Offerings of an Itinerant Peddler

Joel Halpern
Offerings of an Itinerant Peddler

JOLE M. HALPERN
U OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

This title may seem a bit out of place here. I also must confess to a permanent place of residence—
I don't even own a camper. By calling myself an "itinerant peddler," I'm suggesting my need and
search for an audience—even if I've earned my primary living as an anthropologist. Also to
"itinerant peddler" should be added "intrusive showman"—characteristics not unfamiliar to the
marketplace.

I've been involved with anthropology as a student and teacher-researcher for more than a half-
century, and in that time I have made a photographic record of my wanderings in diverse set-
tings in North America, Europe and Asia, with peaks at North Africa, Latin America and the
Caribbean. A considerable part of my experience has been in peasant market settings, as well as in
their urban counterparts. Such markets, of course, tend to be dominated by the penny capi-
tal plus sellers of fruits, vegetables, livestock (large and small) and livestock products. Like the work
of photographers, what always has captured my imagination about peasant markets has been the role
of the artisan-traders working in wood, clay, metal, cloth and leather—each with an
to a degree carrying the maker's distin-
guishable imprint with aesthetic enhancements beyond the immediate utilitarian function. These
items are then patiently offered to the public, occasionally accompanied by a hawkers chant.

It should be clear that I am putting my emphasis on the world beyond the use of photographs
which anthropologists to illustrate resulting
monographs. Such visuals do, of course, form
an integral part of the historical anthropological
enterprise. My emphasis, however, is on both the use and significance of photographs, either
intended or unintended, beyond the immediacy of one's field investigation. Similarly, the work of
a village-town artisan may have meaning and

Photograph taken by Joel M Halpern at a multieth-
nic market in Maglaj, Bosnia, in 1964. A stone car-
er carved Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox grave
markers to sell at the market.

 IWAC and NYWAC Materials Archived

JUNE NAISH
THE CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

The records of the New York Women's Anthropology
Conference (NYWAC) are now at the Robert
Library, NYU. A Wenner-Gren historical archives
grant was awarded last year to Constance Sutton
(NYU) to aid in the preparation of these materials
for archival deposit at NYU. Naomi Schiller pre-
pared a guide to these archives.

IWAC

In 1972, the New York Women's Anthropology
Caucus was formed. Women anthropologists
(Eleanor Leacock, Ruby Rorhlich-Leavitt and
Constance Sutton) founded the group to critique
anthropological writings, from a feminist perspec-
tive, to encourage new research by women, and to
identify and challenge sexist academic prac-
tices faced by women students and professionals.
In Nov, 1974, the group changed its name to the
New York Women's Anthropology Conference
and became an official nonprofit registered in the
state of New York.

This group of about 25-40 women anthropolo-
gists first met at Columbia U's International
House and then at the CUNY Graduate
Center. NYWAC renamed itself the International
Women's Anthropology Conference in May 1976.
An international board of Directors composed of
five officers and six members-at-large, each of the
latter from a different country, led IWAC. IWAC
brought together an international network of
anthropologists interested in research on women
informing of a cross-cultural perspective. At its
height, IWAC claimed 500 members, half of
whom were from Africa, Asia, the South Pacific,
the Caribbean or South America. The remaining
members were from North America or Europe.
In 1982, IWAC became a NGO in consultative
status with the UN's Economic and Social
Council in order to influence international poli-
cies concerning women using an anthropological
perspective.

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The second photo, of a boys spectacular
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point of death in
immediately main-
But he also is a mu-

Those interested in
photos can see them
of the Society for the
(http://www2.fhs.utexas.

IWAC Conference

IWAC organized the
"First, "The Set-
ment and Women"
by Eleanor Leacock and
Aug 1980 at the
Center, Austria. In
1985, IWAC members
Helen Sala organized
of Women's Collective
Perspectives" held
Highlights of IWAC
include participation
NGO Forum and the
IWAC's panels includ-
Women's Move-
"Women's Labor: Im-
and "The Woman
Research and Strat-
Over the years,
attended panels at
organized several
Beijing during the
Women in 1995. A
number of prepara-
ting to influenced
issues such as the "Plato-
the NGO Forum on

January 2007
A Photo in the Hands of Translators

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

JOEL M. HALPERN
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How do anthropologically based photos come to be used or abused? Here I offer an example of a photo's ad hoc beginnings, and how it ended up being manipulated as propaganda.

Some 50 years ago, in 1953-54, my wife and I were researching a Serbian village, which at that time was considered by most Westerners, specifically Anglo-American anthropologists, as a prime example of backward European peasant society. We were visited there by an American friend and his wife. He thought it would be neat if they could pose in regional peasant dress. At that time men still wore peasant dress for special occasions, although women generally preserved such attire for internment.

COMMENTARY

As our hosts had already experimented with our clothes when we were away for a few days, we didn't think borrowing their clothes would be a problem. Seeing our friends in their new sartorial splendor, we decided to join them. Having read one too many 19th-century travel accounts, I was intrigued by those frontispieces of the author and his wife in native dress.

Using available charcoal from our wood stove, I created an instant mustache; we found a signifying flowerpot and posed in a suitable historic setting, the corner of the doorway of the old house that had been transformed into a pigsty. Fortunately, the pigs were out to pasture and we had the place to ourselves. After the momentary flurry of excitement and taking modest pleasure in the resulting photo, we thought little about it for almost half a century and never used it in our own publications.

Then in 1986, TV Belgrade did an hour-long documentary about our four decades of research in the Serbian village of our fieldwork. The Charles Kuralt-type commentator typically looked for the exotic and unusual, and in this particular program he used many prints of color photos that I took during my initial period of fieldwork. To "humanize" the TV setting, we decided to include the one of us in peasant dress. Our village friends found this photo amusing and even, in a way, a bit nostalgic. After the airing of the documentary, we experienced the full 15-minute Andy Warhol effect of fame throughout Yugoslavia.

Inspired by our momentary fame, the following year the American Embassy magazine did a multipage spread using many of the photos I had employed on the TV program. On the first page of the article was the photo of us in peasant dress in which we were clearly identified as Americans in the detailed caption.

This photograph then reappeared in 1990 in the Serbian magazine Duga (Rainbow) amidst right-wing nationalistic articles on Serbia. It specifically was used to illustrate a selection from Lawrence Durell's 

spy novel, The Magicians of the Nobility. Equally important, they placed the photo after a paragraph on, among other things, People Connect.

Our photo is of a man and woman in peasant dress and a caption that notes their American origin and the fact that they were married. A white line was drawn to denote the Norwegian newscaster and another white line was drawn to denote the American couple. None of the original caption was preserved.

Initially, we were only bothered by the distortion of our photo. Now it is part of a larger dialogue, to which the photograph has become a part of a nationalistic discourse.

Looking more closely at the photograph, I see clouds of dust in my hair and dust on the hair of the woman. Ever since that research project, I had always wondered if the dust represented a strain of bacteria, myopia, or anything else. I already have a decent hypothesis that the dust is genetically programmed into my organism. The fine particles could be a symptom of the effort to change my internal DNA and establish my personal identity. (Serbia is high on the list of places where I believe the dust has been.)

I could also be correct that the dust has nothing to do with me and is something that was put there to keep the dust off the surface. All I can say is that the dust is certainly complete with the other elements, just like the rest of our lives. It is a living part of us.

— JOEL M. HALPERN

February 1
spy thriller about Yugoslavia, *White Eagle Over Serbia*, written when he worked at the British Embassy just after World War II. With our photograph was the caption, "Healthy Peasant Element, a Barrier against Communism." There was the seeming implication that such folks could stop spies. I wanted to feel amused since something over a decade before I had been accused in the Yugoslavian press of being a spy because of my fieldwork. But I was not amused to see this picture of us and my friends included in images featuring nude models cavorting with supposed British spies and a decadent intellectual who was distracted by supposed voluptuousness. The Western "other" was clearly depicted as corrupt, a contrast with us stalwart peasants.

*Duga*’s use of our image was obviously being used without our permission to mobilize nationalist feelings as part of Milosevic’s plan for a greater Serbia. This is perhaps a worst-case scenario, in a way it could have been dismissed as farce if subsequent events had not proven so tragic. Even so, there is much to learn about the roles manipulative translators play in cases where the deliberate distortion of our images is involved. Clearly, an image’s history does not necessarily determine its ends. As we’ve learned, an image originally taken in a playful moment for private use in which anthropologists dressed as natives can end up being screened apparently successfully on local TV in 1986 and published soon after in a widely distributed, American-sponsored magazine in the country’s language (Serbian), yet only four years later be published again in a popular local monthly without concern that the public would recognize the image either from the TV show or the *Emboss*. This seems emblematic of a public awash in media where the spurious and genuine merge in the torrent of output. Anthropology, documentary, cultural affairs and nationalist propaganda all mesh in a gush that obliterates meaning.\footnote{Joel M Halpern and Barbara K Halpern are the authors of *A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective* (1957, 1986).}
The Porous Boundary between Researcher and Subject

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It is a bit of a challenge to sum up my anthropo-

Table of Contents

ogy photography career as discussed in my brief
AN articles with their accompanying photos. As I
now reflect it was rather comforting, if not com-
placent, for me to begin in Jan with the meta-

phoric image of myself as a peddler (of images) at
a setting akin to a peasant market. I felt that this
image captured a bit of the dynamics of present-
day anthropology. I liked the notion of apatric
en, even inferred marginality while at the same

This photo of Damrong Tayanin (also known as
Kam Raw) taken by Joel M Halpern and the history
of the relationship between these two people
demonstrate the porous boundary between
researcher and subject.

But here in this third article I hopefully conclude
on a more positive note in which the crossing of a
boundary has led to a remote ethnographic sub-
ject becoming a valued colleague. In this case, the
observed becomes the principle actor obliterating
the boundaries of culture, class and age.

In 1959 I spent some time in the small town of
Muong Sing in northern Laos near the Chinese
border. While there I followed my usual practice
and visited the local market. On that occasion I
"captured" with my camera a not very good pic-
ture of two small tribal boys carrying loads of
wood. They were shy and even more important
were Kammu people who rank well below the

Don Messerschmidt

Homer G Barnett, my adviser at the

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social and economic life of a highland
people, the Manangba, of the central
district of Manang, bordering Tibet.

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dominant ethnic Lao in the status hierarchy. If
one were today to go to Google and punch in
Kam Raw, one would get instantly some 1,790 ref-

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ences. Prominent among them is the Kammu
Home Page that features the research and publi-
cations of Damrong Tayanin. Although the name
is Thai, he is also known by his Kammu name of
Kam Raw. In 1989, Kam received a Rockefeller
Fellowship to visit Cornell U.

Given my interest in the peoples of Laos, it was
natural that I would invite Kam to come and lec-
ture at my university, U of Massachusetts Am-
herst, during his stay and also to be my house-
guest. It was a most successful visit. Importantly,
however, we spent the first night viewing slides
of Laos. The slide of the little wood carriers
flashed on the screen. Kam exclaimed, "That's me.
I didn't pay too much attention because I
thought that Kam had said or meant, "That's
somebody like me." I went to sleep thinking no
more of it. At 3 am the phone rang. It was his
close associate Kristina Lindell calling from the
U of Lund in Sweden explaining to me what I seem
not to have understood: that the little boy was
indeed Kam! As he notes on p 5 of his mono-

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