University of Massachusetts Amherst

From the Selected Works of Joel M. Halpern

Winter January, 2003

Offerings of an Itinerant Peddler

Joel Halpern

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Offerings of an Itinerant Peddler

JOEL 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 settings in North America, Europe and Asia, with peeks 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 capital 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-merchants working in wood, clay, metal, cloth and leather—each with an item, to a degree carrying the maker's distinguishable imprint with aesthetic enhancements beyond the immediate utilitarian function. These items are then patiently offered to the public, occasionally accompanied by a hawker's chant.

It should be clear that I am putting my emphasis on the world beyond the use of photographs taken by field 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 multiethnic market in Maglaj, Bosnia, in 1964. A stone carver carved Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox grave markers to sell at the market.

use—aesthetic and symbolic—beyond the worldview of the creator and beyond the historical period in which it is created. Being something of an historical artifact myself, although not yet entirely on the shelf, I feel I have some limited authority in such matters.

In this first of a series of a "peddler's" offerings, I offer for display at my intellectual market stand two photographs taken at the multiethnic market in Maglaj, Bosnia, in 1964. The first is of the product of a local stone carver: Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox grave markers intertwined with some brushes. The carver obviously was motivat-

ed to serve his div-
ing this photo, I tr-
The second photo,
of a boy, devoid of
iation, playing a flu-
point of death in
immediately mani-
But he also is a mu-

Those interested in
photos can see them
of the Society for the
(<http://www2.h-net.n>

IWAC and NYWAC Materials Archived

JUNE NASH

THE CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

The records of the International Women's Anthropology Conference (IWAC) and its predecessor, the New York Women's Anthropology Conference (NYWAC), now can be found at the Bobst 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 prepared a guide to these archives.

IWAC

In 1972, the New York Women's Anthropology Caucus was formed. Women anthropologists (Eleanor Leacock, Ruby Rhorlich-Leavitt and Constance Sutton) founded the group to critique anthropological writings from a feminist perspective, to encourage new research by women, and to identify and challenge sexist academic practices 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 anthropologists 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 informed by 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 policies concerning women using an anthropological perspective.

IWAC Publications

IWAC published a
ning 1982-95. Th
international exch
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reported on IWAC
Forum World Con
Kenya. In addition
tins summarizing
1985 Wenner-Gre
men's collective a
"Practicing Femi
for the Internatio
ence on Women
Together with the
Anthropology, IW
edited by Constan
Samoa: The Theory
Leacock (1993) an
Militarism (1995).

IWAC Conference

IWAC organized t
The first, "The Sex
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Eleanor Leacock a
Aug 1980 at the
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Helen Safa organiz
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Highlights of IW
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Women's Labor: I
and "The Woman
Research and Strate

Over the years,
attended panels a
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Beijing during the
Women in 1995.
number of prepa
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A Photo in the Hands of Translators

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

JOEL M HALPERN
U OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

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 interment.

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

This photo of Joel and Barbara Halpern dressed in native folk costume in front of a peasant house in Orašac in 1953 and its history tell much about the roles translators can play in the distortion of images.

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 Durrell's

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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 Embassy magazine. 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 merge in a gush that obliterates meaning. ■

Joel M Halpern and Barbara K Halpern are the authors of A Serbian Village in Historical Perspective (1957, 1986).

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The Porous Boundary between Researcher and Subject

JOEL M HALPERN
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It is a bit of a challenge to sum up my anthropology photography career as discussed in my brief AN articles with their accompanying photos. As I now reflect it was rather comforting, if not complacent, for me to begin in Jan with the metaphoric 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 apartness, even inferred marginality while at the same time being desirous of trade, i.e., contact. These notions are a bit reflected in my first photos.

But reality intrudes as the decades old avalanche of publication on observers and the observed amply demonstrates. The myth of the existence of a firm boundary between the two, grounded in class and culture, is clearly now an historical artifact.

As my Feb AN article well illustrates, the observer can become purposefully transformed by the host society. In my case, somewhat amusingly, becoming, in a soft porn magazine context, a nationalistic symbol in a mass mobilization trend which helped lead up to a most destructive war in the former Yugoslavia. Interestingly, my previous appearance as the focus of a local (Serbian) TV documentary, from whence the photo derived, was Warhol like, though obscured by the media wind.

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 subject 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 picture of two small tribal boys carrying loads of wood. They were shy and even more important were Kammu people who ranked well below the dominant ethnic Lao in the status hierarchy. If one were today to go to Google and punch in Kammu, one would get instantly some 1,790 references. Prominent among them is the Kammu Home Page that features the research and publications 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 lecture at my university, U of Massachusetts Amherst, during his stay and also to be my houseguest. 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 someone 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 9 of his monograph *Being Kammu, My Village, My Life* (Southeast Asia Program Series, No 14): "The picture of a young Kammu boy comes from . . . Halpern's collection. . . . Strange as it may seem, there can be no doubt that the young boy is me. I remember that a Westerner took a picture of me . . . but I never thought that more than 30 years later I would meet the man again in Amherst, Massachusetts." The biographical sketch in this volume gives the background of how Kam traversed the geographic and intellectual distance from northern Laos to Sweden and from poor tribal youth to distinguished university researcher. The photo that appears on p 103 of this book is reproduced with this article. ■

Joel M Halpern was a field service officer with the International Cooperation Administration Community Development Division in Laos, 1956-58, and a consultant to the RAND Corporation in Laos, 1959-61. His field experience includes research on Swedish Laplanders, Alaska Eskimos, Serb villagers, Bosnians, Indian community development sites, Loatians, Bulgarians and Jewish ethnic communities in western Massachusetts.

"Be Innovative, Be Prepared"

DON MESSERSCHMIDT

Homer G Barnett, my adviser at the U of Oregon in the early 1970s, always worked to instill in his students a sense of creativity, ingenuity, preparation, and "innovation" in his students. As his advisees for the field, he made a constant suggestion, one that later saved several of my own students, to whom I owe a lot of grief. He said something like, "Always carry an alternative plan, or several. If your subjects to look at, in your back pocket, your original plan doesn't work out, you're prepared. Be innovative, be prepared."

My plan was to conduct fieldwork in Nepal. I had lived and worked there as a Peace Corps volunteer a few years earlier and had found an interesting location and subject for my study of the social and economic life of a high-altitude people, the Manangba of the central district of Manang, bordering Tibet. I was acquainted with the respected high lama of Ngawal, and intended to use his influence to gain entrée into the Manangba community. A few years earlier I had trekked through the region, knew the territory, and was reasonably acquainted with the local culture. An American Nepali, the *lingua franca* of Nepal, I felt fully prepared. I had a rather traditional ethnographic approach and subject, and I had passed muster with the dissertation committee. In Sept 1971, my wife Kareen and I left for Oregon for a year in the high mountains of Nepal. On arriving in Kathmandu, however, to my dismay that the lama of Ngawal was ill and was too incapacitated to help me. Moreover, the government of Nepal had closed its northern border districts, including Manang, to all foreigners due to serious fighting between communities in the district and among attending groups of Tibetan refugees taken shelter there. I simply could not do what I had planned. In short, my well-made plan was shattered.

Fortunately, I had taken Barnett's advice, and had an alternative plan in my pocket. I pulled it out, and went to the eminent Nepali academic for advice. My plan was to study the socioeconomic life of a mid-hills Gurung ethnic community. A Gurung academic contact suggested a village, and Kareen and I set off in search of a suitable community. To make a long story short, I spent the next 15 months living the Gurung village life. Near the end of the year I returned to Oregon to write up the results.

Barnett's "Be innovative, be prepared" advice!

If you have sage fieldwork advice, please contact slathrop@aaanet.org. ■