

Rethinking world anthropologies through fieldwork: Perspectives on “extended stay” and “back-and-forth” methodologies

Čarna Brković

Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies, carna.brkovic@geschichte.uni-regensburg.de

Andrew Hodges

Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Research, andyfilozofski@gmail.com

Abstract

In this article, we explore the grounds on which world anthropologies can be differentiated and how this can be discussed without reproducing the internal hierarchies of a discipline that has at least four names (social anthropology, cultural anthropology, ethnology, ethnography). We suggest that ethnographic research (rather than national intellectual traditions) can be used as the criterion to differentiate between world anthropologies. In doing so, we discuss whether the production of anthropological knowledge is affected by the model of ethnographic fieldwork employed, by focusing on two methodologies: the “extended stay” model and the “back-and-forth” model. We also consider how methodologies may be discussed, given that the extended stay and back-and-forth fieldwork designs exist within anthropological-ethnological communities in unequal power positions. On the basis of an anthropological conference, *Anthropology Otherwise*, organised in Valjevo, Serbia, in 2011, which used consensus-based decision making as an organisational technique, we suggest that encounters of people who practice ethnography in various ways may unsettle existing hierarchies within the discipline if organised through experimental academic conference formats.

KEYWORDS: ethnography, fieldwork, world anthropologies, activist traditions

Introduction

‘Immersing oneself in a culture is not like falling down a rabbit hole.’

These words were uttered by one of the participants at the conference *Anthropology Otherwise: Rethinking Approaches to Fieldwork in Different Anthropological Traditions*, organised in 2011 at the Petnica Science Centre near Valjevo, Serbia, and supported by

the Wenner Gren Foundation.¹ The topics under discussion included what it could mean to do “anthropology otherwise”, in terms of ethnographic research methodologies as well as in terms of formats of academic meetings. More specifically, this included a discussion of whether immersion, which participants agreed was indispensable for ethnographic research, can be achieved through back-and-forth visits repeated over several years. The conference was described by another participant as an “anti-conference”, through its use of consensus-based decision making, rejecting formal academic hierarchies.

Drawing together insights gained through the conference method and questions posed, this article discusses how different ethnographic methodologies produce relationships with interlocutors in different ways and the implications of this for knowledge production. We seek to find a way of talking about this without reproducing hierarchies of power among different “world anthropologies” (Restrepo & Escobar 2005). At least four names of the discipline (social anthropology, cultural anthropology, ethnology, ethnography) and their variations (socio-cultural anthropology, ethnology and anthropology, and so forth) summarise different historical trajectories, knowledge canons, and disciplinary assumptions, which have intersected and diverged from one another in complex ways throughout the 20th century. Taking into consideration the complex histories and unequal power relations among different anthropological traditions, this article focuses on the grounds on which world anthropologies can be differentiated – and how this can be discussed.

We suggest that ethnographic research – rather than national intellectual traditions – can be used as the criterion to differentiate world anthropologies. In doing so, we focus on two ideas concerning how ethnographic fieldwork should be organised. The first is an ethnographic approach that we name the extended stay (loosely defined as Anglo-Saxon, which involves spending an extended amount of time, usually a year or more, in one location), whilst the second is an ethnographic approach, which we have chosen to call back and forth (loosely defined as Balkan/Eastern European, whereby researchers make repeated short visits to a field site for a month or so at a time, often over many years).

Alongside discussing this topic, we also consider the methods through which such a discussion can be led, bearing in mind that the extended stay and back-and-forth fieldwork designs exist within anthropological-ethnological communities in unequal power positions. When a conversation about ethnography is organised among

¹ The key note speakers were Sarah Green, Stef Jansen, Zorica Ivanović, Slobodan Naumović and Margareta Kern. The participants of the workshops were: Aline Moore (Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle), Andre Thiemann (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropological Research), Andrew Hodges (University of Manchester), Anja Tedeško (University of Torino), Andrea Peres (independent researcher, Brasil), Čarna Brković (University of Manchester), Dragana Kovačević (University of Oslo), Dragica Popovska (National Historical Institute in Macedonia), Igor Mikeslin (Central European University), Ioana Miruna Voiculescu (Central European University), Ivan Rajković (University of Manchester), Katarzyna Puzon (Polish Academy of Sciences), Lilia Khabibullina (University of Barcelona), Maarja Kaaristo (Tartu University), Maria Cristache (Central European University), Marie van Effenterre (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales), Marija Ilić (Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbia), Marina Simić (University of Belgrade), Marko Rupčić (Central European University), Mihajlo Jevtić (Academic Film Centre, Serbia), Monika Alovjanović (Central European University), Nina Kulenović (University of Belgrade), Rory Archer (University of Graz), Vanja Čelebičić (University of Manchester).

anthropologists and ethnologists who live in different parts of the world and who employ different approaches to fieldwork, such a dialogue may quickly end up reinforcing existing differences, with people defending their way of studying things against other possibilities. In order to prevent this from happening, we suggest that a consensus-based decision-making process, borrowed from Anglo-American anarchist political organising circles, is useful. During the 2011 conference, instead of a conventional conference format, we used this approach to discussion. As an experiment in collaboration, we believe that it worked, although within the confines of the conference theme. In the article, we will use extracts from the conference conversations as ethnographic illustrations of how consensus-based decision making works in academic practice.

Thinking about world anthropologies through ethnographic practice

Instead of offering a view of anthropology as a singular body of knowledge radiating from the centre towards the peripheries and semi-peripheries, the notion of world anthropologies 'seeks to take seriously the multiple and contradictory historical, social, cultural and political locatedness of the different communities of anthropologists and their anthropologies' (Restrepo & Escobar 2005: 100). This notion allows us to see anthropology as a polycentric intellectual endeavour characterised by a multiplicity of origins, intellectual and epistemological assumptions, political roles, and names that this discipline has had in different moments and places throughout the 20th century. In a similar fashion to state borders, where the exact boundaries of a discipline are set up, and how they come into being, 'depends on the scale, and the moment, at which you are looking at them' (Green 2005: 142). Bearing this in mind, we are interested in how different modes of producing anthropological knowledge – different world anthropologies – can be captured, compared, and discussed.

One principle was succinctly summarised in Hofer's (1968) ideal-typical distinction between anthropologists as *those who study other cultures*, and European national ethnographers as *those who study their own culture*. Hofer deepened this distinction by assigning a comparative perspective to anthropologists, and a cumulative perspective to European ethnographers, whose work he describes in the following way:

National ethnographers may be compared to granaries where generations of ethnographers, one after the other, hoard and preserve their knowledge.... the field is nearby, is easy to visit, and field visits are usually short (1968: 313–4).

Whilst this kind of a sharp distinction is untenable, some of it shapes contemporary understandings of what constitutes fieldwork and of what constitutes an anthropologist in both Anglo-Saxon and Eastern European anthropologies and ethnologies. It should be noted that the origins of the two approaches discussed by Hofer may be closer than is usually thought (Hart 2013). The model of the extended stay in another place was formed almost coincidentally, because Malinowski, educated both in European national ethnography and anthropology, found himself unable to return from Australia to Europe

when the First World War was raging. Malinowski studied ethnology in Leipzig and anthropology in London and was familiar with the back-and-forth design of ethnographic research commonly used in eastern European ethnologies. The heated discussions regarding the epistemological characteristics of extended ethnographic fieldwork occurred much later, after it had already been enthroned as the way to conduct anthropological research in Anglo-Saxon traditions. As Hart (2013) writes about Malinowski's extended ethnographic stay:

He got the model from Central European nationalism: the ethnographer describes the timeless customs of a peasantry living close to nature and bound together by kinship, the living soul of a Volk seeking a state to match its culture and territory (Hart 2013).

The notion of world anthropologies allows us to take into account such intellectual and epistemological borrowings without assuming that anthropology has a single history and a clear-cut intellectual centre. However, the question of the grounds on which particular world anthropologies can be seen as different remains. Hofer's distinction uses nativity as the differentiating criterion of various anthropological traditions. This is not helpful from today's perspective, since a large body of literature has discussed and criticised the (un)importance of being "native" for the anthropological learning process (Narayan 1993; Peirano 1998; Ryang 1997). Moreover, a significant body of research in Anglo-Saxon anthropologies today presents a study of "one's own" culture.

Other possible grounds for differentiating world anthropologies are national traditions (cf. Bošković 2008). However, we think it is highly problematic to use the nation as a frame of reference for defining and comparing world anthropologies. A comparison of "British" and "Serbian", or "US" and "Croatian" traditions of anthropology-ethnology carries the danger of reproducing methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002) and freezing intellectual landscapes into mosaic-like image of discrete cultures. Restrepo and Escobar's (2005) notion of world anthropologies/anthropology otherwise opens up a possibility to understand different historical modalities of anthropological practice as constitutive of the discipline of anthropology, but it does not prevent seeing these modalities through a nationalistic lens.

In order to avoid reproducing the "national order of things" (Malkki 1995) in the discussion of anthropology-ethnology and in order to go beyond claiming visibility for the other, nationally or regionally defined, ethnologies, we propose a focus on *ethnographic practice*. Focusing on ethnographic research is a useful way to examine the differences among world anthropologies for two reasons. First, the classic anthropological-ethnological analytical move in disturbing the concept of (national) cultures as discrete wholes has been to explore how practices unravel within particular sets of socio-political relations. We are suggesting that the same analytical move should be applied to thinking about our own discipline. Taking into account how ethnologists and anthropologists a world apart conduct their research within particular socio-political relations opens up the possibility of discussing different world anthropologies, without enclosing them in units of national culture. Second, it is noteworthy that the back-and-forth and the extended

stay fieldwork designs have been shaped by particular socio-intellectual environments but are separable from them. They can easily be abstracted from the contexts in which they originated, as well as used as ways of ethnographic learning in, potentially, any community of ethnologists and anthropologists.

If understood in this way, what kind of difference do they make? Are they epistemologically different: is knowledge produced by one model necessarily different from knowledge produced by the other? If not epistemological, is there any other disciplinary relevant kind of difference between the two designs? We will go through these questions in the following sections, acknowledging the historical differences between the two approaches to fieldwork and discussing the implications of these differences for the epistemological process in anthropology-ethnology. After that, we will address one possible format for discussing such and similar issues fraught with tension in our discipline – consensus-based decision making – and present how it can be used in academic conferences.

Converging histories of extended stays and back and forth approaches to ethnography

The differences in fieldwork design that Hofer (1968) described were part of wider socio-intellectual environments in the first decades of the 20th century, when the first university departments, museums, journals, and other elements of disciplinary infrastructure were established, both in Anglo-Saxon anthropologies and Eastern European ethnologies. If anthropology can trace its conceptual roots back to the imperial and colonial world order, ethnology/ethnography can trace its roots back to the nationalisation and industrialisation of so-called “peasant societies” and the need of newly formed states to learn about their populations in order to govern them in a particular way and to govern them (Ssorin Chaikov 2003). The not-quite-Other of Eastern European ethnologies were communities of peasants living within the boundaries of the same state: people who were perceived as ‘the embodiment of the nation’ (Halpern & Hammel 1969: 18), simultaneously the same and different from the ethnographers. Ethnology had been perceived as a science that should ‘confirm that there really existed a nation (by enforcing cultural and linguistic unity upon heterogeneous peasant populations)’ (Naumović 1998: 108). In the background of the back-and-forth design was a theoretical assumption that the ethnographers’ task is to collect pieces of the “puzzle” of how the modernised, urbanised members of a nation presumably lived in past (Naumović 1998).

Again, the conceptual origins may not be so far away from one another. The dominant form of polity organisation in the 20th century was a nation-state, rather than an empire. Hart (2013) argues that ethnographic research understood as an extended stay in one place reflects and reinforces central political assumptions of the 20th century of how the world is (or ought to be) organised: ‘The age of nationalism, our own, likewise needed a vision of the world as a medley of isolated cultures and the social anthropologists provided one.’

The directions of the two traditions intersected in the second half of the 20th century. Research “at home” became common in Anglo-Saxon anthropologies. Across

Eastern Europe, many departments of ethnology were renamed and changed curricula so as to incorporate topics, approaches, and bodies of literature produced in Anglo-Saxon anthropologies. This has disturbed assumptions about what counts as ethnology/anthropology and who an ethnologist/anthropologist is (Kürti 1996). This issue remains open for negotiation (Hann et al. 2007), and is affected by various bureaucratic conundrums (Prca 1999), new hierarchies of knowledge (Buchowski 2004), and various understandings of the meanings and uses of ethnography (Milenković 2008).

Ethnology continues to be perceived as a science in the service of one's own society, although in a very different form from the one it had in the first half of the 20th century. Today its role is often understood as a critical reflection upon the nationalist, ethnocentric ideas about the country one studies and works in, rather than as a confirmation of the legitimacy of a national culture, as it had used to be, or 'as a source of knowledge about "others"' (Bakalaki 2006: 257), as may be the case with anthropology. This 'inward looking analytical viewpoint' (de la Cadena 2005: 13) is present in Eastern European as much as in Latin American (Ribeiro 2008) or UK anthropologies (Gledhill 2008), at least in the discussions of the roles and public relevance of the discipline.

Epistemological differences?

The extended stay and the back-and-forth approach to ethnography may seem very different at first. It may seem that different avenues for understanding social reality are opened if a researcher stays a couple of weeks at the field site, then comes back after several months, and repeats this over years or decades, or if one stays in a place to research it for a long time. Differences between fieldwork designs would be highly important if the quality of one's ethnography were affected by those differences. However, since the quality of one's ethnography mostly means the quality of one's engagement with a particular set of socio-political relations, we suggest that the differences between two designs can be waived.

One ground for differentiation between the two designs could be the existence of movement. In the ideal model discussed by Hofer, back-and-forth fieldwork supposedly lacks movement because it is completed in the same country in which one lives. Lack of physical travel across state borders is read as a lack of comparative perspective, which is sometimes also interpreted as a lack of possibility for conceptual movement. In this view, long-term ethnographic fieldwork includes physical travel abroad as well as epistemological movement across social and cultural differences. However, this assumption is flawed, since both approaches require movement on different scales. The ways in which back-and-forth ethnography has been undertaken involved repeated movement between diverse social and intellectual networks of the "field" and of the "desk", whilst a long-term ethnographic stay is not reserved for research across state borders.

Another difference can be made on the basis of the quality of movement. Going back and forth between the field and the desk is an ethnographic movement that is constant in its repetition, whilst long-term ethnographic research requires a single move into the field, and then a move out to the desk. This difference in the quality of movement can be relevant for the epistemological process but does not have to be. Epistemologically, both designs require the researcher to engage in what Ingold (2014) calls participant

observation. Ingold calls for abandoning the term *ethnography*, which has become too widely used across social sciences and humanistic disciplines, and suggests that not everything ethnographers do is automatically ethnographic:

“ethnographicness” is not intrinsic to the encounters themselves; it is rather a judgment that is cast upon them through a retrospective conversion of the learning, remembering and note-taking which they call forth into pretexts for something else altogether. This ulterior purpose, concealed from the people whom you covertly register as informants, is documentary. It is this that turns your experience, your memory and your notes into material – sometimes spun quasi-scientifically as “data” – upon which you subsequently hope to draw in the project of offering an account (2014: 386).

In addition to knowing the language and sharing concerns of people being researched, ethnographic learning requires one more step: organising one’s own movement through social relations, finding one’s own route through the relations in a way that follows the ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu 1990: 66) of the field as well as the expectations of the discipline, with the aim of ‘opening up new possibilities for thinking about experience’ (Jackson 2013, cited in Ingold 2014: 388). Since ethnographic learning is not very predictable, the points at which the learning, writing, and production of anthropological knowledge happen within the back-and-forth or the extended movement through social relations cannot be precisely pinpointed. Thinking through the two discussed ethnographic approaches suggests that, sometimes, the differences in knowledge production are not as radical as might seem to be the case between the natural sciences and religion, or between Malay and anthropological tools for the description of the world (cf. Strathern 1987). Knowledge forms are sometimes only partially different, as is the case with the two fieldwork designs.

As earlier mentioned, the conference was a place to discuss in what ways it is possible to conduct “anthropology otherwise”, in terms of fieldwork designs and of formats of academic organising. A major portion of anthropological and ethnological practice happens not during fieldwork, but in academic institutions, meetings, and publications. We assert that distinctive knowledge forms, at least to an extent, emerge from different knowledge practices: an assertion we reflexively applied to academic conditions of production in which our “anti-conference” took place, utilising a non-adversarial method of group discussion designed to minimise the effects of existing hierarchies amongst participants.

Consensus decision making: its uses and limits in the conference format

The consensus method is a tool that may be used to challenge people who have been conducting anthropological/ethnographic research in a particular way in order to find common ground with people who have been doing anthropology “otherwise”. It is geared towards encouraging a group of people who are debating a particular issue, topic or strategy to attempt to find common ground, whilst respecting the different viewpoints of participants and not imposing one particular line of argument on everyone present.

The stages of this method are often presented in the form of a flowchart. At first, the topic or issue under discussion is introduced and clarified if necessary. Following this, the issue is explored from a variety of perspectives generated by those present. Possible ideas for resolving the problem are collected, and their advantages and disadvantages discussed. The list is shortened as particular solutions are discussed, and possible proposals weaving together the best aspects of the solutions offered are suggested. When a small number of proposals have been distilled, they are amended and further discussed before testing for agreement. If an agreement is not reached, the process repeats itself. If an agreement is reached, then the group discussion comes to a close, prompting any necessary action to take place. When coming to an agreement, individual members of the group may “stand-aside”, if they are not comfortable with the proposal but still wish, for the rest of the group’s sake, for the proposal to go ahead. If a member of the group is extremely unhappy with the decision reached, they may block it, meaning that the actions decided on, or theoretical conclusions reached, are not acted upon. Blocks are used very rarely, most often in situations in which individuals feel a possible outcome of the discussion may have an extremely negative and/or dangerous effect.

Consensus decision making relies on a group finally reaching some form of consensus on the topic or point being discussed. This means that, whilst respecting and allowing for different viewpoints and perspectives amongst those present, the ultimate “movement” is centripetal, in finding common ground and utilising that common ground as a basis for further *action*. In contrast, an academic discussion often moves centrifugally, in proposing a particular theoretical or methodological question, and then seeking to explore and elaborate on many different kinds of possible responses to that question.

Successful consensus decision making, therefore, promotes group solidarity and collective action, whilst simultaneously accepting that different individuals have different analyses and perspectives. This means that the subsuming of various experiences and viewpoints into one singular grand framework or narrative in which all actions are interpreted is avoided. For these very same reasons, the method is best suited to political activism and practical decision making (which includes concerns about methodology), rather than more abstract discussion and the fruitful elaboration of theoretical viewpoints.

The use of consensus decision-making in the conference format constitutes an interesting experiment on two counts. First, academic conferences are frequently hierarchically organised with a chair, “renowned” or “academic celebrity” speakers, and academics who “lead” discussions. Questions are often, but not always, dominated by a small number of prominent (frequently male) academics who have the privilege of arguing the first few questions, whilst undergraduate or early postgraduate career anthropologists are sometimes reluctant to speak. Second, we felt that the insights of social anthropology regarding the importance of material and organisational cultures in shaping the kinds of and qualities of knowledge that is produced are often applied to knowledge produced “in the field” and less frequently to working contexts in academia as well. Experimenting with such a conference format thus promotes the reflexive application of knowledge produced in the field to working contexts in academia, where hierarchies are much frequently implicitly accepted and are often necessary to advance one’s academic career.

Activist traditions

We suggest that the technique, which works best in the form we used it amongst fairly small groups of people (five to twenty participants), has some similarities with a liberal political tradition that makes use of organisational techniques such as focus groups, participative democracy and the use of inclusive rhetoric. However, in anarchist circles, the use of such techniques, combined with, for example, Marxist analyses of political economy are highly critical of this same liberal political tradition with which they have a limited and partial affinity. Due to the use of similar techniques, particularly in NGO circles, some of the conference attendees were familiar with consensus decision making and, in particular, the use of hand signals, which are used by the FYEG (Federation of Young European Greens), for instance.² We suggest that, amongst revolutionary leftist organising circles in the Balkans, consensus decision making is often understood as being more closely associated with the internationally funded NGO scene rather than with anarchist circles, which have used a number of other direct democratic techniques over the past few years in the region, including the plenum format.³ This contrasts with another model of activism that has propagated itself throughout the region over the past twenty years, i.e. the NGO flexible networked activist, a semi-professional role, making bids and brokering grants from organisations promoting "civil society" such as Soros' Open Society Foundation.⁴ This kind of activist had a particular set of associations in the region. As the sociologist Paul Stubbs described on the basis of twenty years of activist and academic engagements, primarily based in Zagreb, Croatia:

These flexible networks and organisations constitute "resource pools" enabling an NGO elite to prescribe, co-ordinate, implement, and promote particular programmes, people, and projects. Unlike the neo-conservative "flexians" which Wedel is most concerned with, the Croatian NGO flexians are less concerned with direct political goals than their own position as brokers smoothing access to grants and to other tangible resources of influence (2012: 12).

The use by NGO networked activists of certain techniques that have an affinity with some techniques used by anarchists thus generated a particular set of images, tainted for some, associated with the use of participatory techniques such as consensus decision-making and perhaps most of all with the use of "enforced informality" – an insistence on casual clothing, calling people by their first names and perhaps using techniques such as "icebreakers"; games designed to encourage people to relax in each other's presence. In the discussion that follows, it is worth bearing in mind the distinctive activist as well as methodological traditions that resulted in consensus decision making likely have quite different associations for participants attending from different states. This is important as it shapes anthropologists' expectations of one another and of the use of particular methods, which influences how they respond to different comments. This was particularly visible,

² See <http://www.fyeg.org>.

³ For more information see <http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/>.

⁴ See <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org>.

for instance, with some conference participants discounting the use of some enforced informality techniques at the start of the conference. As all participants had agreed to use the methods; however, this quickly led to some participants to change their views as they saw that, in some contexts, it was a useful tool in enabling everyone to speak more equally in discussions.

Consensus-based decision making, and its focus on common ground, is particularly suited to dialogues between different world anthropologies where different techniques, approaches and styles of argument have been used because its format does not seek to pit one tradition against another or reinforce a hierarchy of world anthropologies. It is also well-suited to discussions of ethnographic field methods, as methods concern practice and, therefore, in a direct manner, actions, echoing the technique's use in activist traditions. Nevertheless, in the conference format, an experiment amongst academics, a number of problems were encountered. Whilst those attending showed a broad commitment to making the conference method work, one significant problem was the lack of experience of the facilitators. Given the passion on the part of many of the participants to state their views and opinions, this sometimes led to facilitators occasionally slipping out of role and getting engaged in the discussion.

Some participants commented on the need for a similarity in terms of knowledge and familiarity among the people in the group, a precondition for activist groups that are typically self-selected: it is interested and concerned people who typically choose to participate. One of the most significant concerns was that the process is time-consuming. One group (happily) continued their first section well past the early evening deadline to 10 p.m. This was interesting, as they were perfectly happy to keep going, suggesting that the method had created and/or cemented a good group dynamic. One participant, however, made the comment that, at times, she 'didn't really know what the objective was; was it the process in itself?' In the discussion at the end of the conference, it was interesting to see that focusing on consensus provoked a much wider discussion about conference organisation in general, which was not the desired topic under discussion at that time. A number of participants were also ambivalent. One made a comment, which has also received some attention in anarchist circles,⁵ to the effect that the process was too centralising:

I think the process was bizarre. What we got is a kind of tasteless soup in the end because we were trying to agree, constrained by time.

The importance of having a common starting point, in terms of similar knowledge was also emphasised:

I also thought that the preparation was essential, that if people come to the session and they were thinking about the subject before, it is so much easier than if they need to discover what the terms mean and debate about those terms, and discover it during the session. I thought it was important as well.

⁵ For a discussion, see <http://libcom.org/library/consensus-its-discontents>.

As concerns the method itself, the overall consensus was that the difference between a good conference chair and a facilitator ought to be minimal:

I actually think that it worked well, but I am not sure that I completely understand the line between a workshop with a good chair and kind of workshop with facilitator, so that's, I mean, kind of, and what actually for me this format of con-facilitating did is to help the discussion in a way to give more structure to discussion and to give more or less equal opportunity to everyone to talk. So, I am not really sure... I did not get that there is a firm line between a good chair in a workshop and a facilitator.

However, such comments often do not occur during academic conferences, where chairs are often forced to negotiate ego and hierarchical values attached to different academics, which indicates that the explicit focus on allowing equal opportunity to speak was a useful one.

Immersion in the “back and forth” and the “extended stay” models

One of the consensuses reached during the conference was that immersion is necessary for any ethnographic fieldwork, regardless of its design.⁶ We understand immersion here as participant observation (Ingold 2014), a repeated involvement in the socio-political relations one is interested in and an ability to skillfully pursue those relations. Since immersion is achieved through practice, “being there” is not an adequate description of a process of becoming immersed in a particular set of socio-political relations. Immersion is inherently an incomplete process, because a place should not be imagined as a distinct whole (or as a rabbit hole, as one of the conference participants said) in which one becomes immersed. Instead, places are better understood as changing networks of hierarchically ordered relations (Massey 2008). For this reason, in the end it does not matter whether ethnographic fieldwork is designed as an extended stay or as a back and forth endeavour or in some other way. Some topics are easier to explore ethnographically by following one design, other topics by following another. What is important is to be repeatedly involved in a particular set of socio-political relations one is interested in and to participate more and more skillfully in some of them. As Lewis and Russell suggest, the constant of ethnographic practice may be an attitude towards the field that is ‘sufficient to experience the mundane and sacred, brash and nuanced aspects of socio-cultural life and, through observations, encounters and conversations, to come to an understanding of it’ (2011: 400). Immersion constitutes the requirement for any high-quality ethnographic fieldwork – including back and forth and extended stays. This was one of the consensuses

⁶ There were two working groups which discussed differences and similarities in the back and forth and the extended stay approach to ethnography. Members of Group One were Andrea Peres, Andre Thiemann, Anna Zadrožna, Dragica Popovska, Marija Ilić (facilitator), Čarna Brković, as well as the key note speakers Zorica Ivanović and Slobodan Naumović. Members of Group Two were Aline Moore, Andrew Hodges (facilitator), Dragana Kovačević, Igor Mikeshin, Maria Christache, Rory Archer, Čarna Brković, and the key note speaker Stef Jansen.

among the participants. Furthermore, all of the participants agreed that one can be immersed in the language, and that “language immersion” requires continuous practice. The participants also agreed that becoming immersed means learning how to share concerns with the various people one works with, rather than simply perceive them. Finally, since ethnographers regularly maintain relations within various social contexts (academic and personal among others) both fieldwork designs require movement across different sets of relations. The frequency and the duration of this movement may be different, but its quality does not have to be.

Conclusion

We assert that doing anthropology otherwise requires thinking about actual everyday practices through which anthropologists and ethnologists conduct their work, in the field as well as at the desk. Conversations about ethnographic practice offer productive ground for considering the relationship between world anthropologies. The (dis)continuities, inequalities, borrowings and separations among world anthropologies are reflected in their research designs: in the ideas of what constitutes fieldwork and how anthropological knowledge is created. The conference discussions revealed that the term back and forth takes into account the frequency of research visits, whilst the term extended stay refers to the duration of the research. Perhaps it would be more precise to use terms long-term single stay and shorter back and forth visits, as conference participants agreed to do after an initial discussion. During the conference, these issues were raised by the questions ‘Immersion to what?’ and ‘Back and forth from and to what?’ These are questions that seek to build a bridge between a discussion of the two methods, rather than, for instance, centrifugally dissecting the multiple meanings of “immersion” and “back and forth”. We also suggest that discussions of the different ethnographic formats could be complemented by discussions of various, experimental academic conference formats. Encounters of people who practice ethnography in various ways may function as organisational experiments with the aim of unsettling existing hierarchies within the discipline. The challenge would be to invent new organisational experiments that applied similar critiques of hierarchy formation to academic formats that had quite different requirements, such as the elaboration of different theoretical perspectives. We hope to participate in new such experiments in the future.

Hart (2013) suggests that ethnographic research in the future will likely incorporate different designs, since it will have to adapt to new directions of socio-political relationships throughout the world:

After the Cold War, something new has happened. Anthropologists do fieldwork anywhere in a world unified by capitalism, but they still stick with the restrictions of the method. We get studies of “knowledge practices” in a Tokyo stockbroker’s office, but receive no insight into where the money goes or why.... our methods need to be more eclectic than they are.

Since the nation-state model of a polity is slowly weakening (cf. Fraser 2010), ethnographic methods may need to reflect (but hopefully not reinforce) the emerging political alliances and associations. Looking across world anthropologies and back to the past may be productive in envisioning possibilities for ethnography in the future.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/F022727/1], Wenner Gren Foundation, and Leverhulme Trust.

References

- Bakalaki, Alexandra. 2006. A Different Kind of Knowledge? Learning Anthropology in the Greek University System. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 24(2): 257–83.
- Bošković, Aleksandar. (ed.) 2008. *Other People's Anthropologies: Ethnographic Practice on the Margins*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Buchowski, Michal. 2004. Hierarchies of Knowledge in Central-Eastern European Anthropology. *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 22(2): 5–14.
- De la Cadena, Marisol. 2005. The Production of Other Knowledges and its Tensions: From Andeanist Anthropology to Interculturalidad? *World Anthropologies Network E-Journal* 1: 13–33.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2010. *Scales of Justice. Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gledhill, John. 2008. Fateful legacies and the burdens of academic excellence: UK anthropology and the public sphere. *World Anthropologies Network E-Journal* 3: 167–179.
- Green, F. Sarah. 2005. *Notes From the Balkans: Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian Border*. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hann, Chris. 2007. Anthropology's Multiple Temporalities and its Future in Central and Eastern Europe: A Debate. *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Papers*. Halle/Saale.
- Halpern, Joel and Eugene Hammel. 1969. Observations on the Intellectual History of Ethnology and Other Social Sciences in Yugoslavia. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11: 17–26.
- Hart, Keith. Why is anthropology not a public science. <http://thememorybank.co.uk/2013/11/14/why-is-anthropology-not-a-public-science/>. Accessed on 2 March 2014.
- Hofer, Tamas. 1968. Anthropologists and Native Ethnographers in Central European Villages: Comparative Notes on the Professional Personality of Two Disciplines. *Current Anthropology* 9(4): 311–5.
- Ingold, Tim. 2014. That's enough about ethnography. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4(1): 383–95.
- Kürti, László. 1996. Homecoming: Affairs of Anthropologists in and of Eastern Europe. *Anthropology Today* 12(3): 11–5.
- Lewis, Sue & Andrew Russell. 2011. Being embedded: A way forward for ethnographic research. *Ethnography* 12(3): 398–416.
- Malkki, Liisa. 1995. Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 495–523.
- Massey, Doreen. 2008. *for space*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Milenković, Miloš. 2008. Da li je etnografija deo antropologije ili je antropologija deo etnografije? *Etnoantropološki problemi* 1(3): 275–8.
- Narayan, Kirin. 1993. How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist? *American Anthropologist* 95: 671–86.
- Naumović, Slobodan. 1998. Romanticists or Double Insiders? An Essay on the Origins of Ideologised Discourses in Balkan Ethnology. *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2: 101–20.
- Peirano, Mariza. 1998. When Anthropology is at Home: The Different Contexts of a Single Discipline. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 105–28.
- Prica, Ines. 1999. Etnologija ali antropologija! Prilog diskusiji na temu: Etnologija i?, ili?, i/ili?, kroz?, versus? (itd.) antropologija. *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 10/11: 201–14.
- Restrepo, Eduardo and Arturo Escobar. 2005. 'Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise': Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework. *Critique of Anthropology* 25(2): 99–129.
- Ribeiro, Gustavo Lins. 2008. Stereotypes and the Changing Image of Anthropology in Brazil. *World Anthropologies Network E-Journal* 3: 159–65.
- Ryang, Sonia. 1997. Native Anthropology and Other Problems. *Dialectical Anthropology* 22: 23–49.
- Ssorin Chaikov, Nikolai. 2003. *The Social Life of the State in Subarctic Siberia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Strathern, Marilyn. 1987. The Limits of Auto-Anthropology. In: Anthony Jackson (ed.), *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock Publications, pp.16–37.
- Stubbs, Paul. 2012. Networks, Organisations, Movements: narratives and shapes of three waves of activism in Croatia. *Polemos: časopis za interdisciplinarna istraživanja rata i mira* 15(30): 11–32.
- Wimmer, Andreas and Nina Glick Schiller. 2002. Methodological nationalism and beyond: nation-state building, migration and the social sciences. *Global Networks* 2(4): 301–34.

Povzetek

V članku raziskujeva podlago, na kateri je mogoče razločevati svetovne antropologije, pa tudi kako je mogoče o tem razpravljati ne da bi ob tem reproducirali notranje hierarhije discipline, ki ima vsaj štiri imena (socialna antropologija, kulturna antropologija, etnologija in etnografija). Predlagava, da bi (namesto nacionalnih intelektualnih tradicij) lahko kot kriterij razlikovanja med svetovnimi antropologijami uporabili etnografsko raziskovanje. S tem razpravljava, ali na produkcijo antropološkega znanja vpliva metoda uporabljenega etnografskega terena, pri čemer se osredotočava na dve metodologiji: na model “podaljšanega bivanja” in model “odhodov in vračanj”. V prispevku se ukvarjava tudi z vprašanjem, kako je mogoče o teh metodologijah razpravljati, saj terenska modela podaljšanega bivanja ter odhodov in vračanj izhajata iz antropološko-etnoloških skupnosti, ki z vidika moči niso enakopravne. Na osnovi antropološke konference Antropologija drugače, ki je bila leta 2011 organizirana v srbskem mestu Valjevo in je kot organizacijsko obliko uporabljala odločanje na osnovi konsenza, pokaževa, da soočenja ljudi, ki prakticirajo etnografijo na različne načine lahko zamajejo obstoječe hierarhije znotraj discipline, če so organizirane znotraj eksperimentalnih formatov akademskih konferenc.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: etnografija, terensko delo, svetovne antropologije, aktivistične etnografije

CORRESPONDENCE: ČARNA BRKOVIĆ, Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies, Landshuter Str. 4, Regensburg 93047, Germany. E-mail: carna.brkovic@geschichte.uni-regensburg.de