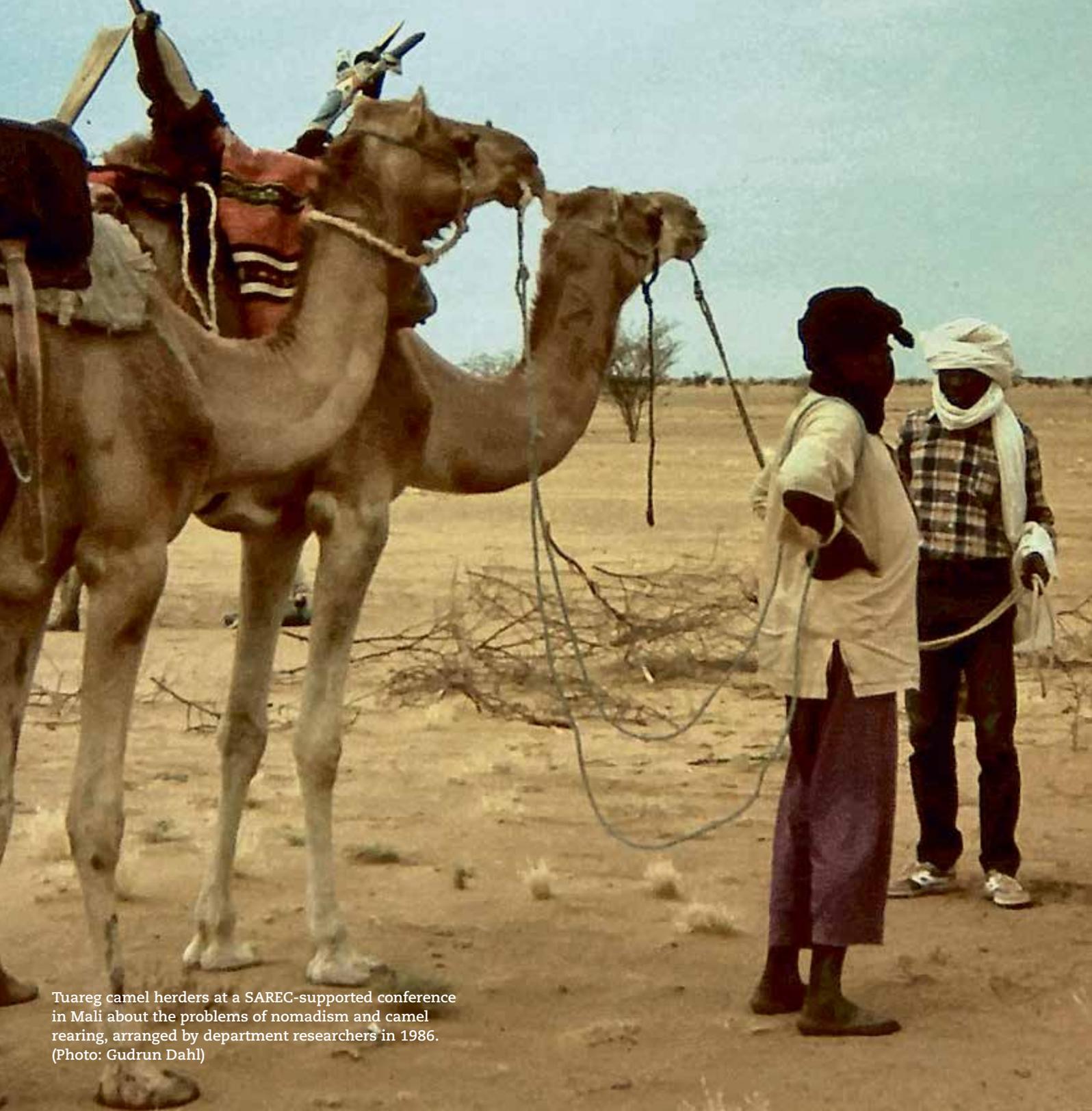


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Tuareg camel herders at a SAREC-supported conference in Mali about the problems of nomadism and camel rearing, arranged by department researchers in 1986. (Photo: Gudrun Dahl)

# Department of Social Anthropology

Karin Norman

“IT IS NO SECRET that anthropologists are mobile, but when going through the material presented in this chapter, I’m struck by the extent to which the world is our workplace and subject of enquiry. Seminars, publications, research projects and conferences straddle places and topics across the globe. The longstanding claim that transnational connections are a key defining feature of our Department still seems to hold true. Yet, through our special mode of engaging with the world, the specificities of place and the diversity of human experiences are still brought to the fore.” Thus writes the head of department in his introductory words to the latest annual report from the Department of Social Anthropology.

Fifty years earlier, there was no annual report to be had and no Department of Anthropology. There was its outdated ancestor, the Department of General and Comparative Ethnography, housed at the Ethnographic Museum in Djurgården. How did we get from there

to this professionalized, internationally-oriented department with elaborate undergraduate and graduate courses, active researchers, and a long list of accomplished publications and doctoral theses?

That is a long, complex story. By reminiscing with colleagues, being reminded of events and persons, and by looking through a disparate assortment of documents, I have tried to sort it out. I hope to give some glimpses of what this department is and has been about.

## The early days

“The 1960s and 1970s constitute a period that the older generation consider especially important and memorable – and not (just) because they have reached the age where you love to dwell on memories of the ‘time when everything was much better,’ but because these were the formative years of the Department and the discipline in Stockholm. It was in 1970 that the first professorship in Social Anthropology was

installed, while remnants of the eccentricities of bygone days would make themselves felt all through the 1960s.”<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Ethnography was in the beginning oriented toward the study of cultural traits seen as isolated phenomena to be studied through artefacts and techniques. In lectures among the collections of masks, axes and arrows, students were told intriguing stories about fieldwork in New Guinea with lively descriptions of the men’s penis sheaths and elaborate ritual adornments, forming some ideas of what fieldwork could be. The old professor, Sigvald Linné, made sporadic appearances serving anecdotal tales from his archaeological excavations in Mexico. As one of the early students remembers from his first year at the department, Linné would persistently pose more or less far-fetched questions, such as “Why are Eskimos so well clothed while the Indians of the Magellan Strait who have no less cold weather, wear such little clothing?” He never gave any answer.

Although this trait-oriented outlook was kept alive into the 1960s by the older teachers, there was a generational shift during those years. The researchers and teachers became influenced by British social anthropology and its structural functional studies of social organization, in time also by the more culturally orient-

ed North American anthropology. Some of the course literature of that time has become obsolete. Other parts have been raised to the status of ‘Classics.’ The view was of local cultures as coherent, territorialized wholes. Ideas of origin and diffusion at this time lost a former interest. This theoretical shift had a political aspect in its recognition of local cultural creativity.

From the mid- and late 1960s, the Department was in the throes of being transformed into social anthropology. In 1968–69, for those young students yearning to ‘change the world’ or to know something about it, anthropology seemed a politically radical alternative to the stuffiness of conventional academic subjects. Those were the days of strong political movements – the anti-Vietnam war, anti-imperialism, anti-authoritarian pedagogics, and the women’s movement. With the younger, more up-to-date and ambitious teachers, most of them only graduate students themselves, things were getting more interesting but also more confusing and conflictual. ‘It was a breaking point, and it was exciting to be part of it,’ one of the young students/teachers of that time remembers.

When Linné retired in 1968, the suggestion for professorship caused upheaval and student protests. The whole procedure was rewound, surprisingly with support by the government. Karl Eric Knutsson from the Gothenburg department, who applied, was appointed. This found the support of both staff and students.

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1 Ulf Hannerz, personal communication.

The Department was renamed ‘Social Anthropology’ and transferred from the Faculty of Humanities to the Faculty of Social Sciences. During the year-long lapse between professors, acting Head of Department Göran Aijmer took hold of the situation by setting a stricter agenda for teaching and curriculum. To everyone’s horror ‘he failed everyone on their current course exams,’ as one former graduate student remembers.

The Department moved from the Museum in 1969, to an old apartment at Sveavägen. The Geology Department used the apartment before us and left an assortment of rock specimens lying around on shelves, like some ironic inversion of the masks and axes. Lecture halls were spread out in different buildings in the city. Students and teachers mingled fairly freely. C-students were welcome to the seminars and hung around in the library. They organized various study groups on their own or together with graduate students/teachers. Some of them were recruited to teach first year students, while the more accomplished graduate students were responsible for much of the second and third-year courses.

A temporary rift between the Museum and the Department arose due to the students’ involvement in a demonstration against a (seemingly) uncritical exhibition on the Maya Indians of Guatemala. In time, several of the Department’s researchers, however, found positions

and employment at the Museum or arranged temporary exhibitions. Throughout there have been guided tours of exhibitions with undergraduate students. The head of the museum was in later years Ulla Wagner, who received her PhD in 1971 at the Department.

The journal *Ethnos* has been an important link between the Museum and the Department. It still has an editor from the Department, although it is no longer published in the name of the Museum. It has gone through a number of editorial changes and is no longer specifically turning to Scandinavian contributors and readership. The first issue was published in 1936 with a focus on material culture and ‘extra-European ethnography and archaeology.’ Today “there are no restrictions on the range of anthropological topics and fields of interest covered in the journal” (Bubandt et al. 2006:5–8).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, teachers and students were turning to fields and theories that they felt relevant to the political urgency of the world in which they lived – theories of political economy with a neo-Marxist turn and about the nature of patriarchy.

The concern with ‘changing the world’ also meant our own world. Students were enthusiastic about the Norwegian anthropologist Ottar Brox’s study of Northern Norway (1966) and Daun’s ‘*Upp till kamp i Båtskärsnäs*’ (1969). Several young students were keen to conduct studies in rural Sweden for their BA theses, per-



PhD candidate Gudrun Dahl writes field notes in Kenya in 1974. (Photo: Anders Hjort af Ornäs)

haps for their future doctoral work. This ran into some opposition among the oldest professors – ‘you must first go abroad, girl!’ as Izikowitz, professor in Gothenburg, exclaimed on a visit to the Department. That is, leave the world you take for granted, confront the unknown!

To come to grips with the ‘unknown,’ students formed various study groups – the Northern Europe Group, the Rural Group (*Glesbygdsgrupper*), and later on the Turkish Group (con-

sidering the large number of immigrants from Turkey) and the Southern Europe group. Other groups were explicitly oriented towards theoretical/political issues. A stencilled document was at some point sent out by two amanuenses/doctoral students with the query, “A critical social anthropology – where will it lead?” They wrote: “Last semester a few student groups arranged informal discussions about what characterizes social anthropology in comparison with sociology. An attempt was also made to

clarify the potential usefulness of anthropology for society. This coming semester we are planning to widen these discussions and form one or two study groups. Two themes have been preliminarily decided upon: ‘Applied Anthropology’ and ‘Marx or Malinowski?’.

### Identifying anthropology

For his instalment in 1970 as the first professor in Social Anthropology, Knutsson presented a text titled ‘The Anthropological Perspective, Reflections about the identity of a discipline’. In the text, he grapples with the task of identifying what anthropology is. What is specific about anthropology? What creates its disciplinary unity?, he asks.

Anthropology is no longer a regionally identifiable discipline, nor is it limited to a specific set of empirical or theoretical problems, Knutsson tells us. Neither can the method of participant observation define the discipline. Participant observation is not only a method for gathering information but an attitude towards the ‘material,’ he writes. It is about striving to create social relations based on trust and reciprocity. This research attitude Knutsson refers to as ‘the anthropological perspective.’

Its most basic characteristic is to take the view from inside the universe of the people being studied. Inside implies from below, he goes on; it is a grassroots perspective, or an asphalt

perspective, he adds, referring to an early paper by Ulf Hannerz (1970), ‘The Management of Danger.’ This perspective is the definite strength of the discipline. Anthropology is nonetheless a generalizing and comparative science, Knutsson states, foreboding a classic debate that has been on the critical agenda many times since (cf. Abu-Lughod 1991, Gingrich & Fox 2002, Bubandt & Otto 2010).

This perspective raises ethical problems about the responsible uses of anthropology, something that greatly preoccupied Knutsson. He points to anthropology’s social relevance, which was high on the agenda for many students and younger teachers, a prominent issue in the continued formation of the Anthropology conducted at the Department and its subsequent engagement in research on ‘ideologies of development.’

### “The next ten years” – anthropology in Stockholm

Knutsson was an enthusiastic, networking person, wanting to get things moving. He was engaged in getting students out into the field and finding channels to finance doctoral students’ fieldwork. This had a great significance for the many who did fieldwork during the 1970s and early 1980s. “Who else would have taken students (C-level and graduate students) to the AAA Annual Meeting in New York (1971), finding ways and means of financing it? It was

an amazing experience, most of us had never been to New York before,” a former amanuensis remembers.

“With you (the students/teachers/researchers) there are no problems – but what will happen in the next ten years?” Knutsson wondered. A conference for the Department was arranged in 1973 to discuss the future of anthropology, called ‘The Next Ten Years’. A number of different topics were on the agenda – teaching, research specializations, the job market, international exchange, the role of Swedish anthropology. The aim was that the conference would have an ‘open and spontaneous atmosphere.’

The question was what we could contribute to anthropology, given that Sweden was on the periphery of the ‘established centres of the discipline’ (Great Britain and USA) and had “a lot to learn from them given our lack of tradition,” according to Knutsson. Endorsing the international contacts, Hannerz emphasized that “too great attention to, and dependence on, metropolitan anthropologies could be detrimental.” Perhaps it would be possible for us at some point in the future to take a role in decentralizing anthropology, he suggested.

Although all contributions were concerned with the ‘social relevance’ of anthropology, the emphasis went in different directions. Some argued specifically for the study of the effects of neo-colonialism and for establishing

a Marxist anthropology, critiquing the continued focus on ‘micro-level questions’ and ‘the desperate search for new fields of inquiry, such as the anthropology of hierarchies, linguistic anthropology, urban anthropology’ when most people in the world are part of a ‘world-embracing system’ where the ‘mechanisms of underdevelopment’ are prolific. For Knutsson it meant problematizing the ‘neo-colonial consequences of development’ and working against ethnocentrism.

Others lifted questions such as the organizational goals of the doctoral studies. Should there be specific field training courses? What kind of anthropological competence would be sought after in the future? Should doctoral training promote specialization or broad general anthropological knowledge?

Ten years had not passed, however, before Knutsson left the department for other pastures. He initiated the funding organization for development research, SAREC, and became its first head in 1975. In terms of funding research, this was significant, but it left the Department in a kind of limbo during the second half of the seventies. A row of temporary visiting professors, such as Sandra Wallman, Robert Paine, Harald Eidheim, Maurice Bloch and others, all had significance for the graduate students who often were left to their own devices and heavy teaching loads, since their supervisors and the department head were absent.

### Being a doctoral student

“You don’t need to have read the classics, it is enough if you just have held them [the books]” is one of Knutsson’s more memorable statements.

There were no definite criteria for admittance to doctoral studies. Being an amanuensis meant an automatic admittance, although becoming an amanuensis was not just about being willing to shuffle paper, fix schedules or make stencilled copies of all sorts. You must have been an active C-level student, shown an interest. There was hardly any doctoral programme and no regular courses. Knutsson met up once a year with the doctoral students who then reported on the credits they had attained during the previous year. “I have seen that you are all hard-working,” he would say, which was sufficient for him. He was fully preoccupied with getting the Department adjusted to the new surroundings at Frescati and the Faculty.

Knutsson was open and supportive in general, letting people engage in different fields and research issues. This was also the stance of Hannerz, and has continued to be so. Others worried about the proliferation of research interests and the ‘fragmented state of the Department.’ For the graduate students, this openness to a variety of studies and approaches was stimulating but made it more difficult for them to find their theoretical bearings and formulate reasonable research questions.

Even if there was no dominating regional or theoretical ‘school,’ some of the new ‘elders’ and guest professors were influential. Knutsson was a significant supporter of the early graduate students turning to studies in East Africa and development issues. Hannerz was more influential for those interested in ‘complex societies’ and urban life, a group which evolved into the so-called PLUS project, four studies on ‘social stratification’ in different urban contexts.

It has always been hard work to be a doctoral student, difficult to get adjusted to the workings of the Department, the requirements, the loneliness of writing, worries of not succeeding. During the first decades, the doctoral studies were disorganized. The great worry for many students was money – how to support yourself, perhaps even a family? It was either about having a well-to-do and supportive family or finding a job that allowed for time to study. Or it meant teaching and administrative work at the Department. Such work was seldom full-time. It was low paid and often on an hourly basis. In time it became clear that you had to have credits in order to at some point have a chance to get the small student grant.

Dissatisfaction with the disorganized doctoral studies and the hierarchical atmosphere at the Department, especially in terms of gender, made the active female students at the time feel that something must be done, both with the organization of studies and with tendencies towards



Dissertation defence audience 1987.  
(Photo: Gudrun Dahl)



Opponent, grading committee member and respondent. Professors Aijmer and Adamson congratulate Claes Hallgren after viva examination. (Photo: Gudrun Dahl)

male favouritism. They demanded change! The protests resulted in the establishment of AKSA, the Working Group for Women Social Anthropologists (*Arbetsgruppen för kvinnliga socialantropologer*), in 1973.

To his credit, Knutsson took it seriously. “You say that I am oppressing you, I don’t think I am, but if you say so, then I probably am,” said Knutsson, “so go find out what to do.”

He rather unconventionally supported AKSA. He made the Department finance a weekend conference at *Bergendahls folkhögskola*, where the issue could really be debated among the women and something concrete come out. As one of the participants notes, remembering this historic event: “It turned into a regular revival meeting!”

Much of the ‘looseness’ of the 1970s, however, continued into the 1980s. There was periodically no real leadership or continuous supervision to count on. The seminars were supplemented by visiting professors who all took an interest in the research projects. In the 1980s, Moshe Shokeid came several times and Bruce Kapferer for a semester. The study group on phenomenology that he held in his dungeon-like apartment on Kungstensgatan in the mid-1980s is unforgettable.

There was a kind of blurred hierarchy with doctoral students keeping the ship afloat with teaching and doing administrative work, while arranging their own small series of seminars. It was exciting to be part of something new. All

were young and engaged in finding out about anthropology. Yet this involvement had its disadvantages in the long run – it postponed their own dissertations and advancements. They became learned teachers – worried about not being ‘good enough’ and able to manage the critical students – now as they were on the other side of the fence. No matter, “it will work out, it always has...”, several people reasoned, not concerned enough with their careers, until they realized that time was no longer on their side and the University became a more demanding controller of academic careers and increasingly scarce positions. This process has sharpened over the years.

In the end, the doctoral studies became more clearly organized with regular courses given, although more sporadically than in later years. Students again formed their own reading groups. People tend to remember such groups as important and stimulating, something they miss. Such seminars/discussion groups seldom have a specific goal; they are about searching, learning, and they have an ambient value.

With a reform of the universities in 1998, doctoral students have become more hedged in. Studies are more narrowly oriented to their own projects, which they must have decided on as they apply to the programme. They are more secure financially and in terms of social security. Yet their time is restricted. In four years they are supposed to have accomplished reading courses,

more or less a year of fieldwork, and writing up their ethnographic material into a thesis. In addition, they are of course still expected to participate in research seminars. Their teaching experiences are restricted to being assistants to the lecturers. For all that, their future as researchers or in finding employment is uncertain. “This streamlining is a misguided view of what research is about, and the varying conditions that universities have. The whole ‘new management’ drive is detrimental for the life of a department and the creativity of its students and researchers”, one supervisor summarized the view that several others also have expressed. No wonder students hope that ‘having a theory’ from the start will more effectively and professionally solve their dilemmas of gathering their ethnography and writing it up in time.

#### *Publishing theses*

In 1974, the Department started its own publication series, the SSSA, to accommodate the printing of doctoral theses and other book-length manuscripts. The first book printed was Hannerz’s “Caymanian Politics” in that year. The last to be published in the old series was Anette Nyqvist’s “Opening the Orange Envelope” in 2008. Nowadays, the doctoral theses of the University are packaged in a blue-white Acta series – perhaps symptomatic of the centralizing regulatory frame in which research is finding itself.

SSSA was organized as a non-profit association with statutes, a board and a paying membership – in 1983, for example, the annual fee was 10 Swedish Crowns. Managing the SSSA series was as so much else in the hands of researchers and doctoral students. According to a rotating schedule – one month each – they were responsible for taking in orders of books and distributing them to customers, answering letters and keeping track of payments. In time, the work became too extensive as did problems with storage, so this was outsourced.

A council was constituted in the early 1970s, during Knutsson's era, in order to give department researchers the opportunity to influence the division of resources, the distribution of student scholarships, teaching, and administration. There was no constitutional ground for the council. It was instead a way for the head of department to delegate power, something the later formal Department Council also decided to do. The 'Resource Council' (*Resursnämnden*) was informal and advisory, with no power of decision. In the council resided the head of department, elected representatives from among the doctoral students, teachers and researchers, all who read through documents of applications and made recommendations to the Department Council. However, one of the professors was in the end not so pleased with this set-up, feeling that the committee was "more into equality than quality."

### **A variety of projects and interests**

In the 1970s, and the 1980s, there were a number of group projects, more or less loosely tied together. Many projects were individual. Quite a few were studies in Europe, some 'at home' in Sweden, but the majority outside Europe – countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America. The variety has continued, now including the USA and some of the post-socialist countries in Europe.

The individual projects had a broad range of topics – an Indian reservation community in Canada, household management in a French municipality, Maasai pastoralism and changing gender relations, child raising and ideologies of personhood in Germany, class relations in a Swedish working-class community, young girls growing up in London, and a development project and local relations in Syria.

A study of the Sami minority in Sweden was conducted in the 1970s (Svensson 1976) and in 1981, Ulf Björklund conducted fieldwork among the Suryoyo from Turkey in Södertälje, one of the first anthropological studies of immigration in Sweden. He and several others at the Department working with issues of migration and ethnic relations at that time had close contacts with CEIFO, The Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations, a multi-disciplinary research centre of long-standing and international acclaim which for many years was a neighbour and collaborator with the Depart-

ment. Only very recently was CEIFO transferred, in diminished form, into the Department of Anthropology, as a research programme.

The Turkish group (*Damturken*) consisted of a small group of three doctoral students. They all located their studies among Turkish immigrants in a suburb to Stockholm. One was a study of Turkish women in Swedish health care. The other two turned to children in a day-care centre and in an elementary school. Those were the days when Swedish immigration policy on integration and the right to one's cultural heritage was to offer children 'home language' education. The Turkish children were learning mainly in Turkish, going to a Turkish class. The study of the day-care centre became an ethnographic film, one of the first among the few that have appeared at the Department.

#### *Plural societies / PLUS*

Although a quite different group project, the Plural Societies Project (PLUS) was launched and funded during the 1970s, but lasted to the end of the 1980s when the last of the three theses was completed. The research was linked to the early interest emanating from Hannerz's study of an urban ghetto and developed a focus on 'complex societies,' with forerunners in British studies of African towns and of the networks of ethnic and 'tribal' relations and in the American sociological studies of urban life. The three male doctoral students conducted

fieldwork in Yemen, Malaysia, and India, respectively. Hannerz conducted his study in Nigeria. Their theoretical approaches varied, but 'social stratification' is a recurring concept in their project descriptions. From the beginning, one of them was attempting a Marxist analysis of the mode of production, but found that it did not work. As one, now retired colleague contemplates, "For me, Marxist anthropology has been important, emotionally and politically, and still is, but I haven't succeeded in making a Marxist analysis of my material."

#### *KOS – women and social change*

In 1976, one could read in the largest evening paper: "The Tercentennial Fund of the National Bank has this year given its largest grant, half a million Swedish Crowns, to a research team of five women for their project 'Women and Social Change' in different parts of the world." It was an unusual endeavour, and prestigious for the Department.

They had all participated in AKSA and supported by Knutsson decided to organize a collaborative research project on women and social change for their PhDs, a comparative study of women in five different societies including Colombia, Ghana, Yugoslavia, Morocco, and Sweden, which was. Their stated aim was to "correct an anthropological deficit and give a more complete and valid view of social life which must include the work and lives of wom-

en, as well as that of men; to explore what opportunities and power women have of taking control of their lives; and to see how social changes have influenced women's lives." It was the first and most ambitious group project at the Department (AS 1981).

In their common 'log book', they made notes of topics to discuss with each other: since it was to be a comparative study, how would this be accomplished? They had many, many discussions about how to proceed gathering the empirical material, what kind of material was needed and how to go about gathering this "without constantly feeling at a loss as to how to structure the data." Should they concentrate on the same issues? What concepts to work with? In a sense, they put the cart before the horse, realizing this only when the different fieldwork had gotten underway. Like generations of doctoral students after them, they were prone to be too theoretical, too structured before they knew their fields well enough. "We should have done each our own study and then from our results drawn out issues that could have been raised to a level of comparison," one of the former participants reflects.

Another entry is a brief, somewhat despondent reflection from one Friday afternoon during the autumn semester. Sitting in the project room, E, who is temporarily home, writes in their log-book, "The wind is blowing right through the room here, making the glass façade



KOS ("Women and Social Change") were pioneers in Swedish feminist research. Here Eva Sköld, Eva Evers-Rosander, Prudence Berger and Gunilla Bjerén. (Aftonbladet 1976)

and the aluminium roofing creak and moan. It sounds as if this whole ice-blue university building will fall apart any minute, like a house of cards... There was a report from ER that arrived today – desperation. The usual conflict of roles in the field. Sometimes I wonder if we were just too naïve and optimistic about this whole project. Will all the suffering feel worth it in the end? Yes, maybe. Probably."

### Fieldwork/Life in the field

"To me, the most important aspect of anthropology is that of fieldwork, the detailed and in-depth work with the 'people themselves,' taking part in how they see their lives," an older colleague once said. As one younger colleague

comments, ‘fieldwork raises questions, it is a kind of problematization.’”

What is fieldwork all about? How do we go about conducting fieldwork in our different projects? In the late 1970s, edited volumes on fieldwork methods began to see the light of day, often less technical and distanced. One or the other were more personal, however, like that of Freilich’s ‘Marginal Natives’ (1970) or the edited volume by Golde, ‘Women in the Field’ (1970). The few more detailed and sensitive descriptions such as Briggs’ (1970) or Bowen’s (1954) were far apart, and not seen as intellectually compelling as the ethnographic monographs and theoretical treatises. They were mainly written by women, which is noted in the much later volume ‘Anthropology and Autobiography’ (Okely & Callaway 1992).

At this time, an initiative was taken to arrange a seminar series about ‘life in the field.’ The publications in existence were not about the *whole* field situation and *our own* experiences. How do people live in the field? What demands are they confronted with? Who are one’s contacts? What influences one’s sense of well-being or discomfort in the field? What influences choice of field site?

Every Wednesday morning for a year, an informal and open group of the Department’s researchers and doctoral candidates met to exchange experiences on a variety of issues relevant to their different projects and fieldwork.

The point was that the seminar should have a ‘holistic view’ of fieldwork and not just take up questions of method in a circumscribed, technical sense. The discussions revolved around the significance and problematics of one’s gender, family situation, the language difficulties one had, how one’s network of contacts evolved, and relations with assistants. People’s fields were widely dispersed geographically, but many difficulties and methodological/theoretical issues were shared. This rich material was compiled in a modest form in a special issue of the small local student-led magazine, *Antropologiska Studier* (1977: 21).

One of the more difficult topics was that of field notes. “The tendency to one-up-manship, that at times made itself felt during the seminars, became more prominent and the atmosphere became more defensive” wrote Birgitta Percivall (1977: 33), going on to write about the participants’ struggle with doing ‘real work’ – that is, interviewing, writing notes, and the more participatory activities of ‘hanging around.’ The contradiction became apparent, between the critique of positivism and the general agreement, that anthropology cannot become an ‘exact’ science, one the one hand, and the unhappy admiration for the social sciences’ use of more technically sophisticated methods than ours on the other.

Since then, the debates on the meaning of participant observation, the formation and de-

limitation of a field site, the relationship between experience and anthropological knowledge, as well as the more practical aspects of conducting fieldwork, have gone on. For many years it has been formally included in graduate course work as well as in undergraduate teaching.

For anthropology, it has always been problematic, whether implicitly or explicitly, ‘who’ the anthropologist is in relation to her or his research subjects, and what the possible sources of bias are. In the 1960s and 1970s we learned that we should see things from “the native’s point of view,” as Malinowski wrote, yet avoid the dangers of ‘going native.’ We were taught to distinguish between the ‘emic’ and the ‘etic’ the native’s views and experiences and the anthropologist’s privileged analytical position. Subsequently, this gave rise to worries whether the people we studied were ‘informants’ or if they could be called ‘friends.’

In time, this ‘native’ has become all the more problematic, as if everyone were the same. Did people not think and do things differently everywhere? In other words, what is ‘culture?’ Was it difference or sameness that we were concerned with? What was being compared in the comparative project that anthropology claimed to be? Issues of hierarchy, power, and gender entered the debates and ‘the Other’ became a different kind of dilemma. Again, who was the anthropologist in this post-colonial world? Whose voices were being heard in the ethnog-

raphies? The problem sharpened and became more politicized. It was the post-structuralist era, and the reflexive turn of the 1980s and 1990s. This ‘turn’ has shifted its intention and meaning, but the significance of the anthropologist as a political subject has remained a compelling problem. It questions concepts of culture, of representation and cultural translation.

### **End of a decade and a new professor**

Already in 1969, Hannerz received his Doctorate and thereby made the newspaper headlines. In the provincial thinking of those days, his thesis, ‘Soulside’, an ethnographic study of an African American ghetto, was with its lack of statistics not really seen as scientific by the social scientists in the examination committee. None of them were anthropologists and competent to judge, having no clue about anthropological methods or theoretical perspectives, or that the book would become a classic. They were unwilling to give him the highest grade, which would have made him Docent and eligible to apply for professorship. He is quoted as saying: “[T]he kind of one-man show that a professorship is will disappear. Becoming professor or county governor (*landshövding*) is the end-station of a long career and there you sit until you die. If you wish to do research it is not especially attractive to have to sacrifice half of your time on office work”.

He was 29 at the time. A little more than ten years later, nearing the prime of his career, he must have changed his mind since he applied for and took on a professorship after all. In addition, he was head of department for several longer or shorter periods until he retired in 2007.

#### *Performing an initiation ritual*

By the time of Hannerz's instalment, the graduate students he had known at the Department were also much more in the know, compared to the days of Knutsson. They had read and taught van Gennep, Mauss, Turner, and Douglas, so Hannerz was installed and celebrated accordingly. Academic formalities were one thing, but the tribe at the Department wished to celebrate its new headman. With meticulous preparations, a rite of passage was to be arranged. Everyone stood gathered in the venue that had been rented (a restaurant in town). The room was lit only with candles. In a Turneresque mode, two ritual experts, two of the female graduate students, dressed in flowing textiles, their faces painted white, led the trembling initiate to the centre of the room, placed him prostrate on the floor and covered him with leaves. The music throbbed and the ritual experts danced around and around the still body. As his old identity successfully died he was raised up and placed in a special chair, covered in a royal

mantel. Our chief was born! The audience cheered and the ritual experts departed. And the party lasted far into the night.

### **Research in the 1980s**

#### *Gender continued*

Studies of women and gender have been a continuous and more and more complex issue in anthropology since the 1970s and the days of AKSA and KOS. Like most other research issues, it has been linked to the wider theoretical and political debates. Perspectives have shifted from studies primarily on women, by women – few men have proven specifically interested in studies of women – to a wider scope on gender and sexuality and the problematization of feminism, subsequently taking in theories of queer and heteronormativity.

The body and sexuality have been part of anthropological research since the days of Malinowski and Mead, but then mainly in relation to marriage, socialization processes, initiation rituals, circumcision, and homosexual behaviour. Issues of sexuality and the body in terms of power relations and performance are a much later theoretical development. However, socially and culturally pervasive, gender analysis is a more or less separate topic and research focus and has at the Department its own reading course. Some 'do gender,' others don't, as it were.

The seminar series on women at the Department had been going on for quite some time



Mona Rosendahl acted as ritual leader when the Department in 1981 celebrated its new professor, Ulf Hannerz. (Photo: Gudrun Dahl)

when, at the end of the 1980s, the suggestion was to rename it ‘The gender theory seminar,’ GET (*Genusteoretiska seminariet*). In 1987, a volume with contributions from several of the researchers at the Department was published with the title *Från kön till genus* (From Sex to Gender, ed. Kulick 1987). Although some were afraid that the use of the gender concept would again make women invisible, most of the participants opted for ‘gender.’ Although the nature/culture dichotomy had been discussed and critiqued for some time, a seemingly indisputable distinction made between biological sex and the social/cultural sex was still taken for granted, which, it was argued, would be confounded if

the term ‘*kön/sex*’ were to be retained instead of the more distinctive concept gender.

Since most of the participants in the gender seminar were graduate students, they decided to compile a reading list for a credit-giving course. The papers they wrote were discussed in the seminar and later printed in abbreviated form in the special issue, ‘The Gender Debate,’ of the departmental student journal, *Antropologiska Studier* (1990).

#### *Development as ideology and folk model*

‘Development’ and related issues of social change, modernization, and progress had been a prominent interest since the days of Knutsson. Already in 1974, the Development Studies Unit was established, an initiative of Knutsson, leading to the constitution of ‘*Sektionen*’ – the Development Studies Unit – connected to the Department but financed by SIDA assignments. Unfortunately, it became marked by a division between applied and theoretical anthropology, and almost turned into ‘a supplier of convenient labour for SIDA,’ in the opinion of some. However, the Unit arranged a series of seminars at which the Department’s researchers and students would sometimes participate. It was for quite a few of the Department’s doctoral students and researchers a source of experience in development work, what it entailed, and a source of shorter and longer periods of employment.

In the mid-1980s, a group project was initiated by Gudrun Dahl, focusing on development as an ideological and cultural concept and ‘the processes through which Western thinking about development is reproduced and communicated in developing countries.’ A variety of research issues were part of this overarching project and the series of seminars that were organized every semester for quite a few years discussed a number of different theoretical and ethnographic problems. The projects included a large variety of studies – how the ‘concept of development among the Boraana nomads of Ethiopia and Kenya relate to their traditional notion of growth as a central cultural value and fate as a cyclical phenomenon’; comparing notions of development in Jordan, Kuwait and Syria as this was communicated in political speeches, education and mass media; language shift in a small village in Papua New Guinea and villager’s cargo-oriented ideas about development and its relation to Catholicism and white skin; the conceptions of development in local and regional notions of belonging and cultural identity and processes of mobilization in Sweden. ‘Kam-ap or Take-off’ was an edited volume with contributions from the different participants of the seminar series (Dahl & Rabo 1992), in addition to the Swedish volume, ‘*Bortom bruk-sandan*’ (‘Beyond the Company Town Mentality’, Ekman 1996).

In 1989, the Department had received a second professor in ‘Anthropology, especially development research.’ ‘Development,’ which is central in Western thinking, is a problematic concept. It “has a normative and evaluative meaning,” as Dahl notes (Dahl 1989:4), which goes against the grain of anthropology. So, the appointed professor herself, Dahl, commented on the paradox of the specification of the professorship (*ibid*). This interest in conceptualizations of ‘development’ has been extended to the more current theoretical interests in environmental issues, sustainability, resilience – concepts that today are common, yet problematic, and the focus of critical studies in several of the Department’s projects.

#### *Research on cultural organization*

‘Cultural organization’ had become a significant research focus at the Department, so far expressed on an unarticulated basis in various projects. To create a forum for such interests, a seminar group, FOKO, was loosely formed in 1987 by Hannerz, open to researchers and doctoral students concerned with theories of culture. The notion of cultural organization was meant to problematize the relationship between culture and social organization. The world is all the more complex, it is stated in the presentation of the group. In terms of ideas and forms of expression and representation, culture may still be seen as a collective phenomenon,

but hardly as something undifferentially shared. Culture is diversely distributed but socially organized. Quite concretely, the group's participants represented varying areas of interest – the division of labour as a division of knowledge; popular culture; research and education as cultural processes; the significance of information and media technologies for the organization of cultures; transnational cultural flows; cultural identity in relation to ethnicity and nationalism.

These regularly recurring seminars stretched over many years, reflecting one of the more prominent research profiles at the Department at the time. It has continued and been reformulated into various projects, and is one of the predecessors of the current 'profile area' of the Department – transnational anthropology.

To some, the focus on culture seemed to disregard the workings of economic and political structures and power relations. A group of (doctoral) students declared that the interest in economy and economic organization had “decreased to the extent that we must do something radical! The individualisation of doctoral studies and the interest in so-called cultural analyses shows that we need to take a renewed interest in studies of economic organisation and inequality”. Seminars were to be organized and those interested were instructed to contact the two initiators, calling themselves ‘Not yet PhD’ and ‘Never Attaining Docentship.’ How-

ever, there was, and has been, an ongoing diversity of interests and theoretical debates at the Department about power, economic organization and shifts in the labour market and meanings of labour, work that has incorporated both culture, power, mechanisms of control and dependence.

#### *The material and the visual*

The interest in ‘material culture’ is of course an old one, central to the Museum, and so something the critical students in early years were more interested in avoiding than studying. Slowly, the material aspects of social life reappeared in a different theoretical guise and became an important part of the anthropological project in terms of ‘the social life of things’ (Appadurai 1986) and their uses and consumption (Miller 1987). But ‘things’ raise problems. What is a ‘thing,’ and what is its materiality? In other words, the problem concerns severing life from things, the material. Today, doctoral students confront in their courses the disconcerting question if ‘glaciers listen’ or ‘forests think.’ It may seem far-fetched, but the issue is whether or not we can understand and come close to a world, where some of our interlocutors think that glaciers do listen (Cruikshank 2005) or forests think (Kohn 2013). This raises anew the question of what difference is and what it means for the anthropological project and our conceptions of who ‘the Other’ is.

‘Material culture’ was about documenting, and in a different way so are the images – photos, films – that anthropologists make. These are, however, also much more, since the whole idea of documentation alludes to some kind of objectivity. Most anthropologists will remember one or another of the ethnographic films they have seen during their studies and the strong impression it made, and the seemingly odd black and white photos in early monographs – Malinowski sitting on his veranda talking to some ‘informant,’ Margaret Mead wearing a Samoan dress, standing beside her female informant, or the Nuer leopard-chief holding his status paraphernalia in Evans-Pritchard’s monograph.

Most anthropologists take photos during fieldwork; many monographs contain pictures of various field situations and persons, including the anthropologist herself. Yet, what is the relation between image and text? What message is conveyed? What are the aesthetics employed? How is ethnographic film-making related to fieldwork? Somewhat differently, how do we study the images produced by others? Ethnographic films have always been used in teaching, especially in undergraduate courses. Visual anthropology has also been a growing interest, both in the making of various images and in the study of images produced by the people being studied.

Already in 1972, a Nordic film association, NAFA, was initiated at the anthropology depart-

ment in Uppsala. It engaged a number of our department’s graduate students and researchers. For many years, the Ethnographic Museum was responsible for archiving the films. Several of the graduate students were engaged in the festivals and workshops, but there has not been any training as such at the Department (AS 1986). A few films have nonetheless been produced. An early film, *Pinnarävar*, was based on fieldwork among workers in a Swedish small-town factory. A more recent film, “B.A.T.A.M.” was based on work among migrants in a free-trade zone in Indonesia. Today, members of the Department are invited to participate in a departmental lab workshop on digital photography and HD video.

### **The research seminars and thinking about hierarchy**

*What are seminars for?*

“The research seminar is the backbone (or the ‘life blood’) of the Department, both academically and socially,” as one colleague formulates it. “It is something akin to a gift economy – by participating, giving, you also receive,” as another sees it. “But now it’s more of the neoliberal attitude – what-can-I-get-out-of-this-type-of-thinking.”

Throughout the past 50-odd years, a variety of seminars have been a standing phenomenon at the Department, as in any other academic department. The complaint that students do not

participate enough is an unresolved issue that transcends every generation.

Apart from the weekly or bi-weekly general research seminars, there have been an array of temporary or long-term seminars for different purposes and topics – regional, methodological, theoretical, and seminars for presenting work in progress. In the 1970s and 1980s, the few formal courses offered to doctoral students made the various seminars all the more important and encouraged students to take initiatives to form reading and discussion groups. There was in the beginning a sense of enthusiasm among the generationally fairly homogenous, and at times acephalous, group of graduate students/teachers/administrators. There was “an implicit but pervasive denial of academic hierarchy,” as Tomas Gerholm wrote in a document.

Research seminars are meant to be fora for thought and communication but easily become fora for personal positioning and experiences of uncertainty. There is a tension between the wish for the uncensored openness and the formality of the institutional seminars, however informal they are meant to be. The seminar room seems to constitute a supreme place in the academic world for performing hierarchy. The emplacement in the room, who tends to sit where, is part of this performance. Then again, “if you don’t participate at the seminar, take part in the discussion, you can get caught up in hierarchies, seeing more of that than the poten-

tials of the seminars, the learning,” as one researcher reflected. One may feel or act as if one’s whole intellectual credibility is at stake. Even in the early days, the intended openness of the ‘Life in the field’ seminar ran into trouble as “some tended to dominate discussions at the expense of others,” Gerholm writes (AS 1976). Already in 1970, a group of female students felt that the research seminars were such a “demoralizing pain,” given the dominance of some of the males, and arranged a form of ‘pre-seminars’ to prepare themselves by discussing the paper and conjuring good arguments. “It was very helpful, lasted a couple of years.”

#### *Alternative fora*

In the 1990s a series of debates were arranged with those doctoral students who so wished to participate. They were based on the recurring debates at Manchester University, a number of them which were gathered in a volume, ‘Key Debates in Anthropology’ (Ingold 1996), and followed the format in simplified form: two speakers argue, one for, the other against a chosen theoretical statement, followed by general discussion. A number of interesting and compelling issues were debated. It was intriguing and great fun, inspiring people who tended to be silent at regular seminars to actively participate and not succumb to a sense of uncertainty or unease that is such a common occurrence at seminars.

About ten years ago a small group of doctoral students decided to arrange their own reading group, the Vasa seminar, named after the pub where they met. After a while, the group transformed into more of a thesis-text group. They took turns carefully commenting on each other's texts at various stages. "We tried to be constructive, but thinking back, we were probably too critical, too detailed. We may even have contributed in delaying each other in finishing our theses. Then again, it led to some rewarding general anthropological discussions. Apart from that it has always been nice to meet regularly in a relaxing pub environment!"

### **The move towards 'internationalization' – 'centre and periphery'**

In the introduction to a special issue on national anthropologies in *Ethnos*, Gerholm and Hannerz state that "one of our interests is in the inequalities of international anthropology; in the ways the strong influence the relatively weaker" (1982:6). Their concern coincides with the general interest in anthropology at the time, namely the tensions between 'centre' and 'periphery.' How does this relate to the Stockholm Department?

What is the meaning of 'international?' What constitutes a 'centre?' What is a 'periphery?' In different ways the issue has been an ongoing aspect of our discussions about research, teaching, publications, and language

use. Concepts and notions of centre and periphery may, however, easily reify relations, overlooking temporal, spatial and intellectual shifts and changes.

To what extent do we cultivate our own signum? The dilemma is that a small national research community can end up becoming just a "safe haven for mediocrity" (ibid:12).

Although differentiated, centres may remain on the whole intact, self-sufficient with little awareness of the peripheries. Peripheries do not necessarily turn to each other as much as to centres. Whether we could, at some point in the future, take a role in decentralizing anthropology (and if) Swedish anthropology (would) be any more acceptable to the Third World than the metropolitan, great-power anthropologies is still an open question. Individual researchers have through their networks and specific interests and publications surely had an impact within their specialities, or even in terms of broader issues – such as transnationalism, globalization, migration, organization, development, and law.

At the same time, a department may have its own version of 'centre' and 'periphery' – or hierarchy, perhaps more to the point. Some researchers are for various reasons central in terms of formal position, generation, gender and scholarly accomplishments – while others revolve around them as constant or temporary and shifting peripheries. What are the consequences of such a division of labour?

On the Vega Day Symposium of 1995, 'Culture and Voice in Social Anthropology,' Veena Das, the Indian anthropologist, was awarded the Retzius medal. Hannerz refers to the issue of periphery in his presentation: "She asks us to listen to more voices than what mainstream metropolitan anthropologists have historically done: to the scholars of the periphery, grounding their work in other experiences and world views; to women, youth and children; to victims of disaster and upheaval" (Hannerz 1995:158, Restrepo & Escobar 2005). What have we ourselves taken in of the various 'peripheries'?

#### *Stockholm Roundtable*

The suggestion for an annual Stockholm Roundtable in Anthropology was raised some years ago, to create an unconventional meeting place for discussing particular issues. One or two of the Department's researchers are responsible for organizing a particular meeting. The main contributions are to be given by the Department's own researchers, with a few invited speakers/interlocutors. All papers are brief, the point being to discuss and to exchange ideas and experiences. The stimulation of guest participants from different places has, however, come to rather dominate the scene. As some feel "there is too much emphasis on guests, while our own researchers come in second hand, risking that we place ourselves in the periphery" and assume that we have less to offer than others.

#### **The last few decades**

The FOKO seminars continued into the 1990s and globalization entered the research vocabulary, together with transnational connections, cultural complexity and 'flow.' While culture was on the agenda, far from the earlier straight-jacket of the territorialized, trait-oriented view of culture, the culture concept became an issue to reflect over. Could 'culture' both be a descriptive and an analytical concept? What could Marxist analyses do with this concept? With Geertz stepping out onto the scene early on with his 'webs of meaning' and interpretative take, the concept raised problems of symbolization and representation. Over time it became an even more problematic issue for us to think about.

On the one hand, there were issues of culture and globalization, of culture mediated through the media and the internet. The topic of cultural flows raised problems in relation to method and fieldwork – where to do fieldwork? The 'field' as place and locality could be anywhere, as before, but also everywhere simultaneously. The article by Marcus on multi-sited anthropology from 1995 raised what had been going on to the status of (an American) discovery. It was referred to so often that finally the whole issue seemed to become an end in itself. Recently, the pendulum swung back a bit to a defence of the 'one sited' field (cf. Candea 2007). However, before it got to



In the spring of 2014, the Department held a competition for the best student photo documentation. This is a corridor exhibition featuring female tea workers at Siliguri in Northern India, made by Sandra Åhman. (Photo: Mats Danielson)

that, Hannerz edited a volume (2001) with contributions from department researchers, *Flera fält i ett* ('Several sites in one').

On the other hand, there were the problems of power and practice addressed by Bourdieu and the theories of political economy: power and knowledge as forms of surveillance, governmentality in the terms of Foucault, opening for analyses of the 'audit culture' of Neoliberalism and of the increasing 'benevolent' surveil-

lance of educational systems and practices. Such theorizing could also be connected to the organization and diversification of the labour market and how people experience work. This interest has developed into a number of current projects both in Sweden and abroad on 'flexible labour' and manpower agencies, EU bureaucrats at work, as well as normative educational policies, and, lately, how 'think tanks' work and influence policies.



The book cabinet mirrors the width of thematic and regional interests at the Department of Social Anthropology. (Photo: Mats Danielson)

With the growing interest in mobilities of all kinds, and the practical and ideational movements that make up people's lives in relation to migration, labour, organizations, policies, and kinship, the Department formulated a programme for its overarching profile, Transnational Anthropology. Subsequently, four thematic clusters were formed – Migration, Media, Environment and Organization.

These clusters are fora for paper presentation, small workshops with outside researchers, and reading groups. Thematically and theoretically they overlap and 'membership' is loose. Most find something in these clusters that relate to their different research interests. In different ways, many issues connect the 21<sup>st</sup> century decades with the theoretical and political concerns of the 1960s and 1970s.



Thoughtful listeners at an anthropological seminar: Mark Graham and Simon Johansson. (Photo: Gudrun Dahl)

### Some final words

As anthropology goes through its twists and turns, some turns are declared to be more crucial than others. Such declarations of turns or crises appear to come mainly from the more established centres. An ‘ontological turn’ is the most recent, leaving us in a somewhat bewildered state, as crises tend to do. This ‘turn’ questions any conceptions of what anthropology is all about. We are again asked to ponder: “[W]hat is an anthropologist and who’s the native?” (Viveiros de Castro 2003:2). Waiting to figure out an answer, we must also ‘get on with anthropology’ as best we can. A colleague

mused while thinking about anthropology, that it has changed her as a person, made her see things differently, and question assumptions and relations in a way that colleagues in other disciplines find unnecessarily complicates matters. The problem is, how do we know what is unnecessary?

Not only professors, researchers and doctoral students move about in the Department corridors, attending all the ‘very important seminars with very important guests,’ queuing in the stuffy little copy machine room to print out articles, schedules or project proposals in the last hectic minute, or hanging around in the kitchen talking and joking, planning the next ‘beer seminar.’ Persons have varied – from the professor’s own somewhat scary secretary many years ago in the age of typewriters and black telephones, to the present staff of efficient and open internet users – but the staff of administrators are the reliable presence at the Department. The bureaucratic superstructure is unavoidably there to keep absolutely everyone in the folds of university rules and regulations. Who would be able to manage without this small local group of administrators? Who would be able to offer such a sense of stability and good company? Certainly, through the years, some have at times given up on us, tired of confusions, heavy workloads, unclear hierarchies and empty corridors, and left us for more interesting projects. Others have come,

tried us out and found that, “yes, why not stay on, researchers aren’t always such a bad, incomprehensible lot” as it were.



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