

EDITOR'S NOTE

The two articles in this issue of *Suomen Antropologi* deal with the anthropological study of society in the United States. More specifically, both contributions focus on questions of inequality and polarization, although from very different angles. Professor Dmitri Bondarenko (Russian State University for the Humanities) looks at the complex relationship between African Americans and African immigrants in a society where race is still very much a stratifying category, while Michael Amundsen (Tallinn University) explores America's underbelly through an exercise in literary anthropology. In US anthropology there is a long-standing 'critical Americanist tradition' that has analyzed how its socioeconomic structures of inequality have developed and persisted, but this strand of scholarship is rather little known outside the borders of its home country if compared to the celebrated studies on Native American groups or other non-Western societies conducted by American academics. Consequently, it is indeed intriguing to see how scholars working from European institutions with different backgrounds tackle similar topics.

Bondarenko has led a team of researchers conducting an ethnographic study in six different US states. According to the racial categories of the dominant American culture, both African Americans and migrant populations of African origins are labelled as 'Blacks' despite the vast cultural and social heterogeneity within this group. As Bondarenko aptly points out, it is hardly surprising that the people in question do not perceive themselves as forming a singular 'Black community'. More precisely, his article focuses on collective historical memory as a major dividing line in the construction and reproduction of identities. Even though on one level there exists a shared understanding of wrongs suffered in the past, on another there are diverse ideas of what the most important historical ordeals have been and what their consequences for the present-day circumstances are. Hence, such institutions and processes as slavery, colonialism, apartheid, decolonization, and the civil rights movement feature very differently in the self-understanding and self-identification of the two groups.

In the second article Amundsen approaches Jack Kerouac's legendary novel *On the Road* as an autoethnography, which provides an alternative to previous politically-minded readings of the book. Some commentators have seen *On the Road* primarily as a rebellious outburst against the fearful right-wing atmosphere of the early Cold War era in America. Amundsen, on the other hand, reads it as a description of the ways of life of several marginal groups in the mid-twentieth century United States. In the first instance, the book provides a view of a community of 'bohemians' to which Kerouac himself belonged. Furthermore, through the documented travels of the 'bohemians' the reader becomes acquainted with the sub-cultures of African American jazz musicians, Mexican immigrant workers, homeless persons, and other groups of people that were normally ignored or looked down on by the mainstream media of the time.

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In the research report section Heidi Härkönen (independent researcher) looks at the interaction between the Cuban state and its citizens in the midst of dire political and economic changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union. She observes that in recent literature there has been a tendency to see the socialist state as a paternalistic force interfering in the lives of citizens who essentially wish to reject it. However, Härkönen's ethnography of a Havana neighborhood shows how this relationship is far more complicated: people do ignore and even reject the state institutions in some instances, but in others they embrace them and clearly expect them to work on their behalf.

Finally, I conclude this introduction by thanking everyone who took part in the Biennial Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society held in Helsinki in October. It was a very successful event and hopefully several of the excellent papers presented there will be published in future issues of *Suomen Antropologi*.

TIMO KALLINEN
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF