

Doing Anthropology in Western Societies

A Short Contribution to the Ongoing Debate

Samuel Muchoki

Introduction

In this article, I attempt to argue for the need of a fourth variant in anthropology – a case where a non-Western European anthropologist is doing research in a Western European culture – advocated by Godina (2003). The article supports this argument and tries to make a case for these anthropologists to research also non-Western cultures in developed countries and thus to develop suitable theory, method, and practice in anthropology. With the rapid increase in mobility of global population in recent decades (Smart and Smart 2003), many people from developing countries have settled permanently in industrialized nations (Inda and Rosaldo 2008; Naerssen et al. 2008). This has led to an increase in the size of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the Western nations; evidenced by the promulgation of the multiculturalism ideology in policies of these nations (Ang and Stratton 1998; Parekh 2002). Due to global migration, the “exotic other,” therefore, is no longer necessarily living in “exotic” places; and this is true for both non-Western anthropologist and non-Western “research subjects.” However, these “emerging” populations are “fields” that have not yet been adequately explored by anthropologists. This has left a gap in the “practice” of anthropology in the developed world; an issue that may lead to reluctance of anthropological research by non-Western anthropologists interested in cultures of the “Western world.”

Theoretical Literature Review

Vesna V. Godina in her article published in 2003, explores different variants of anthropological fieldwork in relation to location and dislocation of anthropological knowledge, and the implication this has to the future of the discipline. Godina stated that the traditional variant in anthropology, which she referred to as “classical anthropological fieldwork,” occurs when a West European¹ anthropologist con-

ducts fieldwork in a non-European society or culture. Nonetheless, in the course of its development, Godina argues, anthropology has witnessed the rise of two other variants: anthropology at home and native anthropology. According to her, the “anthropology at home” involves a situation when a West European anthropologist does research in a European field setting, while the “native anthropology” occurs when a non-West European anthropologist does research in a non-European setting. In her analysis, Godina argues for the possibility of a fourth variant in the discipline: a non-West European anthropologist doing fieldwork in a West European field. This variant, according to her, has not yet been fully integrated in the discipline. This has led to a situation where there is monopoly of anthropological knowledge by West-European anthropologists.

Closely related to Godina’s argument is the critique regarding the view of non-Western cultures through the “lens” of Western scholars. The critique has been developed in postcolonial anthropological works on power and knowledge that exerts its influence between and across the western/eastern, or the western/non-western divide. One of such widely acclaimed works on Eurocentric anthropology is Edward Said’s book “Orientalism” (2003) that examines the way the “West” observes the Arabs. Similar works have continued to emerge over the recent decades.² What these works have in common is the call for alternative methodology of understanding non-Western societies and cultures. To foster such alternative narratives, it is crucial for non-Western anthropologists to conduct ethnographic research beyond their native contexts. “Native anthropologists,” as Godina argued in her article, have gone a long way to develop alternative discourses in their home countries and cultures. However, as Kim noted in 1990, there has been little anthropological fieldwork done in non-Western communities in developed countries. This is because anthropology has been “traditionally” associated with the study of the “exotic other” in the once colonized parts of the world – a practice that has persisted among many anthropology scholars to date. By comparing my training and experience of doing research in a developing country (Kenya) and later in a developed country (Australia), I hope to demonstrate the importance of extending anthropology training and research to field settings in developed countries.

¹ Godina uses the term “West Europe” to refer to West European countries, the USA, and Canada. Similarly, she uses the

term “West European Anthropologist” to include anthropologists from these countries.

² See Ntarangwi (2010); Lazarus (2011); Hobson (2012).

Anthropology Training and Research in Kenya

I consider myself a “home-grown” anthropologist. I was born and raised in Kenya and received my anthropology training at the University of Nairobi (Nyamongo 2007). During my fourth year of undergraduate studies, in 2004, I had my first experience of fieldwork. I conducted a research to explore the sexual practices of students of the University of Nairobi. Like the majority of undergraduate students at the time, I was living on-campus, which provided me with an opportunity to observe how students were expressing their sexuality within the existing social venues around the campus. In essence, this experience of fieldwork was very much “native anthropology” as I was a researcher active within my own “Community” – the student fraternity.

After my graduation (2005), I had the opportunity to work as a consulting anthropologist for a community-based organization called “Gurapau.” My task was to assist the organization in documenting the culture of Elmolo, a community living in the northwest of Kenya along the shores of Lake Turkana. As an ethnographic study, the project required that I should live within the community for an extended period of time (over a year), while participating in day-to-day activities. Interviews were conducted in the local language, and my three field assistants, all from the community, were very helpful as interpreters. By the time I finished the first phase of the project,³ I had a good experience of doing anthropological fieldwork in the “traditional style”: studying a community other than one’s own.

I enrolled for a Master in Anthropology (2006) soon after the first phase of this project, and focused my interests on the issue of prevention of sexual and gender-based violence. My thesis concerned individual motivations and social and cultural factors that predispose men to enact sexual violence (Muchoki and Wandibba 2009, Muchoki 2011). However, this latter research neither allowed me to live among my participants – convicted sexual offenders in Naivasha, Kamiti, and Nyeri Prisons in Kenya – nor to engage in their social activities because of the institutions’ rules and regulations. I had to visit participants under supervision and leave by the end of the day. Nonetheless, the face-to-face contact with my participants allowed me to ask, and clarify questions. Furthermore, just like the Elmolo project, doing research among the sexual offenders enabled me

to have an “outsiders” status in a population within my country of origin.

Doing Research in Melbourne, Australia

In 2010, I was awarded scholarship by La Trobe University in Melbourne and travelled to Australia in order to commence my PhD candidature at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health, and Society, Faculty of Health Science of that university. I had some flexibility regarding the choice of my research topic and the location of my fieldwork (either Australia or Kenya). I designed my research to explore how men with refugee backgrounds from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia living in Melbourne enact their sexuality within the context of migration and resettlement. While designing my research proposal, I intended to draw upon the “traditional” anthropological fieldwork methods, including participant observation (Ginkel 1998). I also hoped to draw from the experience acquired while doing research in Kenya. However, I was unsure of how to employ methods of anthropological fieldwork within the Australian setting. I had little literature that I could refer to on anthropological work among non-Western cultures from Africa. Consequently, I decided to disregard the method of “participant observation” and instead chose to use semi-structured interviews. In the end, I conducted four group discussions (selected on geographical basis), eighteen individual interviews (with at least four men from each community), and seven key informant interviews. Although I did not use participant observation and other field methods popular in anthropology, like unstructured interviews, I learnt valuable lessons that proved to be useful for non-Western anthropologist conducting research in Western countries.

Methodology

Unlike my anthropological projects in Kenya, where it was relatively easy to locate my participants and employ the method of participant observation, I found it more challenging to find a suitable setting for my participant observation in Australia. This was because I could not find sample groups clustered in a single location, as many people live in public housing and private rental properties dispersed across the urban area of Melbourne. In addition, many men would spend most of their time outside their houses; engaging in paid work, attending school, looking for work, or hanging out with

³ I did not manage to go to the second phase because of delay in funding for the project. By the time the funding for the second phase became available, I travelled to Australia for my PhD.

friends. It was, therefore, difficult to get to know their time schedules and meet them. Although this could also be a common challenge for urban anthropologists, what was specific in my situation was that as a non-Western anthropologist I was constantly aware of the unfamiliar setting of my work, and thus shared some of the experience of migrants as they are forced to constantly negotiate various aspect of life in an urban centre like Melbourne. This formed a reflexive part of my fieldwork experience.

Nonetheless, I discovered that there exist a number of advantages for non-Western anthropologists who do research on non-Western cultures in developed countries, in particular the fact of being of similar regional (if not ethnic) background as the target group. Consequently, informants are more likely to identify with the researcher, which makes the process of creating the necessary rapport easier, although this may not always be the case. A number of these men would refer to me as their “brother” perhaps because I shared some physical and cultural similarities that set us apart from the predominantly “white” society. Some informants even stated that they were willing to share their experiences with me because I was a migrant like them and hence I would understand them. Such assumed “similarities” enabled me to interact better with them within their own social networks and become part of those networks as well. Furthermore, some informants would even offer to assist me whenever I needed help. In addition, sharing certain common cultural traits with the informants allowed me to relate the acquired information to broader cultural contexts. In addition, while it was easier to interact with the informants and ask questions, it was much more challenging to acquire certain details information from them. This was mainly because of their assumption that we share a similar culture and, therefore, I already knew the answers to the questions I am asking. This is an issue that non-Western anthropologists doing research in non-Western communities should be aware of.

The Role of Language in Interviews

Traditionally, anthropologists have been encouraged to master a native language in order to better understand the “emic” perspective.⁴ This is never an issue with “native” anthropologists who speak the same language as their informants. However, the use of a second language could be useful while ex-

ploring some sensitive research topics, such as sexuality. Initially, I settled on the use of English due to the limited resources at my disposal. Since I was engaging with participants who spoke a variety of languages, it would have been expensive to employ interpreters. Although the choice of English was a limitation to my research, as I was not able to recruit those people that may be willing to participate but were unable to speak English, it helped cut the cost associated with the research. Furthermore, English was a common language between participants in group discussions because, although informants may have been from the same country, they spoke different local languages and dialects. Nevertheless, I later learnt that there was a latent and more critical advantage of using English in my research: it made it easier to explore the research topic by rising above the inhibitions imposed by the first languages of the participants, particularly restrictions to open discussion of some aspects of sex and sexuality – something that is considered obscene and offensive in many African languages,⁵ including my own. The use of English enabled me to probe the views of the men in relation to sex and the sphere of sexuality. For example, some of the informants would use certain obscene words, such like “fuck” and “pussy” while talking about their sexual practices, which would not be appropriate in their own languages. In addition, English made possible the exploration of alternative sexual practices – such as anal sex, oral sex, masturbation, and bondage. According to the participants, these were “Western inventions” that did not have any “straight-forward” terminology in the participant’s first language.

Discussion and Conclusion

The central purpose of this discussion on my fieldwork experience in Australia against the background of my training and previous research experience has been to answer the question how non-Western anthropologists can “observe” and research non-Western communities in industrialized countries and thus point to the complexities of the subject, in particular the constant shifting between the “insider” and “outsider” perspectives. Although I did share some migration experience and cultural similarities with my informants, I was different in that I intended to take a “detached” view. It was interesting to see, nonetheless, how the participants “took me in” as one of their own. In retrospective, I wonder if the same men would consider me as one of their own if

4 Russell (1994); Ulin (2001); Ottenheimer (2009); Ahearn (2012).

5 King (2002); Arnfred (2004); Flaitz (2006).

I was doing a similar research in Kenya – a country that hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa. This, being both a “migrant” and an anthropologist, certainly influenced how I analyzed and presented my findings.

During my anthropological training, I received no reference to doing research in industrialized societies, where – as stated above – the researcher frequently experiences the need of a constant shifting between the “insider” and “outsider” perspectives. Making us aware of that potentiality would have certainly been beneficial. Unfortunately, even non-Western anthropology students at Western universities are usually encouraged to do their fieldwork in their countries of origin, while, on the contrary, their Western colleagues do it in cultures other than their own (Munthali 2001). This results in the already signalled shortage of both ethnographic descriptions and of methodological reflection stemming from the research experience of “non-Westerners” conducting their research in a “Western” setting. Such situation may discourage many of them to undertake such research. I had my doubts as well.

On the other hand, there exist a number of self-reflective publications by non-Western anthropologists concerning their fieldwork experience in a familiar cultural setting.⁶ These publications have played a significant role as contributions to theories, methods, and practice of doing “native anthropology.” Nonetheless, the rapid “globalization of cultures” in the 21st century opens the possibilities for non-Western anthropologists to think beyond the horizons of their indigenous cultural boundaries. Inda and Rosaldo (2008: 14) state, for example:

... anthropologists have come to conceptualize culture as deterritorialized ... [the] general weakening of the ties between culture and place, [and] ... the dislodging of cultural subjects and objects from particular or fixed locations in space and time. ... deterritorialization of culture is invariably the occasion for the reinsertion of culture in new time-space contexts.

Therefore, if anthropology has to assert itself as a study of human cultures in both time and space (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003), the “space” must also include researching cultures in industrialized nations by Non-Western anthropologists. Godina (2003: 483 f.) views this as a crucial step in the discipline:

[a]llowing a non-West European anthropologist to do fieldwork on a West European field means taking that cru-

cial step in the dislocation of anthropological knowledge. It signifies an end to the situation in which West European anthropologists can claim a superior position because they are in possession of sole, or better knowledge.

Non-Western anthropologists have a lot to offer. Their fieldwork experiences acquired in the industrialized world and their findings may considerably contribute to anthropological theories, methods, and practice, and thus broaden the existing methodological horizon, not to mention the contribution to professional formation of non-Western anthropologists. As anthropologists engage in this debate at the global level, such methodological shift is a necessity if anthropology is to live up to its claim of being the holistic study of human beings in time and space.

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6 Munthali (2001); Gokah (2006); Zaman (2008); Muchoki (2010).

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Dionysosreligion und Christentum

Ein ökumenischer Ansatz von
Vjačeslav I. Ivanov

Ein Rezensionartikel

Brigitte Wiesenbauer

Dionysos ist bekannt als griechischer Gott der Fruchtbarkeit und des Weines, der die Menschen zu ekstatischen Festen und Umzügen alle Mühen des Alltags vergessen ließ. Als sterbender und wiederkehrender Vegetationsgott war er mit dem Blühen und Vergehen der Natur verbunden und stand in wichtiger Beziehung zum Leben der Menschen. Der Autor des Buches "Dionysos und die vordionysischen Kulte"¹ ist der 1866 in Moskau geborene und 1949 in Rom gestorbene russische Gelehrte und Schriftsteller Vjačeslav I. Ivanov. Er studierte in Berlin Altertumswissenschaften, schlug aber keine akademische Laufbahn ein. In Sankt Petersburg war er Mittelpunkt eines Kreises von Literaten, Künstlern und Gelehrten. Ivanov vertrat einen realistischen Symbolismus, der eine andere Wirklichkeit hinter den sichtbaren Dingen annimmt. Den Mythos sah er als das Werk einer Gemeinschaft, die diese innere Wahrheit in gleicher Weise versteht und erlebt (Ferber in Ivanov 2011: 13).

Ivanov veröffentlichte das genannte Buch auf Russisch bereits 1923 in Baku. Da die Thematik in der UdSSR zu jener Zeit wenig populär war und er 1924 nach Italien emigrierte, blieb dieses Werk weitgehend unzugänglich. Es wurde daher ins Deutsche übersetzt. Diese deutsche Übersetzung sollte bereits vor etwa 70 Jahren veröffentlicht werden. Ivanov starb kurz vor Abschluss der Arbeit und das Werk geriet in Vergessenheit. Es ist Michael Wachtel, Professor für Slawistik in Princeton, und Christian Wildberg, Professor für griechische Literatur und antike Philosophie ebenfalls in Princeton, zu verdanken, dass dieser wichtige Beitrag zur griechischen Religionsgeschichte nun doch noch seine Leser findet. In diesem monumentalen Werk – so Wachtel – kam Ivanovs "tiefes und vielschichtiges Verständnis der griechischen Religion – als Dichter, Mythenforscher, Philosoph, religiöser Denker und Gelehrter – zur Reife" (xii).

In der Einleitung fasst Michael Wachtel unter

1 Vjačeslav Ivanovič Ivanov: Dionysos und die vordionysischen Kulte. Hrsg. von Michael Wachtel und Christian Wildberg. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012. 416 pp. ISBN 978-3-16-150208-8. Preis: € 59,00