



Fostering Engaged and Responsible Scholarship: Global Scope, Local Relevance and Public Engagement

Sten Hagberg | Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Director of Forum for Africa Studies, Uppsala University

Jörgen Hellman | Associate Professor of Social Anthropology, School of Global Studies University of Gothenburg

Introduction

The launching of this inaugural issue of the journal *kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology* marks both historical continuity and future-oriented innovation. The journal is for sure a *nouveau-né* in the family of publications of Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography (*Geografiska Annaler*, Series A, and *Geografiska Annaler*, Series B, and *Ymer*), as well as in the anthropological scholarly publications in Sweden and internationally. At the same time, *kritisk etnografi* draws on 145 years history of SSAG, a scholarly association founded in 1873, in the time of European exploration and expansion, that took its current name combining anthropology and geography in 1877. The long and sometimes problematic past of SSAG constitutes an entry-point and challenge for *kritisk etnografi* – the journal does not just build on the past but it aims to foster critical regards on anthropological scholarship and its historical trajectories. In present days, when ethnography is claimed by so many scholars and disciplines outside of anthropology the critical historical perspectives are badly needed. In *kritisk etnografi*, we seek to situate and examine ethnography as historically grounded scholarly practice and reflect upon what it stands for today in its multifarious shapes and articulations. Yet, the discipline of anthropology is not the same as it was at the time of SSAG's foundation; the continuity is institutional rather than thematic, structural rather than processual.

The inaugural issue of *kritisk etnografi* is largely composed of articles emanating from the 2016 Vega Symposium when Didier Fassin – James D. Wolfensohn Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study Princeton, USA – was awarded the SSAG's Medal in Gold. The theme of the Symposium was “The Public Presence of Anthropology”. It aimed to address the public relevance and importance of anthropology, as well as, the complex issues raised by the interactions with publics. In this introductory note, we delineate some guiding ideas of *kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology*, and seek to show how the public presence is a central aspect of critical ethnography.

Scope and relevance

The journal aims to promote critical ethnographic voices and perspectives of the current global situation: unprecedented global flows of people and things; global connectedness and instant communication; escalating political and social tensions; growing forms of authoritarian backlashes undermining fundamental democratic achievements; and, at the same time, new social and cultural processes of multiculturalism, global development, social change and popular protest. The journal seeks to capture societal transformations and global change from multiple ethnographic voices and perspectives. It also wants to promote new forms of societal and cultural engagements, critical reflections on the craft of ethnography, and collaborative joint-authorships.

First, *kritisk etnografi* will have a global geographic scope. Articles may be about any place in the world addressing situated issues, conflicts and engagements. It reflects the need for a critical ethnography on how entities such as the global and the local are constituted, formed, compartmentalised and interrelated through social, political, economic and cultural processes. The notion of critical ethnography incorporates reflexive inquiry into its methodology, implying that the individual researcher is intrinsically linked to those being studied and thus inseparable from their context.

Secondly, *kritisk etnografi* will promote inter-disciplinary approaches. Anthropology covers all aspects of human life, and has always been inspired by ideas from other disciplines, such as sociology, linguistics, philosophy, and political science, resulting in a myriad of sub-disciplines, such as, psychological anthropology, medical anthropology, political anthropology, economic anthropology, and gender anthropology, to name but a few.

Thirdly, *kritisk etnografi* will aim to promote new forms of public engagement beyond the academia. As a matter of fact, contemporary anthropologists increasingly experiment with various forms of engagement. The journal will support the “engaged” and “public” aspects of the discipline to increase the anthropological presence in the current public debates. Such engagements favour collaborative, joint-authorships, e.g. between junior and senior scholars, between scholars from the global North and South, scholars and activists, scholars and professionals.

The historical legacy of SSAG represents an important asset; the Society stands for stability, recognition and tradition, coupled with openness, engagement and curiosity. Continuing the tradition of SSAG to work in close cooperation with other organisations, the journal has good working relations with Swedish Anthropological Association (SANT), and will therefore offer a particularly lively and engaging window of what is going on in, and through Swedish anthropology today, without being limited to Sweden.

The name *kritisk etnografi* (‘critical ethnography’ in Swedish) signals a focus on ethnography and the ways in which ethnography is conducted, invented and transformed. Swedish anthropology and the SSAG have a longstanding tradition of promoting ethnographic fieldwork as a basis for the discipline. Moreover, the name aims to promote critical reflections on the craft and practice of ethnography itself. Today when so many disciplines and scholars do ethnography the forms and shapes of ethnographic work should be subjected to scrutiny and debate. The Swedish name signals that the journal takes as its point of departure the Swedish-based academic anthropology and its many outlooks to the world. The country has well-established and respected anthropological traditions but

nowadays it lacks a journal through which what happens in and in relation to Swedish anthropology is known.

The purpose is to develop solid, responsible and engaged scholarship of high standard that may complement mainstream international anthropological journals in terms of ethnographic practice, societal engagement, and disciplinary exploration in a truly global endeavour. The setup of close organisational links and well-established networks to anthropologists across the world offer a way of providing voices from the world through the networks of scholars and universities in a country in Northern Europe. Today, Swedish Anthropologists have special relationships with many relatively unknown academic traditions, in countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, Indonesia, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Bolivia, Colombia, India, Malaysia, China, and Japan.

Hence, while being based in Swedish anthropology, *kritisk etnografi* provides a venue for anthropological voices from both “global South” and “global North” to be heard in the academic community and in public debate. The uniquely “Swedish perspective” of the journal is grounded in the Swedish tradition of international engagement in conflict resolution, humanitarian aid, generous state development budget (through Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida), various NGOs, and solidarity in refugee politics and policies. This twentieth century Swedish legacy has resulted also in rich international networks that Swedish anthropologists maintain with colleagues, students, and other actors, not the least in the “global South”.

The instant online publication of the journal without any restrictions whatsoever is a concrete way to make ethnographic voices heard well beyond the discipline. In this vein, the journal seeks to strengthen anthropological voices in, and about, current public debates on cultural differences and similarities that sometimes too easily sway into the field of xenophobia and racism, and, at the same time, discuss the methodological, ethical, and epistemological problems of this engagement as particular forms of critical ethnography.

Swedish-ness, Language and Public Presence

One ambition is to situate debates and discussions, perspectives and practices from different vantage points. The “Swedish-ness” is not a return to nationalist sentiments but a way to encourage perspectives on society and culture in interaction with the Swedish anthropological community. We aim to reach out to all anthropologists, scholars, and practitioners in adjoining fields, particularly those interested in ethnographically grounded research that offers alternatives to the contemporary international Anglo-Saxon mainstream. We use English, as a major international language, in order to reach as wide international audience as possible. Yet in each issue, there will be a section with reports and news from the Swedish anthropological community. In this inaugural issue, we publish all abstracts of PhD dissertations in cultural and social anthropology defended at Swedish universities since 2016.

The inaugural issue of *kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology* publishes three articles presented at the Vega Symposium on 20 April 2016 on the theme The Public Presence of Anthropology, and one article on Swedish anthropology. The symposium highlighted the work of Professor Didier Fassin. From a basis in medical anthropology, Professor Fassin has developed his research towards a broad humanitarian anthropology – sometimes called “a critical moral anthropology” – focusing on marginalised and vulnerable groups, and the

public institutions that contribute to make them vulnerable. He has highlighted humanity and state machineries in a way that also connects to Swedish public debate, and is likely to serve as a source of inspiration for Swedish anthropologists.

The work of Fassin ties nicely into the foundational ideas of *kritisk etnografi*. The research he presented on the Vega Symposium suggests a critical approach to the public presence of anthropology. The article highlights the afterlife of ethnography, when research results have been published and, at best, discussed in the public. But, Fassin recognises, “[g]oing public [...] means taking some risk”. Such risks both involve unpleasant moments when those who feel threatened by the anthropologists who speak truth to power try to delegitimise the researcher, discredit the work, block the career, prosecute them, or prevent the continuation of research, and more subtle and ambivalent forms, such as the compromises accepted, when the researchers become the official expert for public authorities or private corporations.

The Vega Symposium also included other eminent scholars. Professor Margaret Lock presented her work on protean biologies. In her article, Lock points out that “[t]he human genome is no longer recognised as the origin of life but, rather, as ‘reactive’ to environments external and internal to the body”. Moreover, the genome is inherently unstable, meaning that “the very ‘nature’ of what it is to be human is being revised on the basis of accumulating knowledge brought to light when mapping the human genome, with enormous consequences for reflecting upon and understanding ourselves”.

Another speaker was Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen who talked on being irrelevant in the relevant way. Eriksen claims that universities must find new ways of being irrelevant, and “the subversive, engaged, open, imaginative and knowledgeable perspectives represented by anthropology when it is at its best, are needed more than ever”.

A fourth speaker was invited to the Vega Symposium: Professor Saba Mahmood. Yet she had to cancel due to illness. Her announced presentation – *Anthropology for Embattled Times: How Can We Live Differently?* – would have fitted nicely with the other three papers. Her spirit informed the 2016 Vega Symposium. Sadly, Professor Mahmood passed away on 10 March 2018.

In a very personal, reflective article, Professor Ulf Hannerz writes about past and present of Swedish anthropology, in what he terms “an assemblage of recollections, opinions and attempted overview”. Hannerz outlines a public anthropology for Swedes. First, it is a matter of good citizenship – offering knowledge and insights which people outside anthropology may find valuable. Second, not doing it is living dangerously. “If we do not tell the wider public what we do, it will not know, or (perhaps even worse) mistakenly believe it knows what we do – like still studying mostly ‘primitives’”. Hannerz calls for a public anthropology that also involves writing in Swedish and engagement with the media.

What's next?

The journal *kritisk etnografi* – *Swedish Journal of Anthropology* will be published with two issues per year, instantly available online and accessible to the large public. Next issue will gather papers on Municipal Ethnography, bringing together anthropological research on political practice and democratic culture in municipalities and districts across the world. Upcoming issues will touch upon health and wellbeing, and political moralities. Furthermore, reports on ongoing projects and programmes in Swedish anthropology will be published on a regular basis. The 2019 Vega Symposium will award another leading anthropologist, leading

to an issue of *kritisk etnografi*. Plans are underway, themes pondered upon, and a Swedish public anthropology is emerging.

So, dear readers, welcome to *kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology*. Enjoy the reading! Engage with the articles! And, share it!