Epilogue

Alpine Anthropology in the Anthropocene

Werner Krauß – University of Bremen

It is a great pleasure for me to write an epilogue for this collection of articles about one of the anthropological topics which is dearest to my heart, the Alps. Growing up in the foothills of the Alps, they were also my first field of study as an anthropologist. My point of departure was an interest in the differences between Swiss *Volkskunde* (folklore studies) and American anthropologists who studied the Alps during the 1970s. The encounter between these related, but different, disciplines initiated a dialogue and served as a starting point for an Alpine anthropology, as evidenced by several articles in this volume. Anthropological research in the Alps started in the Holocene, took an ethnographic turn and was critical in the emergence of political ecology. Today, anthropologists explore what it means to live in the Alps during the Anthropocene. In carving out this role, Alpine anthropology became a field of its own, with its own tradition, and as such, it makes an important contribution to anthropology in general.

Blind Spots

In his book *Blind Spots* the writer Teju Cole (2017) combines the pictures he took during several stays in Switzerland with short texts. One of these photographs shows a rocky crossroads on the Gemmi Pass, connecting the municipality of Leukerbad with the neighbouring canton. In the accompanying text, the reader learns that it was at this spot the African-American writer James Baldwin came up with the title for his first book *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (Baldwin, 1957). James Baldwin, who had travelled to Leukerbad to write

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a novel, was, to his knowledge, the first Black person the people of Leukerbad had ever laid eyes on. The residents stared at him in amazement, and children ran after him, calling out "Neger, Neger"[1]. Baldwin saw in this situation a reflection of when people in Africa saw a White person for the first time, and these observations influenced his novel about slavery and the relationship between Black and White people in the USA. The other photographs and texts that Teju Cole produced in Switzerland subvert the cliché of the over-photographed Alpine scenery: The laundry on the line or the parking lot take centre stage, while the snow-covered mountain peaks almost disappear into the background. In another picture, the radiant panorama of the Alpine landscape serves as wallpaper on a cabinet in a hotel room. These photographs and comments offer multi-faceted perspectives and shed light on the blind spots in our perception of Alpine landscapes in the 21st century.

Teju Cole's book came to mind as I read the articles in this volume on Alpine research. They, too, draw attention to blind spots, to what unfolds outside of our attention, to the hidden stories of the Sinti in South Tyrol, the cheesemakers in the province of Bergamo, the climate researchers on the glaciers, the tourists in Verbier, or the herders in the Julian Alps. Anthropological research challenges the familiar patterns of perception and interpretation of the Alpine region, opening up new perspectives on the crises of the present, which manifest themselves in the Alps in numerous ways. The authors in this volume tell, archive, and question stories about life in specific places in the mountains as a way to uncover individual layers of time and thus show the full range of conditions under which life in the Alps was and is possible. In this fashion, they continue an Alpine anthropology which dates back to the beginning of modern Alpine research in the 1970s.

1 A highly offensive term for Black people in German (Deutschlandfunk, 2022).

Hot Spots

The Alps are precarious in many ways, and it has always required a sophisticated system of behaviours and techniques to sustain continuous life in Alpine villages: hence Robert Netting called his study of an Alpine village *Balancing on an Alp* (1981). This precariousness is more pronounced than ever today and affects the Alpine landscape as a whole. Foremost are the consequences of climate change, with the mountains being a place where its effects are particularly striking: the rapid melting of glaciers, the thawing of permafrost, and the dramatic threat to biodiversity. The Alps are an arena which is an exemplar of the Anthropocene. Human activities leave traces that will be identified in the distant future, whether it is the tunnelling through mountains for military and road construction or the consequences of ski tourism. The COVID-19 virus spread across Europe from the ski resort of Ischgl via tourists returning to their home countries. And the world's economic elite gather in Davos at the World Economic Forum. Are the Alps periphery or centre? These events make it clear that we need to realign ourselves in both time and space: Where are we actually when we are in the Alps?

Alpine Chronotopes

The term Anthropocene may still be debated in geological circles, but it has value as an analytical concept in the social sciences and humanities.[2] Here, the term serves as a spatial and temporal configuration in which phenomena as diverse as climate change, a viral disease, or the global economy can be discussed as contemporary elements of our societies (Pratt, 2017). The Anthropocene is a chronotope, following Bakhtin (1981), just as the Alps, their glaciers, or their green pastures are. Once, the white mountain peaks served as national symbols; today, they represent the consequences of global climate change. By focusing on individual chronotopes, various layers of space, time and meaning are revealed. For example, the mountain dweller was once revered as a national hero of freedom, while in the 20th century, they were re-

2 See, for example, Antweiler (2022) for an overview.

vealed as a poor soul who could not make it to the valley. Today, there are the "new highlanders" who inhabit mountain villages threatened by depopulation after the world economic crisis of the early 21st century. It is one of Bakhtin's observations that old meanings tend to disappear, but they can suddenly reappear in a new context.

A pertinent example of a new chronotope, a shift in our coordinates, is the story of Ötzi, who died more than 5,000 years ago during the Holocene and whose body was buried in the supposedly eternal ice. Ötzi resurfaced in a new era, the Anthropocene, when the climate-change-driven melting ice released his body and it was found by astonished tourists. For a while, there was confusion about where Ötzi was actually found: was it in Austria or Italy? The border, running along a watershed on the glacier, had shifted as a result of climate change and is now the first movable border in the Schengen Area, measured daily.[3] Ötzi was thus much more than a greeting from the past, he questioned the system by which we determine where we are. Where exactly was Ötzi found now, when the nation and the map are no longer our sole frames for our location and description? Where are we today when we are in a place in the Alps?

The Alpine Region as a Critical Zone

In anthropology, ecological conditions have always played a role in the depiction of the Other, especially when examining non-European peoples and cultures. When looking at their own societies, anthropologists prioritize concepts such as nation, identity, or class. However, in recent decades, the division between nature and culture has been repeatedly challenged, not least by anthropology itself, giving way to more complex approaches, such as political ecology, with John Cole and Eric Wolf, two of the originators of the concept, being prominent figures in Alpine research. Bruno Latour (2018) provides a contemporary response to the question of where we are when we are "down-to-earth" at a specific location. He adopted the term "critical zone" from the geosciences, which describe it as the zone from the depth of the soil

3 This is derived from Ferrari et al. (2016) http://www.italianlimes.net/project.html; see also Krauß (2018).

to the top of the vegetation and beyond to the climate envelope. In short, it is the zone where life originates and is possible. Today, the term critical zone might also be understood in a metaphorical sense, a place where life is precarious, endangered, and in need of care. This definition certainly applies to extreme landscapes like the Alps, where what is usually regarded as the background or stage for human activities – soil, rock, weather, atmosphere – is in the foreground. Mountains are not just a backdrop, but they are active too, they have agency. Geology matters, as the French Annales-School historian Fernand Braudel (1998) knew, connecting changes over a geological timescale with those of more human duration, such as the emergence of civilisations and historical events.

The anthropological method is characterised by its patience and duration, enabling the uncovering of various layers, breathing life into the skeleton of numbers and statistics which are normally used to define people and places. The articles in this book shed light on those areas which escape the attention of the objectifying sciences, and they inquire about what it means to be human in Alpine landscapes. Anthropological research and the production of knowledge about life in the Alps always has to define its field as a critical zone: It is situated in, and has to define the interaction and interconnection between, the elements, the weather and the people who inhabit and shape these vertical landscapes.

Narratives of Change

Glaciers are melting rapidly before our eyes: Within my lifetime, the Rhone Glacier and the Aletsch Glacier have shrunk dramatically. They have done so before, and there was a need to understand how changes in climate occur. My great grandfather, an amateur scientist, published a theory in 1900 about the last glacial cycle and the transition from the Pleistocene to the Holocene, which is remarkably valid even today (Krauß, 2015). At the same time, the Alps were becoming an icon of national identity, one of many homelands in Germany or a national symbol in Switzerland. Growing up as a teenager in the foothills of the Alps in the post-war era, I wondered if the Alps were, in fact, fascist because of Hitler's residence at Obersalzberg near Berchtes-

gaden and the strict discipline of the Alpine Club's activities. As a young anthropologist, I chose the Alps as a field of study and I wondered about the strict distinction in German speaking countries between domestic *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde*, that is, anthropology. The arrival of American anthropologists in the Alps challenged this.[4] Arnold Niederer, the successor to Richard Weiß, the founder of post-war folklore studies in Switzerland, mediated in the dialogue between folklore studies and the anthropologists from outside. Throughout his career, Niederer sought to free folklore studies from its nationalist biases – in which it was deeply entangled – and he helped to initiate an ethnographic turn in folklore studies. Richard Weiß had already debunked the myth of the Alpine mountain dweller as a Swiss national hero. Using the example of a photograph of a young man on a moped with a large alphorn under his arm, Weiß asked himself: Was it possible to reconcile tradition and modernity? Arnold Niederer, in turn, discovered in the *Gemeinwerk*, the collective work of mountain farmers in the Valais, an alternative to the capitalist production of commodities. For both, it was a central task to free folklore studies from its nationalist delusions and transform it into a modern field of study. It is worth revisiting the beginnings of what is now an anthropological engagement with the Alps, especially since much of what they overcame is gaining renewed relevance today.

This is particularly true in the face of the alarming rise of far-right and populist tendencies in Alpine countries, which are gaining ground in remote areas with their theories of the unity of people and territory (Stacul, 2015). Rewilding, reforestation, nature conservation, and EU agricultural policies are often perceived as foreign interlopers by populists in Alpine regions. In the light of the necessity to adapt to the consequences of climate change, which are particularly acute in many Alpine valleys, we can learn from the mistakes of the past. The study of the multifaceted narratives of change in the field's history and the region itself can act as an antidote and offer alternatives to a return to an imagined idyllic world or to top-down technocratic measures, whether in agriculture, nature conservation or climate adaptation. Narratives of change provide access to the many layers of time that make up an Alpine landscape (Krauß and Bremer, 2020).

4 The following information is all based on Krauß (1987).

Revisiting and Renewing Alpine Anthropology

In the 1980s, the transition from studying non-literate to peasant societies marked a turning point in anthropology. While European ethnography, with a focus on the Mediterranean, was gaining momentum, anthropology in the backyard had limited prestige among well-travelled anthropologists. Even when John Cole (1977) announced that anthropology was now "coming partway home", this did not prompt a great change in practice. The concept of symmetrical anthropology and the idea that "we have never been modern" (Latour, 1993) were still generally unknown. However, as a student working on my master's thesis on the encounter of domestic folklore studies (*Volkskunde*) and (mostly American) anthropological research in the Swiss Alpine Region (Krauß, 1987), I had no doubt that our own societies were no less exotic than others. Were the crimes of World War II not exotic? The Holocaust, racial doctrine, and the ideology of a people without territory, all drew their justification from so-called scientific approaches, including *Volkskunde*. In my opinion, it was high time for anthropology to come home, and with John Cole and Eric Wolf, who wrote the classic *The Hidden Frontier* (1977) on Alpine anthropology, it was in good hands. They had a different, enlightening, and materialist approach to ethnicity, nation, and ecology. The encounter of Swiss *Volkskunde* with American anthropologists who conducted field research in the Alps in the 1970s gave me the opportunity to confront my phantasm of the fascist Alps and was also my entry into anthropology as a profession.

With the current volume, it becomes clear that this encounter between folklorists and anthropologists serves well as a foundational myth of Alpine anthropology. Despite lying dormant for decades, it is more relevant today than ever. The anthropologists in this volume implicitly or explicitly take up this thread and develop it. Their unity lies not in the geographical coherence of the Alpine region or in a shared theoretical framework, but in a methodologically informed engagement with the experience of "making a living in the Alps". This collection of articles articulates "hidden histories" (Schneider and Rapp, 1995) and seeks to understand the Alpine world from an existential perspective. Alpine anthropology, in many ways, stands in the tradition of Malinowski, and carries it forward into the 21st century.[5]

5 See Tauber and Zinn (2023).

Paolo Viazzo retraces the origins of Alpine anthropology and, almost fifty years later, transposes its questions to the present. At first glance, the opposing pairs that structure his retrospective may seem obvious, but as his article and the essays in this volume progress, they reveal an intense dialogue about what Alpine research means in the Anthropocene. The debate between folklorists and anthropologists revolved around whether being native was an epistemological advantage (native vs foreigner), it covered the conflict between the domestic and exotic, i.e., whether one's own culture was worthy of ethnographic research and who the preserver of culture was, the local or the newcomer. The articles presented here address these tensions in different ways. These are questions that go to the heart of anthropology and which are discussed over and over again in ever-new contexts. Eric Wolf addressed the tension between who is marginal and where the centre is in *Europe and the Peoples Without History* (1983 [2010]), just as Bruno Latour did ten years later in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). The Alps no longer lie at the periphery; as a hotspot of climate crisis, they belong at the centre of critical debates in the Anthropocene.

One of the points of conflict between the American anthropologists and local folklorists was the duration of fieldwork. Folklorists often remained loyal to their field for a lifetime, wandering from alp to alp, knowing every mountain farmer, while they accused anthropologists of having a "slash and burn" mentality with their – typically – one-year of fieldwork. While these debates are now a thing of the past, the long duration of field research, the documentation of processes over long periods, and, following in the footsteps of Eric Wolf, their historical roots are characteristics of all the contributions in this volume. Valeria Siniscalchi dissects long-term fieldwork as a process, a movement between different places, based on comparative research in the Apennines and the French Alps. She follows in the footsteps of Mediterranean anthropology and Alpine research but, above all, she follows the thread of heritage, demonstrating that space must be understood primarily as an economic factor. In her analysis of conceptions of space and nature at the example of the Parc National des Écrins, she uses political ecology as a central element of Alpine research, closely engaging with the work of Eric Wolf.

Anthropology as a slow movement in time and space is also a theme in Cristina Grasseni's work, who is an expert on the slow food movement. She

explores spatial and seasonal movements using the example of Alpine farming and transhumance, showing how "in the last decade, care for the 'alps' (grass, cows and milk) has begun to mean also care for the microbiological extracts and strands from the local microbiome". This shifts the focus from material culture, which has always characterized Alpine research, toward bacteria and microbes as non-human actors. Grasseni demonstrates how cheese varieties that have emerged from the seasonal movements of Alpine farming and transhumance are labelled with a sense of "locality". This leads us into the world of European regulations which deeply influence local practices today. The hallmark of Alpine field research is not places but "practices of locality". These culminate in accommodation for tourists built from clay, where visitors can simulate life on the alp and engage their senses by smelling hay, touching wood and experiencing the soundtrack of a cowshed through video installations. In many ways, it is indeed a long way from the considerations of Richard Weiß, who, based on a photo of a moped rider carrying a traditional alphorn, pondered whether tradition and modernity could ever be reconciled. Yet, it is this long journey that leads to the postmodern "practices of locality", which Grasseni and other authors describe in this volume.

Storytelling: The Alpine Pastures as a Chronotop

The term Alps does not originate from the white mountain peaks but from the green meadows that are created by seasonal farming in high-altitude areas above mountain villages. Alpine pastures are undoubtedly a chronotope, with the various meanings ascribed to them providing insights into the prevailing perception of time. Goethe could scarcely imagine how people could live in such a harsh region, while Albrecht von Haller considered mountain dwellers to be free national heroes. In contrast, Richard Weiß noted that after the war only those who were too poor or too old to resist the call to the valleys and the temptations of the department store catalogue still lived in the mountains (Krauß, 1987). Today, there are the "new highlanders", refugees from the city and austerity politics, who take up herding in the mountains. And these are merely some of the meanings attributed to the green pastures of the Alps, each of them carrying meaningful messages for their time.

Four of the articles in this book comprise ethnographically grounded storytelling which reveals the diversity and dynamism of these seemingly remote areas. These are landscapes which are precarious in many ways, ecologically, economically, and demographically. Being subject to conservation and climate policies, they are permanently "caught between abandonment, rewilding, and agro-environmental management" (Krauß and Olwig, 2018).

In her meticulous ethnographic study of Vinigo di Cardore, Anna Paini describes how the remaining inhabitants tell stories of an unusual winter snowfall, of population aging, and altered forest management. According to Paini, these are narratives that develop a philosophy of care based on connection and dependence. In earlier times, the surrounding woodland was used for agriculture, while today the forest is advancing and is perceived as a threat, a sign of disorder. Migration patterns have changed; formerly the ice cream makers who operated abroad returned, but today, the emigrants stay away. The climate is changing and becoming unpredictable, and the forest is no longer managed according to old norms, but is advancing further and is altering the social and physical microclimate. Many vignettes unfold into an ethnographic narrative where the sense of place of the Vinighesi is taken literally: all the senses are engaged, and an image of an intact landscape emerges, one that returns agency to people and presents the encroachment of the forest as a loss.

Špela Ledinek Lozey conducted long-term fieldwork on an Alpine pasture in the Julian Alps in Slovenia. Here the distinction between insiders and outsiders seems to blur over the length of her fieldwork and repeated visits, as well as her work in the dairy. Her deep knowledge of the Krstenica alp comes from regularly revisiting both her fieldnotes and the field site. This allows her to analyse the changes in the recruitment of herders, of ownership structures and the meanings of the alp, along with the tensions arising from them, and to compare these events with her own interpretations. This method of reflective participant observation reveals that the Krstencia alp is not the common ground of an otherwise diverse Alpine community, but their uncommon ground. The alp is not viewed differently by different actors. It is "a pluriverse and a shared setting" across many different actors, both human and non-human. The tensions arise from differences in worldviews and being in the world rather than distinctions between local and non-local actors.

It involves a continuous negotiation of interests among those invested in Alpine farming, with common goals, rather than traditional politics which exclude certain actors. This form of "cosmopolitics", as advocated by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2016), acknowledges ontological differences and promotes a pluriverse: a preservation of plurality.

One starting point for Almut Schneider's article is the crisis faced by high-altitude farming, once already described by Richard Weiß during the middle of the 20th century. The regional South-Tyrolean government recognized this problem in the 1970s and convinced mountain farmers to transition from diversified self-sustaining agriculture to a monoculture of dairy farming. This ensured the families had a livelihood and the cultural landscape, which is crucial for tourism, was preserved. Today it is not surprising to see trucks loaded with soybean-based concentrated feed climbing the narrow mountain roads. Schneider juxtaposes this with the hybrid apples produced under hi-tech conditions by cooperatives in South Tyrol and then marketed as "pure" and natural products. Through two case studies of mountain farmers in South Tyrol, Schneider portrays this paradox of modernity from an insider's perspective, emphasizing the importance of the role of inheritance and how biographical events, climate change, market mechanisms and the effects of recent international crises need to be balanced by mountain farmers. Ultimately, for her, dairy mountain farmers embody the paradox of modernity. The return to diversified agriculture may be an alternative, with some farmers already attempting this, and adaptation to climate change will further boost diversification.

Hot Spot Anthropology

The starting point for the research of John Cole and Eric Wolf in the 1970s was the different inheritance patterns in the German- and Italian-speaking parts of Val di Non. On one side, there were individual farms, each passed on to a single heir, and on the other side, there were clustered villages resulting from reallocation, where all the children were provided for. This came to mind when reading Andrea Boscoboinik's and Vivianne Cretton's article about Zermatt as a "place of strength" and Verbier as a "magic bubble". Could

the contrast between 'conservative' Zermatt and 'liberal' Verbier also be due to different attitudes towards inheritance and the resulting ownership patterns, as suggested by the authors' reference to clan-like family structures in the Valais?

Boscoboinik and Cretton integrate the mountain landscape, particularly the iconic view of the Matterhorn, into their vibrant portrait of the two tourist hotspots, Zermatt and Verbier. In good ethnographic tradition, they present an insider's perspective and emphasize the diversity of the populations, as well as the differences within that diversity. It seems that everyone is under the spell of the magic of the Matterhorn and the Alps, from Portuguese domestic workers to Japanese tourists, from jewellery-clinking jetsetters and ravers from around the world, to local homeowners and hotel owners. Despite all the iconic symbolism and mediatisation, this still appears to be a place where the magic of the Alps is revealed to the observer. By examining inheritance structures, and thus forms of ownership, the subtle differences between Zermatt and Verbier become evident. Place is here de-territorialised in various ways due to the dynamics in the population – tourists, travelling employees, second-home owners – and held together by both hierarchies and flat structures, by "practices of locality", and by the Matterhorn, which stands out because of its verticality.

Equally spectacular is the example of a glacier ski resort in the cryosphere, the realm of frozen water which mostly occurs at high altitudes. In her article, Herta Nöbauer combines verticality, climate change and ownership. Glaciers like the Pitztal glacier in Tyrol turn old hierarchies on their head: In the Alps the precariat usually lived at high altitudes, and the wealthy resided in the valleys. This is different in a ski resort where the glacier is the main attraction. Nöbauer uses a detailed examination of verticality to cast light on this, touching on physicality, geology, geomorphology, and ecology, as well as its social, political, and psychological elements. Different forms of ownership help structure the ski resort and its management, and working in the ski resort also creates vertical hierarchies among the residents. It is fascinating to see how this subtle infrastructure is literally on thin ice. The glacier and ski slopes are under permanent construction, water becomes a contested resource when it comes to making artificial snow, while the glacier is partially covered to prevent it from melting. Herta Nöbauer shows how the drama of

climate change plays out here, in the high Alps, and in doing so, she provides a glimpse into the accelerating pressures on mountain populations and their practices of locality as temperatures continue to rise.

Ski resorts in the cryosphere or tourist hubs in the shadow of the Matterhorn are far from being marginal or remote, they are each, in their own way, critical zones, with their own dynamics, assemblies, hierarchies and senses of place. Where are we, when we are on top of the Pitztal glacier or in a fashionable après-ski location in Verbiers? Who assembles there, who is included, who is excluded, and according to which rules? Hot spot anthropology does not differ from the anthropology of an Alpine pasture. It takes time to understand what is going on and what it means to be down-to-earth, be it on top of the world or in a club.

New Horizons for the Alps: Ethnographies, Reshaping Challenges and Emerging More-Than-Alpine Relations

This volume not only tells ethnographic stories of the history of and life in the Alps, but also about the blind spots in our perception and how to reveal them by continuously revisiting both the field and our fieldnotes. The Alps are, in many respects, a hot spot of climate change, and Alpine anthropology contributes to our understanding of what it means to be human in the Anthropocene.

A common feature of the articles in this volume is a consideration of fieldwork, the cautious and respectful approach to the Other, and, above all, the careful writing about it. Most of the articles can hardly be reduced to concise statements or partial information, they have to be read in full to become aware of the many twists and turns and many layers of seemingly familiar Alpine chronotopes. At its best, Alpine anthropology is about the art of storytelling. Designating James Baldwin as an honorary godfather of current Alpine anthropology is certainly not incorrect; his anecdote of his stay in Leukerbad tells us a great deal about how anthropologists gain their knowledge, the culture shock of seeing oneself in the mirror of the Other, and the transformation of these experiences through writing.

To speak about others means to speak with care and caution, as Elisabeth Tauber demonstrates in her article about the Sinti. This was a caution that led her to leave the material untouched for 26 years until she finally was ready to write about the fact that the Sinti are also residents of the Alps. Why were they never part of the ethnography of the Alpine region, its folklore and representation? What does active forgetting, exclusion and the stories behind them mean? The articles in this volume create a more inclusive Alpine region, a pluriverse that welcomes other worlds. This collection serves as a strong foundation for continuing – and sometimes rewriting – Alpine anthropology.

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