

INTRODUCTION: SILENCE, SECRETS, AND REVELATIONS

Few things inspire the anthropologist's imagination and analytical speculation as much as silences and secrets encountered in fieldwork. They compel one to ponder whether something interesting might lie beneath what appears to be covered by silence or secrets, and if so, through what means that something might be uncovered. Relatedly, few things launch the anthropologist into more profound methodological, ethical, and political deliberations than the silences one does unveil and the secrets one is made privy to in the field, many of these converging in the question of how secrets and silence should be treated in one's writing. This special issue delves into the interconnections between these two: silences and secrets in fieldwork encounters, and the silences that are produced through the knowledge we gain within them. The articles examine how secrets and silences are embedded in social structures: how they include and exclude people and map the operations of power, and how they are reproduced, transformed, and broken in the narratives people tell about themselves.

As the papers all show in different ways, silence is characterized by a fundamental ambiguity. A rich body of anthropological research has highlighted that silence does not mean the lack of memory (Shaw 2002; Trouillot 1995); indeed, although experiences in the past might not allow themselves to be verbalized, memories may be transmitted, for example, as embedded in landscapes or as embodied in ritual practices. However, in the contemporary conjuncture of the 'Western' world, silence *is*

often intuitively viewed as failure, and there is a strong normative, moral, and therapeutic weight attached to the ideal of speaking out, particularly concerning the atrocities of problematic pasts (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Yet alternatively, it is also widely acknowledged that silence can function as a means of communication: in this journal's home country Finland (Carbaugh et al. 2006), as in many other cultural contexts. Scholars working on war and trauma have also highlighted the role of silence as a pathway to healing and as a method of protecting social relationships and of co-inhabiting the world after violence (Das 2007; Eastmond and Selimovic 2012).

Whether silence is perceived as a form of communication, or as an absence of it, its analysis always entails consideration of the relationships within which it manifests, and of the power relations there-in. Silence, it has been suggested, can itself be viewed as a currency of power (Achino-Loeb 2006). An assessment of what and who is silenced can lay bare gross inequalities in power. Similarly secrets, which mete out the boundaries between the included and excluded, constitute an operation of power. In some cases it is fairly easy to identify those who benefit from silence or secrets, and those they sever from justice, recognition, freedom, or truth. Yet in others, silence and secrets may simultaneously benefit different individuals and groups in different and contradictory ways. A particular question to which all of the articles in this issue thus speak to is the interplay between concealment and revelation: while silence and secrets are constitutive of power

relations, their breaking can provide powerful leverage for the underdogs in these relationships. Thus, as Manderson et al. note (2015: S184) paraphrasing Georg Simmel's early work (1906) on secrecy: 'While governmentality could be construed as the power to determine which secrets can be kept by whom, who is required to remain visible and who is not, conversely, secrecy was a means by which people might resist social control'.

For the ethnographer, the ambiguity of silence presents the dilemma of what and how to reveal. Secrets may be shared in order to build important social relationships, and the breakings of silence may be crucial signs of and pathways into growing cultural intimacy. Yet the ethnographic commitment to preserving one's informants' secret knowledge and protecting things that are deemed honored and sacred (Manderson et al. 2015: S183), may make the ethnographer a 'legible moral subject' (Jones 2014: 62).

In this issue, three ethnographers approach silence and secrets from the perspective of their research. Henni Alava reflects on the resonances between silence following the violence of colonization and the more recent violence of war in northern Uganda, and on how these silences compelled her to grapple with how they could and should be reproduced in ethnographic writing. Timo Kallinen looks into how Ghanaian traditional priests use social media in exposing Christian pastors as frauds, thereby re-employing and redirecting an age-old accusation of charlatanism previously targeted at themselves by both Christian and secularist commentators. Katja Uusihakala analyzes a public apology to British child migrants as a state attempt to rewrite and redress a previously silenced past. In so doing the apology seeks to repair social relationships and to reconfigure the temporal order.

In the following, we draw attention to three themes that these articles all engage: rituals of silence and secrets, silence and secrets as moral questions, and the ethics of ethnographic revelation and concealment.

THE RITUALS OF SILENCE AND SECRETS

Ritual occupies a central place in one way or another in all the three contributions of this special issue. Alava's study on Uganda uses a Roman Catholic mass pilgrimage that culminates in a large commemoration ritual for Acholi martyrs as an important reference point in her analysis. In Uusihakala's treatment of the British prime minister's public apology to the child migrants, one key dimension is to look at it as a ritual. Kallinen's paper deals with Ghanaian traditionalists whose ritual life is characterized by secrecy; thus questions about what can be made public and how have proved difficult.

In opposition (or as a complement) to the classic Durkheimian view of society as the source of the sacred, there have been those who argue that the sacred necessarily conceals something from the social view. Thus deep-running conflicts and inequalities either disappear from ritual representations or they are depicted as 'necessary' or even 'good' for society (Godelier 1999: 171–199). In her analysis of the commemoration of the martyrs Alava looks at how a certain historical image of the Acholi society is created and maintained by remaining silent on various troubling issues in the colonial and missionary past of the country. If the prevailing orders and dominant ideologies are sustained by such crucial silences and concealments, the opposite instances would be those, where politically or socially inconvenient truths are brought out in the open. The public

apology discussed by Uusihakala seems to gain its effectiveness from just that: whatever the motives of the apologizers are, the receivers of the apology are at least content that their hardships are publicly acknowledged to have occurred.

An important question in recent studies on ritual has been the modern culture's marked skepticism toward rituals as empty formalities. This view is most often traced back to the ideology of Protestant Reformation, which stressed the value of sincerity and saw that ordinary speech is capable of conveying the truth about the inner states of individuals. Consequently, rituals that appeared to emphasize the prescribed and superficial aspects, rather than the spontaneous and internal, became suspect as forms of communication (see, e.g., Keane 2002; Robbins 2001). In Uusihakala's discussion on the reception of the public apology by the child migrants this view becomes evident, when people appraise whether the apology was sincere or 'just words', that is to say, an empty ritualistic formality. From an analytical point of view, however, the more relevant way of looking at a ritualized apology, as adopted by Uusihakala, is to focus on how it seeks to restructure social relations, reorganize temporal orders, or reorient experience.

Ritual and secrecy can also be approached from the point of view of social hierarchies. A number of famous ethnographic studies have explored the ways divisions between those who know and those who don't know are engendered in ritual. However, on a closer look, such distinctions often appear to be far more complicated, for example, between those who know and those who pretend not to know, or even between those who know they know and those who don't know they don't know (see, e.g., Barth 1975; Taussig 1993). The Akan traditional priests discussed in Kallinen's article

undergo a long and complex initiation in order to become the guardians of the ritual secrets of their communities. In Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian discourses their devotion to secrecy is interpreted as satanic, standing in opposition to the revelatory nature of Christianity. To counter these claims the traditionalists have developed a public discourse that portrays Christian pastors as frauds who secretly solicit ritual help from traditional priests.

SILENCE AND SECRETS AS MORAL QUESTIONS

Silence and silencing, keeping secrets and being excluded from them, as well the revelation and voicing of the previously unknown or un-verbalized, are ambiguous and complex moral questions. The three articles in this issue illuminate the moral and ethical issues involved in the interplay between concealment and revelation from different perspectives. Uusihakala examines public apology as a political gesture and a moral act, which attempts to voice, redefine, and redress a previously silenced past. She argues that in the public apology to British child migrants, the state reveals a past that has been silenced, takes responsibility for its concealment, and publicly renounces the practice as a moral failure. In so doing the apology attempts to reaffirm the nation's commitment to a shared moral principle—the safeguarding of its children. Thus apologies, as Celermajer (2013) argues, are recognitions of the state's ethical failure to live up to its ideals. In providing a moral narrative for a silenced past, in which those previously excluded are recognized and given a voice, apologies further seek to transform how national histories are understood and narrated. Uusihakala's case is an example of an instance where the public breaking of silence is seen as a moral act

with restorative intentions—as in truth and reconciliation commissions, testimonies, or confessions. In such forms of speaking out, there is a conviction that exposing of wrongdoing is intended to ‘form closure, to resolve individual pain, and to meet a collective need for repair’ (Manderson et al. 2015: S185).

The moral goals of telling and revealing are somewhat different in the case Kallinen examines. His article focuses on the interplay between honoring secrets and revealing them in the Ghanaian traditionalists’ ways of challenging Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. While Christianity is considered a ‘revelatory religion’ which strives to make the unseen visible, traditional religion has focused on esoteric knowledge and secrecy. And, while the emphasis on public visibility makes the use of electronic mass media for broadcasting their message straightforward for the Christians, the public representation has been much more complicated for traditional religions, in which authority is grounded in restricted knowledge and access to spirit powers. Whereas one of the major themes of the Pentecostals’ promulgation has been the revelation of the satanic influences in traditional religions, Kallinen shows how the traditionalists have recently developed their own version of revelatory discourse by exposing Christian pastors as fakes. They maintain the traditional religion’s emphasis on restricted knowledge by concealing their own secrets but publicly revealing the secrets of others—the Christian pastors. This public exposure is presented as justified by the Christians’ immoral behavior. By selectively concealing and disclosing secrets, the traditionalists, it appears, have adopted a modern strategy of naming and shaming as a form of moral judgment.

As the above discussion already suggests, silence implicates the researcher in profound ways. The researcher is inevitably drawn into the

power relations in which silences are embedded, and into weighing the moral claims attached to calls to break it. Alava’s discussion shows how silence forces the researcher to go beyond regarding silence as an interesting object of analysis to considering the implications of silences for the entire research process: from the multiple choices silence demands during fieldwork, to the choices made about it in writing. Alava suggests that in choosing to write about silence, the researcher by necessity amplifies it. Recognising the multiplicity of the rationales, reasons, and desires for silence, Alava argues, however, that this amplification may either shield or break the silence. Thereby she advocates an approach where silence is considered polyphonic, layered, and complicated. Examining two cases of silenced violent pasts in northern Uganda, silence regarding colonial and missionary expansion and a more recent one regarding the northern Ugandan war, she highlights how silence may be healing and destructive at the same time. Both silences contributed to a moral re-imagining of community, enabled by the re-signification of painful events in individual and communal past, and a highlighting of alternative points of identification. In her article, Alava traces her choice to break one of these silences and to shield the other.

THE ETHICS OF MAKING AND BREAKING SILENCE

Thus, engaging with our interlocutors’ secrets and silences has profound ethical implications for the research process. One of the key concerns is how to write about the silence and secrets of others, while at the same time maintaining an ethical stance and a commitment of doing no harm. In addition to avoiding direct and immediate harm, anthropologists need to

consider carefully the potential, or unintended, consequences of their choices to reveal or keep their interlocutors' secrets; to expose or break their silences (see American Anthropological Association's Statement of Ethics 2012; Ryan-Flood and Gill 2010). As the articles in this issue reveal, depending on the research context, silences, secrets, omissions, and erasures encountered during ethnographic fieldwork and in writing up the research are very different, and have diverse ethical and political implications. While Alava discusses two moments of silenced violent pasts and her decisions concerning protecting or breaking them, Uusihakala analyzes the public revelation of a silenced past through political apology. The ethical rationale of apology is empowering in its claim to undo oppressive silencing, which, as Sara Ahmed suggests, implies not only that one does not speak, but that one is 'barred from participation in a conversation which nevertheless involves you' (2010: xvi). In addition to examining how the child migrant apology attempts to re-voice a silenced past, Uusihakala also shows that a political apology is always partial. While it overcomes certain silences, it reproduces others by avoiding to fully address the wider political conditions which enabled the child migration policy in the first place. In the case discussed by Kallinen, the Ghanaian traditional priests, who publicly expose their adversaries, appear to be putting themselves in an ethically ambiguous position. On the one hand, they have successfully revealed that Christian pastors are guilty of similar immoral secrecy they accuse traditionalists of, but on the other, they seem to implicate themselves as they admit

to have secretly helped the pastors in their search for spiritual powers from traditional gods. However, for the traditionalists, there is nothing unethical in secrecy itself; it is rather the public denouncement of traditional religion by Christians that invites their moral judgement.

Although the articles in this section focus on specific ethnographic cases dealing with secrecy and silence, the ethical questions raised by them pertain to the practice of anthropology in general—especially in the current era. Recently, the tropes of transparency and revelatory regimes that have come to characterize Western public imaginaries around atrocities and trauma have entered discussions concerning research practice. The moral value of telling, revealing, and exposing, embedded as they are in the institutions and practices of truth and reconciliation commissions, committees of inquiry and public apologies, also colour debates relevant for research practice in anthropology. Recent pressures to archive data in publicly available forms are presented as commensurate with calls for making publicly funded research openly available to everyone. Yet for anthropologists, as for many others in the social sciences, demands for transparency resound in different ways depending on the contexts of their work. For instance, those working to salvage ways of life under threat of extinction have for decades called for support for efforts to make ethnographic data publicly available. Yet for those working in regions of on-going conflict or violence, pressure to share data in open repositories are seldom in line with the ethical obligations of those whose trust has been gained in fieldwork encounters.

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