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Event Focused Fieldwork and Comparative Methodology: Exploring Ethnic Boundaries and Cultural Variation

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" – more of our attention should be given to the contexts of the particulars, their embeddedness and linkages. That means learning from Bateson to "follow the loops" that links events together and that will give us leads in our search for connections and systems.----It puts pressure on us to adopt new categories as we go along, particularly from those we are living among, but also from our own accumulated experience" (Barth 1994: 352)

1. Introduction

The present paper deals with methodological problems involved in establishing the interconnection between the particular events of our field observations and their general significance in terms of causality and in terms of meanings. I shall discuss some aspects of this problem with reference to my own attempts to explore an important and hotly debated anthropological problem field, namely ethnicity. The main reference for the paper is material from my own fieldworks in different parts of the world (Darfur, Bangladesh, South East Asia and China). My argument starts with some general reflections on advantages and limitations of participant observation; on theoretical orientations as constituting a horizon of expectation (Popper, 1972: 346) influencing what we look for in the "world" we are exposed to, and what we "see" in the events of this "world"; on the way we can develop our horizon of expectations by the use of comparative ethnographic material; on variations in the factors that in particular social settings are salient in production of ethnic categorization; on looking at ethnicity not in terms of enduring holistic units, but in terms of something that happens among people; and on the importance of being sensitive to events that do not fit our preconceived horizon of expectations, of ideas, of theories, models, etc.

I see anthropological research as an unending quest directed towards development of more adequate understanding of our object of study that I understand to be interacting people. I shall make a short presentation of the state of the art in anthropology when I started my quest in the field of ethnicity. This is followed by analysis of my empirical cases from different ethnographic contexts, and concludes with the importance of comparative material as a source for reflecting back on my previous analyses. I have used my own field experiences in order to show how engagement with people in different

interethnic situations has served as a source for my attempt to develop a generalized perspective on ethnicity. Although development of my perspectives on ethnicity has been influenced by my exposure to conceptual developments that have taken place in social science since the 1960ies, I will strongly emphasize that the main inspiration for my rethinking came from being exposed to events that did not fit the horizon of expectation I had come to entertain from the way I had managed to 'make sense' of ethnic processes in previous fieldworks.

The perspective I over time have developed is of course a provisional one, and the intention is that my representation of the analytical steps I make on my observations from different ethnographic contexts is sufficiently clear to be challenged with reference to comparative material from other ethnographic situations as well as with reference to theoretical coherence.

Fieldwork constitutes an essential part in the anthropological tradition of knowledge. Since the time of Malinowski anthropologists have emphasized the importance of participant observation. That one can learn a lot about a people's "culture" by living with people in their daily activity seems obvious, but what does one actually do in addition to hanging around and drinking local beer, occasionally taking a hoe and weeding a field, or being present at ceremonies? Furthermore what has one learnt about a people's "culture" and how does one represent this? To claim that immersion in village life is somehow like an osmotic process where the ethnographer acquires the "culture" of the people s/he studies like a child learns to understand and behave is part of anthropological mythology. It is naïve to imagine that participation is the key that opens the door into the world of values, knowledge, tacit meanings etc in terms of which members (old and young, men and women, occupational specialists etc) interact and shape the community the ethnographer is studying. As Obeyesekere has expressed it: "There is no way the anthropologist can, in any significant sense, participate in another culture. I doubt he can even when he is studying a segment of his own culture. --- Only naïve ethnographers identify with their subjects; but subjects rarely identify with the ethnographers, unless it is a key informant or interpreter locked in a *personal* relationship with the investigator. You are always the other, the alien; and even the most well-meaning investigator is a CIA agent for some" (Obeyesekere. 1990: 228).

We cannot pretend that our participation is not influenced by limitations imposed on us by members in the community we study, as well as by our preconceived horizon of expectation. Instead of despair of these limitations on total access to the cultural 'world' of the people studied, we should admit them, and rather search the opportunities participant observation offer for making unexpected and significant discoveries. The task we confront in our search for such conceptual filters is aptly expressed in Clifford Geertz' formulation "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" and that we take "culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973: 5). Individual human beings can only act in the world if they have been able to spin webs of significance that provide them with workable mental "maps" of their social and natural environments, and workable instructions ("driving rules") for acting in these environments. Through participation in daily life one may be able learn fragments of the webs of significance people continuously are spinning. Grasping important aspects of

the spinning process thus largely depend on our ability to follow 'loops' that connect events to meanings - 'loops' that lead us into the "world" of symbolic imagery current in the population.

However, people don't live only in a world of "meaning", they primarily live in a "world" where they depend on the impact of concrete objects (food, tools including technologies of communication, weapons etc) in terms of which they relate to each other. A major task in fieldwork is therefore also to discover the 'loops' of material causality (e.g. material flows mediated by the market, by political power, by eco-system dynamics) that connect events (whether known or unknown to the people engaged in them) in the "world". What happens among people thus has to be understood in contexts of cause-effect relations as well as in the contexts of meaning. Discovery of such 'loops' of meaning and causality is the main objective of our fieldwork, but how do we while participating in community life go about making observations that lead us into productive hypotheses about significant 'loops'? We do not possess any manual of accepted field methods that by application will lead us into them; we have to rely on our ability to make creative use of interests and orientations that we have acquired in our professional training. Long time back Karl Popper at a public lecture asked the audience to participate in a simple experiment: "My experiment consists of asking you to *observe*, here and now. ---However, I hope some of you, instead of observing, will feel a strong urge to ask: 'What to observe?' ---For what I am trying to illustrate is that in order to observe, we must have in mind a definite question which we might be able to decide by observation." (Popper, 1972: 259). The problem is that our professional training may serve to focus our observations on things and events that already are generally known. Thomas Kuhn has argued that normal science can be characterized as kind of puzzle solving where theoretical frameworks (paradigms) serve to formulate definite research questions that can be answered by accepted observational techniques: "The man who is striving to solve a problem defined by existing knowledge and technique is not just looking around. He knows what he wants to achieve, and he designs his instruments and directs his thoughts accordingly" (Kuhn, 1976: 96). In other words, puzzle-solving research does not aim at discovery of the unexpected, but rather document what the theoretical framework leads one to expect will be the case. Recently Peter Berger has lamented the disease of methodological fetishism that sociology (including much of anthropology) is suffering from: "There is nothing wrong with quantitative methods in themselves, and they can be useful, but because of the interests of those willing to fund the expensive budgets of survey research, the result is often increasingly sophisticated methods to explore increasingly trivial topics" (Berger, 2011: 8)

The practice of good ethnography in many ways differs from Kuhn's view of normal science, and Berger's methodological fetishism. Before going to the field most anthropologists have worked out a broad perspective on an empirical problem field they have reasons to believe is big enough to be worth investigating, accompanied by some sketchy reflections on the methods they are planning to use in order to provide answers to their research questions. However, the important thing is that it is not preconceived methods that should decide the problem to be investigated, but rather the problems that arise our curiosity in the field that should decide the methods we adopt to explore them. In contrast to normal science it is most anthropologists' ambition to discover something that is unexpected; not only documentation of features that was unknown in the anthropological community, but most importantly something that challenges pre-conceived "theoretical"

perspectives on our understanding of general properties of the socio-cultural "reality", something that changes our horizon of expectations. Here I have drawn inspiration from Walter and Vayda's argument for curiosity driven research where "Models and theories learned beforehand should be seen as potential aids for drawing alternative working hypotheses to interpret findings of interest. In this array of theoretical tools at one's disposal, the better, but researchers in the field should strive to be open and willing to adapt to findings that are surprising or contrary to expectations and they should resist the temptation to jump uncritically to conclusions when observations appear initially to conform to such expectation (Walters & Vayda, 2009: 544)

By exploring the particulars we have an opportunity to discover something new of general significance. Barth has advocated that we in our exploration "take a cue from Darwin. His strategy was to focus, in the tradition of the wondering naturalist, on small parts of the picture, closely observed and revealingly interpreted. He did not reach directly for the overall pattern in a myriad of forms, or the general shape and direction of phylogenies. Whether in the courting display of golden pheasants (Darwin 1871: 728) or the relations of beak form, environment, and feeding habits of Galapagos finches (Darwin 1843: 373) he looked for the generalizable features in the particular situation which might be give cumulative direction to small increments of change. In other words, he sought to extract generalizable mechanisms and processes from his particulars." (Barth, 1987: 24).

My fascination with cultural variation and the way this was related to ethnic categorization involved me in an unending tagging between immersion in the particulars of peoples' daily life, and theorizing about generalizable mechanisms underlying observed variations in time and space. Experiences from fieldwork in diverse ethnographic contexts alerted me to the importance of reflecting back on observations I had made in one community in light of comparative material from other communities.

By stepwise presenting analyses of ethnic processes from various parts of the world, I shall try to show how comparison may serve to broaden our perspective on ethnicity.

2. Anthropological perspectives on ethnic groups and cultural variation in the 1960ies

> *"Science never starts from scratch; it can never be described as free from assumptions; for at every instant it pre-supposes a horizon of expectations – yesterday's horizon of expectations as it were. Today's science is built upon yesterday's science --; and yesterday's science, in turn, is based on the science of the day before. And the oldest scientific theories are built on pre-scientific myths, and these in turn on still older expectations."* (Popper 1972 pp 346-347).

When I started my anthropological career in the early 1960ies the relationship between 'culture' and 'society' was among most anthropologists generally seen as unproblematic. In the structural-functional tradition of Durkheim this relationship was not considered problematic. In Radcliffe-Brown's words: "I wish only to deal with one part of Durkheim's work, namely his theory that religious ritual is an expression of the unity of society and that its function is to 're-create' the society or the social order by reaffirming and strengthening the sentiments on which the social solidarity and therefore the social order itself depends" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1961: 165). Society was assumed to be analogous to biological organisms, and research was oriented towards the way various socio-cultural

components contributed to maintenance of the 'social solidarity'. "Continuity and change in the forms of social life being the subjects of investigation of comparative sociology, the continuity of cultural traditions and changes in those traditions are amongst the things to be taken into account" (Radliffe-Brown, 1961: 5). The focus of research was on relations 'within' groups (e.g. 'tribes'), not on the way cultural and social forms were shaped by relations between groups. In USA Everett Hughes in 1948 formulated an important perspective that drew attention to the importance of seeing different groups in relation to each other: "An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups: it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group he belongs" (Hughes,/1948/1994/: 91) Stimulated by Pitirim Sorokin and Talcott Parsons, Geertz distinguished between culture and social system with reference to the different kind of integration that characterize each of them: Culture is characterized by "logico-meaningful integration", i.e. "the sort of integration one finds in a Bach fugue, in Catholic dogma, or in the general theory of relativity; it is in integration of style, of logical implication, of meaning and value. By causal-functional integration, characteristic of the social system is meant the kind of integration one finds in an organism, where all the parts are united in a single causal web; each part is an element in a reverberating causal ring which "keeps the system going. And because these two types of integration are not identical, because the particular form one of them takes does not directly imply the form the other will take there is an inherent incongruity and tension between the two—." (Geertz, /1959/ 1973:145). Geertz' perspective implies a somewhat more dynamic view on the relation between 'culture' and 'society', but it hardly takes up the processes involved in this dynamic relationship. With the growing interests in the so-called new states, anthropologists started to pay more attention to the problem of integration of culturally different groups within states. "A more exact phrasing of the nature of the problem involved here is that, considered as societies, the new states are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial attachments. By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the "givens" – or more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed "givens" – of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being borne into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular practices." (Geertz, 1963: 109). These are important comments that draw attention to the possible conflicts between citizens' primary identification with the state and their attachment to smaller culturally different groups within the state. However the processes by which peoples' embracement of cultural features were made relevant in political contexts were left largely unexplored.

Meanwhile, interesting developments were taking place in various departments in England. The Manchester school headed by Max Gluckman produced a range of publications that showed the importance of studying local communities in their relation to wider political and economic environments (Gluckman 1956, Gluckman 1958, Gluckman 1963, Epstein1958). One of the most important contributions to the study of processes affecting cultural hybridization under colonial rule was a small pamphlet by Clyde Mitchell called the 'Kalela Dance': "—the set of relationships among a group of tribesmen in their rural home is

something very different from the set of relationships among the same group when they are transposed to an urban area. In the rural area the relationships of the members form part of a complete tribal system.--- In the towns the pattern of the social system is determined largely by the industrial system which forms the basis of their existence, and by the laws which the Government has enacted to regulate the life of the town dwellers. As cities have developed on the basis of industrial production the pecuniary nexus which implies the purchasability of services and things has displaced personal relations as the basis of associations. Individuality under these circumstances must be replaced by categories" (Mitchell, 1956:44).

Some of the most important challenges to received wisdom on ethnicity were stimulated by South east Asian ethnography. Moerman working among the Lue of Thailand could not identify any set of criteria by which he could define who was a Lue: "Since language, culture, political organization, etc., do not correlate completely, the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another" (Moerman, 1965: 1215). He concluded that a person was a Lue "by virtue of believing and calling himself Lue and of acting in ways that validate his Lueness" (Moerman, 1965: 1219). Probably the most influential publication that came out of South east Asian ethnography and which articulated a dynamic perspective on the relationship between group organization and identification on the one hand and cultural content on the other was Edmund Leach's book 'Political Systems of Highland Burma'. Writing about relationships between different groups associated with different cultural traditions (e.g. the Shan speaking dialects of Thai language, practicing wet rice cultivation, embracing Buddhism, and being organized in state-like political units, while the Kachins were speaking Tibeto-Burmese languages and being organized in fluctuating political units ranging from those based on the *gumsa* ideology of hierarchical ranking and those based on the *gumlao* ideology of anarchic equality) Leach claims "that Kachins themselves tend to think of the difference between *gumsa* and *gumlao* and Shan as being differences of the same general kind. Further they recognize that these differences are not absolute – individuals may change from one category into another ---Kachins think of the difference between Shan and *gumsa* Kachin as being a difference of ideal, and not, as the ethnologist would have us believe, a difference of ethnic, cultural or racial type." (Leach, 1954: 285 -286).

Contributions like this were intensely discussed in the Department of Social Anthropology in Bergen when I prepared for my first fieldwork in the early 1960ies. Fredrik Barth who brought inspirations from his studies in Chicago and Cambridge had founded this department. He was more influenced by the Weberian tradition than by the Durkheiman tradition that had dominated anthropological departments in England. The way Barth developed his analytical conceptualization of ethnic boundaries is in many ways similar to Weber's perspective: "We shall call "ethnic groups" those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (Gemeinsamkeit) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitate group formation of any kind, particularly in

in the political sphere" (Weber, 1978: 389) Barth had already made several important contributions to the study of ethnic processes (Barth 1956, 1963 and Barth 1964). In these studies Barth elaborated on the way ethnic group structures were related to intergroup relations of competition, cooperation and symbiosis, as well as like Leach had done, showing that ethnic groups might persist despite a substantial mobility of personnel between them.

Although I participated in discussion on ethnicity when I prepared for fieldwork, my primary interest at that time was more oriented towards the economic dimension of social life. I had in 1965 been accepted as field assistant for Fredrik Barth in a FAO regional development project in Darfur. Barth had just circulated a draft of his article "Economic spheres in Darfur" and this was a stimulating introduction to Fur economy (Barth, 1967). Although my main task was to follow up Barth's earlier research on economic anthropology, I was encouraged to pursue a conventional type of ethnographic fieldwork participating in daily activities, and documenting various dimensions of the world I was exposed to in Darfur. Instead of letting 'methods' decide the problems I took up, it should be the problems I discovered that should decide the kind of methods I applied. Barth's position was in many ways similar to what Wright-Mills had expressed: "We should be as accurate as we are able to be in our work upon problems that concern us. But no method, as such, should be used to delimit the problems we take up, if for no other reason that the most interesting and difficult issues of *method* usually begin where established techniques do not apply" (Wright Mills, 1973: 83).

3. Exposure to unexpected events and discovering 'loops' structuring ethnic processes in Darfur

> *"The truth of the matter is this: both sociological historians and social anthropologists are fully aware that any event has the characters of uniqueness and generality, and that in an interpretation of it both have to be given consideration"* (Evans-Pritchard 1972: 175).

When I arrived in Sudan in 1965 my main task was to collect data on the social and cultural features relevant for formulation of a regional development plan in western Darfur. Barth had done his fieldwork in the culturally homogeneous Fur area in the Jebel Marra mountain, while I worked in the environmentally different areas of the western lowlands towards the Chadian border. This work involved studies of the two main groups that used the area – the Fur farmers and the Baggara Arab pastoralists who migrated into the project area in the dry season after the Fur had harvested their fields. A most visible feature characterizing the two groups was housing and settlement pattern; the Fur living in straw huts in compact villages, while the Baggara were living in straw-matted tents in migratory camps. The two groups were associated with contrasting cultural traditions; e.g. in terms of language (the Fur speaking a language of the Nilo Saharan language family while the Baggara speaking Arabic); in principles of household organization (the Fur spouses generally operating as individual management units, while the Baggara operating as family based management units); in values and symbolic expressions (both Fur and Baggara were Muslims but the Fur practiced a range of rituals not connected with Arab cultural traditions). From my earlier reading of Herskovits (Herskovits, 1926) I assumed that we here had an example of a contrast between pastoralists with a so-called cattle complex (strong emphasis of cattle rearing and the lifestyle associated with it) and cultivators with a cultural emphasis on village life.

One day when I went to interview people in a "Baggara camp" I was greatly surprised when I heard them speak Fur instead of Arabic. My first reaction to the observed events was to explore whether this was a unique case or whether it represented more widespread phenomenon. From a simple survey of a sample of villages I found that every year about 1% of sedentary Fur cultivators left the village and established themselves in migratory camps living like the Baggara and in many respects behaving like them. Furthermore many of them actually migrated to Baggara areas in the rainy season and some even lived in mixed camps with Baggara Arabs.

This puzzled me. My initial hypothesis was that maybe the Fur also had strong cultural preference (cattle complex) for a pastoral style of life, but that economic and ecological circumstances forced them to live as farmers. However I did not find any evidence for this, neither in inteviews nor in any symbolic expressions like rituals and songs. On the contrary it was a sedentary life-style that was culturally emphasized. This negative evidence for cultural determinants behind the observed events of Fur nomadization, took me back to what was supposed to be the focus of my research namely economic processes. No matter what the cultural importance of cattle was, they represented a form of value that was accumulated through inheritance, bridewealth and most importantly through investments. That led me to the investment 'loop' and the question of why the Fur invested in cattle. The reason seemed simple; land in the Fur lowlands was communal and investment opportunities in shifting agriculture were therefore limited, while cattle on the other hand was private and provided an investment opportunity with growth potential (animals breed animals). The next question was why did so many Fur establish themselves in camps instead of keeping the cattle in the village. This led into exploring the ecological 'loop'. On the clay soils of the western lowlands there was a high risk of cattle diseases during the rainy season. The chances of success were increased if the cattle could be brought out of the cultivating areas and into less disease prone areas. That some Fur changed from successful sedentary cultivators to nomadic herdsmen I thus 'explained' as a consequence of structural features of Fur economy and of ecological variations in the larger Darfur region. But why did the nomadized Fur start behaving like the Baggara? While pondering on that I discovered that both Fur and Baggara took migratory cattle husbandry as a marker of Baggara identity and sanctioned those who practiced it according to cultural standards of evaluation current among the Baggara. This was of course particularly important for the really successful Fur cattle herders who sought access to the environmentally most favourable Baggara tribal areas in Southern Darfur. To a large extent such access was a matter of political assimilation in a Baggara camp community.

In 1967 I presented my Darfur material in a symposium Barth organized in Bergen on ethnic processes. The anthropological position at the time with regard to the study of ethnicity was roughly as follows: Ethnic groups were carriers of its own integrated culture. How social groups maintained themselves over time in contact with other groups had not been paid much attention to, neither was the question of the impact of circulation of cultural ideas and of personnel between different groups. My observations made it necessary to pay attention to these issues. In the introduction to the symposium Barth emphasized that the exploration of ethnic groups should focus on "--self-ascription and ascription by others. A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background" (Barth, 1969: 13).

Presumptions of common origin and background are associated with the idea that similarity is based on the assumption of sharing important cultural features making "my" group different from other "they" groups. The point is not that ethnic groups were different because they were "carriers" of different integrated "wholes" of cultural inventory. From this perspective the important dimension of ethnicity is not the total inventory of cultural features current in particular groups, but only those that are made relevant for interaction between members of dichotomized groups. Such features are basically of two orders: "(i) overt signals or signs – the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life, and (ii) basic value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged. Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity" (Barth, 1969: 14). Which cultural features people in particular inter-ethnic contexts emphasize and make relevant for interaction has to be discovered. In some cases they may regulate interaction in many sectors of activities, in others in just a few sectors. Maintenance of dichotomized ethnic groups depended on maintenance of interactions boundaries. As long as such ethnic interaction boundaries restrict interaction in certain sectors of activity (e.g. family and marriage, ritual, occupation) cultural differences may be maintained in these sectors, while interaction in other sectors not structured by ethnic dichotomization of activity leads to diffusion of cultural inventory between groups.

The different case material presented by participants in the symposium clearly indicated that ethnic groups might persist as distinct social units a) despite close contact and exchange of goods and services between them; b) despite a certain amount of cultural diffusion; and c) a substantial amount of flow of personnel between them. My material of nomadized Fur constituted a puzzle. On the one hand their interaction in the first camps I observed was to a large extent structured by Fur cultural ideas, while on the other hand they were judged and sanctioned both by other Fur and Baggara according to standards of evaluation according to which Baggaras were judged. Admittedly Baggaras as well as Fur villagers considered their performance according to these criteria rather mediocre. The important thing, however, is that social sanctions expressed in such evaluations stimulated them to learn Baggara culture and act like Baggaras. I thus argued that change to migratory cattle husbandry implied a change of ethnic identity, despite the fact that initially those Fur who made that change in terms of cultural features shared more with their sedentary Fur relatives. The longer a Fur managed to operate as a migratory cattle herder and the closer he had been assimilated in Baggara tribal units, the more competent he became in acting as a Baggara. In local Fur village genealogies such successful Fur nomads are manifested in disappearing lines.

My material of nomadized Fur raised further questions. Why did the Baggara tribes apparently so easily admit Fur nomads to their rainy season pasture areas? An important basis for this is personal inter-ethnic relationships that have been forged during the dry season when Fur farmers allow Baggara nomads to let their cattle graze on the sorghum stubble and eat the nutritious pods of the Acasia Albida trees growing on the Fur farmers fields. Frequently these relationships also involved herding contracts where the Baggara took the Fur farmer's cattle to the Baggara rainy season area. Such individual relations were important, but if the number of pastoralists exploiting the Baggara dry season grazing areas

were increased by assimilation of nomadized Fur, one would expect that this would increase pressure on pasture and possible overgrazing in these areas. This led me on to an interesting macro-level demographic/ecological 'loop' – nomadization of Fur farmers reduced pressure on agricultural land in the Fur area while it potentially might increase competition for pasture in the Baggara areas. By consulting demographic surveys and medical reports on the Baggara it seemed that the Baggara were hardly able to reproduce themselves and that this was probably related to the prevalence of venereal diseases (El Hadi al Nagar & Taha Bashar, 1962; Rushdi Henin, 1969), in other words nomadization of Fur farmers served to replenish the Baggara as an ethnic group.

The book we published, "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries" (Barth, 1969) has been widely read by anthropologists as well as sociologists, political scientists, archaeologists and historians, and for several years it ended up on the top 100 on the social science citation index. It has played a major role in the scholarly debate about ethnicity, a debate that has developed our perspectives further. One point in the debate has focused on the rather muddled issue of instrumental management versus primordial attachments.

Is ethnicity to be understood as something primordial with long historical roots that nurture deep-lying cultural values fostering identification with a specific ethnic group or as something related to opportunistic instrumentality? Those who emphasize primordiality frequently refer to Geertz' and his arguments that "congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen as to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves" (Geertz, 1963: 109) In my field observations I was not struck by the importance of such features in the ethnic processes I observed. I must admit that I during my first fieldwork in Darfur in 1965 became biased towards an instrumental position because the reasons why Fur farmers started to behave like Baggara Arabs seemed to be dominated by economic benefits following from accumulation of cattle, by the ecological advantages of migration, and by the political importance of behaving like Baggara because it facilitated political inclusion in a Baggara group.

Looking back at those who criticize Barth's position as instrumental I think that many of them are overlooking a phrase in Geertz' formulation, namely "assumed givens" of social existence. The question is who assumes and why. Primordial attachments are social constructions, and in order to understand their relation to specific identities, we have to explore the metaphoric imagery that makes ethnic ties convincing and compelling. e.g. imagery of "birth", "blood", "earth".

Maybe because of my instrumental bias I did not see the relevance of observations I already had made in the field of symbolism and ritual and its relevance for understanding why so little seemed to be at stake in Fur identity change. It was only after I had been exposed to field experiences in different ethnographic contexts that the relevance of this material became more clear to me, not only with reference to its importance for commitment to Fur identity, but also with reference to a range of other conditions that were relevant for understanding ethnic processes in Darfur. Some are quantitative causal relations and can be counted; others (e.g. values and juridical rules) are qualitative and have to be interpreted. The problem is that there are neither methods that lead us to 'correct' interpretations of meanings, nor methods that automatically tell us what to measure. The 'loops' that connect actions to qualitative meanings as well as to quantitative cause-effect connections have be discovered. I have argued that this requires

creative imaginative thinking, but not arbitrary intuition, but intuition stimulated by theoretical insights from a variety of approaches, as well as from familiarity with comparative material (through reading or from own fieldwork) of comparative ethnographic material. In the model I constructed of ethnic processes in Darfur I tried to identify different 'loops' and how they linked up to produce patterns in individual identity change and in aggregate demographic balances between groups. An essential part in the development of my model was to search for comparative cases that could challenge the conditional hypothesis of my model.

4. Comparison of variations as discovery procedure

> *"Science is a procedure for testing and rejecting hypotheses, not a compendium of certain knowledge"* (Gould: 1972: 111)

The hypothesis I developed from my fieldwork among Fur in a particular part of Darfur (the western lowlands) I tried to test by doing fieldwork among Fur living under different conditions. I searched for cases where investment opportunities were different. I found such areas in the western foothills of Jebel Marra where there were perennial streams allowing for permanent irrigated cultivation of cash crops. Irrigated land is codified as private land and can be transacted for cash. In villages with irrigated agriculture I did not find a single case of nomadization, on the contrary I found that former Fur migratory herdsmen had sold cattle in order to invest in irrigated land. This corroborated my provisional hypothesis. Secondly, I searched for Fur communities in environments that allowed for a combination of cultivation and cattle rearing. This I found in the drier areas of Jebel Si in the northern part of the Fur area. The economic structure was essentially similar to what I had observed in other Fur communities and I also here found that cattle was a preferred investment object, but here Fur villagers kept their cattle close to villages in the rainy season and only engaged in short migrations in search of water during the dry season. Here the cattle owning Fur encounter the Zaghawa, a different ethnic group in an overlapping niche, which implies a certain amount of competition between the two. Competition thus restricts Fur cattle herders' movements and assimilation as Zaghawa. This synchronic comparison of ethnic processes in space corroborated the hypothesis I developed on the basis of material from the western lowland and showed that variations in ethnic processes within the Fur area could be understood as variations in a few underlying factors, i.e. investment opportunities, natural environment and the politics of interethnic relations (Haaland, 1972).

Diachronic comparison of case material I collected during fieldworks in the 1970ies and 1980ies showed dramatic changes in ethnic processes in Darfur. My search for factors behind these changes led me to changes of flows in 'loops' I discovered in my earlier work, primarily demographic processes and ecological balances; as well as into new 'loops' connected with the national and international market for livestock products and politico-administrative power structure, etc. In 1973 the importance of several of these macro-level conditions became blatantly clear when I did fieldwork in Southern Darfur. This region is mainly a Baggara controlled area. Survey data showed that better health and veterinary services had led to growth in human and animal populations. These changes increased competition for pasture, primarily among different Baggara tribes. This was manifested in higher frequencies of raiding events, and most importantly in increasing construction of

village enclosures reserving pastures for dry season grazing. Ecologically this had the advantage of establishing a primitive regime of rotational grazing, but it had the possible disadvantage of blocking migratory routes for nomads practicing long distance migrations. (Haaland, 1982).

In 1986 the symbiotic relationship that traditionally had existed between the Baggara Arabs and the Fur farmers had changed. With increasing pressure on pasture, the Baggara herders had become less interested in assimilating Fur livestock owners and tried to prevent migrations of nomadized Fur into the Baggara areas in the rainy season. The Fur reacted by preventing Baggaras moving into their areas in dry season. The Kalashnikovs started to speak. Today the border area between the Beni Helba (a Baggara tribe that used to have close symbiotic relations with the Fur) and Fur is one of the most contested areas.

Since 2003 this conflict has lead to atrocities that are among the worst in Africa. The events that had unfolded since my first visit in 1965 opened my eyes to the importance of globalizing 'loops' in understanding the position of the Baggara pastoralists in Darfur. I had in my early research mainly focused on local level 'loops' and had overlooked the importance of the fact that the Baggara for centuries had participated in ideological and political interaction systems of global scale, interaction systems that had changed over time but always served as a factor in the way the local pastoral "game" was played.

As 'players' in the Darfur 'game' the Baggara are not only positioned with reference to livestock ownership and access to pasture and water resources, but also with reference to sources of support based on their participation in the nationwide Muslim Ansar movement and its affiliated party, the *Umma*. In this complex 'game' the present Muslim Brotherhood supported by the Government of Omar el Bashir has played the dangerous "card" of arming local militias recruited from Arab nomadic groups (including the Baggara). This move has to be understood in the context of the newly discovered oil resources and the international support the Sudan Government gets from China as a counter-prestation for Chinas privileged access to the oil (Haaland, 2006).

The diachronic comparison showed that the ethnic boundary between Fur and Baggara over a 20 years period had changed dramatically with far-reaching consequences for individual change of ethnic identity. Furthermore, people that identified themselves as Fur were not only cultivators, an increasing number of them had for a certain period of their life been labour migrants to the irrigated schemes along the Nile and industrial factories in Khartoum. There they harvested experiences of ethnic interaction boundaries very different from those in Darfur. Assimilation into the dominant Arab groups along the Nile was hardly a realistic option and the ethnic stratification between Arabs and Fur was a dominant experience in Fur migrants' everyday life. The emergence of Fur "clubs" where Fur migrants established a forum for discourse on their position in the larger Sudan society and in particular to the Arab elite.

Another important factor was the increase of Fur with secondary school and university education. One would expect that their command Arab 'culture' would stimulate them to identify with the dominant Central Sudanese Arab elite. Many of them also made that choice, even to the extent of speaking Arabic instead of Fur to their children. Others however chose to articulate and cultivate Fur identity in ways that surprised me on the

background of my early village fieldwork. My interpretation is that this was partly related to the importance of mobilizing Fur support in the national political game, and partly of frustrations experienced in attempts to being assimilated in the commercial and administrative Arab elite in Darfur (Haaland, 1978).

By systematically searching for diversity and variation in cases of ethnic relations, I tried to discover causal and symbolic loops that connected events with significant consequences for the organization of ethnic boundaries and for the distribution of cultural content. As I have tried to show these boundaries varied in space and time, and with that the cultural features distributed among differently positioned people who identify themselves as Fur.

Comparison of variations in Darfur cases led to modifications and elaborations of my understanding of ethnic processes in the region. Apparently, my analysis of the specific Darfur material brought out some general mechanisms that anthropologists working in different ethnographic contexts have found useful. However, over the years after I had done fieldwork in different parts of the world, I have become aware of dimensions of ethnic processes that I had overlooked in my Darfur work because they were not salient there. I shall try to develop this point by discussing how my exposure to comparative cases have affected not only my understanding of ethnic processes generally, but also how it has stimulated me to look back on my Darfur material in new ways. I shall not deal with comparison in a strict sense of comparing 'societies' analogous to anatomists' comparison of organisms, but comparison as source for discovery of different dimensions of the general problem field I am concerned with here, namely the relationship between ethnic identity and distribution of cultural features. Although I here shall focus on the way my comparative reflections were influenced by questions that arose from the different empirical 'worlds' I was confronted with, I was of course also alerted to points that had been articulated in the 'flood' of works on ethnicity that followed the publication of "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries".

5. The Santals of the Indian sub-continent and primordial constructions

> Primordialism *is the affective counterpart of the inherent birth associated nature of axiomatic identities. --- Moreover, primordialism is not a unique feature of translocal identities either; what is unique to them is the difficulty of creating and maintaining such ideas and feelings."* (Obeyesekere 1995:232)

My instrumental bias was challenged when I 1979 did fieldwork in a very different multi-ethnic setting, primarily in Dinajpur of northern Bangladesh, but also with shorter work in Bihar and Orissa in India. This was very different from Darfur; in Dinajpur, Bengali Muslims constituted the overwhelming majority (75%), with a minority of Bengali Hindus (24%) and a small minority called Santal, speaking a language of the Austro-asiatic language family. Given my Darfur experience ethnic relations came to fascinate me, particularly the position of the Santals; they spoke a language unrelated to Bengali; they had their own religious practices, different consumption patterns (including pork); they were recognizable in their dress as well as in their ways of comporting themselves in public space; and they were clearly stigmatized in the larger society by Muslims as well as by Hindus. With my previous experiences from Sudan I started by searching for cases of Santals who had

changed their identity because I thought this would be instrumentally rewarding, but what I found was rather insignificant.

Then I looked for their economic position to explore limitations in access to resources. Yes, they were to a large extent landless wage labourers, sharecroppers or very small landowners, but so were many Muslims and Hindus and these groups avoided the public stigmatization the Santals were exposed to. In fact the Santals did not seem to hide cultural idioms that clearly showed their identity in a social environment where this exposed them to prejudices and certainly was a handicap in court cases, particularly cases involving land transfers.

Since my search for material instrumentality was negative I searched in a different direction, namely symbolic expressions that might foster commitment to Santal identity. This led me into a rich symbolism found in seasonal and life cycle rites; in folk songs, proverbs, stories; in ideas of sacralization of features of the house and the natural landscape; and in origin myths expressing important rules of organizing relations among humans as well as the expressing the Santal vision of the good life. This vision is summed up in their concept *raska* (pleasure); which they experience in festivals, in mixed dancing, and in consumption of rice beer (*handi*). This view contrasts sharply with what is found in Islam as well as in Hinduism.

Conditions (droughts, floods, political harassment, diseases, economic losses) that deprive the Santals of enjoying *raska* lead to *dukh* (suffering). Whatever the objective causes are, the Santals place their experience of suffering in a cosmological framework of *bonga* (spirit) interference. In this cosmology, experiences of daily life are seen as being caused by or having consequences in their supernatural world of *bonga* spirits (Haaland, 1991). A rich corpus of traditions (*hapramko ak dustur*) recited on many ceremonial occasions expresses and indoctrinates the connections between *bonga* spirits and Santal personal identity. The *bonga* cosmology mirrors, in many respects, the social world of the Santals, serving to mark off important social boundaries, as well as to express dilemmas in Santal interpersonal relations. Santal acts that defile (*bhond*) the *bongas* are particularly important because they may pollute social units of different scale from household to kinship groups and local communities. The Santal observations alerted me to how processes internal to Santal communities played an important role fostering individuals' commitment to the kind of personhood implied in Santal identity in the multi-ethnic world Santals inhabit.

The strength of these symbolic expressions is manifested in the fact that today there are probably around 6 – 8 million Santals living in small pockets among different majority people scattered over an enormous area covering Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal in India, several districts in Northern Bangladesh and the eastern lowlands of Nepal. There is no Santal wide organization uniting all the small pockets of Santal households, although networks of kinship and marriage serve as a channel of communication between them.

In order to further grasp the varying ways Santal identities are maintained in these scattered localities, processes internal to Santal communities must also be placed in the context of rules regulating interaction with other ethnic groups. In India caste ideology is the most important factor regulating the Santals interaction with different Hindu castes (*jati*) and from an organizational point of view the Santals fit into the encompassing Hindu society as

a particular *jati*, although their cultural construction of personhood is based on *bonga* cosmology, not Hindu religious ideas. The pressures, particularly from the Arya Samaj movement on the Santals to adopt Hindu ideology and ritual practices are strong, and have in some Santal communities had an impact.

In the Muslim environment of Bangladesh the conversion to Islam was a realistic possibility and in the encompassing Muslim society a convert is definitely a different person from a non-converted Santal. In contrast to the Hindu ideological emphasis on ritual hierarchy, Islam strongly emphasises equality among the believers. Despite this I got the impression that Santals expressed closer affinity with Hindus. Given the politico-economic costs incurred by maintaining Santal identity it was puzzling for me that I found so few Santals who had converted to Islam (one woman had married a Muslim, and one man had embraced Islam and had become a *maulana* after several years studies at an Islamic school). Maintenance of Santal identity in the Bangladeshi Muslim environment indicates that reproduction of ethnic boundaries cannot be satisfactory explained only by focusing on the encompassing society's restrictions on assimilation, it also have to take into consideration the way cultural features fostering active embracement of Santal identity were expressed in sectors of activity (family and ritual) excluding non-Santals.

However the *bonga* ideology and the ritual/ceremonial institutions that played such an important role in fostering commitment to Santal identity is affected by processes of different kinds. With the Santals comparatively weak development of skills and organizational frameworks relevant in competition with other groups in larger national economic and political contexts they definitely has a handicap, particularly in competition for land. With demographic growth an increasing number of Santals are seeking urban employment (e.g. in the Tata steel mills in Jamshedpur in India) or attach themselves as landless labourers to Hindu or Muslim landowners. As Santals are increasingly drawn into the national society, the strategies of the educated Santal elites are of crucial importance for maintenance of ethnic boundaries as well as distribution of cultural features. Various Christian Missions have dominated education among the Santals and have succeeded in converting a substantial number. M. Orans has argued that one of the reasons for acceptance of Christianity among the Santals elite is related to their search for an alternative high tradition comparable to Hinduism and Islam (Orans, 1965). The consequence of the spread of Christianity is that important premises (*bonga* cosmology) in Santal culture is discontinued and replaced by a dramatically different worldview. This cultural change does however not imply that ethnic boundaries between Santals and other ethnic groups are discontinued, although it leads to dramatic differences in cultural traditions (*bonga* cosmology versus Chistianity), a difference that potentially may lead to ethnic differentiation within the Santals. In Bangladesh there is however some evidence for attempts to organise a campaign directed towards reconversion of Christian Santals to *bonga* cosmology.

The salient points that my fieldwork among the Santals brought out was a) primordial attachments don't exist by themselves, but are reproduced in continuous acts of institutionalized ritual communication; b) the institutions of ritual communication changes with changes in the politico-economic context of the interethnic situation; c) politico-economic changes may create a space for articulating alternative 'cultural messages' (e.g. Christianity) that may make cultural premises expressed in so-called primordial attachments less convincing.

6. The Nepalese of South East Asia and symbolic entrepreneurship

> "*--metaphor conceived as a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind. -- Through metaphor we make use of patterns that obtain in our physical experience to organize our more abstract understanding"* (Johnson, 1987: xiv-xv)

My Santal experience had drawn my attention not only to the fact that so-called primordial attachments were reproduced and changed in daily events of cultural constructions. However, I had hardly any observations on the 'cultural constructors' who were most active in such construction processes, and on their search for metaphoric imageries that expressed and fostered ideas of belonging to a particular group. During fieldwork among garment traders in tourist resorts in Southern Thailand I was surprised when I discovered that most of them were Nepalese.

This triggered my curiosity: Why had so many Nepalese ended up as garment traders in a tourist resort in Thailand. To explore this I followed Vayda's advice on progressive contextualization (Vayda 1983) and tried to search for linkages that connected the Nepalese garment traders to other events - outwards in space and backwards in time (Haaland, 2008). From a small survey I found that most of them had not come from Nepal but from the Shan state of Northern Myanmar, and I decided to explore the Myanmar connection and went to Myitchina district. From interviews there I found that the earliest group were Gurkha soldiers from the British Army that had been sent to pacify the Shans and Kachins from the early eighteen eighties and into the twentieth century. Their fighting skills had reduced the local population significantly, but thereby also reduced the land tax revenue to the colonial power.

In order to stimulate economic activities the British actively encouraged settlements of Gurkhas in the Shan State. The Burma District Gazetteer expresses explicitly this concern as it was perceived in the beginning of the twentieth century: "A very large influx of cultivators is still needed in the plains in order to bring the fertile area, now lying uncultivated, under the plough" (Hertz, 1960: 77).

Most of the Nepalese garment traders in Thailand were descendants of Nepalese settlers in Shan State. I wondered about how the Nepalese in Burma had maintained Nepalese identity in the multi-ethnic community of Northern Burma where they were greatly influenced by another and larger culturally closely related immigrant group – Indians. It was Hindi music and songs they listened to, and it was Hindi films they watched. In interviews with people they also explicitly stated that the Nepalese had increasingly been adopting cultural features associated with the Indians. However, about 50 years ago a particular event happened that came to reverse this process of Hindization.

A gifted Nepalese singer, Rocky Thapa, came to play an important role in giving meaning to the value of being Nepalese in the Burmese context. He was the son of a Gurkha soldier and was born in the Shan state. His primary education was at a missionary school. He was interested in music and was a member of a band who performed at various functions. However, in the 1950ies they had very little idea about Nepalese music and culture, so the music and songs were mostly learned from Hindi films and records.

A critical event in his career occurred in 1957 when a function was organized in the Shan state for the visit of the Burmese Prime Minister, U Nu. Many foreign visitors attended the function. The Burma government had invited different ethnic groups of the region to present folk music and dances that would represent their 'culture and tradition'. The Nepalese were also invited and Rocky Thapa and his group presented Hindi film songs and dances as representative of Nepalese culture. After the performance one of the guests, a British major in a Gurkha regiment later spoke to Rocky Thapa and told him that he did not think that what they had performed was representative of Nepalese culture.

Rocky Thapa was shaken by this comment and started to think about what cultural expressions could possibly represent Nepalese culture in Burma. Rocky had never learned Nepalese language properly. Now he started to take classes in Nepalese language and read Nepalese literature. He came to see that his mission in life was to make the Nepalese in Myanmar "shed off" aspects of Hindi culture. His means to accomplish this mission was to write and sing Nepalese songs. In his opinion it took him about 20 years to finally get the Nepalese to accept what he called their traditional music, consisting of songs he himself had written and composed. He considered his mission successful since he found that many people had been deleting their cassettes of Hindi songs by famous Indian singers like Mohammed Rafi and Mukesh, and substituted them by copies of his own songs.

In his songs, Rocky spins webs of significance from items and symbolic patterns sufficiently familiar to the Burma Nepalese, items that he "weaves" into a symbolic pattern emphasising new ways of conceiving the Nepalese's life in Burma as a Diaspora situation. In his songs he actively tries to create a collective memory, or myth, about their place of origin as an ideal home to which he encourages them to return (Haaland, 2010).

As an example of the ethnic symbolism I shall take one of his songs performed on the occasion of a Nepalese minister visiting Burma in 1964.

Phulera Phulyo Jhaka Ra Maka

English Title: *Flowers Have Blossomed, Colourful and Bright*

Marigold has blossomed everywhere with
its golden hue,
How did this flower spread all over this
foreign land?
Seed is ours, how beautiful is this flower,
Let it not disappear in this foreign land.

We will paint the silver Himalayas with golden hue,
Marigold in thousands let us take them with us, keeping them in our hearts,
Let us adorn our mother's body in garlands of marigold.

We, the Nepalese, have our homeland in the lap of the Himalayas
The pure blood of Nepalese run through our body;
This day is ending and the darkness of night has reached this foreign land,
This flower is withering, oh Brother! Let us take it back to our country.

Here Rocky draws on the powerful imagery of the marigold (in Nepalese "*sayapatri*" literally meaning "hundreds of petals"). The marigold with its golden petals is a flower that is closely associated with Nepalese identity in the sense that Nepalese cultivate it in their gardens for use as garlands as well as in the decoration of their houses during the important festivals of *Tihar* (festival of lights) and *Dasain* (Festival of the Goddess *Durga*). In his song Rocky describes it with reference to its golden hue – an attribute associated with gold, i.e. the natural element that par excellence stands for purity. The flower is clearly meant to serve as a marker of Nepalese identity. This associative linkage is developed further in the second line of the song where Rocky raises the question about how the marigold comes to be spread to a land that is foreign to the homeland of the flower. He answers the question by associating the seeds of the marigold with the seeds of the Nepalese people – the reproduction of the marigold depends on the Nepalese tending it, and the reproduction of the Nepalese depend on them being faithful to their Nepalese "culture" (marigold serving as a metonym for Nepalese "culture"). If marigold disappears, Nepalese identity will disappear. The longing for return to the home country is expressed in several metaphors: "painting the silver Himalayas with golden hue, i.e. bringing the seeds of the marigold (Nepalese in Diaspora) back to Nepal; marigold (i.e. Nepalese identity) in the hearts; mother's body (motherland) adorned with marigold (filling Nepal with Diaspora Nepalese)." By using Himalayas as a metonym for the Nepalese homeland, the ideal of being Nepalese is dressed up in a garb of sacred associations with the great civilizations of Hinduism and Buddhism; by talking of the purity of Nepali blood the importance of Nepalese endogamy in relation to other groups in Myanmar is over-communicated, while endogamy within the different Nepalese castes is under-communicated – it is not stated that "different blood" runs in the bodies of members of different Nepalese castes. In the foreign land night has reached, i.e. the restrictions imposed on Nepalese and other foreigners after Ne Win's coup in 1962 caused the marigold to wither and it is time to return to the homeland. However most Nepalese in Burma preferred to migrate to Thailand instead of Nepal. The situation in Burma changed to the worse after Rocky got involved with Aung San Suu Kyi and her "National League for Democracy" (NLD).

She had heard about his popularity among the Nepalese community and was also eager to meet him to ensure the Nepali votes in the election of 1990. Rocky Thapa agreed and mobilized the Nepalese community (300 000) to vote for her. However after Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory in 1990 the Ne Win government started arresting NLD party workers, and Rocky Thapa had to go into hiding. It was after this he visited Nepal for the first time in 1988.

As the short sketch of Rocky's life-story indicates, he was originally rather marginal in the Nepalese community and his embracement of Nepalese identity only became a compelling concern after a British major blamed him for using Indian songs to represent Nepalese culture.

My fragmentary sketch of Rocky's life story is meant to draw attention to the importance of exploring ethnic entrepreneurship – the small events that may trigger consciousness about the importance of identifying with a particular identity, and cultural entrepreneurs' production of expressions fostering commitment to that identity

The small event I started with brought me not only to an individual's artistic creativity, but also to how this had consequences in systems of larger scale involving processes of global

politics (British colonialism, Burmese national politics) and economy (growth of tourist industry in Thailand and the income earning this provided for Nepalese migrants (Haaland, 2008).

Rocky is one of the actors who through his cultural creativity served to create a particular landscape of Nepalese group identity in a particular place, namely Myanmar. This ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1991) is however not spatially bounded, although it is anchored in an imagined diasporic consciousness connecting it to a specific motherland, Nepal. A certain amount of shared cultural understandings are forged between Nepalese particularly with regard to what they have in common in contrast to their Myanmar neighbours.

In terms of Saran's characterization of the main features of Diaspora (history of dispersal, memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for return, support for the homeland, collective identity significantly based on the relationship to the homeland) the Nepalese situation in South-East Asia only share some family resemblance (Saran, 1991: 83-84). The dispersal from Nepal was voluntary and motivated by economic concerns. The memories of the homeland did not have much significance until the politico-economic situation changed in Myanmar and Rocky Thapa started his "memory work" expressed in songs where "the past is at times objectified in different cultural forms such as the land, memorials, material artefats, and bodies" (Litzinger, 1998:264) Alienation from the host-country became important in Myanmar after Ne Win's coup, while this is not so in Thailand.

Desire for eventual return to Nepal was of some importance in Myanmar after King Mahendras' visit in 1970. Support for the homeland among Nepalese in South–east Asia has however been limited. There is no doubt that collective identity defined by relationship to the homeland is of importance for Nepalese spread all over the world as manifested in the networks of Nepalese associations in many countries e.g. the Manchester based "Himalayan Yeti association" and the USA based "Nepali Diaspora and Friends of Nepal for Peace Campaign". Rocky's contribution to the construction of a Nepalese ethnoscape is of relevance for understanding how Nepalese in a particular place (Myanmar) in a particular time period (after 1962) viewed their position in the "landscape" of other ethnic groups and nations. Only there, did it create a vision of an ethnoscape that included additional diaspora features like "the desire to return" and "memories of the homeland" expressed in symbolic forms.

What it means to a member of a particular Nepalese ethnic group varies from the mountain villages of Nepal, to the farms and businesses of Northern Myanmar, to the tourist resorts in Thailand. However, fields of communication are still to a large extent maintained, and thus serve as a channel for mediating discourses about relevant identities in Nepal as well as in various Nepalese settlements in South-east Asia.

7. Minorities in Yunnan China and the context of political economy

> *"The Communist project has been the most explicit and systematic in its process of definition. It has classified the population within China's political borders into fifty-six minzu, or "nationalities," so that every citizen of the People's Republic is defined as belonging to a group that is more civilized or less so. This scaling of groups, in turn, is based on an avowedly*

> *scientific scale of material stages of social process (derived from Morgan and Engels, refined by Lenin and Stalin) that tells each group exactly how far it needs to go to catch up with the civilizers."* (Harell, 1995)

In my attempts to understand the events that arose my curiosity in southern Thailand I discovered 'loops' of meaning as well as causality that fundamentally connected ethnic processes to macro-level state politics. This macro-level impact became blatantly evident when I during the first decade of the 21st century supervised Chinese and Norwegian students doing fieldwork in Yunnan, southwestern China.

How many different ethnic groups there are in Yunnan I do not know. However the Communist Government decided that non-Han Chinese people should be registered as members of specific so-called Nationalities according to Stalin's theory of Nationalities. Stalin defines a Nationality as follows: A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of people, based upon the common possession of four principle attributes, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common special features of national culture (Stalin, 1950: 8).

According to orthodox Marxist theory, the economy constitutes the infra-structure of societies, while the political institutions that maintains the dominant economic class interests constitutes the structure, and the cultural ideologies that legitimate the institutions serving these interests constitute the super-structure. The driving force in social evolution is supposed to be class conflicts emerging in the economic infrastructure. Chairman Mao somewhat contrary to conventional Marxist theory tried to find a shortcut to development by taking control of the political structure and through this force the economic infrastructure to correspond to Marxist theory, a theory that through systematic indoctrination served as an ideology legitimating Communist Party rule. During this time tourism and other service industries were castigated as unproductive.

With the post-Mao reforms from 1976, Chinese reality has in many ways turned Marxism upside down. The economy assumed to be the determining basis of society is largely organized on a capitalist mode of production. The political structure that according to theory should reflect the infrastructure, is still controlled by a party that calls itself the Chinese Communist Party, while the ideological superstructure that during Mao's time claimed to follow Marx conflict theory is increasingly drawing inspiration from Confucian teachings emphasizing harmony between different ethnic groups; between different classes; between men and women; between urban and rural communities. According to Confucian theory such harmony is based on clear perceptions of the proper hierarchical relations between these social categories, e.g. the urban centre above the rural periphery, Han majority nationality above minority nationalities, men above women. The connection between capitalist economy and communist polity is not as contradictory as it seems. Members of the ruling Communist Party are closely involved in the capitalist economy both through their privileged access to privatized public assets, and in the close networks (*guanxi*) connecting Party bureaucrats to capitalist entrepreneurs. However despite these changes in ideological emphasis, there are still some remnants on conventional Marxism manifested in the Government's understanding of and policy towards minority groups.

This can be seen in the concept of Nationality as defined by the Chinese Government. This concept should not be confused with the anthropological concept of ethnic group. Both

concepts relate to cultural difference, but the relation between ethnic identity and cultural traditions is far more complex than what is often assumed.

It is important to recognize that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic groups and cultural contents. The cultural features that are taken into account in ethnic dichotomization are not the sum of 'objective' cultural differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant" (Barth, 1969: 13-14). In anthropology the concept of ethnicity thus refers to peoples self-identification while the concept of nationality in Stalinist theory refers to the Government's concern about administrating a culturally diverse population.

Stalin's program of organizing the different ethnic groups in so-called Nationalities can be seen as a strategy of reducing the possible conflicts between loyalties to the ethnic group and loyalty to the state. The state was ideally supposed to be organized as a confederacy of equal Republics each identified with a specific nationality.

However the territories in China (like most Soviet Republics) also contained smaller ethnic groups. Establishing a Chinese boxes-like hierarchy of encapsulating units solved the problem of reconciling administrative feasibility with ethnic diversity. Multi-ethnic Republics were organized in Autonomous Regions identified with its dominant ethnic group. The Regions might again be sub-divided into smaller Autonomous units such as provinces and districts associated with the ethnic groups that were dominant in these smaller units. The reality of ethnic diversity in China however was more like a mosaic where many ethnic groups were intermingled with each other and spread in often vastly separated localities. This made it impossible to administratively recognize all of them. The most important point is that it was the state that identified and recognized the nationalities. Nationality identification is thus from above. In China the application of Stalin's criteria often led to great discrepancies between peoples self-identification and the Government's definition of the Nationality they belonged to.

By allowing for expression of ethnic identity within the administrative system this solution was intended to diffuse a possible threat to the state, and it allowed for expression of cultural features (language, religion, costumes etc) associated with the recognized Nationalities. Most importantly, autonomous units on different administrative levels were supposed to be represented by their own political leaders. These however had to be approved by the Chinese Government and had as their task to carry out the central policy within their respective administrative units. This administrative system seemed to imply bottom-up channels for articulation of concerns related to ethnic identity. In reality it constituted a very strict top-down control of ethnic loyalties according to the administrative concerns of the political centre.

Furthermore the Chinese Communist government was not only concerned about defining groups that constituted Nationalities, they were also concerned about scaling the Nationalities according to their evolutionary stage. The scaling of Nationalities as being on different levels of socio-cultural evolution was based on Engels' modification of Morgan's theory of stages of human evolution (Engels, 2010). The earliest stage "Savagery" was characterized by hunting-gathering, and by promiscuous mating. Higher up on the evolutionary ladder on transition to Barbary we find an early stage of matrilineality. On

higher levels of Barbary patrilineality emerges. On the highest level of Civilization we have writing, urbanism, advanced division of labour, and family life characterized by patriarchal monogamy.

An important aspect of this theoretical perspective is the assumption that the peripheral minority people today represent stages the civilized people were on in earlier periods. In China the lower ranked peoples are in many publications referred to as living fossils from the past, they illustrate the stages the civilized "society" was at in earlier times..

It is interesting to note that this theory of evolutionary hierarchical levels fits nicely with the Confucian philosophy of a moral hierarchy among people. In this hierarchy the Han majority represents the civilizational centre, while the minorities can be ranked according to how much Confucian civilization they have acquired.

However according to orthodox Marxist evolutionary theory, "ideas of ethnicity and nationalism were part of false consciousness of people who were still in bourgeois, pre-socialist stage of development. Once they understood that history was determined by class struggle, they would see things in terms of class rather than ethnicity, which would gradually fade away. In the meantime, the soviet state would have to see that its institutionalization of ethnicity was not allowed to impede progress toward the triumph of socialism when ethnic attachments would disappear because they had no further relevance" (Maybury-Lewis, 2002: 53).

It is on this background we can understand the importance the Chinese Communist Government attached to scaling of Nationalities. The Communist Party saw as its task to up-lift people placed lower down on the evolutionary ladder. One way of doing this was a policy of affirmative action – allowing lower ranked minority people to have more than one child, and allow minority students applying for admission to Universities to add 25 extra points to their test results. Since a couple could choose to register their child to the nationality of any of their parents, it was a clear advantage for a Han couple to register their child as a minority nationality if one of them had a parent from a minority group. By ethnicity their child would be Han, but by nationality it would be minority nationality.

An important component in affirmative action is promotion of ethno-tourism. The way this is promoted is consistent both with Morgan/Engels evolutionary theory, but also with the Government's strategy of legitimating its rule with reference to its capacity to increase the material welfare of China's population – rural and urban, majority and minorities.

While tourist expansion is clearly shaped by the Government's manipulation of economic conditions that may serve to increase foreign currency earnings and to redistribute wealth from urban to rural minority populations, it is also significantly shaped by the tourist business symbolic manipulation of images of minority people (Tan Chee-beng et al. 2001).

To attract tourists to different groups they have to be represented in ways that evoke the tourists' desires, fantasies and interests. Various agents involved in the tourist trade play up to this by making representations that project minority people as "exotic", "authentic" "ancient", "erotic" etc.

By exploring two cases of representations of minority people in Yunnan Province I shall draw attention to their underlying ideas or fantasies. The first case is the Jinuo Ethnic Park

and illustrates the Chinese Government's cultural policy of representing minority groups with items that fit the evolutionary scaling expressed in the Morgan/Engels theory.

The Jinuo is a small Tibeto-Burmese speaking minority group in Xishuangbanna Dai Prefecturat in Southern Yunnan. It was originally categorised by the Government as being on the first stage of human evolution, and therefore worthy special development efforts (Shieh-chung Hsieh, 1995). One of these efforts was to stimulate tourist industry by construction of an Ethnic Park.

The Park is supposed to represent the cultural evolution of the Jinuo. A central part is a longhouse that is said the Jinuo used to live in during earlier times. The long houses are almost exactly like the long houses of the matrilineal Iroqois Indians of North – East USA where Morgan made his major study and which inspired his evolutionary theory. The Jinuo are cultivators and practice patrilineal descent. Consequently they are classified as being on the evolutionary stage of Barbary. However, since longhouses are found among the matrilineal Iroquois (the proto-type of the upper sub-stage of savagery) this must from a Morgan/Engels perspective be understood as a survival from a time when the Jinuo were on the upper stage of savagery, and that they in the recent past practiced other features, e.g. matrilineality is assumed to characterize societies on that stage. To represent other stages of the evolutionary development of Jinuo, the Partk has constructed objects similar to cultural items ethnographically documented from culture-historically unrelated communities elsewhere, but according to Morgan/Engels' theory classified as being on lower stages of evolution.

Next to the longhouse is constructed an amphitheatre similar to ancient Greek theatres. This strange construction may be understood when seen in the light of Engels' reference to Bachofen's argument that the ancient Greek play-writer Aeschylos in his play Oresteia presents the dramatic conflict between declining mother right and the rising father right that lead to the victory of the latter completing the transition to Barbary in ancient Greece. Earlier stages in Jinuo evolution is represented by cultural features taken from other ethnographic cases assumed to be on lower stages. On the other side of the longhouse we find a remarkable totem pole similar to those found among the Northwest coast Indians in America. Engels mention that totems is a characteristic cultural element of people on the upper stage of Savagery, such as the Northwest coast Indians of America. This totem pillar can thus be interpreted as a reconstruction of the stage the Jinuo were on in earlier times when they presumably lived by fishing. There is no archaeological evidence for such items, but since it is assumed that all societies at specific levels of evolution share a similar bundle of cultural features characteristic of this stage, the evolution of the Jinuo is represented by items copied from cultural inventories found in culture historically unrelated ethnographic and archaeological contexts. In contrast to the "memory work" of Rocky Thapa among the Nepalese in Myanmar, the Jinuo Ethnic Park is an example of "memory work" produced by the state that present a narrative representing the position of the Jinuo within the Chinese state. This narrative is based on a generalized quasi-evolutionary theory consistent with the country's Marxist ideology and serves to repress alternative narratives of the specific historical events that have shaped that position. Litzinger has argued: "If the modernist narrative of the nation's unfolding in history forces people to forget or ignore other ways of telling, seeing, and behaving in the world, then memory is one site where power enacts its violence" (Litzinger, 2000: 70)

The second case is the Na (Mosuo) and exemplifies the lack of correspondance between peoples' self-identification and the Governments administrative classification of nationalities. Most importantly in this context it illustrates the tourist business's commodification of ethnicity.

The Na is a small Tibeto-Burmese speaking ethnic group in Lijiang Naxi Prefecture. The Na who live in Yunnan province are classified as members of the *Naxi* Nationality, while some who live on the Sichuan side are classified as Mongols. Classification of Yunnan Na as Naxi was based on administrative convenience legitimated by Chinese scholars' assumption of culture historical common origin between the Naxi ethnic group and the Na ethnic group, despite the facts that they speak mutually unintelligible languages and practice contrasting principles of descent (The Naxi practising patrilineality and the Na matrilineality). The Naxi Nationality thus includes two ethnic groups the Naxi and the Na. Today many of the Na elite articulates demands for recognition as a separate nationality. The Classification of Sichuan Na as Mongols is apparently a legacy of Kublai Khan's conquest of Yunnan in 1252-1253. The Mongols ruled through an administrative system of local leaders *(tusi)* recognized by the Mongol state. With establishment of a Mongol military colony and inclusion in the administrative system of the Mongol dynasty, the Na on the Sichuan side were classified as Mongols (Harell, 1995) despite identifying themselves as Na.

Descent among the Na is overwhelmingly matrilineal. The basic unit of Na social organization is the *yidu*. This is a family based corporate group having an agricultural estate in the form of land and livestock. Recruitment to the *yidu* is through children borne to its women. Sex between male and female members of the *yidu* is strictly prohibited. Reproduction of the *yidu* thus requires that its women have sex with males of other *yidus*, socalled walking marriage. The male partner *(adzu*) of a girl in a *yidu* does normally not enter through the main door of the house on the ground floor, but climbs through a window in the girl's room on the first floor. The sexual encounter is not secret, but by not entering the main door the importance of the matrilineal descent relations are over–communicated, while the importance of the sexual relation is under-communicated. In the morning the *adzu* is supposed to leave through the window and return to his mother's *yidu*, where he performs the male tasks in the division of labour within his mother's household. While sexual relations are socially regulated, they neither seem to establish any social arrangement with rights and duties of a kind commonly labelled as marriage, nor do they lead to relations that can be considered as social fatherhood, although the Na do recognize men who are the genitors of the children borne to the women of the *yidu*. The *yidu* thus lacks two dyadic relations generally found in family units, namely: Husband – wife relation and father – children relation (Cai Hua, 2001, Wu Yunchuan, 2005).

This kind of male – female relations are clearly strange to most people, and the tourist business makes a lot out of it. In glossy brochures, e.g. "Eastern Girl's Kingdom" romantic pictures of loving girls and boys placed in the beautiful landscape of Lake Lugu clearly play on the contrast to the conventional more strict sexual mores of the Han. These pictures illustrate Stevan Harrell's point about differences in the way the central Han majority and the peripheral minorities are represented in China (Harrell, 1995). Peripheral people are generally (except Mongols, Yuighurs, and Tibetans) represented with pictures of women. The sexual metaphors of erotization and promiscuousness of the peripheral people are very explicit in the books on the *Na* – they have not learned the proper moral rules of the

civilizing centre. Such representations foster an image of minority women as more "ethnic" than the men of the minority group. This contrasts with representations of the Han who are considered the civilizers and pictorially represented primarily by men.

There is here in interesting analogy between women as peripheral in relation to men, and minorities as peripheral in relation to Han. Both women and minorities are subordinate categories that have to be uplifted by the state's civilizing projects – they lend themselves to be conceptualized as being of a similar kind. Minorities are like women, therefore women represents minorities.

Harrell has argued that in terms of Han cultural frameworks both minorities and women are considered to be polluting. Menstruation is considered dirty and dangerous for males like minorities are also considered dirty and dangerous. Women and minorities are similar in the sense that they both have the power to pollute as manifested in the majority population's fear of local food and sanitation. The sexual metaphor is a metaphor for domination – it serves to indoctrinate a hegemonic legitimization for the superiority of the centre Pictures in tourists brochures from the Na clearly play on images that appeal to males' erotic fantasies as well as being consistent with Marxist evolutionary theory according to which the Na can be considered to be on the transition to Barbary since its subsistence is based on primitive cultivation while its members practice sexual relations that seems pretty close to promiscuity.

Expansion of ethno-tourism leads to increasing commodification of culture and ethnicity; "clothes become costumes, and steps become slick moves" (McKhann, 1995: 44), tools and ritual objects become curios; local dances, ceremonies and rituals become performances staged for tourists paying a fee for watching them.

While the tourists are interested in something they think is "authentic", the fact that the tourist industry arrange staged "ethnic" performances inevitably leads the members of ethnic groups participating to understand what the tourists want to see and adopt their performance accordingly. Clearly having learnt to perform for tourists has become part of minority groups' culture in the sense that they have knowledge about how to behave in tourist encounters. This need not imply that they agree on the images projected. It is quite possible to have a backstage where they can comment about and evaluate what takes place in the tourist front stage. Learning new cultural ideas may reduce cultural differences between Han majority and the peripheral minorities. However ethnic boundaries may persist despite such cultural diffusion.

Such reduction of cultural difference may however be against the interests of the tourist business, because it is the "difference" between the minorities and tourists they sell. The tourist business may thus try to make people in "ethnic villages" behave in ways that project ways of life not practiced in daily life any longer. It may seem like a paradox that playing on ethnic differences for profit purposes may run counter to the government's concern about potential political problems that follow if ethnic loyalties are mobilized to challenge loyalty to the Chinese state. In China "People are considered Chinese in perpetuity if they have ever belonged to the Chinese family of nations. ---. Those who have been brought into the orbit of Han civilization cannot leave it, for they have become part of it" (Maybury-Lewis, 2002: 110). Tibetans, Uighurs, and Hui may not entirely agree on this, because they associate themselves with alternative civilizational centres.

8. Reflecting on the Fur in light of comparative experiences

> *"It may be that "ethnicity" is simply a convenient – though in certain respects misleading – rubric under which to group phenomena that, on the one hand, are highly disparate, and, on the other have a great deal in common with phenomena that are not ordinarily subsumed under the rubric of ethnicity"* (Brubaker 2004: 27)

In the comparative cases I discussed different kinds of conditions were most salient in shaping ethnic processes, and this made me pay more attention to them.

In the 1960ies it seemed that economic structure and ecological setting primarily channelled processes on the Fur – Baggara boundary, and this made me focus on instrumental aspects of identity change.

Looking back at my Fur analysis after my Santal fieldwork I became concerned about the kind of solidarities expressed in the Fur symbolic constructions that I had observed without having considered their implications for ethnic processes (Haaland, 1998). Now I was alerted to the qualities in human relations they might express; qualities like trust and solidarity; suspicion and witchcraft; rivalry and murder. Drawing on perspectives from Bateson ideas about communication of qualities in social relations (Bateson, 1975), I tried to argue that the elaborate symbolic imagery constructed around a key symbol called *bora fatta* (white milk - mother's milk) served to foster the quality of solidarity. Solidarity in social relations is a fundamental concern everywhere. Among the Fur this is expressed in development of a rich symbolic language focused on a relation where this quality is taken for granted, namely the mother-child relation. A very convincing metonym for this solidarity is mother's milk (*bora fatta*). The concrete item mother's milk (*bora fatta*) is metaphorically linked to another concrete item, namely millet mixed with water and also called *bora fatta*. The use of millet flour mixed with water on a variety of critical situations in individual and collective life e.g. at circumcision, at rain rituals, at treatment of certain diseases, expresses and foster a precarious solidarity in a wider range of social relations (*May I trust your solidarity like I trust the solidarity of my mother*). Furthermore *bora fatta* (as millet flour mixed with water) is associated with two other items *kira* (millet beer) and *nung* (millet porridge).

The two items, *kira* and *nung*, are related to each other by being produced from the same raw material (millet) by the addition of female labour. They are also related in Fur thinking; and to sell either of them would imply an activity categorized as *ora* (shameful act similar to prostitution). The metaphoric and metonymic associations connected with millet items are convincing when used to signify a quality of solidarity.

Solidarity is the desired state of interpersonal relations, but lingering doubts about this quality in fellow community members is an ever present concern. Such doubt is expressed in ideas and symbols standing for the opposite of solidarity, namely betrayal. This quality is expressed as witchcraft (*kar*). Witchcraft is assumed to work on an unconscious level and it was said that during sleep a black bird would come out from the witch's heart and suck blood from its victims causing diseases. When looking for relations where the quality of witchcraft was suspected I was told that observable manifestation of this quality was behaviour considered unsociable, e.g. not participating as expected on community occasions like beer-work parties. The sanction of being identified as witch (*kar*) is ostracism.

On the conscious level there is another quality that contrasts with solidarity, namely competition, rivalry and enmity. This is expressed in the term *nungi toke* (hot eyes – evil eyes). In its most extreme form competition is manifested in killings. The relation between a killer and the victim's relatives is expressed by the statement that there is blood (*kewa)* between them. Where the *kewa* relation exists, food sharing should not take place. If it does, the mystical sanction is leprosy that is also called *kewa*. Leprosy is understood as caused by having shared porridge or beer with someone who has killed one of the lepers' relatives,, but he may never know when that event took place or who the killer was.

The ideas expressed in the connected symbolism of *bora fatta, kar* and *nungi toké* do not serve to express and foster Fur solidarity in contrast to other groups. The "others" who are a threat are ones neighbours, even ones relatives – it is among them that the suspicion of witchcraft arises, and it is among them that competition is most likely to occur.

While important cultural constructs produce suspicion about solidarity among Fur neighbours, other ideas communicate close connection between the Fur and the Baggara. Most importantly they were both Muslims and different versions of genealogies served to create a symbolic linkage between Fur and Baggara since they connected Fur dynasties to a North African Hilali, Ahmad al-Ma'qur, and his importance in introducing Islam to Darfur. Such a connection is also expressed in the story that the first historical ruler of the Fur Keira dynasty, Suliman Solong was an Arab (*Solong* means Arab in Fur language). While there were clear cultural differences between Fur and Baggara, these differences were reproduced in fora like family life, village ceremonies (rain rituals and circumcision etc). The cultural differences were clear, but they were not a big issue in day-to-day interaction. Symbolic and ritual events did thus not serve to produce a high level of Fur-wide groupness in the 1960ies. My reflections on the Fur and the Santal material supports Brubaker's argument that we should not assume that ethnic categorization implies ethnic group solidarity: "Shifting attention from groups to groupness, and treating groupness as a variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of – and potentially, to account for – phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as constant, enduring, or definitely present. It allows us to treat groupness as something that happens" (Brubaker, 2004: 12)

Later fieldworks in the 1970ies and 1980ies had drawn my attention to how Fur groupness was manifested in events caused by the dynamics of macro-level economic and ecological processes. The importance of macro-level political dynamics was blatantly clear in the China case. Macro-level politics had of course also been an important dimension in Darfur from the colonial time until today, but I had left it unexplored because the micro-level processes of identity change could be understood as an outcome of political, economic and political conditions during my fieldwork. However political changes have occurred over time, from the time of the independent Fur sultanate, to the Ottoman Empire, to British colonial administration (the Anglo-Egyptian condominium) and after independence. These political changes must have had far-reaching impacts on ethnic relations in Darfur.

In China, state policy impact on ethnic processes is blatant and very explicit since it here is based on a clearly formulated (albeit outdated) evolutionary theory. Reflecting back on our contributions in Ethnic groups and Boundaries, Barth some years ago argued ""---we

must start by analyzing the policies of each state by linking these policies to features of the *regime*, that is, the state's policy-making core. We are then able to depict the power represented by the state as a specifiable third player in the boundary construction between groups,----. Different regimes require very different conditions for their perpetuation and have quite different policies towards ethnic categories and movements in the populations they seek to control. Identity management, ethnic community formation, public laws and policies, regime interests and measures, and global processes thus fuse and form a complex field of politics and cultural processes" (Barth, 1994: 20). Like China, European colonial empires were frequently confronted with the problem of administrating culturally and organizationally very heterogeneous populations that inhabited their colonies. The common British solutions was the indirect rule policy of identifying so-called tribes they could administrate through their chiefs, i.e. formalize features of the tribal structure that the British found convenient for their administrative purposes. Hierarchies of 'tribal' rulers were in this system included in the British Empire and had their power sanctioned ultimately from London. This so-called indirect rule masked several important social dimensions: the pre-colonial 'tribal' structures were fluid and power was to some extent based on mobilization of local support. Colonial rule froze 'tribal' boundaries and made the rulers not only dependent on the colonial power, but frequently seeing their interests best served by cooperating with it. The whole problem of classification of people became particularly difficult in areas where the rulers did confront groups with weak institutionalization of leadership. The problem of organizing a socio-cultural heterogeneous population on geographically contiguous areas was often similar to the situation the Chinese faced, and often 'tribal' administrative units came to include culturally rather diverse groups of people, not to mention the many cases where ethnic groups were divided by international borders. The correlation between colonial tribal classification and existing ethnic boundaries was far from perfect, but in some cases this discrepancy over time have been reduced because the people being administrated as 'a tribe' may increasingly identify with and act according to the cultural values of the dominant group within the 'tribe'. Although the British colonialists were also influenced by evolutionary theories of the 19th hundred century they did not use it for ranking purposes as systematically as the Chinese Communist Party did. Ideas of inherent inequality between the rulers and the ruled were however common and then largely based on racist ideas current in Europe at the time.

With the independence of Sudan the political game changed dramatically and with that the importance of ethno-politics on governmental distribution of goods and services, as well as of bureaucratic positions. The final source of power was not any longer in London but had to be based on forces within the country (control of the means of suppression as well as on mobilization of popular support).

The changes I described in Fur-Baggara relations on a regional level have thus to be analyzed with reference to processes on the macro level of national political economy. A major factor in this context is the contrast between the narrow strip of irrigated land and urban centres along the Nile dominated by an Arab commercial and educational elite; and the vast savannah regions like Darfur with a scattered population of animal herders and shifting cultivators the population in the Nile area has thus for centuries participated in a market economy where survival depended on skills in capital management and on the ability to exploit off-farm income-earning opportunities. The riveraine groups also

perceived the advantages of education much earlier than did the farmers in the rainfed savannah areas. As a result, the Nile valley, mainly Arab population was much better prepared, than the Savannah groups to participate in modern developments in the economy as well as in civilian and military services. The population of nomads and shifting cultivators like the Fur of the Sahel-Savannah zone has of course been affected by the developments in the Nile valley, but have to a much lesser extent participated in occupations outside primary production or gained access to the specialized knowledge such participation required. Politically these demographic, economic and cultural contrast gave the Nile valley population a vastly greater influence on national politics and with this distribution of public goods and services. The Darfurians perceived themselves as losers in the national political game, and from the 1960ies voices articulating separation was heard. In 2003 anti-Government forces attacked the airport in El Fasher – the provinsial headquarter of Darfur. The Sudan Government responded by sending in its air force, and by directing its paramilitary units, the so-called Janjaweed and the Muraheleen to fight the insurgents. These paramilitary units were mainly recruited from Arab livestock herders (Baggara cattle herders in southern Darfur and Jumala camel herders in northern Darfur). This linked regional resource competition to national politics giving the Darfurian Arab livestock herders a critical advantage. Furthermore it stimulated formation of alliances between traditional enemies (African groups like Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa) underpinned by symbolic work under-communicating traditional stereotypes of animosity, and over-communicating similarity in opposition to the Arab groups supporting the Government. This could lead to the emergence of a larger regionally based ethnic categorization, but so far the Sudan Government has been very clever in its divide and rule tactics, particularly by attracting local opposition leaders to positions in the Central Government.

The relevance of ethnic identity in Darfur today is therefore very different from what it was 40 years ago. With the changing economic and political conditions, I expect a growth in primordial constructions, although to make them convincing is difficult, because they will have to bridge many different visions current among the regional elites.

9. Conclusion

> *"– there are some brute facts about the world of the twentieth century that any ethnography must confront. Central among these facts is the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity. As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic "projects", the ethno in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond. The landscapes of group identity – the ethnoscapes – around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous."* (Appadurai, 1991: 191)

By focusing on a particular problem field, namely the interconnection between cultural features and ethnic categorization I have tried to argue for the importance of curiosity driven research focused on particular events where ethnicity was "happening". My attempts to understand these "happenings" lead to a search for "loops" that connected the events in linkages of meaning and of causality. In the ethnographically best-documented case of Fur-Baggara relations I tried to establish a hypothesis about underlying general mechanism. In many ways I found this analysis quite satisfactory.

However as I did fieldwork in very different ethnographic settings I was alerted to other conditions channelling ethnic processes and started to wonder whether the processes I had observed in Darfur also were affected by underlying conditions I had not questioned because their impact in the cases of ethnic "happenings" were less conspicuous. My exposure to events in different ethnographic settings led to awareness of different kinds of "loops" that affected the chain of events affecting the way ethnicity was unfolding. I have used this awareness as a source for reflecting back on my Fur material to develop a more nuanced understanding of the processes taking place there. The further development of my understanding of ethnic processes in Darfur shows the importance of accidental observations that a fieldworker in Malinowskian tradition of participant observation may accumulate. The Darwinian "watch and wonder" approach built into the over-ambitious Malinowskian idea of "learning" the culture of the people we study by unstructured observations made while hanging around, drinking beer, occasionally participating in work activities, engaging in ritual activities etc, is therefore an invaluable part of anthropological practice and may lead to observations that significantly alert us to other factors than those we have discovered in our more systematic search for "loops" that connect events that emerge in peoples interaction vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis components in the natural environment.

I have tried to draw on various theoretical and methodological approaches in exploration of a particular empirical problem field, namely ethnicity. I have not advanced any theory about ethnicity but rather explored a set of empirical cases that show enough family resemblances to justify being taken as examples of a the fuzzy category that anthropologists call ethnicity. My first article about Fur nomadization and change of ethnic categorization seemed counter-intuitive to our idea of identity as something deeply anchored in our personality, and not something we change like changing shirts. The importance of my argument was that it focused on the sociological dimension of categorization, and not on how the people subjectively experienced such change in categorization. That such subjective embracement could be a factor in identity change was brought home to me in my work among the Santals. In the Chinese example I discussed the management of public information in publications and other representations in ways directed towards reshaping personal memory among minority groups. This made me aware of how Sudan state level campaigns for prohibition on consumption of local beer, can be seen as a means to suppress memories attached to a fundamental symbol of construction of Fur personhood. Absence of public representation of important symbols of ethnicity should however not be taken to imply that attachment to such identity is absent. The most important context for reproduction of such attachments may in fact be the publicly unobservable fora of family life and other small-scale settings.

The lesson I draw from my attempts to make sense of various dimensions of ethnicity is that we need to improve our conceptualization of the interplay of ethnicity on different interpenetrating levels from the micro-level formation of personhood, to the median level of entrepreneurial formulation of programs for ethnic mobilization, and to the macro-level of state policies and the way governments manipulate public discourse about the rivaling identities of nationalism and ethnicity. A very important research problem today with fundamental practical implications is to study this interplay in modern complex societies like China, India, France, Brazil and USA. Multi-culturalism within the state versus

assimilation to the culture of the dominant ethnic group of the state is a critical issue in public discourse in modern societies. I will particularly draw attention to processes that serve to produce variations in commitment to own identity - the extent to which such commitment is "hard-coded" seems to vary enormously between ethnic groups. I will particularly draw attention to the connection between ethnicity and high religious traditions e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The large-scale international migrations we are experiencing today further complicate this problem field, particularly when it leads to creation of ethnically based and religiously justified international networks of social relations crosscutting national boundaries. In exploring this complex problem field we have to be careful to avoid confusing the categories of ethno-political practice, with our categories of social analysis. The categories of ethno-political discource are part of our data in the sense that they are ethno-political entrepreneurs attempts to invoke ethnic categories in order to evoke ethnic group action. If we confuse the two levels we end up reifying groups by treating them as substantial things in the world, a fallacy that Bourdieu has referred to as "our primary inclination to think of the social world in a substantialist manner" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 228).

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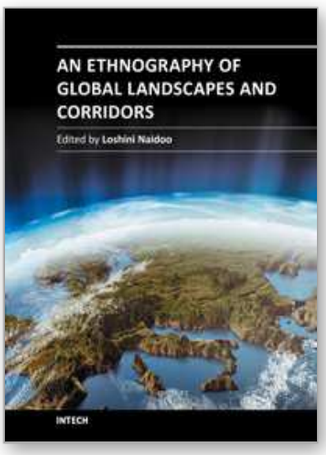
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The chapters presented in this book draw on ethnography as a methodology in a variety of disciplines, including education, management, design, marketing, ecology and scientific contexts, illustrating the value of a qualitative approach to research design. The chapters discuss the use of traditional ethnographic methods, such as immersion, observation and interview, as well as innovative ethnographical methods which have been influenced by the new digital culture. The latter challenges notions of identity, field and traditional culture such that people are able to represent themselves in the research process rather than be represented. New approaches to ethnography also examine the use and implication of images in representation as well as critically examining the role and impact of the researcher in the process.

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