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ACTUAL

ANTHROPOLOGISTS REFLECTING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

*Continuity through Change: Anthropological Perspectives in the Contemporary World.
The Annual Convention of Finnish Anthropologists in Tampere, 7–8 May, 2009*

Laura Hirvi, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto and Kaisa Nissi

This year's annual convention of the Finnish Anthropological Society was organized in cooperation with the Department of Social Research from the University of Tampere. Altogether there were about 70 participants, mostly from Finland, who took part in the two-day event. The program offered nine interesting workshops, which were related to the meeting's topic: "Continuity through Change: Anthropological perspectives in the contemporary world." In her opening words, Minna Ruckenstein (University of Helsinki), the president of the Finnish Anthropological Society, addressed the question of how anthropology matters in the contemporary world. She emphasized that Finnish anthropologists need to be recognized – by other scholars and by society at large – as experts in current debates dealing with relevant topics long studied by anthropologists, such as multiculturalism, migration and social transformation. At the same time, she suggested that these scholars also need to expose themselves to new ideas and innovative theories that go beyond fashionable topics that attract funding. Ruckenstein's comments kicked-off a two-day discussion on research traditions and on current practices, and continued with dialogue on the future of Finnish anthropology.

PLENARY SESSIONS: GLOBALIZING CHANGES, KNOWING SUBJECTS AND HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The first key note speaker, Professor Signe Howell (University of Oslo) examined the change happening amongst the Chewong, who live in Malaysia. During Howell's first fieldwork in the eighties, this traditional hunter-gatherer group was still living isolated from the outside world in the rainforest. By means of multi-temporal fieldwork, which Howell defines as "sporadic research with the same people over a long period of time", she was able to witness and document the changes happening to this particular group of people over a period of years.

Howell could see the Chewong move from the rainforest and their earlier traditional wooden huts to cemented houses located outside the forest. Furthermore, she observed that buying and selling (accompanied by a desire for material goods, such as motorbikes) became an essential part of the Chewongs' lives, causing inequalities within the group, which was previously structured according to egalitarian principles. Thanks to her multi-temporal fieldwork and additional data, which was gathered by one of her students, Howell could also notice the arrival of Islam and Christianity to the group. Scrutinizing the challenges related to multi-temporal fieldwork, Howell emphasized that a researcher should be aware that the intellectual climate of scholars as well as the attitudes of the ethnographer have changed between multiple visits. Promoting the benefits of this method, Howell emphasized that multi-temporal fieldwork enhances an anthropologic understanding of the studied group, since it helps the researcher to conceptualize processes within the group and to grasp their complexity. Howell's lecture offered a great insight into the practice of fieldwork, yet she seemed to have difficulty stepping outside of and reflecting her own experiences, which was displayed through her choice of examples and images, *her* representations of the Chewong culture as victims of globalization and lack of competency in today's world.

The second keynote speaker of the first day was Professor Ulla Vuorela from the University of Tampere. In her lecture, "Ways of knowing - The Anthropologist as a Transnational Subject," she scrutinized how experiences in the field are reflected in the biographies of anthropologists. As an example, she gave an overview on the life and research of the Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist, one of the first female anthropologists in Finland and a student of Edward Westermarck.

On Friday, the last invited speaker, Senior Lecturer Stef Jansen from the University of Manchester, discussed the anthropology of the state in his lecture entitled "Hope, normality and the state after the post-Yugoslav wars." The lecture was based on ethnographic research in a Sarajevo suburb, where Jansen had investigated the materialization of "the state" represented through local grids of provision and organization. He explored the feasibility of hope that accompanies the re-building of the state and that manifests itself in simple everyday phenomenon, such as the opening of a bus route or the reconstruction of urban centers, such as: people's engagements with possible futures and their expectations for improved infrastructure.

“WHERE IS THE FIELD?”

The workshop “Where is the field?” was chaired by Professor Hanna Snellman and PhD Student Laura Hirvi (Schwöbel) (University of Jyväskylä), and consisted of five papers, which approached the workshop’s topic from a variety of perspectives. Laura Hirvi, for example, addressed the question of “Where is the field?” by examining the recent changes found in both definitions and in methodologies of “Malinowskian” fieldwork.

While previously the field and its “exoticism” had to be located far away from home, today’s field also can be found *at home*. Due to migration, for example, the “exotic other” has moved next door, making it clear that a specific culture is not always fixed to a specific, geographically defined location. On the other hand, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto (University of Jyväskylä) dealt with the challenging question of how to conceptualize the field in a study that is based on one individual who has continuously lived within the same community. The research field in such a case is not based on the interview situation alone but includes the subject’s life history, past activities of extended family members, significant changes within the town and community over time, and other “far away” factors. In other words, the study becomes one of the “past as a foreign culture”. In this study, the research takes into consideration time and an altered sense of place as a dynamic aspect of the field.

Pirjo Rautiainen (University of Jyväskylä) addressed the challenges an anthropologist faces in doing fieldwork when the researcher him/herself has romanticized the field as opposed to those who take the field at face value. And ethnologist Miia-Leena Tiili (University of Helsinki) extended the discussion by exploring what happens when the researcher embodies the field by becoming a participant observer. When studying a group of coastguards, Tiili physically participated in their work. She proposed that by incorporating such bodily experiences when conducting fieldwork, one gains new insights and ways of understanding the practices of the people being studied.

However, sometimes the field might become too close or overly intimate. Ethnologist Anne Ala-Pöllänen (University of Helsinki), considered ethical questions that arise when one is doing field research. When students witness illegal or unethical activities, what should be included in their field diaries, especially if those diaries are to end up in an archives where anyone is free to read them? The workshop could not find a simple solution, but it agreed that individual informants should be protected; nevertheless, sensitive matters can still be important and significant to the research itself and should not be hidden or censored.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF MONEY

The workshop concerning the anthropology of money started with a discussion on theories of money and economic anthropology. Timo Kallinen (University of Helsinki), one of workshops chairs, introduced theories of how pre-capitalist cultures regard money. Kallinen talked about substantivism, or how societies meet their

materials needs, which often has been criticized for claiming that when tribal cultures become part of a capitalistic economic system, they experience damaging changes in their society. Kallinen introduced material from African cultures and argued that the substantivism is not that simple. The meaning of (western) money among different societies varies broadly. Though the western currency system can change cultures, it commonly becomes incorporated as part of the old system and existing culture. So the introduction of western currency is much more complex than the mere contribution it makes to the deterioration of pre-capitalist tribal societies. Minna Ruckenstein, the other chair of the workshop, continued with the “cycles of change” theory of Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry. She used their theory in her study of children’s use of money. She found that children’s attitudes toward money differ from adult attitudes in many ways: children use money as a means for comparing and creating in social spheres, while adults report that when teaching their children they concentrate on “moral” aspects, such as saving money.

After the group told about their fieldwork, which carried concepts of money into anthropological contexts, the general discussion of the workshop concentrated on questions of money as both a practical necessity and as a symbolic power-carrying fact. Although economic perspectives have had a strong place in the history of anthropological research, in recent years the subject has not been popular, even though economic issues widely affect societies. Consensus among those attending the workshop was that the more anthropologists study money, the more complex and interesting the topic becomes.

VISUAL AND MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

Johanna Sumiala (University of Helsinki) introduced the visual and media workshop with on her study of Finnish school massacres and death rituals in media. She examined how media produced a collective ritual experience when writing about the massacres and thereby promoting fear. Sumiala quoted Georges Bataille, who has written about fear of death as a commonly shared experience that binds groups together. After her presentation, the workshop participants talked about new forms and meanings of ritual that spring from the relatively new social networks (blogs, Facebook, IRC Gallery, etc.) found on the Internet, which create virtual communities and contexts. Discussion continued as Asko Lehmuskallio gave his presentation about non-professional photography practices and the role of film as an explorative medium. The chair Jari Kupiainen (University of Joensuu) ended the workshop by telling about his anthropological documentary film of the Solomon Islands. While he was filming the documentary, burglars stole some items from the local museum. The anthropological film became part of the “investigation”, as Kupiainen had documented the stolen items prior to the theft; and this event once again underscored the value of anthropological research as a means of preserving culture in the face of both on-going change as well as unexpected incidents.

THE CLOSING PANEL DISCUSSION

The closing panel discussion chaired by Minna Ruckenstein dealt with the broad general topic of continuity and change and their meaning for anthropologists. Anna Rastas (University of Tampere), Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (University of Linköping), Marko Juntunen (University of Helsinki) and Marie-Louise Karttunen (*Suomen Antropologi – Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*) gave short introductions from their points of view and stimulated vivid discussion. Anna Rastas, for example, addressed that changes in society call for anthropological understanding: multiculturalism and its counter voices should be considered and answered. Therefore, she continued, anthropologists must engage with media and must be willing to speak out. As a summary, it could be said, that both continuity and change are important for a discipline to survive in the future. Continued field work and engagement with different groups of people continue to be vital aspects of anthropological study. Yet anthropologists should be open to fresh topics, theories, and new avenues of thought that are inspired by a larger scholarly discussion.

Although the panel discussion was inspiring, not enough time was allotted for such a summary, as participants found themselves having to leave before all the closing statements were made. This was one unfortunate aspect of the conference as a whole; another was that concurrent sessions made it impossible for participants to hear all of the panels. An unfortunate aspect of any professional society meeting, in general, is that as it gains success and increases attendance, meeting planners need to be mindful of how the conference itself is designed and orchestrated to allow for the widest possible participation.

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