HOPE AND THE STATE IN THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF HOME: PRELIMINARY NOTES

by

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CONTENTS

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The Editors

Back in the 1960s and 1970s the community study was a popular genre among anthropologists, European ethnologists, social historians as well as qualitative sociologists. These studies were often organized in the polarity of macro-micro perspectives, taking the shape of topdog versus underdog. Today, the genre has nearly disappeared from the social sciences and cultural research.

This thematic issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* seeks to re-invent the genre in new forms, employing strategies that avoid a nostalgic "the loss of community" air. The authors collaborating also opted to work in a different format. They conjoined their separate yet parallel investigations into one joint piece, elaborating on the same questions in each section. The discussion thus takes its departure from the presentation of a multi-disciplinary research project on health and welfare in contrasting Swedish communities. The project tackles the analytic potential of community studies through ethnographies of the interface between the nation-state and local communities. How do citizens and local administrators of national welfare systems interact and how are local climates of trust and hope created or threatened?

We have asked four scholars to comment on the presentation of the project from different angles. Gisela Welz discusses the development and demise of the community study tradition and its potentials for revival, with a plea for more comparative and contrasting studies of statecraft.

Stef Jansen takes the concept of hope as his focus, drawing on his studies of displacement of refugees in Bosnia-Herzegovina. What are the tensions between home as a site remembrance and belonging and as a future-oriented project?

Tian Sørhaug's contribution centres on the concept of trust and looks at the new relations emerging between state institutions and local communities in what has been called "the audit society". What happens when communication between welfare institutions and citizens are formalized into sets of indicators and incentives?

Pertti Alasuutari directs attention to the ways in which general systems of governance are domesticated as they are put into local practice. His examples come from an ongoing study of how global trends and frameworks are transformed in different national settings.

Finally, Jonas Frykman, who is the guest editor of this issue, takes the commentaries as a point of departure to suggest avenues for developing local ethnographies of the dynamic and often surprising ways in which the state and a local community interact. "Is the world becoming more global, national or local?" is a question often posed today. The answer is of course: "Yes". There are intertwined processes of cultural globalization, nationalization and localization going on and to understand these dynamics we need research situated at different levels as well as comparative and contrasting research approaches.

HOPE AND THE STATE IN THE ANTHRO-POLOGY OF HOME: PRELIMINARY NOTES

Stef Jansen

In this short comment I relate the core text in this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* to some central themes from my own research on everyday experiences of post-Yugoslav transformations of home. Arguing for the need to complement the focus on spatiality in the study of home with an eye on temporality, I offer some thoughts on the interplay of place, hope and the state in a critical anthropology of home-making.

Keywords: hope, home, state, place, time

The study at the centre of this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* aims to contribute not only to the analysis of the "welfare state" in Sweden and beyond, but also – as befits a discussion article in this journal – to the ongoing redefinition of European ethnology. I find the text inspiring on both counts. Through a comparative analysis of the workings of the state, the study sheds light on a number of themes that have emerged as central to my own research on everyday experiences of post-Yugoslav transformations of home. Here I offer some thoughts on the interplay of three of its dimensions: place, hope and the state.

The Place of Home – the Time of Home

Let me first situate my interests in place, hope and the state in my trajectory as a social anthropologist. Since 1996 I have worked on a series of research projects in three of the post-Yugoslav states (Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina) that, with hindsight, can be grouped as anthropological studies of home. In particular, I was interested in how the mak-

ing of home intersected with the making of nations and that of places – and I attempted to understand what kind of persons emerged from those processes. In one project, focusing on the home-making practices of people with different national backgrounds who had been internally or externally displaced by the 1990s war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I was struck by an incongruence between my findings and much of the existing literature on home amongst refugees. To summarise and simplify: this work – which, of course, I industriously surveyed – tends to privilege the spatial dimensions of home over its temporal ones, and *therefore* past over future.

What precisely do I mean by this? Surely, a focus on the location of home is unsurprising in studies of people who have fled war conditions – after all, we say they are dis*placed*, not dis*timed*. Indeed, my investigations of everyday practices of home-making amongst displaced people confirmed what few anthropologists with any ethnographic experience could doubt: that place matters. For me, as for

the authors of the key text in this issue, "the only reasonable question was thus not about *whether* place had any significance, but rather *how* it had an effect." And, with them, I am careful to add that this does not imply a culturalist approach to place, where a combination of sedentarist and functionalist assumptions lead us to reduce "communities" to organic, bounded entities rooted in particular territories.

But this is precisely where the trouble arose in my study of home amongst those who fled their pre-war places of residence in Bosnia-Herzegovina. If one demarcates one's object of analysis through the notion of displacement, then place automatically takes centre stage. Yet I felt an increasing discomfort with the degree of self-evidence with which the majority of refugee studies and policies represent the relation between home and place as the alpha and omega of our understandings about the lives of the displaced. Representations of people being physically and metaphorically uprooted, I found, often rest on an image of an umbilical cord (which can usually be understood as a version of "culture") that irrevocably ties them to a particular place. Their predicament can then be summarised as the violent cutting of that cord, and the most important remedy for that predicament would therefore lie in repairing it as much and as soon as possible. This, above all, is where the yearnings of refugees themselves enter the picture: more than anything else, we are told, they want to return. Now, of course my research too found widespread yearnings for return, and ignoring this would be both ethnographically dishonest and politically irresponsible in view of the struggles for justice and restitution by refugees across the world (Jansen & Löfving 2008).

However, while there is undoubtedly much explanatory power in the umbilical cord image, my research confronted me with much in the lives of displaced persons that cannot be grasped by it, especially when shifting the focus from verbal statements to actual practices. I am investigating this question in a series of texts (e.g. Jansen 2006, 2008a, 2008b and forthcoming), but I shall only mention some contradictions here to illustrate my point. What, for

example, do cultural umbilical cords to places tell me about the fact that so many internally and externally displaced Bosnians expressed deep yearnings for the home they had lost, yet remained reluctant to return for anything more than a short visit? How do they help me to even start to understand that, five years after the war, the key consideration amongst potential returnees – and thus, ultimately, the key reason for people *not* to return – did not revolve simply around safety but was most often summarised in the phrase "*nema perspektiva*" ("there are no prospects")? Indeed, how was I to understand that some of the highest rates of return in Bosnia-Herzegovina are recorded in municipalities that have seen some of the most brutal violence during the 1990s war and that are therefore associated with extremely traumatic memories? Finally, what explanatory room for manoeuvre do cultural umbilical cords offer an ethnographer who, alongside displacement, also wishes to take into account the *lack* of movement amongst many people caught up in the postwar, postsocialist transformations of Bosnia-Herzegovina? Can they help us understand overwhelming experiences of confinement and entrapment, of precariousness and abandonment?

Confronted with phenomena that I felt were insufficiently grasped by most existing frameworks in studies of home and place, I attempted to develop an approach to home that did not automatically privilege memory of place. While this may have come as a counter-intuitive move in the wider study of home and place – particularly with regard to violence – my ethnography forced me to take into account the future as much as the past. Different engagements with futures – related to place, to generation, to political and socioeconomic transformation etc. – thus came to occupy a central position in my work. In this way I attempted to reflect the fact that displaced persons are not only *displaced* but *persons* too … Moreover, picking up on a phrase I coined earlier, many of the people I worked with were not only displaced persons, but, for all intents and purposes, they were actually dis*timed* too. Namely, their location had been overhauled in both spatial *and* temporal ways: the shock of the 1990s had uprooted them from their

pre-war place of residence but it had also disrupted their relationship to past, present and future – to their habitual experiences of time itself.

I thus embarked on an investigation of the conditions in which certain people came to see certain makings of home in certain places as more feasible than others. In addition to the logic of the cultural umbilical cord, my research pushed me to take the transformative dimensions of home-making as a social project seriously. It is in the context of these attempts to develop a critical, dynamic anthropology of home that my interest in place became increasingly intertwined with the two other dimensions that I also found to be central in the key text in this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*: hope and the state. Firstly, if I wanted to consider home-making as a social project, I needed to complement the attention paid in existing literature to a desire for return (i.e. backward yearning) with a grasp of home-making as a future-oriented practice (*pro-ject*: "to throw forward"). Secondly, such efforts were not individual efforts occurring in a political-economic vacuum, removed from the transforming materialities of statecraft. I now briefly address both of those points in turn.

Home and Hope

"Ethnologists", the authors of the key text in this issue remark, "seem to have turned their gaze away from the local as a functioning community. It has become a place of narratives, commemorative research and preservation." This image is, of course, central to some of the stereotypes of European ethnology cherished by some social anthropologists – and as the authors here point out, this is not entirely without grounds. Yet an increasing acknowledgement is emerging that the privileging of the past over the future is a widespread tendency in anthropology more broadly. Indeed, in my search for an anthropological toolbox to grapple with people's engagements with futures, I found that anthropologists far more experienced and talented than I shared my sense that our discipline needs to try harder to understand people's yearnings for possible futures and their relative capacity to create them (e.g. Appadurai 2004; Guyer 2007; Malkki 2001). While religious and magical

dealings with futures have attracted considerable attention, more secular everyday forms of yearning and planning seem to remain understudied, particularly if they cannot be understood straightforwardly as part of cultural idioms. This is where the notion of hope entered the orbit of my investigations: How do different people struggle to imagine and make futures? What can anthropological studies tell us about those engagements with futures, both positively (e.g. expectation, planning, aspiration) and negatively (e.g. despair, worries, cynicism)?

My search for conceptual tools to understand the future-oriented practices of home-making amongst displaced persons in and from Bosnia-Herzegovina (see especially Jansen 2008a, 2008b) took me in different directions. To the work of Tim Allen and David Turton (1996), for example, who conceptualised the movement of Mursi people in North East Africa as "a search of cool ground": a sustained effort to find a place characterised by relative security where one can start a project towards a better future. Spurred by my co-editor and co-author Staffan Löfving, whose own work traces, amongst other things, the shift amongst Guatemalan revolutionaries from movement-as-politics to movement-as-migration (Löfving 2008), I came to think of this "cool ground" through Zygmunt Bauman's work on *(Un)Sicherheit* in late capitalist Western politics (1999). Staffan also sent me a text by Ghassan Hage on Lebanese migrants in Sydney (1997).

Before that, Hage's work on entrapment, hope and white Australian nationalism – prominent in the key text in this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* too – had already struck a strong Bourdieusian chord in me. Yet it was his 1997 chapter that most directly spoke to what Staffan Löfving and I were attempting to do in our edited volume *Struggles for Home*. In terms of my own research on home amongst displaced people in and from Bosnia-Herzegovina, it resonated with my efforts to adequately take on future-oriented dimensions. Hage (1997) conceptualises the social practice of home-making around four parameters: security, familiarity, community and sense of possibility. It is the last of those four in particular that we wished to push further: home, then, cannot be

conceptualised simply in terms of what it already contains, merely as a physical or even social shelter, but it also provides a window on the future. Hage's notion of home as an ideal that can only ever be approximated allowed this emphasis on the future dimension of home-making, on opportunities for change, improvement, and the unexpected. Studying home, then, also requires an eye for a sense of possibility or the relative lack of it, for planning and dreaming, as well as the experience of entrapment and disengagement. Rather than reducing "home" retrospectively to a remembered site of *be*longing, Staffan Löfving and I argue in *Struggles for Home*, we can and should also analyse it prospectively as a socially constituted object of longing.

To me, a central critical contribution of inserting hope into the discussion of home, of emphasising longing within belonging, lies in the fact that it brings a temporal dimension into a discussion about place. As the brief intimations of my research above show, this dimension was actually always already there – even if it took me some time to realise it. To practically engage in a feasible home-making project with regard to a particular place, I found, required an ability to invest it with at least some dimensions of a future, with some hope. Let me illustrate this with a phenomenon I came across amongst many Bosnian refugees in the Netherlands. Initially, they told me, they had "*lived only* to return". They had been in suspension, waiting for the war to end and to move back to their previous place of residence. The institutions of the global regime of refuge – with its reception centres and asylum procedures – had encouraged this through its policies of provision and subjectification, all based on non-permanence and suspension. Yet despite their anticipation, few actually returned when the opportunity arose, even amongst those who had no fears for their safety because their pre-war place of residence was now controlled by political authorities of the national group they were associated with. Interestingly, the breaking point between desire for return and actual decision against return often came with their first visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina. "Everything had changed", people told me, "there was nothing left of what I re-

membered." It was when they were confronted with actual post-war everyday practice in the *place* they had once called home, that they realised the *time* lag that now separated them from it.

I thus learned that my discussion of the location of home needed to heed that temporal dimension, especially when we consider that places – in the post-Yugoslav context and well beyond it – are widely categorised in temporal terms as well. It is not simply that places are seen, in ordinary parlance as well as in high-level geopolitical decision-making, as "behind" or "ahead". There is also a tendency to rank places according to movement through time. All this shapes the configuration in which we must understand people's decisions on the location of their home-making projects (Jansen 2009). It is not uncommon, for example, for Bosnians – both refugees abroad and current inhabitants who seek to leave – to exclaim that they would dearly wish to make a home in Bosnia-Herzegovina, if only they could sense things were getting better there. Or, an English idiom: if they could feel that *the place was going somewhere*. For a place to become home (again), then, required a sense of hope.

Hope, Temporality, and the State

Such a pattern of differential formations of hope embedded in places is, of course, precisely what emerges from the comparative analysis of two Swedish regions in the key text of this issue. The authors' engagement with hope – shaped at least partly by what seems a phenomenological approach – fruitfully links it to trust, and thus to social capital. While their argument is inspired by Hage's work, and through him by that of Bourdieu, it also displays some striking similarities with Appadurai's call to conceive of people's "capacity to aspire" as a cultural capacity (2004).

How else has hope been conceptualised? Even if we leave aside the abundant writings by Christian theologians, some rather varied directions are on offer. Ernst Bloch's (1959) philosophical take on hope, for example, is ultimately grounded in a teleological belief in the "not-yet" of liberation: all hopes to him are a forward dawning of what he calls the "real"

utopia of a communist classless society. His colleague Richard Rorty (1999) builds his pragmatist concept of social hope on a desire for movement towards deeper and better (US) democracy. Amongst anthropologists, Vincent Crapanzano's liberal-humanist alternative shifts the focus to individuals and their "imaginative horizons" (2004), whereas Hirokazu Miyazaki approaches hope as a methodological problem for knowledge practices, including anthropology (2004). Despite their obvious differences, all these conceptualisations of hope share a concern with temporality, and particularly with its forward dimensions.

As such, they have inspired my forays into the study of people's engagement with futures in the post-Yugoslav states – attempts further inspired by the collaborative efforts of a group of colleagues (see Gilbert et al. 2008).[1] Let me state upfront what my particular interest in hope is *not* about: it is neither Obama-esque nor messianic. It is neither about earthly redemption through voluntaristic faith in human agency (Yes we can!), nor is it about heavenly salvation through steadfast faith in the divine (perhaps: Yes, He can!). I do not use the term hope in an attempt to give my anthropological investigations an injection of optimism, even if God, and probably the new US president too, know that people in the post-Yugoslav states could do with that. Instead, based on my ethnographic realisation that an understanding of belonging should take into account the role of longing, my deployment of the notion of hope is meant to bring in a sense of futurity.

My anthropological focus on hope thus aims to highlight a temporal dimension in a discussion of spatiality/locality – it traces the workings of time in place. Let me relate this back to the key text in this issue of *Ethnologia Europaea*. To a degree, the authors do conceptualise hope as optimism (confidence, they may call it). Yet, it seems to me, they are careful to avoid conflating confident forward-leaning with calculating entrepreneurship. At the same time, calling attention to "what people expect from the future and their encounter with institutions, rather than what they reflexively acquire in terms of local culture", their material does not, in my view,

suggest that people in Småland had hope, whereas those in Jämtland did not. Rather, expectations in those two regions were differently structured in the future-oriented practice of social relations: people there *did* hope in different ways. The authors then trace these contrasting engagements with possibility (and hence with the future) through engagements with the functioning of the welfare state.

I find this a productive move. "Community studies" in European ethnology have, of course, tended to ignore the state, while simultaneously making it omnipresent as a modernising, centralising, homogenising colossus threatening to kill the "local communities" that such studies were painstakingly trying to save. The key text in this issue confirms my conviction that ethnographic research is in fact well-placed to provide a critical and sophisticated perspective on the everyday workings of the state. One of the dimensions, that resonates most with my own research, is the value of focusing on the *in-between* – on the interfaces between "the state" and "its citizens". I have found inspiration for this in a growing body of literature on "state effects" (e.g. Mitchell 1999). Rather than taking for granted that the anthropology of the state implies studying government institutions per se, or rather than pondering what precisely the "stateness" of the state consists of, this work provides analytical tools that allow us to understand statecraft. It provides a window on the ways in which (and the degrees to which) "the state" materialises in people's everyday lives. I personally prefer to take the term "materialising" rather literally here: in my recent, still unpublished work I am focussing, amongst other things, on grids of provision, city transport and borders as state effects, as material objects of statecraft that make spaces into practiced places.

From here, it is not a large step to integrate hope – as socially structured engagements with possible futures – in the analysis. Rather than privileging the "controlling" aspects of statecraft (and people's resistance to this), recent developments in anthropology promise clearer analyses of people's often paradoxical engagements with the state. Oppressed, normalised and disciplined by state practices, peo-

ple may *also* desire the state, appeal to it – and in that way, continually call it into existence. Working amongst Mexican peasants, Monique Nuijten (2003) found the state to be a "hope-generating machine": it is the hope invested in it by people that gives some coherence to myriads of state practices. Such work brings hope and statecraft together in one analytical approach that allows us to grasp the gap between people's belief that "the state" *should* protect, provide and care, and their disappointment when it actually acts remote and uninterested and does not fulfil those obligations.

A focus on hope in the post-Yugoslav context, where recent wars and postsocialist transformations produce especially sharp paradoxes, shows that the state is met with both fear and awe, with both distancing and desire. My research suggests that a particularly tangible entry to study this lies in the widespread *resentment* in relation to the state, both about what it has done and about what is has failed to do. The most interesting line of analysis, perhaps, lies in the very contradictions that run through such experiences: cynicism and hope, detachment and investment, rejection and appeal. Distancing themselves from the state *and* evoking its hope-generating capacity (even if through resentment), people continually call it into existence and constitute themselves as state subjects.

What is the place of longing in belonging? What is the place of hope in home? How does the material practice of social relations amongst people in different socio-historical contexts engage with futures? How is hope structured in relation to statecraft? To me, the most interesting questions that emerge from the engineered collision of the post-Yugoslav South East and the Scandinavian North West of Europe in this short text, concern the social life of emplaced temporality.

Notes

1 Discussions materialised in two workshops *Towards an Anthropology of Hope? Comparative post-Yugoslav Ethnographies*, held at the University of Manchester (November 2007, funded by the Wenner Gren foundation and the British Academy) and *Critical Spaces*

of Hope: Locating Postsocialism and the Future in the post-Yugoslav Anthropology, held at the Centre for East European and Russian/Eurasian Studies, University of Chicago (October 2008, funded by ACLS and the University of Chicago). Co-organised by Andrew Gilbert, Jessica Greenberg, Elissa Helms and myself, there were contributions by Pamela Ballinger, Ildiko Erdei, Daniel Hammer, Azra Hromadžić, Emira Ibrahimpašić, Larisa Jašarević, Carolin Leutloff Grandits, Slobodan Naumović, Monika Palmberger, Sanja Potkonjak, Maple Razsa, Michaela Schäuble, Marina Simić, Nevena Škrbić Alempijević, Anders Stefansson, Larissa Vetters and Marko Živković. Expert discussion was provided by Gerald Creed, Susan Gal, Robert Hayden, Alaina Lemon, Frances Pine and Katherine Verdery.

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