSP was the only military unit that clearly sided with the Compaoré regime. In accordance with professional journalistic norms, most of these photos of dead bodies were not published in established media outlets, like lefaso.net, and omega.bf, let alone by international news agencies. Ethically, it would even have been difficult to justify the outright publication of identifiable dead bodies bathed in blood. Yet on social media, these were shared to the outcry and agony of users. The images and video-clips documented details of what really happened on these days when Compaoré and his regime fell (Hagberg et al. 2015, 2018).

Figure 1: A young man killed on 30 October 2014. Image from Facebook.

[12] In Burkinabe French, the term "bunker" is often used to designate luxury houses of power-holders, alluding to the fortress character of the buildings erected by the *nouveaux riches*. In the case of François Compaoré, he was particularly hated for having abused power in his ambiguous capacity of "pétit president."

Figure 2: A victim killed during the 2015 resistance. Image from Facebook.

In September 2015, a similar urge to document dead bodies took place during the resistance against the coup d'état. Largely unknown users published photos of dead bodies, unarmed victims of this RSP coup (Hagberg 2015). A few weeks later, a ceremony was organised at the Place de la Révolution to honour the memories of the victims. Most were very young people.

Figure 3: The public ceremony on 9 October 2015 in the memory of the victims fallen in the resistance against the 2015 coup. Photo: Sten Hagberg

The publication of photographs of dead bodies was an attempt to document and spread the news about violent events, as they were unfolding. It would probably be erroneous to try to read more from these photos. Still, they do represent a shocking way of making a difference; when dead bodies were displayed in social media, followers reacted with anger and despair. In interviews carried out just after the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance, many suggested that images of dead bodies galvanised the struggle (Hagberg et al. 2018). People

had sacrificed their lives and the publication of these images was an appeal to those still alive. For example, one interlocutor said that "the whole thing had become a sort of challenge that we all had to take up, even at the cost of our lives." Nine months later, during the 2015 resistance against the coup d'état, images of dead bodies once again galvanised people. When seeing the atrocities committed by the RSP, many felt that the struggle was an absolute necessity, to honour the memory of dead comrades. And that the struggle had reached a point of no return.

The publication of pictures of dead bodies appealed to public opinion, blurring distinctions between national and international actors; all could see shocking images instantly published. One particular video-clip from the 2014 insurrection, showing protesters running towards RSP barricades in Ouaga2000, close to the presidential palace, shocked people. A young protester was suddenly shot dead, to the visible despair and fear of other protesters; the clip brutally documented a glimpse of the popular insurrection through the smartphone of one protester.

Mobilisation of global media attention

A second kind of photos and video-clips were more oriented to make comments, and directly push for further mobilisation. The dismantling of the statue of President Compaoré in Bobo-Dioulasso on 28 October 2014 was a high point of the movement. Located at the crossroads of the routes leading to Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, adjacent to Bobo-Dioulasso International Airport, the monument was composed of two statues representing Compaoré and Gaddafi. The statue of Compaoré was torn down, in a way that mirrored the tearing down of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2003. The statue of Gaddafi was left untouched because he was still seen as an important benefactor, even a few years after his brutal death. For the protesters, reported lefaso.net, Gaddafi is eternal, and must continue to stand up in Bobo-Dioulasso (Lefaso.net 28/10/2014).

Figure 4: The statue of Blaise Compaoré is brought down by force in Bobo-Dioulasso. Image from Facebook.

Another image that caught global media attention was the photo of a banner with Compaoré as "the Ebola of Burkina Faso"; this slogan was written on many walls in the country in those days, making reference to the then ongoing Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

Figure 5: Blaise Compaoré equated with Ebola, the deadly epidemic. Image from Facebook.

Lots of films and photos showed young men challenging the regime. On 30 October, one young man took the banner that the MPs carry when on duty; he moved around so as to assert that the "National Assembly is now in the street." Another image portrayed a man wearing a T-shirt with a shooting target and a message painted on the chest: "Shoot! The Fatherland or Death" (*Tirez! La Patrie ou La Mort*).[13]

The images and video-clips were used to portray current powerholders, and to show the courage of the protestors. The message was "we do not fear them any longer," and this also made people pursue the struggle. These images caught global media attention. It makes good news reporting to show statues being torn down by enthusiastic protesters, or how they portray the president as a deadly virus. To some extent, humour and violence converged in these images and video-clips, which reinforced the sentiments of a peaceful revolution.

Sex, intimacy, and rumours

In October 2014, other photos showed Compaoré as blood thirsty. Many made fun of him. And in September 2015, there were numerous photos of General Gilbert Diendéré, often with satirical comments. A related strand is related to sex and intimacy. A photo of what allegedly was François Compaoré's mattress was carried away by protesters who had been looting the house of the *petit président*. People quickly turned the house of the younger brother of Blaise Compaoré into "the Museum François Compaoré." For many months to come, anyone could enter the house, and sellers of photos and videos set up stalls outside. Moreover, what was supposed to be the underwear of François Compaoré's mother-in-law,

[13] The expression *La Patrie ou La Mort: Nous Vaincrons*, was the main slogan during the Sankarist revolution in the 1980s and is still the last line of the National Anthem *Ditanyè*.

Alizéta Ouédraogo (nicknamed "Alizéta Gando"[14]), was displayed in public after her house was looted. The display of something so intimate of a powerful woman – she was also the president of Burkinabe Chamber of Commerce and Industry and one of the past regime's most feared and hated actors – was a sexist way of denigrating her power and influence. The image of her underwear was immediately spread on social media.

Figure 6: Ransacking the houses of the pétit président and his mother-in-law. Images from Facebook.

A series of other images were spread from François Compaoré's house, notably the alleged traces and pictures of sacrifices that would have taken place in the basement. One image was said to show a young woman sucking blood from a man who was lying on the ground, even though it is not very clear what this image really showed. Another one showed the head of a

Figure 7: A photo of a sheep head allegedly found in François Compaoré's home. The photo was used to indicate that sacrifices had been carried out there. Image from Facebook.

[14] The word *gando* translates to 'leather-skin' in Mooré, alluding to Alizéta Ouédraogo's dominance and de facto monopoly of leather exports from Burkina Faso under Compaoré.

sheep, indicating that sacrifices had taken place there.
A third image was a traditional *bobo* (kaftan gown-like dress) with traces of blood, suggesting that it had been used when making sacrifices. Rumours about the Compaoré brothers' alleged practice of human sacrifices had circulated for long time.[15] Such rumours about the practice of the occult by powerholders clinging to power have been investigated in various political analyses (ter Haar and Ellis 2009).[16] To my mind, while recognising that discourses on occult politics are prevalent in many African countries, it is important to study popular accusations against powerholders said to practice the occult politics. Rumours and accusations, like conspiracy theories, may say more about those who utter them and their sense of powerlessness in society than the veracity of actual practice.

Stray bullets and everyday life

During the resistance against the coup d'état in September 2015, images were spread to show how ordinary people were affected by terror and violence of RSP soldiers (Hagberg 2015). One image widely shared showed how a bullet had penetrated a family's meal; their traditional porridge (*tô*) was hit by a bullet, but no-one was injured. Another image showed a newborn baby that had been hit by a bullet in its backside; fortunately, the bullet did not kill the baby.

Figure 8: Stray bullets hitting the evening dish and a newborn baby. Images from Facebook.

These images conveyed the message of uncontrolled, arbitrary violence used by the RSP coupists. Instead of maintaining order and discipline, these soldiers were randomly shooting live rounds and were indifferent to the consequences. Bullets penetrating a family meal, and even worse a newborn baby, demonstrated how no one was safe any longer.

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[15] In Burkina Faso, at the time of "the Zongo affair" in 1998-99 there were rumours accusing François Compaoré of having sacrificed an albino man and suggesting that his driver David Ouédraogo had been witness to this. The driver was tortured to death in what soon became "the David affair," an incident that would ultimately lead to the assassination of Norbert Zongo in December 1998 (Hagberg 2002).

[16] A debate emerged in *Africa* following the review article of Terence Ranger in 2007 (Ranger 2007; ter Haar and Ellis; Meyer 2009).

Beyond the capital

Another dimension revealed by images published on Facebook showed support from the whole country, as well as from the Burkinabe in the diaspora. The case of Bobo-Dioulasso is particularly interesting, because protesters in the city mobilised against Compaoré, even though the violent battle took place in Ouagadougou. In October 2022, *bobolais* protesters burned the City Hall and the Justice Palace, representing the Compaoré regime and its mismanagement. The central mayor Salia Sanou was a fervent supporter of Compaoré. Just days before the insurrection in October 2014, he told the regional section of civil society organisation *Balai Citoyen* "to march on their heads to Ouagadougou."[17] This was published in *L'Express du Faso*, a local daily, and as a reminder a photo of the article was published on Facebook on 5 November 2014, a few days after the fall of Compaoré.

In September 2015, Bobo-Dioulasso became the capital of resistance, as curfew was imposed in Ouagadougou. Images from those days show the power and determination of the protesters. Resistance was well organised and the imagery documents how protesters moved between the Bobo-Dioulasso's hotspots: the Tiefo Amoro Square in front of the railway station, the Military Region's HQ, the labour unions' bourse de travail.

To sum up, the images and video-clips that I have described here are among those that were widely shared on social media, notably Facebook and WhatsApp. They communicated different messages, including showing the outside world what was going on and simultaneously mobilising and galvanising protesters to pursue the struggle. They also made fun of powerholders in shameful ways (displaying mattress and underwear) and pointed to alleged human sacrifices in the basement of the house of François Compaoré. In the 2015 resistance, the impact on everyday life – stray bullets hitting a meal or a newborn baby – strengthened the viewpoint that RSP coupists were reckless and random brutes playing with the lives of ordinary Burkinabe.

Marketing Memories

Once the fall of Compaoré was over and the difficult negotiations regarding a political transition began, life started to return to some kind of normality. Yet a street market of images, posters, and video-clips emerged with numerous street vendors selling CDs and DVDs. Right in front of François Compaoré's house, which had been looted and which was then turned into "the Museum François Compaoré," vendors made a business of selling photos and posters from the fall of the regime. Though these street vendors were making money out of an opportunity, but by doing so they were also contributing to memory making. By marketing tangible memories people could get hold of "proofs" (images, CDs, DVDs, posters) of what had happened during the 2014 insurrection.

A similar marketing of memories took place in September-October 2015 after the coup d'état had failed and the RSP had been disarmed and dissolved (Hagberg 2015). On 9 October 2015, a ceremony which I also attended, was organised in memory of the victims, with many street vendors selling photos and posters.

Marketing memories reinforced dominant narratives that soon came to shape the ways in which people referred to these events. The fall of Compaoré made his supporters become discrete and keep quiet for the coming months. The 2014 insurrection, and the

[17] *Qu'ils marchent sur leurs têtes jusqu'à Ouagadougou*.

Figure 9: Marketing memories outside the "Museum François Compaoré." Photo: Sten Hagberg.

2015 resistance meant that the country changed direction, and people took pride in, and were consciously aware about these critical events in its modern political history. "Nothing," so it was argued, "will be as before."

There were also state initiatives aimed at producing public memories. The political transition led by Kafando in 2014-15 was particularly active in producing memories. The Monument of National Heroes in Ouaga2000 is the most evident example (Gabriel 2017). And in 2020 under the presidency of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, a Memorial of the late President Sankara was inaugurated in central Ouagadougou. Important contributions were also made by Ciné Droit Libre, a web-based TV-channel run by Semfilms (http://www.droitlibre.net/). Funded by Danish and Swedish development aid, these actors played a key role in the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance. They documented the ongoing popular struggle, often with smartphones coupled with more professional footage. The Ciné Droit Libre documented the events as they evolved. And the international connection made these actors more difficult to hit, even though they were in no way "untouchable."

The memory making therefore, in the form of images and video-clips spread on social media was complemented by State and civil society driven initiatives. Yet the most dramatic and shocking images were produced on social media, most often by unknown Facebook users.

Freelancing testimonies

There were also freelancing testimonies. Paul Kabré, an independent photographer based in Bobo-Dioulasso, documented the 2015 resistance against the RSP coup. His pictures bear witness of how Bobo-Dioulasso became the capital of resistance over the course of a volatile week. This critical event meant that "the youth of Bobo-Dioulasso" showed that they were not just drinking tea, waiting for opportunities to fall from the sky.[18] An image of a young woman protesting with a spatula in her hand soon became epic and was published by media outlets across the world (with no recognition given to Paul Kabré, let alone the young woman in question).[19]

[18] In Burkina Faso, the youth of Bobo-Dioulasso are said to be passively waiting for job opportunities, in contrast to the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth of Ouagadougou. The stereotypes ascribe a laziness to young bobolais. The 2015 resistance somewhat changed that image of Bobo-Dioulasso's youth.

[19] The woman was later identified as Guewaratou "Guebless" Zongo. She has since then emerged as a youth leader. Before the photo was taken by Paul Kabré, she was a largely unknown young activist who nevertheless had travelled from Ouagadougou to Bobo-Dioulasso, that is a distance of about 350 km, explicitly to support the resistance.

Figure 10: The iconic image of the Burkinabe resistance in Bobo-Dioulasso. Photo: Paul Kabré.

Attempts to document the Burkinabe socio-political transformations have mushroomed in recent years. Locally produced books, homemade video-clips and engaged researchers (including our team of researchers) try to contribute to the understanding of "the new Burkina Faso," and the memory making of its recent popular struggle. A host of books and other texts on the fall of Blaise Compaoré were produced locally, often written by Burkinabe academics or journalists who are not necessarily specialists in the subject and whose work rests on a rather vague empirical basis (Banténga 2016; Kaboré 2016; Sandwidi n.d.a, n.d.b; Sanon 2015; Ouédraogo 2016; Oulon 2018a, 2018b; Siguiré 2015, 2016; Tougouma 2016, n.d.; Traoré 2016).

The interesting thing with these works is that they come close to a testimony literature, documenting and providing ones' viewpoints of the events. International scholarly literature apart, it is indeed interesting to see how documenting the details and summarising "what really happened" has become such an important literary genre in present-day Burkina Faso. Books are sold at gas stations in the major cities, and they do attract readership. Some of the books conspicuously lack proper referencing and, oftentimes, no publisher is involved. To my mind, these books represent an informal literature that is in fact, a mimicry of formal, scholarly literature. They all seek to bear witness of the two critical events – the 2014 popular insurrection that ousted President Compaoré from power, and the 2015 resistance against the coup d'état perpetrated by the RSP – of contemporary Burkina Faso. At the same time, they also seek to market memories, and make some money from book sales, apart from making a name for themselves.

Discussion

In this article, I have sought to analyse images and films published on Facebook, WhatsApp, and other social media in relation to two events of recent Burkinabe political history: the popular insurrection in October-November 2014, and the resistance against the coup d'état in September 2015. These two events are part of social and political transformations that the

country has experienced in recent years. They are critical events in the sense of the term as Veena Das (1995) has written about: they have instituted new forms of action which have, in turn, redefined traditional social and political categories. Even though there is a political continuity – for instance, prevailing political practices, or the fact that President Kaboré was one of the architects in the past regime, or the involvement of the army in politics, etc. – the discourses were definitely redefined. These events changed something fundamental in Burkinabe political culture and framed new forms of political action.

However, this strong popular mobilisation against the Compaoré regime, and the coupists in 2014-2015 sharply contrasts with the absence of protests and resistance against the coup d'état perpetrated by Lieutenant Colonel Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba to oust President Kaboré from power in January 2022. Since his election in 2015 and his re-election in 2020, Kaboré's reign had come to be seen as a failure, and his removal from office in the 24 January 2022 coup d'état was seen as a relief by many. But when the new coup leader Damiba did not meet people's expectations – and even worse, when he invited former president Compaoré to a meeting in Ouagadougou in early July 2022 despite the fact that Compaoré had been convicted by Burkinabe law – a second coup d'état led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré took place in September 2022, and it was met with strong popular support. Although the insecurity had completely changed the situation and the Burkinabe put their hope in the army, for many the memory of the victims of the 2014 insurrection and the 2015 resistance must be kept alive (Hagberg et al. 2019, 2023).

The production and sharing of images and video-clips discussed here complements professional endeavours of taking photos and of making films. And yet they must be contextualised as a particular form of memory making and marketing in the midst of popular struggle for democracy and the rule of law. The sharing of images and video-clips on Facebook and WhatsApp simultaneously documented events and mobilised people in the midst of the crisis. In this vein, they were not different from the more professionalised attempts of Ciné Droit Libre and freelance photographers like Paul Kabré that also sought to document and engage the Burkinabe public in a struggle that would pave the way for "a new Burkina Faso."

If we move beyond this particular Burkinabe case, similar processes of memory making, and marketing have been observed in contemporary political upheavals. In the first half of 2019, protesters in Sudan were particularly successful in mobilising the street, the media, and the social media to oust President Omar al-Bashir from power; on 11 April al-Bashir fell and was replaced by a military transition that however was not satisfactory to protesters, and 48 hours later a new military transition was installed, amidst negotiations and renewed violent repression against the protesters later on. In Mali, events such as the military takeover in 2020, after a broad protest movement had mobilised against President Keïta, show how images and video-clips have become part and parcel of memory making (Hagberg et al. 2023 forthcoming). In other words, popular struggles in any part of the world nowadays rely on the mutually reinforcing actions in the street, and the instant documentation and sharing of these actions as photos and video-clips on social media.

The cross-fertilisation of mobile films, social media and popular struggle tells a particular story of contemporary socio-political transformations. In such arenas, the boundaries between "us"/"them," "here"/"there," "now"/"then," are blurred. Diaspora communities and seasoned experts interact with protesters and online activists, as well as with anonymous

followers in order to support change and strengthen social and political action (see Bernal 2014; Hall 2022; Kirwin et al. 2022). But let me be clear: there is no such thing as a "Facebook revolution," as some analysts suggested for the Tunisian revolution 2010-11. Instead, political culture and historical legacy are as important for such transformations as are the social media that allow for images and video-clips to be instantly shared on smartphones across the country and beyond. And activists in the street do risk their lives in a way most online activists do not. In other words, the memory making in the contemporary social media dramaturgy is also inscribed in a long-term continuity of popular struggle. And memory making is also part of a marketing of memories, of making money from such critical events.

Acknowledgements

This article has a long history. It was presented at the Conference of the Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development in Roskilde in May 2018, and in an expanded version at the African Studies Association's Meeting in Philadelphia in November 2022. Between those conference presentations, the article has received insightful comments from several colleagues, including David Lewis, Dennis Rodgers, Michael Woolcock, Heidi Bojsen, Paul Kabré, Joseph Hellweg, Rosa de Jorio, Susan Gagliardi, and Jörgen Hellman, as well as anonymous reviewers of *kritisk etnografi*. Thank you all! Thousands of thanks to my colleagues with whom I conducted collaborative fieldwork: Ludovic Kibora, Adjara Konkobo, Siaka Gnessi, Sidi Barry, and Firmin Nana. The article is one of several publications coming out as a result of our joint collaborative research in Burkina Faso (see Hagberg et al. 2018, 2019, 2021, 2023).

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Perspectives

kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology
VOL. 6, NO. 1
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-497389

Swedish anthropology in the rear view mirror: Before 1960

Ulf Hannerz | Professor Emeritus of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University

ABSTRACT: This article offers a critical overview of Swedish anthropology as it was prior to 1960, mostly under the label "general and comparative ethnography," together with some comments on relevant parts of the surrounding academic landscape, and on popular writings about distant peoples and countries. Major scholars are identified, and certain more important publications are briefly discussed. There is a certain emphasis on the weakness of contacts within and between academic centers. Some particular challenges for further research are noted.

Keywords: academic departments, colonialism, geopolitics, discipline structures, field research, travel writing, museum collections

Introduction

At various times over the past 40 years or so, I have commented on Swedish anthropology as I have seen it up close.[1] In the meantime, there has been a growing interest among anthropologists in many countries in the history of anthropology, including earlier periods.[2] A large part of it has been a matter of sheer intellectual curiosity. At times, it has also led to debates and conflicts within the community.

However, I have not really come across any attempts to offer an overall view of the slightly more distant past of Swedish anthropology – this has apparently not been urgent anthropology. What I will try to offer here is at least a taste. I do not claim to have dug deep into primary sources: beyond what I consider my personal knowledge and what has accumulated on my own shelves, I have been satisfied with materials readily available through *Wikipedia* and other openings on the Internet. A more thorough early history of Swedish anthropology, I would consequently insist, is a scholarly task yet to be undertaken.

It is a task which would require a knowledge of Swedish. More scholarly texts may often have been in English, German or Spanish – it was recognised early on that the national language was not one in which one would successfully reach out to a wider international community. But there were also writings, which might by now qualify as "public anthropology": in large part travel writings, which at times reveal more personal stances toward Otherness, and how to relate to existing public opinion at home. The translations below from Swedish are mine.

[1] See Hannerz (1982a, 1982b, 1984, 1985, 2018a, 2018b).

[2] The History of Anthropology Network (HOAN) of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) has been particularly active in this.

Contact: Ulf Hannerz ✉ulf.hannerz@socant.su.se

Presumably here many of my readers will be Swedish, anthropologists or non-anthropologists. I would expect, however, that some will be from elsewhere. Therefore, I will mention some Swedish circumstances that will not be so familiar to them, although they are to Swedish readers.

Entering the Department of General and Comparative Ethnography at Stockholm University in 1961 and spending much time there as a participant observer thereafter, I had an early glimpse in the rear view mirror of what my peers and I were moving away from – types of scholarly knowledge and academic practice which did not appeal much to us, and which we may even have looked at with some disdain. Here however, starting out even earlier, somehow combining the rear view mirror with binoculars, we may remind ourselves of certain historical circumstances.

Back in the 18th century, Carl Linnaeus gave the species *Homo sapiens* its name, and he identified a number of varieties. He also sent a number of students on journeys to distant parts of the world. But there are hardly any direct connections between him, or them, and later Swedish anthropology. Someone may want to have a look at a Linnaean prehistory of Swedish anthropology, but I will not take that on here.

Secondly, there was never much of a Swedish overseas empire. In North America of the 17th century, there was a New Sweden in and around Delaware. The rather few settlers engaged in trading relationships with the locals, apparently to mutual satisfaction. This lasted between 1638 and 1655. Only a little later, for just over a decade, a Swedish trading company had one of the several European fortresses on the Gold Coast, in West Africa, before the Danes took it over. Then for a longer period, between 1784 and 1878, the Caribbean island of St. Barthelemy was a Swedish colony, before it was turned over to France. The capital is still named Gustavia, after King Gustav III. The West African and Caribbean enterprises surely involved slave trade and slavery. However, on the whole Sweden seems to have outsourced much on-site colonial work to others, and whatever else was on the minds of those few native Swedes spending time in these colonies, they definitely do not seem to have had practice of ethnography as a priority.[3]

As a result of the above, there may not seem to be much of a Swedish anthropology to decolonise. Yet globally Sweden was obviously part of the West as contrasting with the East, and of the North as contrasting with the South, even if it remained a rather minor and marginal part. And with the development of the discipline over time, one might find colonial attitudes absorbed by a Swedish scholar spending time in someone else's colony, or simply reading the work of British, French, Dutch, Belgian or American colleagues who would have had more of such baggage to carry. Here may be a task for some critical scrutiny.

On the whole, the Swedish situation seems to have been paralleled in neighbouring Scandinavian situations. True, Denmark has had somewhat more of a colonial history. Greenland, out there in the North Atlantic, continues to have some sort of linkage to Denmark, and studies of the Inuit ('Eskimos') have remained a Danish concern, variously organised, over the years. In the Caribbean, Denmark only turned over its Virgin Islands to the United States in 1917 – but there is no sign that this more durable colonial connection left any real traces in anthropological research. On the whole, one can hardly argue that any

[3] A recent historical monograph on St. Barthelemy in its Swedish period shows that the Swedish residents on the island were largely civil servants, with the rest of the population as a rather typical Caribbean mixture (Thomasson 2022). By now, in the 21st century, St. Barthelemy is an expensive tourist site.

of this has made Danish anthropology much of something to be decolonised either.[4]

As far as the heartlands of Sweden are concerned, while there are and have been regional variations, the country has been seen largely as culturally homogeneous. The exceptions, in the past, were the Sami people in the far North, scattered Roma and Traveller groupings, and rather later Jewish immigrants in certain urban communities.

At this point we should also be aware of the division of labour between what emerged as scholarly disciplines. Early enough, Sweden had drawn the distinction between those two disciplines which have had separate existences in much of Central and Northern Europe, and which it, is convenient to identify by their German names, *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde.* The former could be seen as a scholarly wing of cultural nationalism, focusing on possibly vanishing rural traditions, not just "folklore" (as it is sometimes translated into English) in a narrow sense but building styles and artifacts as well. The early Swedish name of the discipline tended to be *folklivsforskning*, "folk life research." Apart from ordinary museums, storing and exhibiting collections, the discipline was marked in Sweden by the first open-air museums, "Skansen" in Stockholm and "Kulturen" in Lund.

As far as the minority populations were concerned, whatever limited research existed involving the Roma and Traveller populations, it tended to find its home in folk life research; any study of Jewish people likewise.[5] The study of the Sami was perhaps rather more shared between the two disciplines, as the Sami were understood as more exotic. It would matter here that the focus was on the reindeer-herding Sami, more than on those Sami found in other livelihoods.

In Sweden, the *Völkerkunde* discipline, for a long time mostly known as "ethnography," or more fully "general and comparative ethnography" (before it would eventually become either social anthropology or cultural anthropology), which I am mostly concerned with here, took longer to reach the two oldest universities – that in Uppsala, started in 1477 (although inactive in one rather lengthy early period) and that in Lund, started in 1666 (as part of the Swedification of the province of Scania, taken over from Denmark by war). Instead, it appeared first in the institutions of higher education in the two largest cities, Stockholm and Gothenburg. These, namely Stockholms Högskola and Göteborgs Högskola – "university college" may be an approximate translation for "högskola" – were started in 1878 and 1891 respectively as local initiatives, but were not granted the formal status of universities until the mid-20th century, when they were fully taken over by the state, and names changed to "Universities." And for a long time, ethnography was not primarily based so much at these academic institutions as at local museum collections.[6] Both Stockholm and Gothenburg had major harbours, where ships would arrive (in times when there was yet little if any air traffic). And so, what both single travellers and organised expeditions would

[4] Ole Höiris (1986) offers a comprehensive critical study of the history of Danish anthropology between 1860 and 1960. For a historical-anthropological study of slave-master relationships in the Danish Virgin Islands, see Olwig (1985).

[5] Two books may be mentioned here although they are not strictly speaking from our pre-1960s period. The folklorist Carl-Herman Tillhagen (1965), with a book on the Roma, was also the specialist on this minority ("Zigenare") to whom the government would repeatedly appeal. The most notable study of a Jewish immigrant community that I can think of is that describing a poor, late- 19th, early 20th century neighbourhood in Lund, with many Jewish newcomers (Ek 1982).

[6] In Copenhagen, as in Oslo, the discipline of ethnography also remained more strongly linked to museums than to universities until the mid-20th century.

bring back as objects of natural history or as artifacts, would arrive and end up here.

Thus, between 1883 and 1885, the frigate Vanadis of the Swedish navy undertook a journey around the world, by way of Rio de Janeiro, Honolulu, Shanghai, Singapore, Calcutta and other places. On board was Hjalmar Stolpe, who had already established his reputation as an archaeologist, digging at Birka, a Bronze Age settlement on an island in Lake Mälaren, not very far from what would later become Stockholm. With Vanadis, he brought collections which would become the beginnings of an ethnographic museum in Stockholm (although at first based at the local museum of natural history). As the 20th century began, he was its curator, also titled professor. But he died soon after, in 1905.

Slightly earlier, another ship and another major figure, find their way into our picture. Born in 1865, Sven Hedin was a 15-year-old, watching the harbour traffic, standing on a hillside looking down as the ship Vega, under the command of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, returned to the Stockholm harbour, to be celebrated, after having been the first ship to come through the Northeast Passage, between Siberia and the Arctic. (Vega Day is still celebrated in April every year by the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography.[7]) That particular experience made the young Sven decide that his life would be one of travel – as it turned out, mostly in Central Asia.

In academic terms, Hedin was primarily a geographer, but above all an explorer. Indeed, that mobile life was already underway when Hedin spent some time in Germany studying geography – and as it appears, received his doctoral degree at age 27, with a dissertation of all of 28 pages, based on a day and a half of observations on Mount Donavand, in Iran. He was encouraged to continue with further academic study but he himself was more inclined to go on travelling. He did a lot of that, over the next 40 years or so, gaining much international attention with his reporting on the inlands of Asia.

Of all Hedin's writings, what I have on my own bookshelf is his 1936 book *Sidenvägen* ("The Silk Road"). It is a book of more than 400 pages. Toward the end there is a photograph of Hedin seated with Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, so evidently, he could move in the highest circles. Mostly the book covers an expedition by car through Central Asia. In our times, those who take an interest in the Chinese treatment of the Uighur people in the westerly province of Xinjiang may find Hedin's account of the expedition's risky passage to the capital Urumchi ("Urumtji") still thought-provoking.

Sven Hedin died in 1952: indeed, an explorer and prolific travel writer, but also a public intellectual. He was the last person in Sweden to be ennobled. In his more mature years, his public reputation in Sweden was affected by his political stances. In 1914, King Gustav V gave a speech in the Royal Palace courtyard to "Bondetåget" ("the Peasant March"), a demonstration by some 30,000 people, in large part farmers assembled from various parts of the country, in favour of the construction of a new warship, opposed by the elected government – this caused a cabinet crisis. Hedin had been the ghost writer for the king's speech. Later on, he showed himself to be favourably disposed toward the Nazi regime in Germany. One might sense that all this had to do with a negative view of what was then the Soviet Union, coupled with a long-term Swedish sense of a Russian threat, going back to wars in earlier centuries.

By 1961, as I came for course work in ethnography, the link to the Hedin heritage

[7] The SSAG was founded in 1873 and has had a rather chequered history. Early in the 20th century, Gustaf Retzius was prominent in it. Since 1988, there is an anthropological symposium and a medallist every third year.

at the Ethnographic Museum was most directly represented by the elderly curator Gösta Montell, a few years away from retirement. Montell, born in the far north but schooled in Stockholm, had his doctorate from Gothenburg in the early 1930s; at around the same time, he also participated in one of Hedin's expeditions to China. Yet again, he later went on an archaeological expedition by a Gothenburg team to Mexico in the mid-1930s. At the museum, he was in charge of the Hedin Foundation, and the heterogeneous collections and publications connected with that. However, apparently a number of other administrative tasks had also been delegated to him.

On the Ethnographic Museum premises, one could also encounter Georg Söderbom, quite tall, not an academic but a camel driver and chauffeur on some of Hedin's 1930s expeditions. (He figures prominently in the book *Sidenvägen.*) Söderbom was born in China (Inner Mongolia) in 1904, the son of Swedish missionaries. Toward the end of World War II, he had participated on the side of the Allies fighting the Japanese in the Chinese-Burmese borderlands. Some years later he moved to Sweden and joined the museum staff, although he may have spent some time in the United States in the early 1950s.

For some time, one of the central exhibits at the Ethnographic Museum was a full-size reconstruction of Hedin's old home office, as it had been in an apartment building in a central town location, with a view of Lake Mälaren across the street. Perhaps one could imagine the exhibit as a sort of shrine?

One other early Swedish China expert should perhaps be mentioned here more parenthetically. Johan Gunnar Andersson, primarily a geologist while at work in China in the earlier decades of the 20th century, also pursued an interest in archaeology – both involved digging. The latter resulted in a major collection brought to Sweden, and the creation of a Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities there.[8] Andersson became the director of that museum. I have seen no sign that he had much to do with the discipline of ethnography in Stockholm. But a book of his, *Under brinnande krig* ("In the fire of war"), from 1938, in an intriguing combination of materials and styles, shows the geologist/archaeologist turning foreign correspondent and even war correspondent, as a rather disorganised China is under attack of that increasingly powerful eastern neighbour, Japan. Reporting on a two-year journey through China, Andersson gets closer to the centre of action here than Sven Hedin did in *Sidenvägen* a few years earlier.

Another parenthesis, although a longer one: about Rudolf Kjellén. Born in 1864 – and thus a year older than Sven Hedin – Kjellén was a political conservative (to the point of serving a term in the Swedish parliament), but a scholarly radical. He wanted to liberate his emergent discipline political science, from the dominance of law, and turn it into an empirical discipline.

Moreover, to do so, he placed it in the middle of a field of other disciplines or near-disciplines, such as geography and economics. One entirely new concept of his, "geopolitik," geopolitics, became globally successful – he published it first in 1899, in *Ymer*, a publication of the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography still published as a yearbook now.[9] Another of Kjellén's neologisms was *folkhemmet*, "the people's home," which took a more leftward path. Kjellén was a scholarly cosmopolitan, well-travelled and well-read.

[8] I have commented on Johan Gunnar Andersson as a China expert in another context (Hannerz 2021).

[9] *Ymer* has its name from pre-Christian Nordic mythology, in which "Ymer" was a giant; to make a long story short, after his assassination, the world was created from his body.

In his major work, *Staten som Lifsform* ("The state as a form of life," 1916), he commented on recent world history: on relationships between China, Japan, and Korea, on tensions between Latin America and the United States, and on the difficulty faced by Ukraine in making its culture the basis of a state. It was a time, too, of upheavals in the world. The Ottoman, Russian, Habsburg, and Prussian empires were on their way out. And to Kjellén's dismay, Norway had fairly recently left its union with Sweden.

Kjellén coined a term of "ethnopolitics," too, and it had a place in his own writings, although it did not become as successful as geopolitics. And when it came to ethnographic or anthropological sources of inspiration, he apparently did not find them in his local academic environment so much as in the German- speaking world – particularly in the *Kulturkreislehre* of anthropologist-geographer Friedrich Ratzel, professor at Leipzig (also the inventor of the term *Lebensraum*). This was a period when scholarly center-periphery relationships mostly had Germany at the center and Sweden at the periphery, but Kjellén was notably a case of the periphery speaking successfully back. A number of his Swedish-language writings were translated into German (while apparently nothing reached into English).[10]

Uppsala University was Kjellén's alma mater, but he spent a large part of his career at Gothenburg, lower ranking in academic prestige yet allowing him to establish himself as a public intellectual, before finally making it back to Uppsala and the professorial chair there. He died in 1922, at the age of 58. A more recent commentator has suggested that he was "perhaps the most influential Scandinavian political scientist ever" (Tunander 2001: 451).[11] Even now, after more than a century, one may find *Staten som Lifsform* intriguing reading, not only as an interpretation of its times but also as an experiment in interdisciplinary outreach. One may also sense that some of the new key concepts of those times were fairly ambiguous and flexible; they could be stretched in different scholarly and political directions.

So, what happened to those ethnographic collections in Stockholm after Hjalmar Stolpe's death? Here it seems useful first to take note of the activities and influence of Gustaf Retzius.[12]

His father Anders Retzius had already taken an interest in physical anthropology, inventing a method of measuring skulls. Gustaf Retzius continued with this interest, under rather special personal circumstances. He was the main owner of stock in the Stockholm newspaper *Aftonbladet*, founded by his father- in-law Lars Johan Hierta, and he actually edited it for a few years. But his main interest was in anatomy and anthropology. The Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, an internationally famous medical institution, made him a professor of anatomy in 1889, but he resigned after only a year. Independently wealthy enough, he continued as a freelance scholar. He travelled widely, with his wife: in Cairo he met Henry Morton Stanley, and at the World's Fair in Chicago he met Franz Boas, who worked there. He also went to British Columbia and did some shopping for Northwest Coast Indian ethnographic artifacts, to be turned over to the museum collections in Stockholm.

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[10] One of Kjellén's German readers was Karl Haushofer, an army general but also a geographer, who reputedly gave private tutorials to Adolf Hitler while the latter was in jail after a failed Munich putsch. Ratzel's notion of *Lebensraum* seems to have come to renewed use here.

[11] The most recent overview of Kjellén's work is an edited volume by Björk and Lundén (2021).

[12] There is a recent, entertaining, over 500-page biography of Gustaf Retzius by Nils Uddenberg (2019). The incident involving Nordenskiöld and Hartman discussed below gets a little more than half a page. Olof Ljungström, historian of ideas, has written a monograph on late19th century Swedish anthropology centering on Hjalmar Stolpe and Gustaf Retzius (Ljungström 2003).

Back in Stockholm, he continued his endeavours in physical anthropology. In the theorising that had developed, people with long skulls had superior minds to those with broad skulls. By the early 20th century he embraced the theory and ideology of racial inequality, which was spreading in Europe, finding the Nordic race "a natural aristocracy." Through the Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography which he led at the time, he also organised measurings of the skulls of 45,000 military recruits.

After Hjalmar Stolpe's death, there were two candidates succeeding him at the Stockholm ethnographic collections. One was Erland Nordenskiöld, son of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, of Vega fame – but Gustaf Retzius, very influential in local academic circles (a member of the Swedish Academy, for one thing) supported the competitor, Carl Hartman. The vote in the Academy of Sciences, still in charge of the collections, turned out even, 22 to 22. And then by way of lottery, Hartman won.

There was considerable grumbling that the winner was someone without much formal academic merit. But Hartman, born in 1862, was an interesting person in other ways. His grandfather and his father had both been skilled botanists, although teaching in provincial schools. Carl left secondary school without graduating, trained as a professional gardener, and got a stipend which took him to the United States, where after some time he could join an expedition to Mexico, led by a Norwegian scholar. Although he was supposed to be the expedition botanist, he became more involved in its archaeology, learnt Spanish quickly and put together a word list from one of the local Indian peoples. He enjoyed Mexico, but after half a year as foreman at a silver mine he left for Chicago to work at the anthropological exhibit at the World's Fair, in 1893 – he, too, met Franz Boas.

Back in Sweden, he took a job as gardener at the Bergianska Garden at the outskirts of Stockholm, also an Academy of Science undertaking. But he had a falling-out with the director, who had made him work too hard in the summer season. (He wrote a harsh newspaper article about this.) Soon after he got a stipend to travel in Central America and having successfully reported on this enterprise at an Americanist conference in New York he was invited to join the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He travelled to Central America on its behalf as well; and then he came back to Stockholm, taking over the ethnographic collections after the Retzius intervention.

In that position, Hartman continued to travel, including once around the world. However, he was most active at home too. During his sojourns in America, he had learned about the value of publicity, so he made himself very visible in Stockholm life, and in the Stockholm press. For one thing, one of his pet ideas was to build a new museum next to Skansen, the outdoor museum. His ethnographic museum was to be surrounded by a park, with exotic huts and animals. Buffaloes would be imported, as would be llamas and kangaroos. Unfortunately, this all came to nothing.

Perhaps Hartman was more of a showman and trickster than a scholar in a conventional sense. Then in 1923 he was diagnosed as mentally ill. That went with drinking too much. He was requested to go on administrative leave, and that lasted until his retirement. He never really had a home of his own in Stockholm, but lived in various hotels and pensions, and in his final years at a hospital.

After Hartman came Gerhard Lindblom, who was apparently at the museum off and on during the Hartman period, taking over and by 1929 becoming the director, with

which would go a titular professorship at Stockholms Högskola.[13] Lindblom would become a major figure in the history of the ethnographic discipline in Stockholm. But it seems reasonable to distinguish between early and late Lindblom, even if there is not a sharp divide. The early Lindblom is above all remembered for his doctoral dissertation – although he earned his doctorate in Uppsala in 1916, the main edition of *The Akamba in British East Africa* was published in 1920. It drew on a year and a half of field work among the Akamba people in Kenya, in 1911-1912, when Lindblom was in his early twenties. There was still a German East Africa to the south, to change hands and become Tanganyika with the coming world war. In an obituary published about a half-century later, the leading anthropologist-Africanist Daryll Forde (1969: 39: 346) would say that this monograph "set new standards in both thorough description and careful analysis in East African ethnography… Lindblom anticipated many of the procedures later advocated in anthropological field research, learning the language and placing great stress on systematic participant observation." (Forde, one might add, was also a representative of colonial anthropology at its zenith.)

Indeed, in its 607 pages, *The Akamba in British East Africa* offers a remarkably comprehensive and detailed description of an African society in a time when it was not yet so influenced by colonialism. It describes Akamba material culture, with rich drawn illustrations and some comparative commentary on corresponding artifacts elsewhere in the world. It also covers the clan system and totemism; warfare; spirit worship; medicine men; beermaking; forms of dancing and courtship; the gender division of labour; and a wide range of other topics.

As Forde later noted, the comments on principles of field research are also sophisticated. While it could be tempting to learn only Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa, it was much better to learn the Akamba language, and Lindblom obviously did so very conscientiously: "linguistic and ethnological studies ought to proceed side by side." If possible, one should acquire one's knowledge about all kinds of conduct through personal observation, but when this was not possible, one should not rely on interviews with some single informant but ask several of them the same questions.

Of course, the acknowledgments in the introduction of the book are very interesting in themselves. They include Carl Hartman, who provided the opportunity to undertake the journey to East Africa, and Charles Dundas, a former District Commissioner in the Akamba area who had also undertaken field studies there. But Lindblom (1920: 6) also identifies the "principal natives who have been of assistance to me in my work." Some of them are elders, referred to more briefly. Three seem more remarkable:[14]

> In the first place comes my servant and language teacher *Kioko wa Malata* of the Machakos district. He showed great interest in the work, and I trained him systematically, until he understood exactly what I wanted. He is one of the most intelligent natives I ever met and had served as an *askari* (soldier) in the English police troops, during which time he had learnt

[13] A recent Swedish overview of global "Black history" refers to a 1929 tour of the Cirkus Carl Hagenbeck from the famous Hamburg zoo, which brought elephants, trained tigers, and a Somali dancing troupe to Stockholm. These Somali visitors also brought several objects from their home country which they presented to Gerhard Lindblom, Ethnographic Museum director (Levin 2022: 310).

[14] The names of the three informants in these quotes are my approximations, as I do not have access to the special orthography used by Lindblom.

to associate with Europeans and to grasp their way of thinking.

Vindia…an ordinary medicine-man from the district of Kibwesi. I pitched my tent near his village, and we were together every day. He conceived a great liking for me, and would gladly have accompanied me as a servant, if his occupation and reputation as a medicine-man would not have suffered thereby. Among other things, he initiated me into the secret ceremonies of the third circumcision, the so-called 'men's circumcision.' The revelation of the abominable customs connected with these rites is punished by death, if the offence is discovered.

Muli, a disreputable and half degenerate individual living near the mission station of Ikutha. His rapacity betrayed him into showing me, among other things, the place where a valuable *kipitu* (see p. 166) was kept.

Beyond the dissertation, Gerhard Lindblom would also write for a more general audience, in Swedish. His book *I vildmark och negerbyar* (1921), "In wilderness and Negro villages," may have an appealing title, although it is not all that much about either. It reports on a somewhat later Swedish expedition to the Elgon mountain area in north-western Kenya, making zoological, botanical, and ethnographic collections, and studying. The book is dedicated to J. P. Johansson, an evidently affluent farm owner in southern Sweden who was also his father- in-law. Johansson had paid for Lindblom's journey, with his new wife – this also served as their wedding trip.

The book reports on the Elgon expedition, but in large part it is devoted to a more general commentary on early 20th century Kenya. In Lindblom's view, the natives should be grateful for *Pax Britannica*: it saved them from local violent conflicts as well as the Indian Ocean slave trade. The colonisers also told them how to work. He is mostly friendly in what he says about the natives, although the perspective is clearly that of European colonial superiority. There is most noticeably a contempt for the many newcomers from India who have established themselves in economic niches between the natives and the European settlers, and who do not always show the appropriate respect for Europeans. Altogether, the close-up ethnography of colonial life may be what is by now most interesting in the book. Hunting – lions, giraffes, whatever – is already a major interest for Kenya's European settlers and visitors. The time has already passed when the resident, white-skinned population of whatever origin somehow formed a homogeneous entity with internal solidarity. It is beginning to split into an upper class and an underclass. In Nairobi there will probably soon be a white proletariat. Toward the end Lindblom also offers what he describes as some modest advice to potential Swedish settlers.

The next year there was *Negerhistorier vid lägerelden* (1922), "Negro stories at the campfire." These are mostly Akamba tales, but there is also some quite attractive description of the contexts of their collection, and of the storytellers' oratorical skills. The richness of performances, Lindblom points out, is lost when the tales are written down. In his preface he also notes that a scholar may often be saddened that he belongs to a nation without colonies of its own, thus without any real interest or understanding of his kind of work.

Soon after his East African field studies, Lindblom started working with the ethnographic museum collections in Stockholm. Here, we may discern, starts the shift

toward the late Lindblom, oriented mostly toward material culture and culture history, and an organiser and networker in varied areas.

For one thing, he launched the first issue of the museum's journal *Ethnos* in January 1936.[15] This, according to the first editorial note, was intended to have six 16-page issues annually. As it turned out, for much of its existence as a museum publication, four supposedly quarterly issues were combined into one, so in reality it became more of a yearbook. The first issue carried a one-page welcoming note by Sven Hedin (with a photographic portrait). One could note that Lindblom's obituary for Carl Hartman in *Ethnos* in 1941 was quite brief.

Lindblom also kept a variety of international contacts going. He was one of the founding members of the International African Institute (London-based, an important scholarly organisation, started by Lord Frederick Lugard after he returned to the mother country from Nigeria, a country he had basically created as a colony, and of which he was the first governor – the Institute also published the journal *Africa*). When E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1953) reviewed an ethnography dissertation from Stockholm in *Africa,* it could seem he went a little out of his way to note that it appeared in "a series one associates with the respected name of Lindblom." Lindblom was also involved early with what was the Viking Fund before it changed name to the Wenner-Gren Foundation, in New York; in that connection, he took part in planning the foundation's new international journal, *Current Anthropology.*

Before that, in 1946, he had reported on a couple of pages in *Man*, at the time one of the two journals of the Royal Anthropological Institute in Britain, on the situation of ethnology and anthropology in Sweden during the world war that was just over. On the whole, as Sweden had stayed out of it, things had been fairly normal. Some male students had been called up for military service; Lindblom himself had also done some of that. Mostly he described changes in the museums and their collections, some publications, and then he also noted the succession that had taken place in Gothenburg: "Dr. Izikowitz emphasizes the social side of anthropology, which has not always received in Sweden the attention it deserves."

After Gerhard Lindblom died in 1969, his successors published a commemorative issue of *Ethnos*, the journal he had started – a rather uneven set of remembrances but suggesting that he had taken considerable interest in teaching as well.

At this point, however, I want to introduce one little-known, quite original source. Stockholms Högskola became a full state institution, as Stockholm University, in 1960. Veterans who wanted to commemorate the earlier history of the institution had their own connection with an associated foundation, and in 2005, it published the book *Minnen* ("Memories"), without any identified main editor, but drawing on reminiscences by elderly participants (mostly professors) from the earlier period, generally the 1930s onwards (Stockholms universitet 2005.[16] This involves oral history, the flow of loosely conducted interviews, not systematic but possibly with a bias toward what was odd and striking, therefore still remembered. Unlike much academic history writing, this is a backstage view.

Overall, I get a sense of a slow-moving chaos, intellectually and organisationally.

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[15] *Ethnos* is still in existence, although now turned over to an international publishing house, and as an international journal without any obvious Swedish or Scandinavian connection in content.

[16] I was given my copy as part of the event when I was promoted to "Jubilee Doctor" in 2019, 50 years after I was awarded my PhD. I am not sure the book has ever been available in the market.

The border areas between fields of knowledge and theory could hardly be deemed "interdisciplinary," insofar as the fields themselves were not characterised by much discipline. Careers could move between these fields in considerable part as a matter of chance, personal connections and passing opportunities. This is what I discern from what is said about fields like sociology, practical philosophy, sociology, economic history, and comparative religion. As the first professorship in the emergent discipline of sociology is to be filled, it goes to Gunnar Boalt, from "Practical Philosophy" – Boalt comments briskly in his reminiscences that what was "practical" about it he does not know, but in any case, it was not philosophy. I will return to Boalt below. Perhaps situations were more orderly in disciplines directly linked to professional careers beyond the academic world.

From a couple of contributions to *Minnen*, one gets a sense that Gerhard Lindblom's engagements with students could be idiosyncratic. The first is by Bertil Hedenstierna, later to become a geography lecturer at Stockholm University. He noted that since there was as yet no real museum, Lindblom would gather his students in those storage rooms, quite centrally located in town, which held enormous collections from the Vanadis expedition and other outings:

> There Lindblom went about, picking things out of the boxes and saying: "I don't know what is in this box." It could be blow pipes from South America or some head skulls from New Guinea, clothing from the Orient. When he had given his lecture of an hour or he said: "I have to go now, but you can stay." So the girls draped themselves in those clothes, and the rude boys practiced shooting with the bows in that room. Once a boy walked past and an arrow flew just next to his head. So somebody said, "That one is from South America, perhaps there is curare on it." So next time we asked Lindblom if curare is dangerous, and he said, "Curare is not wasted even if it is dry. If it enters there may be poisoning." But he gave us solace pointing out that it was mostly intended for small animals, so it would be OK. (Stockholms universitet 2005: 86-87)

The other comment is by Åke Hultkrantz, later to become professor of comparative religion:

> Gerhard Lindblom was at the Ethnographic Museum but linked to Stockholms Högskola, so he sat in at faculty meetings. He had the rank of professor but was not a university professor. He was a very nice, likeable man. I remember once when we were to have a seminar and came to the museum, and he says: "Sorry, I don't have time. I have to feed Emil, otherwise he will starve. You can help me." And so we go outside and pick grass leaves in a big bag, and when the seminar was over and we had picked enough he went home. (Stockholms universitet 2005: 139)

It is not clear who Emil was – a vegan member of the Lindblom household perhaps? More likely a household pet, perhaps a rabbit. Anyway, Hultkrantz goes on:

> Lindblom was an Africanist. He wrote one of the better early monographs about an African people, the Wakamba. But then he had so awfully much to do with different persons. While he sits there and talks to me the phone rings, and it is Prince Wilhelm. And he was out there on a great many dinners, and he was loved as a dinner eater. He had an enormous sociable

> talent. A very funny person. I had him at a dinner, in the 1960s. We were at the table which we had extended, and when there was no more food and he offered his thanks he fell on his knees in front of the hostess and kissed her hand and offered a brilliant tirade. He was a very remarkable man. At other dinners he could stand up and dance on the table. (Stockholms universitet 2005: 139-140)

Prince Wilhelm was the younger brother of King Gustav VI Adolf.

In Stockholm, for almost three decades, Lindblom was also the chairman of the local Travellers' Club, a gathering of members of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy with cosmopolitan leanings.

One might speculate that if Gerhard Lindblom, especially in his early version, had been in service at Stockholm University in the early 1960s, with his broad interests, wide connections and social skills, he might have responded more satisfactorily to the incoming generation of students, with their focus on living societies and field work, than the elderly museum archaeologists that they encountered.[17]

Yet it is a complicating factor that at some point, apparently in 1962, "Nordiska Rådet för Antropologisk Forskning" (The Nordic Council for Anthropological Research) also appeared, in principle an organisation of professors in ethnography, ethnology, comparative religion, and archaeology, thus more like an American conception of the discipline, perhaps with some connection to the Wenner-Gren Foundation. It seemed to be an assemblage of elderly professors (including Gerhard Lindblom, professor emeritus), working mostly behind the scenes, and perhaps functioning as an obstacle to the changes which the younger generation desired. The organisation disappeared a decade or so later, seemingly leaving little trace. Perhaps someone concerned with the Scandinavian history of the discipline can find its documents in a closet somewhere.

Anyway, there seem to have been only a few doctoral degrees in ethnography awarded during Lindblom's professorship, and only one of them led on to a greater impact on the discipline in Sweden. Sture Lagercrantz, who received his doctorate in 1938, was appointed to a teaching position in ethnography at Uppsala University after a few years – the first at that university– and was eventually promoted to a professorship. But Lagercrantz, with a reputation as an Africanist, never did any field research, and apparently never visited Africa. (His dissertation title was *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der afrikanischen Jagdfallen*, "contributions to the cultural history of African hunting traps.)" His early doctoral students in Uppsala also mostly wrote dissertations based on desk work rather than field research.

In a period when the museum in Stockholm had no Africanist on its staff, Lagercrantz would drive down from Uppsala to Stockholm once a week for a lecture to the students there. The audience was usually small. I remember being alone there on one occasion – the format of the lecture was not affected.

It was said that Lagercrantz, later on, may have been in his university office but made himself unavailable on that day when the monthly copy of the Donald Duck comic magazine (*Kalle Anka & Co*) appeared. The departmental caretaker, the *vaktmästare*, named in the university catalogue was actually Lagercrantz' dog.

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[17] I can only remember one personal encounter with Lindblom, at the meeting of Nordic Ethnographers in Stockholm in 1965. In my own brief presentation on applied anthropology, in Swedish, I had still used the loan word "teamwork," and Lindblom pointed out to me afterwards that the Swedish word was *lagarbete.*

Now over to Gothenburg. After having been sidestepped for that museum position in Stockholm, Erland Nordenskiöld moved to the nation's second city as he was appointed to manage the local museum collections, and became the founding father of the discipline of ethnography there.[18] As the son of Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, he was a "friherre," minor nobility; his mother came from leading Finland-Swedish aristocracy. His wife Olga, on the other hand, was a carpenter's daughter. Perhaps at some point when he and Rudolf Kjellén were both Gothenburg residents, the two of them met? Anyway, his political leanings seem on the whole to have been more liberal than Kjellén's.

Erland Nordenskiöld did not get to have a very long life (he died in 1932, aged 54), but he had an enduring influence. In his early twenties, in 1899, he had been on his first journey to South America, and after he moved to Gothenburg this was followed by several expeditions to the South American highlands, into the late 1920s. These resulted in major archaeological and artifact collections for the museum, and brought pupils on his South American voyages who, mostly as archaeologists, could populate museum staffs in both Gothenburg and Stockholm well into the 1960s. Overall, apart from the practical and organisational museum work, his endeavour may be summarised as an encyclopaedic overview of South American cultural history, with an emphasis on distributions and diffusion processes, based on archaeological findings, early historical sources and close, comparative study of museum collections. At times his publications show a considerable interest in individuals he came to know in the field, but this does not seem to have been a research topic that he passed on to his students to any significant degree.

On my shelf I find one book, *Forskningar och Äventyr i Sydamerika 1913- 1914* ("Researches and adventures in South America 1913-1914", 1915), of 597 pages, richly illustrated. It deals largely with a journey to Bolivia, ending as the world war breaks out in another continent. The journey involved some hardships. Olga had a serious malaria attack. One young Swedish field assistant is briefly separated from them at one point – but is then found murdered. The book is not exactly an easy read. You can follow the passage through a country marked by diversity, between immigrant groups and indigenes in different degrees of contact with these immigrants, between cities and countryside, interspersed with descriptions of collectibles to be brought home. But as the Nordenskiölds seem to be continuously on the move, they do not seem to have more than rather superficial contacts with any particular local scene. There is nothing like Gerhard Lindblom's extended, intensive engagement with the Akamba.

At home in Gothenburg, Nordenskiöld worked hard, cultivated various local contacts (including major businesspeople who could help support his field trips), was in touch with scholars in other countries as well, published a great deal over the years in Swedish, German, English, French, and Spanish, but for some time still did not feel that he was getting the recognition he deserved. Gradually, however, that changed. Apparently as a bit of a surprise, Göteborgs Högskola awarded him a PhD, without any specific thesis ever being examined in the usual academic format. While he gathered students around him, these seem mostly to have functioned as assistants in his own research. As he had a very uneven temper, his

[18] Christer Lindberg's (1996) biography of Erland Nordenskiöld is a major exception to the general scarcity of writings on the history of Swedish anthropology. Slightly earlier, there was a generous memorial volume on Nordenskiöld and his times, activities and milieu, edited by Alvarsson et al. (1992). I draw on both here, even as I do not share the overall view of anthropology evident in them.

relationships with them were also in a state of constant flux. Further away in neighbouring countries, he maintained a steady friendly relationship with Kai Birket-Smith in Denmark, while his contact with Rafael Karsten, a Finland- Swedish student of Edvard Westermarck's but also a South Americanist, had its ups and downs. His contacts extended in continental Europe and in the Americas. He was in touch with Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber and spent a term in Berkeley in 1926. (He was a little uncertain here about lecturing in English – would Berkeley students understand German, or French, or Spanish?)

After Erland Nordenskiöld, the top ethnographer at the Gothenburg museum for a period was Walter Kaudern.[19] Here was a scholar of broad interests. Kaudern did field research first on Madagascar and later (twice) on Sulawesi. The former, of course, was a French colony at the time, the latter Dutch. On Madagascar Kaudern was primarily a zoologist and got his doctorate in Stockholm 1910 on this research. But on Sulawesi he was primarily an ethnographer. Succeeding Nordenskiöld, he moved over from a directorship of the geological department of the Gothenburg museum – so to start with he was apparently a bit of an outsider, who had not been a member of Nordenskiöld's closest circle. And now his ethnographer colleagues would also get to hear about his geological theories.

When Kaudern died at age 61, the main position in Gothenburg was taken over by Karl Gustav Izikowitz. After a doctoral dissertation on South American musical instruments, he turned to field studies: briefly in Mexico, then in highland Southeast Asia. Soon enough, Izikowitz became inclined toward social anthropology (as Lindblom had noted in his overview in *Man*), and was in touch with British, American, and French anthropology. Evidently a sociable person, he cultivated contacts in the local academic community, and for students and younger scholars elsewhere as well, he became with time greatly respected as an elder with an understanding of their kinds of interests.

In 1944, he published a popular book: *Över dimmornas berg* ("Over the mountains of the fogs"). The back cover says that through lecture tours and radio talks the author had become well-known all over the country. Richly illustrated, the book describes his journeys through what was French Indochina but focuses on his field work among the Lamet people in Laos in 1936-38. This is on the outskirts of the Empire; the colonial presence is not conspicuous.

Izikowitz appears as an egalitarian in the field, with little social or physical distance to his helpers and other locals, attempting to see beyond diversity to shared humanity. The Lamet are engaged in swidden cultivation on the hillside, although some of the young men are also going away to work as agricultural labourers in areas where the cash economy has become stronger. The account of field research is lively, rich on physical and sensual experience. Izikowitz makes the point that it is not just a matter of collecting artifacts for the museum at home but investigating a way of life and thought. For one thing, Izikowitz describes in some detail the complications of language learning. There is simply nobody who knows both French and Lamet. He learns a dialect of Laotian which many Lamet know, as Laotian is a lingua franca in a wide region – but then getting from there to the Lamet language is not easy, since the Lamet cannot comprehend practices of translation and dictation. Yet he works away on that. (One could compare his struggle here with Lindblom's comments on learning Akamba.)

[19] An obituary by Henry Wassén (1941), another Gothenburg ethnographer, offers an overview of Kaudern's interests and activities.

For all his systematic effort, he acknowledges that much ethnographic knowledge comes about by chance. His imagination can also take him even further, as in describing a possible conversation between deer and buffaloes about the strange white man who had shown up in their habitat.

By the time the book appears, of course, World War II is on, and what had been French Indochina is occupied by the Japanese. Yet he guesses that his old field area was still remote enough not to be all that affected by the war.

Why bother, then, with investigating a lot of exotic cultures? Izikowitz raises the question in a brief preface, and notes that one answer is that we should get to know human thought and social life in all its variations. One cannot experiment in social research as one can in the natural sciences, but by studying humanity as a whole one can gain a perspective toward our own social and cultural life. In a way ethnography thus becomes the laboratory of the social sciences. When the world is increasingly marked by conflicts and war, there is a need for social study. And through new modes of communication, and especially the enormous development of air traffic, the interest in the exotic peoples will undoubtedly grow.

This was a rather optimistic view of the future of his discipline, aimed at a wider readership. But then in 1959, the *American Anthropologist* published an article on "Anthropology in Sweden," under the general rubric of "Trends in anthropology." It was co-authored by three scholars, as it had three parts: one on general ethnology by Izikowitz, and other parts on prehistoric research (i.e., archaeology) and comparative ethnology (which in this case covered folk life research in Sweden) (Izikowitz, Moberg, and Eskeröd 1959).[20] Elsewhere I have cited this article to show Izikowitz' at that point rather pessimistic, more backstage view of the local circumstances of his discipline:

> Ethnology can hardly be of practical use in Sweden outside the museums and, as a result, relatively few students dare venture into it. The sum total of scientific posts at the museums is no more than seven. Thus, a professional ethnologist has few possibilities for making a living. (1959: 669)

The situation did indeed begin to change during the decade that followed. He also pointed out in his overview that the emphasis tended to be in material culture, and that in Stockholm and Uppsala there was "a tendency toward a diffusionist attitude" but that "the various centers for ethnological study have very little contact with each other."

On a more positive note, he mentioned that in the year before, Danish and Norwegian ethnologists had been invited to a meeting in Gothenburg – and if there could be more meetings like that, he hoped that "we can gradually create something new and more independent as a contribution to the international development of ethnology" (1959: 670).

The meeting was evidently the first in a series of what for some time were called "Nordic Ethnographer Meetings," coming together every other year or so around Scandinavia, on a rotating basis. (The last major effort of this kind was in Reykjavik in 1990 – after that there would be national associations on the one hand, and the biennial meetings of the European

[20] One could note that Albert Eskeröd, the author of the part of this article on folk life research, ends by expressing a hope for "more use of the theoretical and methodological results which have been obtained within the vast field of international cultural and social anthropology" (1959: 676).

Association of Social Anthropologists, EASA, on the other.)[21]

In the late 1960s, faced with the choice between remaining a museum director and becoming a full-time professor of ethnography at Gothenburg University, Izikowitz chose the latter. While he attracted students in Gothenburg, not many of them went on to earn a doctorate during his period in office. In his later years he did not write so much.[22] On the other hand, we could note that in a way, retroactively, his presence led to an entry of anthropology into Swedish literature. In a semi-autobiographical novel published in 2017, Agneta Pleijel, well-known Swedish author, portrays student life as it was in Gothenburg in her youth, in the 1960s. Among masks and claypots in the Ethnographic Museum, she has an enjoyable oral exam with the jovial professor Izikowitz, who asks if she intends to continue with ethnography. She replies that she would like to, although first she has to finish a term paper in literary history.[23] Well, there will evidently never be any more academic engagement with the discipline – but then in 2000, there will be the novel *Lord Nevermore* (in Swedish, despite the title). The central figure is Bronislaw, an anthropologist of Polish origin. It is a book about him and his complicated relationship with his best friend and with women, over decades, moving between Zakopane, Colombo, Melbourne, Port Moresby, places in Melanesia with strange natives, London, New Haven… There is a letter of introduction from Edward Westermarck, and a student in London named Jomo Kenyatta. Pleijel has obviously read up on Malinowskian life history, while mixing it with her own imagination.

What did we read as beginning students in Stockholm in 1961? I do not have the full reading list today, and I do not know how long it had already been what it was. In any case, Kai Birket-Smiths *Kulturens vägar* ("The Paths of Culture"), in translation from the Danish, in two volumes, was the central textbook for students: a comprehensive cultural-diffusionist overview. Birket-Smith was an important Eskimologist, but also very much a museum man. For the history of the discipline, Robert Lowie's *The History of Ethnological Theory* (1937) was assigned. A Franz Boas pupil, and mostly stationed at the University of California, Berkeley, Lowie was of Austrian background, so his book was strong on old German and Austrian connections as well – for one thing, one would learn of Pater Wilhelm Schmidt's *Kulturkreislehre.* There was also Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, in a Swedish translation from 1949.

However, if one found Lowie's book somewhat heavy going and wanted to avoid having to read foreign languages whenever possible, one might be tipped off that Ragnar Numelin's *Fältforskare och kammarlärde* (1947 – "Field researchers and chamber scholars") could be an alternative. Locating a copy in some used bookstore, one would get a comprehensive view of international anthropology all the way from ancestors such as Thomas Hobbes and

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[21] The Reykjavik conference was documented in a volume edited by Gísli Pálsson (1994), who had been the convenor.

[22] Izikowitz' most notable later publication was probably his contribution to Fredrik Barth's famous edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969), based on field studies in Laos in 1936-38 and 1963-64. There is a late interview with him by his student Karl Eric Knutsson (1975), see note 23, in an *Ethnos* issue serving as a *Festschrift*.

[23] Pleijel also devotes a page of friendly comment to the presence of a younger teacher, Karl Eric Knutsson, later (in the early 1970s) to become the first professor of social anthropology at Stockholm University, with an important although brief influence there before moving on to a UNICEF career in Asia. Pleijel's meeting with Knutsson leads on to her reading Malinowski.

Auguste Comte, but also find that at the end there would be chapters on the Scandinavian anthropologies, including some 20 pages on what there was of Swedish anthropology. It took a broad view including folk life research, sociology, and comparative religion, noting that the younger scholar Gunnar Myrdal had studied Swedish railway station communities (no mention here of his better-known *An American Dilemma*), gave more attention to Erland Nordenskiöld, Gerhard Lindblom, and Karl Gustav Izikowitz, and mentioned the three holders of positions at the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm by 1960 as archaeologists and Nordenskiöld students. The book was published in Helsinki, by a Finno-Swedish publishing house. It was dedicated to Kai Birket-Smith and had a foreword of a couple of pages by Gerhard Lindblom.

Numelin could be seen as an interesting person in his own right. He belonged to that Finland-Swedish upper bourgeoisie mostly based in Helsinki and was one of Edward Westermarck's students. Westermarck himself, one of Europe's leading anthropologists in the early 20th century, divided his time between the London School of Economics (where Bronislaw Malinowski was one of his students), extensive field work in Morocco (where he owned a house) and professorships at the University of Helsinki, and somewhat later, the new Åbo Akademi, a Swedish-language university in the town known in Finnish as Turku. Several of Westermarck's likewise Finland-Swedish students went on to become internationally well-known scholars with pioneering field studies: Gunnar Landtman (in New Guinea), Rafael Karsten (in South America) and Hilma Granqvist (in Palestine). Around the time when World War I broke out, a number of them had been in a youth movement agitating for the independence of Finland from the Russian Empire, to which their country had belonged for a little more than a century.

For his part, after gaining his doctorate, Numelin went into the Finnish diplomatic corps. The preface of *Fältforskare och kammarlärde* says that reading ethnological writings could offer some relaxation in the dark evenings in Finland during the war years – for parts of World War II his country was at war with the Soviet Union. By the end of his 35-year career, he was his country's ambassador in Vienna and Prague. But at the same time, he maintained scholarly interests, and wrote books on a variety of topics. One of them, published in Sweden (but printed in Finland) in 1941, was *Den gröna grenen* ("The green bough"), with a subtitle reading "a study in the prehistory of diplomacy." Here he could draw extensively on his ethnographic knowledge, assembled during a stay in 1938 at the Royal Library in Copenhagen. He had planned to write a larger, more scientific work on the topic in English – but then the work had come to an end in a garden in Brussels in August 1939.

It does not appear that apart from Numelin's *Fältforskare och kammarlärde*, and Erland Nordenskiöld's ambivalent relationship to Rafael Karsten, what became known as "the Westermarck School" had much direct contact with Swedish ethnographers.

One might discern a Swedish parallel to Numelin's career in that of Gunnar Jarring, for a long time one of Sweden's most distinguished diplomats. The son of a south Swedish farmer, Jarring (he had invented a new family name for himself) went to Lund University, and ended up – rather daringly, without obvious job prospects – studying Turkish languages. In the late 1920s, this took him on to field studies of East Turkish dialects in what was by then westernmost China – and so we are back in the Uighur area, where Sven Hedin also spent some time. (Jarring was in some touch with the 40 years older Hedin, but mostly seems to have held a certain critical distance.) While Jarring focused on language, he did a

certain amount of ethnological and folkloristic research as well. With his academic home in Lund, however, it does not appear that Swedish ethnography, based elsewhere, was really part of his scholarly milieu. And then in the 1930s, he shifted to diplomacy. At a point when that career (which had taken him through Washington, New York, and Moscow) was largely over, he had an official invitation to return to China, for a visit to his old field site. This resulted in a remarkable book, for a general audience, named *Åter till Kashgar* (1979), combining reminiscences from his field experiences a half-century earlier with vivid reporting from his new journey, through Urumchi and Kashgar, his old research site.[24] It was a time when the Uighur were apparently at relative peace with the government of the People's Republic. Gunnar Jarring died in 2002, aged 94.[25]

Around 1960, the student association in the ethnography department at Stockholm University changed name from Föreningen för utomeuropeisk kulturforskning ("the Society for non-European cultural research") to Antropologföreningen, and its new mimeographed bulletin became *Antropolognytt*, "Anthropologist news."[26] (In the period of the older and more complicated name, the members had also humorously referred to it as "Morianerna," an ancient term for dark-skinned people.) But it would take another decade before the term "anthropology" became the official term identifying the department and the discipline. Before the 1960s, since the activities of Gustaf Retzius, the term was probably in Sweden most often taken to refer to physical anthropology. Between 1947 and 1970, this existed as a separate discipline at Uppsala University, taught by Bertil Lundman, who held a docentship. Lundman had first studied theology, intending to become a minister in the state church (also with its headquarters in Uppsala), but as that refused to ordain him for the priesthood, he turned to more physical features of humanity. His doctoral thesis work supposedly involved measuring the skulls of more than 11,000 individuals in the Central Swedish province of Dalecarlia.

In a 1946 book in Swedish on contemporary races, Lundman is extremely racist in his characterisation of the mental traits of Negroes (he also uses another n-word).[27] For one thing, he suggests, these traits make them excellent slaves. (True, it may be that Lundman, in the Uppsala of his times, had never actually encountered any African or Afro-American.) His books in the 1950s and 1960s, while printed in Tierp north of Uppsala, were in German, on *Rassenkunde* and *Stammeskunde*. In the early 1960s, Lundman gave his weekly lectures on Saturday mornings, showing slides of various human heads, commenting on skull measurements and other personal characteristics. These lectures were part of the Saturday amusements of academic Uppsala and drew sizeable audiences.[28]

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[24] The book was translated into English as *Return to Kashgar: Central Asian Memoirs in the Present* (Jarring 1986).

[25] Gunnar Jarring also took an interest in the local folklore of his south Swedish home area and published a couple of essays on the female trickster figure Potta Långhaka. I have referred to this research elsewhere (Hannerz 2022: 47-50).

[26] As much later I reviewed anthropology's "other press" for *Current Anthropology*, I reminisced about the early *Antropolognytt*, of which I had been one of the editors, as "a roughly produced, amateurish little bulletin" (Hannerz 1987: 215).

[27] This is from the book *Nutidens människoraser* (1946), as quoted in the *Wikipedia* entry on Bertil Lundman.

[28] Another scholar in the field of "racial biology" who has remained better but controversially known is Herman Lundborg, medically trained head of a State Institute of Racial Biology in Uppsala 1921-35. Lundborg, however, seems never to have identified himself as an anthropologist, even as one might feel that he moved in the same general area of research as Gustaf Retzius and Bertil Lundman.

As far as naming was concerned, then, reinventing anthropology took about a decade. Before that, in broad terms, who were the people in Sweden turning early to ethnography? Mostly people of urban background, middle-class with an occasional minor aristocrat. To begin with, their scholarly interest could be in some other field, but not purely desk work or library research – in archaeology perhaps, or entomology. Somehow studying living people could be a second step. Hardly anyone was from a farming family, or of the working class. It was a country largely ethnically homogeneous, although someone of Jewish background but otherwise similar to the others might also be there. By the 1970s, with much more transnational migration becoming reflected in academic life as well, this would change considerably.

Here as elsewhere, however, there was one kind of work which might also lead to something more or less like ethnography: that of the missionary.[29] Early on, there was Karl Edvard Laman, for nearly three decades from 1891 in the Congo, mostly concerned with language, doing for one thing a nearly complete translation of the Bible into Kikongo. But he amassed ritual and other objects as well; these would end up with the ethnographic collections in Stockholm. He earned a medal from the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, and an honorary doctorate in theology from Uppsala University. Bertil Söderberg, one of the people earning a doctorate under Gerhard Lindblom, went for missionary work in Central Africa and came back to the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm in the 1960s to become its Africa curator. However, the best-known Swedish scholar with a mission connection and something approximating anthropological interests was certainly Bengt Sundkler, whose monograph *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948) became internationally well-known. Sundkler was a Church of Sweden missionary in Tanganyika in the 1930s and 1940s and was Bishop of Bukoba in Tanzania in the early 1960s. For a quarter-century between the 1940s and the 1970s he was a professor in the Faculty of Theology at Uppsala University, specialising in mission history, but I have not come across any sign of his engaging in much contact with the discipline of ethnography at that university.

Apart from these more institutionally oriented comments on anthropology and related disciplines in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Uppsala, I should identify a few individuals who appear mostly to have operated outside the university scenes. Present in a slightly wider awareness by reputation or through writings perhaps, but hardly in person.

Eric von Rosen was with Erland Nordenskiöld on his first expedition to South America; but he may be best known for his book *Träskfolket* ("The swamp people") from 1916, reporting on another expedition, to Central Africa – more precisely, the Lake Bangveulu area of what is now Zambia. Gerhard Lindblom's book on the Akamba is dedicated to von Rosen. From an aristocratic family, he became the brother-in-law of Hermann Göring, one of the German Nazi leaders close to Adolf Hitler, and was himself a pro-Nazi commentator in Sweden in the 1930s. His son, Carl Gustaf von Rosen, was a professional pilot, active in Ethiopia, and briefly a notable bomber pilot in the service of Biafra in the Nigerian civil war in the late 1960s.

Gustaf Bolinder earned his doctorate in Gothenburg in 1919, with a thesis on a

[29] In an obituary for Anita Jacobson-Söderman, more widely known as Anita Jacobson-Widding (Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Uppsala University, and Sture Lagercrantz' successor), Kaj Århem (2014) notes that she was inspired to take an interest in Africa by the stories she heard from her missionary maternal grandfather. For a period, before returning to academic life, Jacobson-Widding was also active as a journalist.

South American Indian group, the Ijca. In various Swedish contexts he is frequently titled "professor," but it seems his professorship was in Bogotá, Colombia, 1935-36. He went on to write popular travel books, on Africa as well, and a great many books, in large part fiction, on distant exotic lands for young readers.

On my shelf I find *Genom luften till Afrika* ("Through the air to Africa," 1939), on a two-month journey to Liberia, with intermediate stops: a striking literary exhibition of colonial and quasi-colonial attitudes and practices. With *Vilda buschmän* ("Wild bushmen," 1952), he is back in Africa, this time in Angola. Actually, Bushmen do not have any dominant part in the book, while the varieties of missionaries helping him along his inland route are visible enough.

His ethnographic work seems in large part to entail artifact shopping, for museum collections – and do the descriptions of varied Angolan ethnic groups really go much beyond tribal stereotypes? And then again, he will be in the air making it back to Stockholm in time for Christmas, after a little more than two months. The following year there is the next book, *Indianernas hemliga värld* (1953, "The secret world of the Indians") – more compactly an ethnography of South American highland Indians, their beliefs, rituals and dances, with one chapter on slavery and cannibalism in the past. Bolinder was the grandchild of a Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy.

Yngve Laurell apparently had a subordinate position with the ethnographic collections in Stockholm when they were still with the Museum of Natural History. With the support of Carl Hartman, he recorded folk music with such primitive technology as was available in the 1910s, and then lived in China between 1921 and 1947. He is said to have been a professor of ethnography at the University of Shanghai from 1937 and was also active in art trade there and in Beijing. By 1947 he was back in Sweden.

His professorship at Shanghai could seem to have coincided with the time of Japanese conquest in China. An interesting life history to be explored?

Now over to what was emerging (somewhat ambiguously) as a neighbouring discipline: sociology. In the 1950s a couple of doctorates awarded in that discipline could be seen to link to anthropology.

In Stockholm there was Börje Hanssen, with his dissertation *Österlen* published in 1952. It was a volume of 561 pages, devoted to a study of a region in the south-eastern corner of Sweden, with the town Simrishamn as its center, as it had been in the 17th and 18th centuries. The materials came in large part out of official regional and local archives. Hanssen's aim was to portray relationships between town and country. Mostly this involved livelihoods and commerce, rather than the character of personal ties. The organisation of the text could seem bewildering. He noted that he was inspired by the Chicago School of sociology under Robert Ezra Park, but then shifted between terming his study social anthropology and social ecology. In the original edition the subtitle, in translation, was "a study of social anthropological connections under the 1600s and 1700s in south-eastern Scania." In the bibliography of the dissertation one could find Ferdinand Tönnies, Richard Thurnwald, Bronislaw Malinowski, Robert Lowie, and George Peter Murdock. Hanssen was evidently well-read, but there was no mention of any of his contemporaries in Swedish ethnography.

In 1976, after 24 years, *Österlen* was republished, with a new foreword by the author. Hanssen reminisces here about writing his dissertation in a forest cottage, mostly in a snow-

rich winter, in the light of a kerosene lamp, taking breaks to cut firewood. Hardly any academic contacts here, it would seem. And then he returned to Stockholm, for the public defence of his dissertation.

His work, he notes in that new 1976 foreword, met with "disgust, admiration, confusion." That public defence event lasted for six hours, very much longer than what would be considered normal. After the appointed examiner, a number of additional critics and commentators stood up from the auditorium floor. Then, in a system where dissertations were not just passed or failed, there was a question whether Hanssen would be accepted as a "docent," that higher level of approval which would point to a better chance of an academic career. And if a docent, of what? It seems to have taken a year before the Faculty of Humanities (as there was not yet a Faculty of Social Sciences) could vote – 16 votes for a docent of sociology; three for social anthropology; two for sociology, especially cultural anthropology. (True, neither of the anthropologies existed as established disciplines in Sweden at the time.) Then the highest officer of Swedish academic establishments, the University Chancellor, decided on "sociology, especially historical sociology."[30]

Thus, Hanssen got a six-year appointment as docent, but was mostly frozen out of any connection with the regular teaching of sociology at Stockholm – the discipline was heading in a different direction there. His *Wikipedia* entry notes that he was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study at Stanford in 1957-58 and began a chicken farming enterprise in 1959. This was in a rural area of Sweden, some 200 kilometres west of Stockholm. Evidently it remained his main occupational activity for the rest of his life, even as that second edition of *Österlen*, published on the initiative of the Institute of Folklife Research at Stockholm University, was evidence of a renewed interest in his work. He died in 1979, aged 62.

There was also Bengt Danielsson. Tor Heyerdahl's 1947 *Kon-Tiki* expedition on a raft across the Pacific was mostly a Norwegian enterprise, and Danielsson was the only Swedish participant. The raft landed on the Raroia island in Polynesia, and Danielsson would soon return there for ethnographic work. His dissertation *Work and Life on Raroia* gave him a sociology doctorate in Uppsala in 1955. But he would then go back to Polynesia, to live on Tahiti with his French-born wife.

He could still be a distant celebrity in Sweden, "Resare-Bengt," pictured in colourful shirts and an unusually long beard, furthermore the author of a popular children's book, *Villervalle i Söderhavet*, turned into a television series in the early 1960s. There were other popular travel books as well. On my shelf is *Söderhavskärlek: Polynesiernas sexualliv och familjeförhållanden* (1964; "South Seas love: The sexual life and family relationships of the Polynesians)", but inside it a number of other Danielsson books are listed.

Then Danielsson returned to Sweden in the late 1960s to become director of the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm. He was the first to hold that office without any university obligations. By then, however, a changing Sweden was no longer so receptive to his personal exotic image, and he was soon disappointed that the construction work for a new museum building did not get quickly underway, so he returned to Polynesia where along with his wife, he became an activist against French nuclear weapons experiments. He

[30] In January 1980, just a couple of months after Hanssen's death, the Institute of Folklife Research at Stockholm University, distributed to a select set of readers, a mimeographed collection, 248 pages long, of statements, correspondence and reviews relating to *Österlen* and its early reception. The collection had been assembled by Hanssen in his last year of life.

died, back in Sweden once more, in 1997.

It seems reasonable to also mention Martin Allwood here. A remarkably rich *Wikipedia* entry describes him as the Swedish-born son of the English school activist Charles Allwood and the Finland-Swedish Baroness Aina, née Åkerhielm. Martin Allwood himself was also active in Sweden and elsewhere in a variety of fields, notably (like several generations in his family) in non-state educational institutions in his home area in south-central Sweden. In Sweden he is probably best remembered for a book co-authored with Inga-Britt Ranemark, *Medelby* (1942) – the first Swedish instance of the genre of local "community studies", otherwise most developed in the United States. This was not a doctoral dissertation, but the *Wikipedia* entry states that he later earned a dissertation in sociology in 1953 at the Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany, based on a local study there. While *Medelby* was published a decade before Börje Hanssen's *Österlen*, it is not among Hanssen's references.

Medelby was inspired by the pioneering study *Middletown* (1929), by Robert and Helen Lynd. ("Middletown" has been identified as Muncie, Indiana.) Ranemark, the junior author, was identified as holder of a *filosofie kandidat*, bachelor's degree, and her contributions to the work were apparently rather limited. "Medelby" is a pseudonym; some 80 years after the publication of the book it may be revealed that the community in question is Mullsjö, not so far from the city of Jönköping, where Allwood was born in 1916. (The Allwood family remains involved with the community now.)

The study was planned with the support of Gunnar Myrdal, surely the most prominent social scientist in Sweden at the time. A large part of it is based on interviews and social surveys. Here and there you get to listen to the voice of the locals; this adds colour. Medelby has a rich mixed economy. Mining and metal work came early but remained on a small scale. The railway arrived in 1862, but what was probably more important were the local bus lines which tied the surrounding countryside more closely to the community. There are petty entrepreneurs of various kinds, including barbershops and shoemakers who still make shoes. Media habits include radio, newspapers, and popular magazines.

Religious life is divided between the state church and Pentecostalists. It is at the beginning of a world war, which is already leaving its mark on consumption. The turn to locally produced gas, "gengas," for your car is a particular nuisance. Allwood certainly identifies with sociology, although Bronislaw Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* and Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Primitive Society* somehow make it into his bibliography. On the other hand, one could note that Swedish folk life research is not represented there.

And then we are back, almost 20 years later, with Gunnar Boalt, first professor of sociology in Stockholm. In his contribution to *Minnen*, he reminisces about the need to produce textbooks for growing student numbers:

> Next time I will lecture about this, and then sit down and write them down and then throw it out as a book. One book per year, sometimes two. One awful year there were four. The books were as they would be. (Stockholms universitet 2005: 35)

At a time when social anthropology may have been seen as a potential expansion area for sociology, there would be a book on this as well. For *Socialantropologi* (1960), Boalt would

have two co-authors, Börje Hanssen and Lars Gustafsson, a graduate student – so Hanssen at least had a toehold here.

There was a division of labour chapter wise between them. The cover of the book shows five dark-skinned, black-haired, minimally clothed individuals, as exotic as you can get.

In just above 200 pages, the book places the beginnings of modern social anthropology with Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, notes the military uses of anthropology in World War II (drawing on Clyde Kluckhohn's attempt at public anthropology, *Mirror for Man*), apparently finds George Peter Murdock's view of social structure appealing, and devotes a chapter to Bengt Danielsson's dissertation on Raroia from not so many years earlier. There is also a somewhat oddly detailed chapter drawing on Ralph Piddington's study of the Karadjeri, Australian Aborigines, including their male circumcision ceremony. In large part the book draws on comprehensive overviews and textbooks, rather than monographs, but Evans-Pritchard is heard on Azande witchcraft, and Fortes on Tallensi kinship and clanship. Kroeber gets to contribute a great deal on cultural processes.

On the whole, the view of social anthropology here entails studying sideways, at a distance; not an inside view. There is no mention of a discipline of "general and comparative ethnography" existing at certain Swedish universities, including Boalt's own. Perhaps he had not noticed? In any case, things would change in the following two decades. As Boalt co-authored, with Bengt Abrahamsson, an overview of Swedish sociology in *Current Sociology* in 1977, there was no mention of social anthropology.

Finally, we may well note again that some representatives of earlier Swedish anthropology, such as Karl Gustav Izikowitz, Gerhard Lindblom, and Gustaf Bolinder, did attempt some public outreach, with popular books on their excursions. One should not forget here either that in the mid 20th century, travel writing about faraway countries was more generally a genre of creative non-fiction which probably had an influence on understandings of exotic peoples and societies among the Swedish reading public. Some of the writers were primarily naturalists but could also describe the humans who lived next-door to their favourite animals and plants. Rolf Blomberg was an expert on frogs (and had one species named after him) but also had something to say about rain forest Indians in South America. Sten Bergman specialised in "birds of paradise" in New Guinea, but also interacted with local people, and was even adopted by one family. A resulting book had the title *Min far är kannibal* – "my father is a cannibal." Agneta Pleijel, in her semi-autobiographical novel, indeed mentions Bergman and Blomberg as childhood readings which drew her to ethnography. Rather differently, Olle Strandberg, with a doctorate in literature from Uppsala, writing as a journalist for an upmarket Swedish weekly, tended to also take a humorous approach in his books about journeys in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. At the same time however, there could also be critical insights into the colonial order in his books, as it had been or still was.[31]

Yet more finally, an event: in the fall of 1953, Robert Redfield, one of the leading anthropologists of the times, came from the University of Chicago to Uppsala to give a brief series of lectures; supported by the Gottesman Foundation of New York, and invited

[31] We should also remember Ester Blenda Nordström – journalist, doing more or less ethnographic reporting for the Swedish press, in Sweden (concealed as a farm maid, and among the Sami), in the United States (among Swedish immigrants), in Latin America, and in Soviet Siberia, from around World War I and on for a couple of decades or so. Several of her books came out in new editions recently, with fresh afterwords (Nordström 2012, 2015, 2017a, b) – but by 1960, probably hardly any Swedish ethnographer knew about that, or paid any attention. See also Bremmer (2017).

by Torgny Segerstedt, local sociology professor. The lectures became a book, *The Little Community* (1955), an anthropological classic, still well worth reading. Redfield had prepared carefully for these lectures on Swedish research writings, about Sweden. In the preface he thanks Robert Pehrson for informing him about Swedish studies of community life. Pehrson, American anthropologist, had done field research among the Sami in the most north-eastern part of Sweden (Könkämä; see Pehrson 1954).[32] And indeed as a courteous and interested guest, Redfield draws a number of times in his lectures on Swedish research and writings, and about Sweden. Per Gräslund, a young Swedish folk life student, had been an exchange student in Chicago, and had recently written a comparative account of two villages on the Swedish east coast, Harstena and Kråkmarö.[33] Redfield discusses that, and he also refers to Börje Hanssen's *Österlen* study, to the Stockholm ethnologist Sigurd Erixon's historical study of the village Kila, to Allwood's *Medelby* community study, and to Karl Nickul and Ernst Manker on the seasonal movements of Skolt Lapps. (Of course, he could hardly have read the Swedish-language publications himself.) It is not that *The Little Community* is a book focusing on Sweden – these references appear in a world-roaming account of different anthropological analytical perspectives, together with comments involving E. E. Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer and the Dinka and Meyer Fortes on the Tallensi; Raymond Firth on Tikopia; Marcel Griaule on Ogotemmeli, the old Dogon diviner; Clyde Kluckhohn on the Navajo; James West's American *Plainville*; Redfield's own work in Chan Kom, Mexico; and a great many others. The first end note is to Alfred Kroeber, the second to Sigurd Erixon. Yet Swedish research elsewhere in the world gets a single mention, in passing: setting Erland Nordenskiöld's comparative study of South American artifacts, a quarter-century earlier, next to that of Franz Boas on the features of the bone or ivory needlecases of the Eskimo. Of more recent Swedish ethnography, from perhaps a few blocks away in Uppsala, or from Stockholm an hour's drive or train ride away, there is no mention. Too often the history of Swedish anthropology in the earlier decades of the 20th century indeed seems to be a history of failed connections.[34]

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[32] Pehrson may be best known in anthropology for his field research, just slightly later, among the Marri Baluch in Pakistan, during which he tragically died. His widow turned over to his field notes to Fredrik Barth, who edited them and also undertook some brief complementary field work in the same location before publishing the study in Pehrson's (1966) name.

[33] Per Gräslund later shifted to a business career, but when he died in 2015 the obituaries in Swedish newspapers noted that he had maintained a strong interest in the local history of that same area, where his family had its summer home.

[34] Apparently, Robert Redfield did have a little spare time at the end of his Swedish visit. In a volume on early American anthropology, in large part devoted to Redfield, James B. Griffin, an early student of his and later a University of Michigan museum director who happened to be in Sweden at the same time, could reminisce about an extensive tour of folk life museums in and around Stockholm, hosted by 'Esteruud', most likely the folk life researcher Albert Eskeröd, co-author with Karl Gustav Izikowitz of that 1959 review of Swedish Anthropology in *American Anthropologist*: "On Sunday, while coming back into Stockholm after seeing many museums, we drove through a large park belonging to a former noble family that held the last of the museums, and a shot rang out. Esteruud turned around and said, 'pheasants!' Redfield in the back seat said, 'Did you say 'peasants'?' Well. By that time the nonspecialists in Swedish folk culture were all ready to see Swedish peasants shot." (Murra 1976: 144)

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