

Session on "The Pluralization of Anthropological Knowledges"
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JOURNALISTS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND THE COSMOPOLITAN IMAGINATION

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As the world becomes increasingly "a single place," I believe, there is a growing need to cultivate a cosmopolitan imagination, a sense of informed citizenship of the world which combines a sense of human compassion and responsibility for the welfare of humanity with a respect for, even an appreciation of, cultural diversity. Our experiences of the last few months have perhaps shown this more clearly than ever - in an instant, the link is established between a hidden cave in Afghanistan and the most monumental skyscrapers of Manhattan. Television sequences repeated again and again the world over foster an electronic empathy with the victims and the bereaved, the question is raised whether this is indeed the clash of civilizations we have been warned of, and the nature of warfare is being rethought.

This morning, however, I am not primarily here to add to the commentary on recent events. What I will say draws on a study I have been doing over the past five or six years of the work of newsmedia foreign correspondents, people who would seem to be key players in the contemporary globalization of consciousness. I have been interested in the process of foreign news work, in the conditions of reporting, and in the occupational community and culture of the correspondents. This study has taken me for periods of research to Jerusalem, Johannesburg and Tokyo, but in a more ad hoc fashion, I have seized on opportunities to meet with correspondents and foreign news editors in some number of other places as well. In large part, this field work has had the form of long, free-ranging conversations.

At the beginning of my project, when I made one of my first contacts with a potential informant, he giggled at the idea of being interviewed by an anthropologist - "so we will be your tribe," he said. But it is, of course, from an anthropological point of view, a very special tribe, in some ways rather like that of the anthropologists themselves. "Studying up" became a well-known figure of speech in anthropology some decades ago, as Laura Nader (1972) noted that anthropologists have mostly engaged in studying people less powerful and prosperous than themselves, that is, studying down - the time had come, she argued, to shift the professional gaze. One could perhaps see research on the work of foreign correspondents as a matter of studying up, insofar as the public reach of their reporting is considerable - certainly greater than that most academic monographs. Yet I have been more inclined to see it as a case of studying sideways: a matter of engaging with a craft which is in some ways parallel to our own. Like anthropologists, newsmedia foreign correspondents report from one part of the world to another. We share the condition of being in a transnational contact zone, managing meaning across distances, although in part at least with different interests, under other constraints. An anthropological inquiry into the work of foreign correspondents can in some ways be good to think with, then, as anthropology reflects on itself.

It may seem like a paradox that in recent years, in an era of high consciousness of globalization, foreign coverage has appeared to be in decline in the news media, in the United States but also elsewhere. "Remember that this is a dying occupation," said one of my first informants in this study, as we parted ways at a busy New York street corner; someone who had won a Pulitzer Prize for his foreign reporting and then gone on to other prominent positions in American journalism. I still think this was too dark a view, but we can identify some of the ways in which foreign news has recently been vulnerable. "The accountants are cracking their whips," a Jerusalem news veteran said, and it is certainly a widespread view that media organizations are now more business-minded than ever. The down-to-earth question is raised, then, whether the high cost of foreign news, especially in the form of a more extensive network of staff correspondents, is really balanced by more readers, viewers, or listeners, or advertising revenue directly brought in by such coverage.

But then another factor has certainly been the state of the world. Many of us may still remember the 1990s. Toward the end of the decade, when the British-based newsweekly *The Economist* (1998) devoted a cover story to the decline of foreign coverage in the media, it concluded that "the lack of foreign news is a measure of world peace as well as of rich world insularity...the world is a relatively quiet place these days." Perhaps after the events of September 11, that seems like a long time ago. We may be facing a new period of turbulence in foreign news. Nonetheless, during the decade or so before al-Quaida struck, the main fact was that the Cold War was over, and not least for Americans that may have seemed like a good reason for not having to attend too closely to the rest of the world for a while.

It may also have mattered that foreign news is so often bad news, of conflicts and catastrophes. The world out there could seem to be above all a place to be wary of - one that on the basis of common sense you would want to have as little to do with as possible. If people from out there knock on your door, you will want to have nothing to do with them. Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 8), in a critique of television and journalism, takes this view: "Journalism shows us a world full of ethnic wars, racist hatred, violence and crime - a world full of incomprehensible and unsettling dangers from which we must withdraw for our own protection." And people may have felt it was possible to do that.

Many of the journalists and editors I have been talking to have been concerned with this context of their work, and possible reactions to it. Inger Jägerhorn, foreign news editor of *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest morning newspaper, said she and her colleagues were aware of the possibility that isolationism and even xenophobia could be reactions to bad news from abroad. In her imagery, her paper must make sure to distance itself from a medieval "troubadour tradition", of wandering about spreading news only of what in Swedish could be the three K's - *krig, katastrofer* and *kröningar*, that is, wars, disasters and coronations. With such emphases (although with elections nowadays taking the place of the coronations), the world could indeed seem mostly dangerous and unattractive. There had to be more reporting which portrayed everyday life elsewhere, Jägerhorn said, and which allowed journalists more personal angles and engagements.

In the classic 43rd Street building of the *New York Times* in midtown Manhattan, I met with Bill Keller, serving for a period as the paper's foreign editor. He reminisced about coming back to New York a few years earlier, to take up his new position. At the time he had been worried about his new duties, not least because it had seemed to him that the recent congressional elections (those in 1994) had been a sign that Americans were turning away

from the world, toward more parochial preoccupations. On his way from Johannesburg, where he had been based as a Southern Africa correspondent, however, he had made a stopover in Paris and met with Flora Lewis, oldtimer in foreign news and commentary, who had strengthened his resolve: "That's not a demand problem, it's a supply problem." She had argued that the public would respond to a political leadership and to media which took the world out there seriously.

In our conversation, Bill Keller made the point that foreign correspondents should be interested in societies, not only in states. And his paper had been giving some serious thought to its international news reporting. His predecessor as foreign editor of the *New York Times*, Bernard Gwertzman, who oversaw the post-cold war transition period in his paper, had written an important internal memorandum which pointed to new directions for his correspondents. In the coming period, he suggested, there would be a broadening of reporting from political news to deal more with environmental issues, histories of ethnic friction, and economic developments which might no longer be confined to the financial section of the paper. Not least, however, "We are interested in what makes societies different, what is on the minds of people in various regions. Imagine you are being asked to write a letter home every week to describe a different aspect of life in the area you are assigned."

In such reactions I think we may discern a certain readiness for a renewal of foreign correspondence - a kind of cosmopolitan turn, an actual desire to make the vicarious experience of the world through the media a richer, more varied one, a fostering in audiences of a sense of being at home in the world. And I should say that I see it, in many feature stories in particular, at the same time as a kind of ethnographic turn, as correspondents struggle within the limits of less than a thousand words, or a few minutes on the air, to portray a slice of life in a distant place.

Nonetheless, much foreign news remains crisis news, where trouble spots make sudden appearances and then fade away again. In October this year, it was estimated that there were some 3,000 foreign newspeople gathered in Islamabad, Peshawar and a few other places in Pakistan to which probably only a mere handful would have been assigned at any other time. Among the people recently reporting from there I could recognize one BBC correspondent I had met in Jerusalem, and a *Washington Post* veteran I had talked to in Hong Kong. And the way international news coverage is distributed in the global landscape, some parts of the world stand little chance of making it into the news unless they are sites of violent conflicts or disasters. In Johannesburg and in Cape Town, many of the journalists I talked to were "Africa correspondents," responsible for reporting from the entire continent south of the Sahara, forty-some national units. But mostly, for budgetary reasons, the management at home would be reluctant to budget them for travel elsewhere in the continent unless there was hard news stories to be done.

What, then, does this have to do with the way we do anthropology? It has to do with our place in public culture. Much of the time in the twentieth century, as the discipline professionalized, anthropologists grew used to turning mostly inward toward one another, rather than to wider audiences outside the academy. One reason for this was no doubt the success of the university as a twentieth-century institution, which made it possible to seek the glittering prizes of recognition in large part and most directly among one's peers. Yet I believe that another reason why anthropology as usually practiced in the past century with few exceptions has had a rather limited public impact was that in an age of nation-states, as the twentieth century also mostly was, the expertise and the personal commitments of anthropologists have rather

contrarily often involved places outside the boundaries of the countries where they have themselves been citizens. On the other hand, some of the main recent instances I can think of where colleagues have become public figures have involved for example Brazilian or Indian anthropologists who have been practicing "at home", at least in the sense of studying and commenting on their own countries.

We have seen in recent years, of course, that anthropology is to a certain extent being repatriated, that it is increasingly practiced at home. For one thing, it is exemplified in this session. And so we, too, in our home countries, may tell our compatriots about themselves. As the world now becomes more like a single place, however, anthropologists with their knowledge of the variations of human life and thought may have particular opportunities, and particular duties, on the arenas of a more cosmopolitan public culture - making sure that with regard to materials and perspectives, there will not be, as Flora Lewis said to Bill Keller, a supply problem.

This could make anthropology more visible, in a way which would not hurt in times when accountants may crack their whips not only in news organizations but in academia as well. It also inevitably places us in complicated interaction with the media news flow. We need to think about the terms of interaction here. As I suggested before, anthropologists and foreign correspondents are in a way neighboring tribes. And when we approach any such neighboring tribe, we should be aware that it is hardly an entirely innocent encounter. Clearly, there is a measure of tension across the boundary between anthropology and journalism. With regard to foreign news reporting, anthropologists, especially when they have some relevant specialized area experience to draw on, are often inclined to be somewhat critical; perhaps finding it shallow, or incomplete, or sensational, or simply false.

Indeed journalists often have a rather reasonable suspicion that academics are inclined to be critical of news work, and sometimes to forget the implications of such constraints as deadlines and space limits. And, yes, there may be times when we are critical of the ways the news media present the world. While we should not disregard our own standards of knowledge and knowledge production, we should then try to maintain a grasp of what is the nature of news, and a sense of the conditions of its production process, and aim at helping audiences become yet better informed citizens and skilled news consumers. I should say that I have come away from my research with a great deal of respect for the professional skills and commitments of many of the people I have met. And I am perhaps now more inclined to think of anthropologists and foreign correspondents as involved less in an adversary relationship, and more in a division of labor.

In part our interaction with the media takes place in the classroom. When those members of the public who are or have been our students read the headlines and see the newsreels which draw their attention to people and events in other parts of the world, we should have done our part in fostering those ideas and habits of analysis which can serve them fruitfully as informed citizens in their encounter with the news.

But our cosmopolitan public role also extends to our writing. Here I do sense, in some circles at least, a certain rapprochement between anthropology and journalism. When anthropologists more often find themselves trying to synthesize diverse materials - observations, interviews, texts or whatever - when their fields become multi-sited, and when they grapple with the relationship between the long-term and the short-term, between structure and event, they may

discover that they are themselves blurring the boundary. Some anthropology, it has been said, is now not so different from investigative journalism.

Yet this may still be rather inward-turning work, and it is another question what we may need to do to reach out toward new audiences - in various instances, writing in, with, around or against the news. Clearly there are ways in which anthropological writing will not, and should not, be much like journalism. We would hardly want to accept the practical constraints of much newswork, fitting our efforts into so many column inches, or so many seconds on the air. It must also be obvious that to the extent that journalism is event-centered, anthropologists are seldom in a position to compete. By the time journalists pull out of a news site, having filed their "first draft of history," anthropologists, in the logic of academic production, may at best be polishing the first draft of a research proposal.

There may indeed be instances when we should try to be quicker, just-in-time, to engage in public commentary on current events, although it is true that such efforts often do not fit easily into the rhythm of academic life. Often, however, the division of labor between newswork and anthropology would seem primarily to involve complementarity. Given that news is in large part event-centered, with the lights going on and off quickly in the global news landscape, we may have something to say about what was there before those thousands of parachutist journalists and photographers descend on a news site, and what may be there after they leave. We may shift the balance of reporting between crisis and everyday life in such a way that other parts of the world, and their inhabitants, seem less dangerous and intrinsically unattractive. And we may add more nuance to the quick, one-dimensional typifications of heroes, villains and fools so that the the variations of human agency become a bit more multifaceted and comprehensible.

But then, finally, to get such messages across to a wider public, we must also think about the way we write, and probably diversify our products. Perhaps saying this comes close to swearing in church, but I suspect that the relative consensus among us on the value of rich, fine-grained ethnography is to a degree a result of the inward-turning of academic anthropology. It is a value which comes naturally to the connoisseurship of skilled craftsmen and their apprentices in training. I would not say that it is a value which has had its day. The fact that foreign correspondents are now asked by their editors to do something as much as possible like it, within the severe constraints of their feature stories, I think, suggests that we are not alone in appreciating ethnography. Perhaps it can sometimes be trusted to express, eloquently and on its own, our doubts about some big scenarios and small soundbites. Yet I suspect that in our contributions to a public culture, where audiences may just be somewhat impatient with our in-house enthusiasms, our ethnography may need to be fitted into more mixed genres, combined with other kinds of formulations. There are some scholar-journalists out there who contribute importantly to wider understandings of what we sometimes describe as the history of the present. They are not anthropologists, and we may not want to emulate them precisely, but they present us with styles of work that are worth thinking about if we seriously want to tell our stories about other people not only to each other.