

AFTERWORD

ISLAND AND MOUNTAIN: REFLEXIONS ON UTOPIA AS A POINT OF VIEW

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Nothing can teach us a better lesson in this matter of ultimate importance than the habit of mind which allows us to treat the beliefs and values of another man from his point of view. Nor has civilised humanity ever needed such tolerance more than now, when prejudice, ill will and vindictiveness are dividing each European nation from another, when all the ideals, cherished and proclaimed as the highest achievements of civilisation, science and religion, have been thrown to the winds. The Science of Man, in its most refined and deepest version should lead us to such knowledge and to tolerance and generosity, based on the understanding of other men's point of view.

Bronisław Malinowski (1922: 407)

I would like to thank Maïté and Ruy for encouraging me to participate in the organization of a panel on anthropology and utopia in 2014, and in particular for inviting me to write a last word in this special issue, challenging me to gather together some thoughts on utopias and mutuality.

People trained in my country (Spain) have known of the relationship between anthropology and ethnology ever since Gustavo Bueno published his provocative essay entitled *Emología y Utopía* (Bueno 1971), which made us aware of the intimate connection between anthropological and utopian projects. The study of peoples beyond the limits of our world, which for many defined anthropology (though now we all know that we can also do anthropology at home), is an invitation to become utopian. In a famous short story of 1913,

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Kafka expressed his desire to become an Indian (although the German text says *Indianer*, the concept is often translated into English as ‘Red Indian’, as it is clear that Kafka is alluding to native North Americans). I am sure many of us have felt this adolescent temptation, the lure to break away, to drop out and become an ‘absolute beginner’ elsewhere – to borrow the title of a famous novel on youths in London (MacInnes 1959) – and to behave like a free Indian, galloping on a horse, on the prairies of Nebraska or in the depths of ‘the wild’, like the tragic young man, now an American icon, who two decades ago died in his romantic search for autonomy and adventure in the coldest parts of the Alaskan wilderness (Krakauer 1996). However poetic this search for freedom may be, ‘we’ (I mean we professional anthropologists) know that Indians too can create oppressive cultures, dominant systems of power and local forms of injustice, and that most likely adolescent Indians also dream of becoming something else. Indians too have their Kafkas; nobody can claim a monopoly on imagination.

In discussing these issues with colleagues like Ruy, Maité and many others, including some of the authors in this special issue, I have come to the conclusion (and this is my interpretation of their useful concept of ‘mutuality’) that ethnological utopias mirror each other. In their praxis, anthropologists are not only ethnographers, but ethnographers twice over. Our ethno-poiesis works in two opposite ways: we describe to our readers (most of the time, sadly, other anthropologists) the worlds we have been inhabiting with other humans for a year or two, but we also describe to the latter the worlds from which we come. We feed the latter’s imaginations as much as those of our readers. In our heterotopic boat, to borrow Foucault’s naval metaphor (Foucault 1984), we bring utopias back and forth, along with the ability to be critical about their inhabitants and makers. ‘Someone told me that your people have been to the moon’, said an old rice farmer to me whom at the time I regarded as my adoptive father, in Guinea, in 1993. ‘That’s true’, I said, though I was not sure that the American citizens who did those journeys to the Moon really belonged to ‘my’ people. I then expected some sort of envious comment, or some sign of utopian dream. But no. ‘I think this is wrong’, he reprimanded me. And in a quasi ‘purity-and-danger’ style, he added: ‘God made the sky to be in the sky and the earth to be on the earth. We are not birds. We belong here and have nothing to do up there’. Indeed, I thought: why are ‘we’ trying to escape to the moon when so many people down here, certainly in the country I was residing in at the time, are suffering from hunger, disease, deprivation and toxic debris thrown up on to their coasts by richer countries who send rockets to the moon? Perhaps ‘we’ belong here, as my wise elderly interlocutor was suggesting...

Remembering that verbal interaction now, 23 years later, I realize that it is closely connected to what Malinowski was trying to teach us a hundred years ago. Our culture hero did fieldwork among the Trobriander Argonauts in 1916, at a time when Europe was falling apart under illusions of heroism, making soldiers fight and die under the ‘old lie’, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*..., as the war poet Wilfrid Owen tragically lamented only two years before being killed in the trenches. Malinowski published his monograph in 1922, when Europe *had* fallen apart; it was *The Waste Land*, as another poet, T.S. Eliot, put it in a long poem published the same year (Eliot 1922). The Trobriand archipelago for Malinowski was not only a jolly good ‘object’ of study, but also a platform from which to look back at where he was coming from: the European wasteland. The inspired finale of the *Argonauts*, cryptically, almost like an initiation, entitled ‘The Meaning of Kula’ (the meaning for whom, I wonder?), provokes the reader into thinking that the European ‘crisis’ (a word that had little currency before the First World War) was one of meaning and of value. Looking at Europe from the utopia of the Trobriand Islands was Malinowski’s contribution to the restitution of the devastated continent from which he came. Eliot, Joyce, Mann, Huxley and many others were doing it poetically and spiritually; Malinowski, scientifically and rationally.

Because he was thinking and writing about the failings of European ‘civilized humanity’ from an island, Malinowski’s work inscribes itself in a long series of insular utopian and dystopian thinking which includes fictions such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Huxley’s *Island* and many others. The history of literature shows that islands are indeed good to think and to imagine potential societies, either based on some form of peaceful contract, or as the loci of Hobbesian struggles, or as idealized, almost celestial places based on the prosaic British Isles, like the lyrical ‘Sceptr’d Isle’ evoked by Sir John of Gaunt in Shakespeare’s *King Richard II*, so different from the real island the King was expected to be ruling but was destroying instead. Ever since then, the utopian notion of a ‘Sceptr’d Isle’ has been used to refer to the ideal British Isles, an ideal of isolationist purity still inspiring many local politicians and actors today (and, I suspect, ‘Brexit’ voters too).

But all these islands in literature are, like the Utopia island of our founding father, Thomas More, invented places. Malinowski was the first to take the trouble to actually *travel* to the island. Certainly it is true that in the very beginning of his text he asks that the ancillary imagination be an accomplice to his labour: ‘Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach...’ (Malinowski 1922: 13). But this poetic licence aside, his is a most rigorously scientific piece of work. We the readers have to imagine

ourselves there, but he, the scientist, really *was* there. He is not inventing a world, he is reporting the one he was co-inhabiting with other humans, probably with the same accuracy as he was describing to them the lunatic frenzy of journeys into the sky to which his native Europe was the backdrop. I fancy an elderly local telling him: ‘I think these things your people are doing are wrong. We are not birds, we should not be dropping dirty things from the sky on to the heads of other human beings.’ But this is me, utopian as I am. In any case, Malinowski was on the island, and from the island we read about his confidence that reading about the Kula will help us regain our lost humanity, to recapture some sort of ‘meaning’. It is particularly relevant here to note that Malinowski’s preferred object of study, the one that made him most innovative and famous, was not the nitty gritty of social life itself (though he also wrote about that, kinship, economics and all), but the exchange systems known as the Kula. The Kula is a particularly heterotopic place for the Trobrianders. It is not one island or another, but a third space in between them all, an ideal world of exchange against which they measure their lived reality, like those archetypal rituals Jonathan Z. Smith talks about, which present the state of things not as they are, but as they ought to be (Smith 1980). Reality is not quite like the Kula, but it should tend towards it. The Europeans of 1922 are not like Trobrianders, but ideally they should learn ‘the meaning of Kula’ in order to mend their wounded humanity. Because, unlike many other famous utopian islands, Malinowski’s are real, his criticism of European mores is much more unsettling than Defoe’s, Swift’s, Shakespeare’s or Huxley’s. The latter in particular was a creator of utopias who published his first novel, *Crome Yellow*, in 1921 – almost contemporary with the *Argonauts* – in which much of his utopian thinking is already prefigured.

As Malinowski was collecting his data on islands, another intellectual European, equally worried about the effects of the Great War, was writing about mountains. Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (German edition 1924) was published only two years after Malinowski’s monograph and must also be understood as an allegorical portrait of pre-war society. Like the island, the mountain has offered paradigmatic heterotopic places in which to think about ideal societies. The mystical mountain of Montserrat at the geographical heart of Catalonia, with its perfect, heavenly ordained Benedictine abbey, is still today the mirror on which a Catalonia thirsty for freedom observes the paradigmatic ideal rhythm that should guide Catalan society. Some have seen in mountains places of ideal education, as was the case for the anarchist thinker and geographer Elisée Reclus, whose 1880 lyrical description of the mountain, including a most utopian analysis of its role ‘in the crucial job of the education of children and, through them, of the humanity of the future in general,’ was reissued in

France ten years ago (Reclus 2006). Others have used mountains as places of mystical perfection and symbolic contact between realities, like the surrealist novel *Mount Analogue* (Daumal 1952), which presents the mountain as a fractal of the entire universe and contains some spiritual reflections on the sacredness of mountains that are every bit as insightful as the phenomenology of mountains as universal sacred places presented by phenomenologists of the Mircea Eliade school (e.g. Eliade 1958). Shangri-La, one of the most popular references in utopian literary production (Hilton 1933), is a perfect city found and lost in the mountains of Kunlun, a real chain in today's China. James C. Scott (2009), bringing ethnographic reality to mountaineering imagination (somewhat as Malinowski did with the insular one), has presented Asiatic mountains not as ideal Shangri-Las, but as real places of resistance through the art of not being governed (which I reinterpret as the art of being self-governed). Many other real mountains that have offered, in human history, places of resistance and self-governance are reviewed in the beautiful essay 'Pirate Utopias', part of the collection on 'temporary autonomous zones' (T-A-Z) authored by American anarchist thinker and poet Hakim Bey (Bey 1991).²

Like many of you I have been to the mountains, and I would like to finish this short reflection by taking you on a journey. Let me introduce you to 'the' mountain, my analogous, fractal mountain: the micro-cosmic mountain that is all the mountains, and that contains the entire cosmos. This mountain is called N'kamba, and it belongs to the chain of Bangu, a series of sacred hills, valleys, forests and caves in the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo. N'kamba is today the most important place for the millions of members of the Church of Simon Kimbangu, as well as many other pilgrims who visit it as a place of meditation or to be healed by the spiritual leader who inhabits it, the grandchild of the historical prophet Simon Kimbangu (1887-1951). It was on this hill that the prophet – at the time probably a mere Baptist catechist – realized several miracles back in 1921 (as Malinowski was sending his manuscript to the printers), and it is here that today a huge temple, capable of housing 37,000 people, is located. From N'kamba, a city of cosmic perfection – the 'city as symbol' of which Paul Wheatley wrote so eloquently (Wheatley 1969), the city that Anne Mélice, a specialist on Kimbanguism, described as a 'realized heterotopy' (Mélice 2001) – my own world looked very different. This is, of course, *my* 'meaning of N'kamba', probably different

² Hakim Bey is the pseudonym of Peter L. Wilson, who, using this latter name, has published a book also entitled *Pirate Utopias*, though it is less concerned with mountains and more with pirates as producers of enclaves of alternative forms of governance (Wilson 1995).

from the meaning the sacred mountain and its sanctuary have for many other visitors. Such is perhaps the beauty of analogous places.

I have visited N’Kamba on many occasions, sometime by car and sometimes walking from Mbanza Ngungu, some fifty kilometres away. My first visit there was in October 2009, when I went to the Democratic Republic of Congo with a group of Kimbanguist pilgrims from Lisbon whom I had known since January 2006. The objective of my trip was to attend the exhumation of Mama Mwilu, Simon Kimbangu’s wife, on the very significant date of 12 October, the most solemn day of the Kimbanguist calendar: it was on 12 October 1951 that Simon Kimbangu died in jail in Elisabethville (today Lubumbashi). According to today’s Kimbanguists, this is the same day that his grandson, Simon Kimbangu Kiangani, current spiritual leader of the Church and living in N’kamba, was born. Marie Mwilu Kitawala, who had died in the Belgian Congo in 1959, had been buried in her native village, on a hill adjacent to N’kamba. Separated from her husband since 1921, Mwilu lived her tragic life under the strict surveillance of the Belgian authorities until her death on 27 April 1959. In 1960, her late husband’s coffin was transferred by boat from Lubumbashi to Kinshasa, and then taken by car to the Mausoleum of N’Kamba. In 1992, their sons Charles Kissolokele and, shortly afterwards, Joseph Diangienda Kuntima passed away and were buried in the Mausoleum with their father. Almost a decade later, in 2001, their third son, Solomon Dialungana Kiangani, followed them. Mama Mwilu, however, had not been transferred to N’Kamba. The family was separated by a deep valley and a six-mile tortuous path. It was only in 2009, fifty years after her death, that she was finally transferred and could join her husband and children posthumously in N’kamba. The second burial of Mama Mwilu, normally referred to within the Kimbanguist Church as ‘The Triumphal Entry of Mama Mwilu in N’kamba-New Jerusalem’, was a big success for the Church. They had had to negotiate the exhumation and second burial not only with the huge and fiercely divided Kimbangu family, but also with local traditional authorities and the national government. The negotiations took much longer than planned, and as a result the Triumphal Entry could not take place on 27 April 2009 as logically intended, but only on 12 October (i.e. on the date of Simon Kimbangu’s death, instead of the date of her own death). Still, the exhumation took place within the fiftieth anniversary of her passing away.



Images of the arrival of Mama Mwilu's coffin at N'kamba (photos by Ramon Sarró, October 2009).

There was joy and there was sadness, there were tears, and there were interminable songs of gratitude. The actual transfer of the body on October 11, in the same car that had brought Kimbangu's coffin to N'kamba in 1960, was awe-inspiring. The coffin was surrounded by young women disguised as angels, and thousands of women were singing next to the car in

its very slow progress from one hill to another. I had never seen anything like it before, and I very much doubt I will ever witness anything remotely similar again.

As well as the moving combination of songs and landscape, I was particularly impressed by the words of the Pastor, who, in the meeting's sermon on the 12 October, very solemnly proclaimed: 'This is the moment.' The coffin had already reached N'kamba and was resting within the main temple so that people could pray to it before it was taken into the adjacent family mausoleum. The pastor gave an unusually long sermon, speaking for about an hour and a half, and devoting a great deal of that time to the slave trade in historical Kongo. He explained to thousands of members of his Church that in 1609 Galileo had demonstrated, with his telescope, the Copernican theory according to which the sun, not the earth, was at the centre of the universe. This, he said, was considered by many historians to be the most important historical moment for humanity. But it was certainly *not* 'the' moment, he insisted, for while Galileo was doing these academic demonstrations in Europe in 1609 (exactly four hundred years before the N'kamba gathering), many Europeans were in Kongo, buying slaves and forcibly taking human beings to the other shores of the Atlantic. The 'moment', he insisted, was *now*: the day Mama Mwilu was finally being transferred to N'kamba-New Jerusalem and reunited with her husband. *This* was the moment, the *kairós*, the exceptional time breaking the continuity of *kronos*, the ordinary secular time, which contains things like history, slave-traders and telescopes.

The pastor's sermon left an unsettling impression on me, the only white European in the huge temple that on that day contained more than 10,000 people. I had always assumed that overcoming Ptolemaic geocentrism in the seventeenth century had been one of the greatest achievements of Western science, and, moreover, that I had *never* realized the connection (or disconnection) between Galileo and the slave trader. Geocentrism may have been long overcome, I thought that day, but certainly Eurocentrism is still at the root of our modern cosmography. Ever since that day in N'kamba in October 2009, I cannot help but think about the Copernican revolution with an ironic 'Yes, that *was* a great revolution for humanity' and remembering the millions of humans who were bought and sold on African lands while such a revolution was taking place in European academia. From the mountain's point of view, the meaning of my world was shattered. Perhaps provoking such shattering is the objective of both anthropological and utopian production. Let us hope, at any rate, that Malinowski was not too utopian when he expressed his hope that the understanding of other people's points of view would lead to 'tolerance and generosity' and act as an antidote to mutual antagonisms and divisions.

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