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"Studying Townspeople, Studying Foreign Correspondents: Experiences of Two Approaches To Africa". Ulf Hannertz

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STUDYING TOWNSPEOPLE, STUDYING FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS: EXPERIENCES OF TWO APPROACHES TO AFRICA

Ulf Hannerz

(Stockholm / Schweden)

Let me tell you first about a young man known as "Limited" – or at least he was a young man when I made his acquaintance almost twenty-five years ago. You might think that "Limited" would be a rather undesirable nickname for a lively, bright and attractive youth, but in this case it was not. For he lived in a town in central Nigeria which had developed, in the colonial era, around a railway junction, and the railway remained a central source of its livelihood as well as its imagination when I was there for several periods in the 1970s and 1980s. In this railway town, then, people were well aware that the "Limited" trains were the quickest ones, which did not stop in too many places. And thus "Limited" was rather a flattering nickname; not least was the high-speed imagery appropriate for someone who was well-known in the town as one of its best football players. When he walked down the street, young children would come running up to him, shouting his nickname.

"Limited", whose real name is not important here, was a Tiv, thus a member of an important middle Nigerian ethnic group, and one made famous among anthropologists everywhere through the many publications of Laura and Paul Bohannan.[1] The town he lived in, however, was not in traditional Tiv country. Its name is Kafanchan, and through much of its history, around seventy years by now, it has been in large part a migrants' town. After the railway had arrived, and a British District Officer had also established himself conveniently close to the new center, a small Hausa emirate which had exercised some rather uncertain power over the variety of non-Hausa, generally non-Muslim peoples of the area soon moved its court to the outskirts of the town. But for several decades the town was populated mostly by new-

comers from other parts of Nigeria: Ibo, Hausa, Yoruba, Tiv, Nupe, and some variety of others. And apart from the railway yard, Kafanchan had mostly what thousands of African towns would now have – a bank and a post office; a lively car park from which taxis and vans would leave for nearby villages or more distant towns; a couple of petrol stations; a largish market place; some variety of churches and mosques; a handful of schools; a fair number of drinking places; alternatingly muddy or dusty streets, depending on season; and a mixture of one- and two-storey houses.

Townspeople's horizons

I had had a first brief glimpse of Kafanchan during a previous journey in Nigeria, in the early 1960s, when my train remained for an hour at its strikingly lively railway station – a town with an exotic name which seemed to stand in the middle of nowhere, on the grayish-green savanna. Then I had found Kafanchan portrayed, as it had been in a somewhat earlier phase in its history, in a novel by one of Nigeria's early fiction writers, Onuora Nzekwu (1962), who had apparently spent some time of his own childhood there. And when in the 1970s I was on the lookout for a town which could be a suitable site to try out various urban anthropological ideas and approaches, I had thought of Kafanchan again.[2] What I had in mind was a town that would not be very large, so that I could get some 'sense of the whole', and it should preferably maximize internal diversity, particularly along ethnic and occupational lines. I went on a reconnaissance trip, and found that Kafanchan was just the right sort of place.

During my various stays there in the coming years, I had some contacts with the Emir, Alhaji Isa Muhammadu, and his courtiers, finding them rather isolated and ill at ease in a situation where they had very little support among the townspeople. My circle of friends and acquaintances, however, consisted rather more of the railway workers, office clerks, teachers, artisans and traders who participated fully in the the institutions and networks of urban life. My main assistant, Benjamin, was from a local ethnic group, the Kaje, and an electrician; but after Kafanchan had passed through its first wave of electrification, and the ongoing oil boom economy of the 1970s had placed refrigerators in the parlors and TV antennae over the corrugated zinc roofs of the homes of the more prosperous townspeople, he found business a bit slow

again and thought it was more interesting to join me as interviewer, interpreter, guide, go-between and general-purpose informant – meanwhile looking for other opportunities as well, in business and in politics. Another friend was a commercial sign painter, a migrant from south-central Nigeria, best known by his artist name, "Silver 40", which was displayed outside his small studio. Silver 40 and his occasional apprentices mostly did small jobs, like "L" signs for cars to indicate a learning driver, or hand-carved rubber stamps for offices, but his most appealing, imaginative work was seen on decorative shop signs, with bright and bold lettering, and often a picture of some kind. He had also done one set of large murals, in a bar in a village at some distance from Kafanchan, showing musicians, sophisticated women, and merry drinking groups. Seeking inspiration for such jobs, he was happy to ponder over especially the advertisements in the foreign newsmagazines I passed on to him, and was enthusiastic over a book of circus posters which I brought for him from Sweden.

And then, again, there was Limited. Although he worked for the railway, Limited was really more of a professional footballer, with plenty of time to pursue his interests and maintain his skills in this area. He played for the local railway team against railway teams from elsewhere in Nigeria, and he also found time to play for the all-Kafanchan team, and once in a while for those local clubs which kept forming and then falling apart. He would get time off to travel to the games of visiting foreign teams, to pick up new ideas. Apart from this, he would spend much of his days going about town to see friends, play cards, watch a little television, and sing in a church choir. Limited took a strong interest in popular culture. One of his friends was a tailor, and somewhat offhandedly he had tried to learn a little sewing from him, in order to design his own clothes, but for much of what he wore he would go shopping in a larger town. In his parlor the walls were covered with pictures of popular singers and of British football teams.

Although Limited was a bit of a Tiv chauvinist, he did not have a lot to do with his co-ethnics in town - mostly soldiers and policemen. Once while I was in Kafanchan, however, his popularity and his ethnic identity in combination brought him into some brief trouble. A young Fulani girl had apparently become bored with life in the camp of her pastoral nomadic people somewhere in the vicinity and had come into town, where it seems she had moved in with two young men living in the same house where Limited had his rooms. Her father came to look for her, and encountered Limited in the

doorway. The herdsman asked him if he knew the daughter's whereabouts, but Limited was already defining the situation in terms of the joking relationship obtaining between the Fulani and Tiv peoples, and made fun of him and pushed him a little. The Fulani, dumbfounded, as it was not equally obvious to him that Limited was a Tiv, went angrily away, and reported Limited to the police. When a constable arrived to look both for Limited and the runaway girl, Limited, still in an exuberant mood, mocked him as well, saying that his, Limited's, father, had been a soldier with a chestful of medals from World War II; and then he pointed his finger at the policeman's empty, undecorated shirt front. The angry policeman took Limited to the Kafanchan prison. Apart from being personally upset, he probably thought Limited was exactly the kind of stylish young man that the Fulani girl would have been attracted to. Limited, on his part, asserted that he would have nothing to do with a bush girl like that. In the prison he spent two days, well treated by the wardens who knew him and admired his talent on the football ground. When I came to see him, it turned out that he had picked up an idea or two from me, as he was going about the prison yard, ethnographer-like, jotting down observations and interviewing the other inmates.

Thinking about creolization

As I said, I had first gone to Kafanchan with the more or less micro-organizational questions of an urban anthropologist. Gradually, however, my preoccupations became increasingly culturally and macro-anthropologically oriented. It was not only that some of my new acquaintances would pull my sleeve and suggest that they and I ought to get into an import-export business together; they had lots of ideas about desirable goods to import. Or that they would propose that I take a bright and promising young nephew of theirs along when I would return overseas, to put him into my university where he would get a good education and come back to Nigeria as a rich and powerful man. Obviously these were people whose horizons did not coincide with Kafanchan's town limits. Nor was it just the intriguing historical fact that this was a locality which the expanding world system had produced. If it had not been for the fact that the simple logic of space had brought together here one rail line carrying tin with another rail line carrying groundnuts, on their way from northern Nigeria to the southern coast, there would have been no Kafanchan. Most strikingly, there was that young urban culture, not least in its popular cultural expressions, which was quite basically and dramatically a result of the intricate and shifting blending of West African, European and by now North American cultures as well. Coming through the loudspeakers of Kafanchan's small record stores was the switching back and forth between American televangelist gospel, Afro-American soul and Ibo highlife, between reggae and a juju music with some of its roots in traditional Yoruba praise singing. There were Silver 40's fascination with those newsmagazine advertisements, my assistant Benjamin's persistent questions about my earlier experiences among black Americans in Washington, and Limited's admiration for *Arsenal* and *Manchester United*, and his contempt for bush girls, but also his easy accessing of a Tiv-Fulani joking relationship idiom.

What kind of overall conceptualization could best describe life and culture in Kafanchan? I felt a need for some broad, at least provisional formulation, but at the time when I was working in Kafanchan or just after, some twenty years ago, the preeminent ways of talking about growing global interconnectedness, in Academia or among European intellectuals, did not seem particularly helpful in describing or analyzing the experience I was reflecting on. The widely popular notion of "cultural imperialism" suggested a cultural homogenization which I did not really see, at least not as more than part of the story, and besides, it seemed that "imperialism" in this case was a very imprecise designation. Wallersteinian world-system theory was having its considerable impact across many social science disciplines, but at least in this phase was not very concerned with culture, and tended to see it, if at all, largely as a matter of ideology.

Anthropologists of an older generation sometimes comment with a frown on recent writings on globalization that their younger colleagues pursuing such interests either do not know of, or choose to forget, the history of studies of diffusion, acculturation, culture contact, or social change which have been part of anthropology, even if somewhat discontinuously, for the past hundred years or so. This has certainly not been true in my own case – I spent my early years getting into anthropology focusing precisely on these kinds of conceptualizations. By the time I came to Kafanchan, I had admittedly stored that knowledge somewhere in the distant back of my mind; but more importantly, they did not strike me as particularly appropriate for the kind of postcolonial, literate, mobile, increasingly media-saturated way of African life I was dealing with.

At about this stage of contemplating my Kafanchan experiences, on the other hand, I came across several new formulations – by Johannes Fabian (1978), Nelson Graburn (1984), most elaborately by Lee Drummond (1980) – which drew on Creolist linguistics, and sometimes on the contrast between Creole and Pidgin languages, to characterize cultural phenomena and situations. These formulations appealed to me partly for the reason that in an earlier phase of my life, when I worked with a sociolinguistic project among African-Americans in Washington in the 1960s, a couple of my closest and most stimulating linguistic colleagues had been creolists, who took a great interest in whatever was African in black American English, and who made me reasonably aware of the main ideas and debates of creolist linguistics.

The central idea which attracted me was that creole languages were entities quite fundamentally mixed, combined, blended in their origins. As this was still at a time when anthropology had hardly begun scrutinizing the essentialist assumptions of boundedness, purity, homogeneity and timelessness underlying the mainstream practice and writing of ethnography, this seemed like a major rhetorical point of using a creolist vocabulary in discussing certain cultures and cultural phenomena. But there were other ingredients as well in at least some versions of creolist thinking which seemed to match my understandings of the Nigerian cultural scenery. There was the notion of a more or less open continuum between standard forms of mostly world languages and more local creole forms, where associations of power and prestige could also be seen as linked to the spatial arrangements of global and national center-periphery structures. And likewise, there was in creole linguistics the sense that one was not dealing with new or marginal contact phenomena, but rather with phenomena of some historical depth. Last but not least, there was an understanding that the dynamics of mixture brought new forms into being. Interconnectedness in the world would not result only in loss, but creativity and vitality as well.[5]

Exploring global interconnectedness

Beginning with my engagement with creolist concepts, then, my research in Kafanchan became my point of departure for a series of explorations, during the years which followed, of how anthropologists, as sociocultural theorists and as ethnographers, might view various aspects of global interconnectedness. These explorations led away from Kafanchan, and in part away also from a sharp focus on Africa. I thought and wrote about cosmopolitanism, about the cultural role of world cities, about the uses of network analysis in conceptualizing globalization, and about the changing place of "the national" on the social and cultural map of the world. Mostly, these efforts tended to involve desk work rather than field work.

The last time I was in Kafanchan was in 1983. The oil boom was over, and the democratically elected government of Nigeria was not doing too well. I remember another of my acquaintances, a radio repairer with a small shop at the edge of the Kafanchan market place, sighing that the only hope now was that the military would seize power again – but then why would they want to get involved with this mess? Indeed, a couple of months later the army was back in charge in Nigeria; and despite phases of internal turmoil, it is still there now, fifteen years later. The prospect of an elected Nigerian government is once more becoming visible on the horizon, but particularly during the regime of General Abacha, I did not find the idea of returning for more research in Nigeria very appealing.

If for a while my conceptual and theoretical engagements with questions of global interconnectedness were in large part a matter of desk work, however, some years ago I felt the time was ripe for a more concrete ethnographic involvement again. But then I chose to focus, not on a place, but on a global occupation, that of news media foreign correspondents.[6]

One reason for making a different choice was simply a sense that a concern with globalization ought to involve some experimentation with units of study. In retrospect, I can now see that my work in Kafanchan more or less fits into what has beome a major approach to globalization, not least in anthropology: studies of "the global and the local". Obviously this type of examination of what happens to long-distance influences as they are handled in a local setting draws on major strengths of the tradition of ethnographic study. It turns globalization into something fairly tangible, gets us down to earth from some of the airy and sometimes dubious assertions of what one critic has labeled "globalbabble" (Abu-Lughod 1991). But then sometimes the global-local studies also seem to be little more than a rather reluctant, minimalist adjustment of an ongoing anthropological habitus to the fact of increasing interconnectedness in the world.

Turning to a study of an occupation made sense partly because much of twentieth century globalization has been literally globalization at work.

Business people, academics, diplomats, consultants, journalists, artists, athletes; all of them now extend their occupational communities and cultures across borders.[7] And a more specific reason for my curiosity about the foreign correspondents has been that they would seem to be key players in today's globalization of consciousness. People piece together their images of the world from diverse sources: school books, travel brochures... but not least from the news media. The reporting of foreign correspondents for newspapers and newsmagazines, news agencies, radio and television makes up a major part of that flow of information from and about other parts of their world which, in countries such as Sweden or Germany, is a part of the rhythm of most people's daily routine experience.

And then there is another angle, pertinent as anthropology reflects on itself. Foreign correspondents are a sort of anthropologists, or anthropologists are a sort of foreign correspondents, insofar as they both engage in reporting from one part of the world to another. How do the ways media correspondents practice their craft in foreign lands compare with the field work of anthropologists? And what do they report, how do they mediate to their audiences the foreignness of foreign news?

Perhaps it follows from this that I am not really equally interested in all foreign correspondents. I have wanted to concentrate on those correspondents who, rather like many anthropologists, specialize in reporting from regions which are not only geographically but also culturally and socially more distant from their audiences. For one of my field excursions for this project, consequently, I went earlier this year to Johannesburg and to Cape Town – the cities where a great many European and American media organizations place their "Africa correspondents". So perhaps I was back, although in a somewhat tenuous way, as an Africanist.

Townspeople in Kafanchan and foreign correspondents in Johannesburg and elsewhere – indeed, these are two quite different African research experiences. There may be some minor connection in the fact that I have listened with some special interest when the newspeople have had something to say about Nigeria: about not having been there, about trying to get in but failing, or about actually going there. But these studies are linked also in that both studies raise questions about relationships between Africa and the wider world. In Kafanchan, I sought a way to formulate overall sociocultural features of contemporary postcolonial Africa which would disregard neither the polymorphous character of late twentieth century global interconnectedness

nor the continued strength and flexibility of African modes of life and thought. A main concern was with the way people in a small town at the periphery of world society now look toward the center, and how that gaze combines with their local habits and commitments to form a new, internally diverse culture within a global ecumene. In the study of Africa correspondents, the concern is in a way reversed: I am interested in the way the world, and especially the news media of its centers, look at Africa. In a way I am grappling in both instances, however, with a problem of what might be an emergent overall understanding of the African present.

Johannesburg correspondents

Let me introduce a few of the Johannesburg correspondents to you, to give you an idea of their backgrounds and reporting experiences. The first is Suzanne Daley, Johannesburg bureau chief of the *New York Times*. Since this paper has bureaus in Nairobi and Abidjan as well, Johannesburg is responsible for eleven countries in Southern Africa: South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho, Angola, Mocambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Madagascar and Mauritius. Suzanne Daley also has her husband and colleague in the bureau, and there is some division of labor between them, so that for example she handles Angola and he does Zimbabwe.

Daley, in her early 40s, had been in the New York office of the paper many years as deputy metropolitan editor but wanted to go abroad – her father had also been a foreign correspondent. The managing editor of the *New York Times*, Joe Lelyveld, was himself a former Johannesburg correspondent with a continued strong interest in South Africa, and he apparently felt that the country, in its post-apartheid transition period, with many opportunities to choose one's own topics for "feature stories", rather than being tied up most of the time with "hard news", would suit Daley's particular skills and inclinations. She did indeed feel that she wrote pretty much about whatever she pleased, without necessarily checking with the New York office first. But perhaps she was allowed to this, she thought, because she was so well-connected in the home office. Someone else might have been on a shorter leash.

After a few years in Johannesburg, her feelings about South Africa were complex. The society seemed extremely segmented, sorted into little boxes

by race and class, with few personal contacts in between – "Afrikaners, English-speakers, Indians, Zulu..." And as a tough New York professional woman, she sensed a great deal of sexism among whites as well as blacks. Some appeared to assume that when the *New York Times* assigned a woman to be Johannesburg bureau chief, it was an indication that the paper did not think South Africa was important any longer. When she had taken her visiting managing editor Lelyveld to see president Mandela, and the old president at the end of the meeting, apparently not aware of her status, had patted Lelyveld on his knee and said, "In my country you would be laughed at if your wife is that skinny, she needs some extra pounds," Daley had been only half amused. There was also the crime situation to keep in mind. One morning when she and her husband came out of their house, they found that their car had been broken into, and as the steering wheel lay in the front seat, someone had apparently been at work for a good while trying to steal the car – and the large window of one of their young daughters was next to it. So they put in a higher fence, and more security gadgets.

On the other hand, she found the "size and rawness" of South Africa addictive; and in comparison with it, when she and her husband had gone to France and Italy for a vacation with friends, they had actually become a bit bored. Every minute, every hour that South Africa stayed together without blowing up was a good sign, she thought – it normalized peace. Now she did stories, mostly relating to the political transition, on for example the growth of a black middle class, on a black man who loved horses and had started a riding academy in Soweto, and on a torture specialist of the previous regime who had appeared before the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. She had reported from Angola on an enormous market place in Luanda, and on the impact on Angola on the fall of president Mobutu in neighboring Zaire; and from Malawi on "the last country in the world to get television". Moreover, she had extended her Johannesburg contract for another year, and she and her husband were talking about another foreign assignment after that, one with a mixture of countries allowing interesting feature stories: perhaps the Bangkok bureau?

Most of the correspondents I have talked to in different places are Europeans and North Americans, but in Cape Town, for example, I met with the correspondent for *The Hindu* in Madras, and in Johannesburg with Yuji Yoshikata, the correspondent for the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, one of Japan's largest newspapers, with a circulation of some eleven million copies per day.

Yoshikata grew up in a small town in southern Japan, went to one of Tokyo's universities, was hired by the paper for on-the-job training, worked for a while as a local reporter, spent some time as a sportswriter, and was assigned to the foreign desk where he read correspondents' reports, checked facts, and was rather bored. The plan had been that he should specialize in the Middle East, but then he had rather suddenly been sent to Johannesburg to replace a correspondent who was leaving.

The *Yomiuri Shimbun* has some sixty correspondents in more than thirty countries – this must be one of the world's largest foreign correspondent networks. But for Subsaharan Africa Yoshikata is alone responsible, although he also has a locally recruited reporter working for him, a young Afrikaner woman who also seems to do a variety of office tasks. Yoshikata feels that he writes a lot, but not everything actually gets into the paper. On a normal day it has only two pages of foreign news, so with so many correspondents there is definitely a competition for space. And he wonders if the readers of his paper, or perhaps even his editors, are really particularly interested in Africa. Some years earlier when the Rwanda crisis first became a major story, he remembered, the foreign desk staff in the Tokyo office had had to bring out a map to find the country.

Much of Yoshikata's reporting involved rewriting news agency materials in Japanese, adding some analysis and background information. He did not read a great deal else about Africa, but did much of his information gathering by phone, often with Japanese, American and British embassies in various parts of the continent. We were having lunch in one of Johannesburg's Japanese restaurants, mostly frequented by the city's Japanese business community, when his mobile phone rang. It was from a government office in Tokyo, which he had asked to check certain facts about South Africa for him. He found this a more accessible and reliable source than anything available locally.

But he did other kinds of reporting as well, from many parts of the continent. Unlike many foreign correspondents Yuji Yoshikata would usually travel alone, and since he did his own photography at least for feature stories, he did not take a photographer along either. But often, of course, he would end up in the company of colleagues. When the Mobutu regime was crumbling, he had been among the journalists entering Zaire from Rwanda at Goma, and had then been among those waiting at the Hotel Intercontinental in Kinshasa for Kabila's troops to arrive. Taking an interest in the idea of

peacekeeping forces, he had gone to Liberia to look at the Nigerian troops of ECOMOG. While he had not been impressed, he had thought they were probably better than nothing. As he had wanted to get into Nigeria, he had also asked the Nigerian commanding officer of the ECOMOG force to write a letter of support for his visa application, but this seemed to be of no avail. Had he been allowed into Nigeria, he would have liked to investigate the local roots of Nigerian involvement in international crime, which extended to the Johannesburg scene as well.

Several of the correspondents I met in South Africa had indeed tried to get into Nigeria but failed, or were allowed in only after considerable effort by the head office at home. One who did travel to Nigeria with some regularity, on the other hand, was Chris McGreal, correspondent for the *Guardian*, the British paper. McGreal was a former seaman who had made his way into the media by working for various local radio stations in Britain, then worked as a stringer in Central America and the Caribbean, and came to South Africa in 1990. In the *Guardian*'s division of labor, he mostly did not write about South Africa itself, as someone else did that, but dealt with most of the rest of Subsaharan Africa out of Johannesburg – a job that could take him away from his base for as much as ten months in a year.

McGreal had slipped into Nigeria, for example, the day after the author Ken Saro-Wiwa had been executed for his part in oppositional politics in Ogoniland, in Nigerian oil country. After he was safely through the airport, he thought there was usually very little surveillance and control in Nigeria, compared to what there had been in Mobutu's Zaire. And when he came to the military governor in charge of Ogoniland, to seek permission to enter the area, he found that the governor wondered why so few foreign correspondents came to see him – apparently altogether unaware of the difficulty of getting into the country at all.

When Mobutu's regime in Zaire was about to end, McGreal had like Yuji Yoshikata been among those correspondents who came in at Goma. He had then gone on to Lubumbashi to witness its fall, and finally to Kinshasa. In Lubumbashi there had been a café where everybody went and which served as a rumor mill, with fresh rumors being served up continuously by the waiters. One set of Mobutu's forces had arrested McGreal and two other journalists and beaten them up, but they had then been rescued by Mobutu's local security chief. Despite such experiences, he liked certain things about reporting from Africa. Things were more "up front"; there would be less manipulation of news, less lying, evasion, and spin doctoring. Even Rwandan genocidalists actually offered information, even as they then tried to explain it away. But he did not expect to go on reporting from Africa forever. He had a young family and wanted to be a father who could be relied upon to come home in the evening. And he did not want to turn into the kind of correspondent, he said, who sat drunken in the hotel bar at age 55, reminiscing about Zaire in the 1960s, as all the younger colleagues yawned.

Depicting Africa

Describing my project to foreign correspondents, I usually try to make the point in that I do not intend it as simply an attack on their work and its products. Indeed journalists often have a rather reasonable suspicion that academics are inclined to be critical of news work, and sometimes to forget the implications of such constraints as deadlines and space limits. No doubt academic Africanists frequently share such judgmental predilections. Against the background of these brief sketches of some Johannesburg correspondents, let me consider some of the kinds of worries that you and I may have about the media coverage of Africa, and its background and context.

Perhaps the greatest problem is one for which we can hardly blame the media themselves. It is the fact that for a great many people, the media are almost entirely dominant as a source of understanding of contemporary Africa. They have learned little about it in school, they have mostly not traveled there, and they hardly know personally anybody who has spent much time there, whether African or expatriate. So what they know, or believe they know, about this continent is in unusually large part based on what they read, or hear, or see as media consumers. This places an unusually heavy burden on the media depiction of Africa.

Apart from that, and focusing attention more directly on the ordering of that coverage, we as researchers may well wonder about the very notion of an Africa correspondent – not least those of us coming out of a tradition of local study may feel that this ought to qualify for a ranking high up on the list of impossible jobs. Indeed, there are a great many correspondents with a responsibility for all of Subsaharan Africa. There are, of course, variations here. French media organizations, for example, would have other priorities, involving Francophone Africa more intensively. But there seems to be a

pattern that if a media organization has only one resident correspondent in Africa south of the Sahara, this person is now likely to be based in South Africa, usually Johannesburg. If there are two, the second correspondent is probably in Nairobi. If there is a third, he or she may well be based in Abidjan. But not too many seem to have three, as in the case of the *New York Times*. When not so long ago I met the foreign editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, again a paper with an unusually large network of foreign correspondents, I learned that he normally had correspondents in Johannesburg and Nairobi - but the latter position was in fact temporarily vacant.

Why Johannesburg, Nairobi, Abidjan? One major criterion of location is obviously the quantity of local and national events requiring international coverage. South Africa is and has been very newsworthy, although some in the news community would speculate that now when the battle over apartheid is over, it may be downgraded somewhat by global news standards. South Africa is also important in international business, and a great many Europeans and Americans travel there. In the East and the West of the continent, Nairobi and Abidjan are by regional standards important centers; it also helps to have reliable telecommunications, and airports with good regional connections. (With travel restrictions between South Africa and the rest of the continent lifted, it is now easier to be an Africa correspondent working out of Johannesburg or Cape Town than it was during the apartheid period). And then there is the question of living conditions for the correspondents, and their families.

But if these are the places which it is reasonably convenient to live in, and travel in and out of, and report from, what happens to the rest of the continent? Most of the time, obviously, it goes unreported, and only people like us who have particular reasons for doing so will actively seek out other sources of information. While foreign correspondents are likely to cultivate an imagery of "being there", it is also true that a fair amount of what they report on happens in places where they are in fact not present. Chris McGreal of the *Guardian* is undoubtedly unusual in spending so much time, ten months in a year, away from the base. Much of the correspondents' less glamorous work, as Yuji Yoshikata's account suggests, consists of office routines – attending to the materials coming in from the news agencies, rewriting it, perhaps translating it; checking the Internet, reference books and perhaps personal files for relevant background; perhaps making a telephone call or two, and then reporting. That is to say, if the office at home wants anything at all.

And that leads to the question of what that office wants. Indeed the term "news" is interestingly ambiguous: news can refer to something that just happened, or something can be news mostly because we simply have not heard of it before, and find it interesting. The highest priority of the newsmedia, however, is clearly on "hard news" – what just happened and is somehow important. And hard news is often bad news: reporting on conflict, violence, disasters, or other kinds of trouble. There is a classic line by one veteran which other correspondents are fond of quoting: "Whenever you find hundreds of thousands of sane people trying to get out of a place and a little bunch of madmen struggling to get in, you know the latter are newspapermen." (The bureau chief for the *Associated Press* in Johannesburg said he had had this quote under a glass cover on his desk for years.)

The correspondents I have talked to have certainly had a number of hard news stories out of Africa to tell the world in recent years. Many of them, like McGreal and Yoshikata, had witnessed the fall of Mobutu; several had followed the Hutu-Tutsi conflict in different phases; some had reported from the wars in Somalia and in southern Sudan, and the internal upheavals of Liberia and Sierra Leone. And of course, the transition from apartheid to a "rainbow nation" in South Africa had been a major world news event.[8] With the somewhat complicated exception of the South African story, however, all this had been mostly news of trouble.

Nevertheless, even in such cases there may be a question of what it takes to make hard news interesting, and thus worth having. The international editor at the New York headquarters of the *Associated Press*, whom I talked to early in my project, noted that the end of the Cold War had left much foreign news coverage without a major interpretive framework. "In the past," he said, "if there had been a war between the Hutu and the Tutsi, our first question would have been, who is ours and who is theirs?" And, he suggested, there was indeed some likelihood that one side even in such a conflict would have been getting its arms and its political support from one of the main camps of the cold war, and the other side its from the opposite camp. But now, if the news media were to make audiences far from the conflict pay attention at all, they would have to find other frameworks, other main storylines.

How is news out of Africa framed, contextualized, explained, when even the Cold War is no longer available? One might argue that some of the post-cold war crises still had some cold war element to them – an interest on the part of weapons manufacturers and traders in finding new markets, a declining commitment on the part of world powers to supporting old despots for the sake of an international power balance. Yet in rather large part, the reporting on the 1990s African crises may have come to draw on two interrelated storylines: timeless conflicts of tribes and clans as a cause, and atrocities and human suffering as a consequence. For some time at least, "Afro-pessimism" became a covering term for all that was wrong, and would probably continue to go wrong, in the continent.[9]

If we deplore the fact that 1990s Africa has seemed to be defined by wars, we can hardly see a neglect of these wars on the part of the media as a solution. There is something reasonable about the complaint of one Africa correspondent, for a Scandinavian newspaper, that he could not interest his editors at home in the Sudanese civil war, with thousands of people killed, even as a bomb in Tel Aviv, with a few victims, would get sizeable coverage. To ignore African conflicts, and African suffering, is surely to devalue African lives relative to others. And it is also true that in many of these conflicts, there has been a conspicuous ethnic element. What probably disturbs us most, however, is the tendency to let contextualization and explanation stop there, and allow "tribalism" to stand out as a mystifying, dehistoricized, totalizing symbol for African life. The trouble with taking things further, of course, is not only that it may require a greater depth of local knowledge on the part of correspondents. In very practical terms, it also tends to require rather more than those few minutes or couple of columns they may have at their disposal in a newscast or on the foreign pages.

The problem I see here in a way reminds me of that which I sensed in trying to come to grips with the nature of Nigerian town life, in Kafanchan some twenty years ago. Although the "tribes" were there, too, they were not the entire story. And to repeat, I needed a frame, a storyline, which would suggest both the resilience of everyday African life and its openness to the world – a point of view which depicted peoples as agents in their own multi-faceted lives. In the news, too, we need to see Africans in such a way, not just as one-dimensional villains or victims.

In the work of foreign correspondents, such a perspective is certainly not altogether absent. But we are likely to find it more often in that other kind of

"news" which I alluded to before – that which is news largely because we happen not to have heard of it before, and find it interesting and even surprising. Foreign news clearly has particular possibilities here. A number of things may have a long-term presence in a remote country without our learning of them, until someone tells us. What newspeople describe as "feature stories" are often of this latter sort, and in this way become most like ethnography. The emphasis is rather more on what is different and striking, as in Suzanne Daley's reporting to the *New York Times* on the Luanda market place, or perhaps on a juxtaposition of the familiar with the exotic, as in her story on the introduction of television in Malawi. We can well imagine anthropologists chosing similar topics. I have met foreign correspondents who have done stories on the everyday activities and hardships of Samburu pastoralists in northern Kenya, and on the informal economy of African city streets.[10]

It is true that foreign correspondents often say that they enjoy being present where "history is made". This obviously draws them to hard news events. Yet many of them also tell me that they like feature stories, because these give them a chance to pursue their own lines of interest, and may offer more room for their own skills as writers. Often, obviously, they are entertaining. But we can also discern that they can balance the hard news, in offering a sense of the normal and durable in an alien way of life, and of the more slowly developing changes.

Clearly some media organizations allow more scope for feature stories, out of Africa or anywhere else, than others do. It might just be possible, also, that some of these stories out of everyday life attract women foreign correspondents, like Suzanne Daley, a bit more than their male colleagues; and that the increasing proportion of women in the foreign correspondent corps in recent years could lead to a greater variety of such reporting. (Not that male correspondents necessarily avoid it.) Yet feature stories also face some particular problems. One is that media organizations may well see the need to send a correspondent off from Johannesburg or Nairobi, or for that matter directly from headquarters, to report on hard news elsewhere in Africa. Many of them, on the other hand, appear less willing to allow costly travel only for the purpose of feature stories. The implication of this would seem to be that if there are feature stories out of Africa, they may come more often from the areas where correspondents are stationed, perhaps not too far away from Johannesburg or Nairobi.[11] And unless the correspondents make an effort,

and have an opportunity, to do the occasional such story as a by-product of their crisis travel, much of the continent risks being reported on only when there is hard news - that is, conflict and disasters.

Indeed it is easy to be dissatisfied with the view of Africa which the public is likely to construct from the news flow of the mainstream media. Yet it tends to be a part of an anthropologist's task to make sense of "the native's point of view", and I suppose, in my two African encounters, I have tried to do that – whether the "native" in question is someone like "Limited" or "Silver 40" in Kafanchan, or, a little perversely, an expatriate reporting out of Johannesburg. In the latter case, I am concerned that as we scrutinize the work of others who are like us engaged in depicting Africa, we do not just take satisfaction in critique and complaint, but also seek to understand the comparative ecology of reporting; the practical, spatial, temporal and organizational constraints of news work. This is not to say that anything goes, that we should just shut up and quietly accept reporting or interpretation of any standard. But we must consider in what ways we, from our standpoints, on the basis of our experiences, can enter into fruitful long conversations with the tribe of newspeople, offering constructive criticisms here and allowing a little praise there. And then, in view of the major problem of the huge gaps in public understandings of Africa in our part of the world, giving some more thought to what academic Africanists in various disciplines, as scholars and as public intellectuals, can do to remedy the situation.

Notes

1. Including Laura Bohannan's *Return to Laughter*, pseudonymously published (Bowen 1954), but a pioneering personal account of an anthropological field experience.
2. For some discussion of these efforts, see Hannerz (1976).
3. I have tried to sketch some of this history elsewhere (Hannerz 1997).
4. Here I should particularly mention Joey L. Dillard and William A. Stewart, of what was then the "Urban Language Study" of the Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C.
5. My more elaborated formulations on creolization as a sociocultural phenomenon are in Hannerz (1987, 1996: 65ff.). Somewhat by accident perhaps, my efforts to use a creolist root metaphor have drawn a fair amount of attention, in large part obviously because they coincided in time with a rapidly growing interest in globalization, popular culture and postcolonial society in anthropology and related fields. At the same time, other related concepts - hybridity, syncretism, transculturation, *mestizaje* (I do not think they are necessarily entirely exchangeable) – have also come into

increasing use to focus interest, and debate, on questions of cultural mixing and creativity. Without going into much of this, let me mention one issue which occasionally comes up. There could be a danger, it is suggested, that creolization and other concepts such as those just mentioned simply push essentialism a step back, implying that the cultural currents coming into a new combination were themselves until then pure, bounded, and so forth. I see the point, but I do not find this implication inevitable. Drawing on the linguistic parallel again, there are a number of English-based creole languages in the world, but nobody would seriously argue that the English language is historically pure. The claim need only be that in one particular period, some cultures are more usefully designated creole than others, insofar as previously separate cultural streams are coming together, resulting in new cultural forms – even as historically, these separate streams themselves may have resulted from other such confluences. At some point or other, we or our ancestors may all have been creolized, but we are not forever engaged in a creolization process to the same degree. Be that as it may, however; we seem now at least to be facing up to the challenge of rethinking cultural organization and process in the global context, and thus scrutinizing the local and national frameworks for cultural study which have long been taken more or less for granted. And this still requires a great deal of effort, not least because varieties of more or less essentialist thinking about cultural organization are still being presented with considerable force. The "clash of civilizations" thesis of the American political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) – in which Africa figures only rather marginally – is one example; as I recall it, the blurb on the back of the German edition describes it as a *Kulturknalltheorie*.
6. For some early discussions resulting from this project, see Hannerz (1996: 112ff., 1998 a,b, and forthcoming).
7. In my department in Stockholm, several of my colleagues and students have also recently engaged in the ethnography of transnational occupational life, studies which have at the same time been contributions to the growing trend of multi-site field work in anthropology (cf. Garsten 1994, Dahlén 1997, Wulff 1998). My study of correspondents adds to this departmental specialty.
8. For some accounts of reporting from Africa during the period, see Keane (1996), Schofield (1996) and Richburg (1997).
9. The spread of AIDS has of course also contributed to the sense of Africa as a scene of disasters.
10. It is also true, however, that correspondents often respond in their feature stories to their home audiences' conceptions of Africa – so wildlife is a significant topic, and sooner or later, many Africa correspondents will make the journey to Timbouctou.
11. And it may, under such circumstances, not be very helpful if Africa correspondents, for the kind of practical reasons I mentioned before, are stationed in a society which, as Suzanne Daley put it, is "extremely segmented". Even Johannesburg correspondents with wide Third World experiences found that it was peculiarly difficult to move freely and make personal friendships across the social divides of the city.

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