

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of *Suomen Antropologi* begins with an article by Emile Tsékénis (University of the Aegean) titled 'Kinship Values and the Production of "Locality" in Pre-colonial Cameroon Grassfields (West Cameroon)' in which the author outlines a synthesis of Kopytoff's notion of an 'African frontier' and Appadurai's concepts of 'locality', 'ethnoscape' and 'neighbourhood' in the context of the Cameroon Grassfields prior to the colonial era. Illustrated with foundational narratives collected by the author in the region, Tsékénis suggests that discourses concerning globalization and indigenous peoples, usually thought to be characteristic of the post-colonial period, have analogies with discourses that precede the advent of European colonialism and industrial capitalism; he concludes that pre-colonial African worlds can be described using concepts usually found in ethnographies of contemporary settings to describe the contemporary world.

This is followed by an article by Eija Ranta-Owusu (University of Helsinki): 'Governing Pluralities in the Making: Indigenous knowledge and the question of sovereignty in contemporary Bolivia'. Here the author examines the ideological role of indigenous knowledge in the construction of plurinationalism, thereby shedding light on the changing nature of the Bolivian nation-state in a political situation of indigenous resurgence. In the course of her discussion Ranta-Owusu analyses interview data collected in Bolivia that highlight the 'contested battlefield between multiple notions of sovereignty', meanwhile calling for a review of accepted understanding of the state as both object and instrument of change in the establishment of governing pluralities.

John Liep (Emeritus Lecturer, University of Copenhagen) continues the discussion of ranked exchange on Rossel Island which was published in *Suomen Antropologi* 34 (4). In his contribution to the current issue, 'Conflicting Values: Reciprocity and its defiance in Melanesia', Liep responds to Joel Robbins' argument that a number of exchange institutions discussed in *A Papuan Plutocracy: Ranked Exchange on Rossel Island* (Liep 2009) 'indicate a society where people value and aim to maintain relations of symmetry and equality'. Liep confronts this conundrum while continuing to assert that 'there is at the same time a dominance of senior big men through their control of the exchange of high-ranking wealth and through their manipulation of a complex finance system'.

Both research reports included in this issue are the outcome of research into contemporary Indian phenomena presented as papers at anthropology conferences this year. The first—'Acting Out Class: On mimicking, mocking, Bollywood stars and the urban Indian male' by Tereza Kuldova (University of Oslo)—was first aired at the Finnish Anthropology Conference 2010, while the second is a report on a double session titled 'Indiascapes: Reflections on contemporary India' at the 11th EASA conference held in Maynooth 2010 and written by Mari Korpela (University of Tampere) and Jonathan Miles-Watson (University of Tallinn).

We conclude with our usual Forum, this time on the subject of 'New Technologies in Finland' which discusses the role and effects of new technologies in a variety of

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situations, meanwhile illustrating how anthropology is finding a place in Finnish debates on technological innovation. Introduced by Eeva Berglund (Forum Editor), contributors are Tiina Suopajarvi (University of Oulu), Taina Kinnunen (University of Oulu), Anna Haverinen (University of Turku) and Vuokko Härmä (University of Sussex).

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KINSHIP VALUES AND THE PRODUCTION OF ‘LOCALITY’ IN PRE-COLONIAL CAMEROON GRASSFIELDS (WEST CAMEROON)

• EMILE TSÉKÉNIS •

ABSTRACT

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Igor Kopytoff introduced the concept of the ‘African frontier’ in the mid 80s, providing scholars of Africa with a powerful tool which helped to overcome scientific and political objections posed by concepts such as ‘tribe’ or ‘ethnic group’, though in subsequent decades the paradigm has been subjected to critical scrutiny by major scholars of sub-Saharan Africa. The article begins with a brief outline of Kopytoff’s paradigm, summarizing critical assessment of the model and arguing for a shift in conceptual terminology while preserving Kopytoff’s most useful insights. This is followed by discussion of the sense in which Appadurai’s concepts of ‘locality’, ‘ethnoscape’ and ‘neighbourhood’ fit into the study of the Cameroon Grassfields. Finally, theoretical discussion is augmented by data collected in the region, illustrating how kinship values worked through official discourse (foundational narratives) in order to produce ‘locality’ in pre-colonial Grassfields. As a result, it is suggested that Appadurai’s concepts, initially forged for ethnographies of and in contemporary settings to describe modern societies, also apply to pre-colonial Africa.

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Keywords: pre-colonial Cameroon Grassfields, African frontier, locality, kinship values, foundational narratives, first settlers/late comers

*Introduction*¹

In many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the official version of history, or foundational narrative, re-presents African communities as homogeneous and ahistorical—a condition commonly attributed to autochthonous people—with static borders, thus projecting a kind of ‘reversed image of reality’.² This article deals with a specific region of sub-Saharan Africa known as the Cameroon Grassfields, a term that derives from the German colonial period and refers to the well-watered highland savannah region of western Cameroon. As Fowler and Zeitlyn (1996: xx) argue in reference to the area, however: ‘identity is constantly reworked’ but ‘is nonetheless “fixed” in narratives of the past’. Thus the issue that one immediately confronts when studying myths of origin—or, more generally, narratives aspiring to represent the complex pre-colonial state of affairs—is one of terminology