

## Introduction

Between 1906 and 1918, anthropologist and explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879- 1962) went on three expeditions into the Alaskan and Canadian Arctic, each of which lasted between sixteen months and five years. He published some 24 books and more than 400 articles on his travels and observations, including his autobiography (1). There is also a voluminous literature on his life and work (2). Stefansson was an ambitious and successful explorer and he soon became a public figure in North America and Europe, well-known for his description of the "Blond Eskimo" (Copper Inuit), his discovery of new lands in the Arctic, his approach to travel and exploration, and his theories of health and diet. His successes in exploration, however, as Collins points out, "have tended to obscure the fact that he was primarily an anthropologist," although some anthropological works have referred to his writings and he continues to be cited in ethnographic and historical works on indigenous peoples of the North American Arctic, particularly Inūpiag ("North Alaskan Eskimo") (3).



Young Vilhjalmur Stefansson

Stefansson was born in the Canadian Icelandic community at Arnes, Manitoba. His parents, along with 250 other Icelandic colonists recruited by the Canadian government in 1877, left from north Iceland to settle near Winnipeg, in "New Iceland" as the settlement came to be called. Stefansson attended university from the age of eighteen, first at the University of North Dakota and later at the University of Iowa and Harvard University. Early on he developed an interest in comparative religion and anthropology and for some time he seems to have been torn between priesthood and anthropology. In the end he decided in favor of anthropology, "with the mental reservation that it was to be a humanistic anthropology" (4).

## Stefansson's expeditions

After receiving his first academic degree in religious studies from the University of Iowa in 1903, Stefansson became affiliated with the Anthropology Department and the Peabody Museum at Harvard University. He planned an anthropological field trip to Africa at the suggestion of his teacher, F.W. Putnam: "Putnam pointed out that nobody connected with our department has as yet made much of a study of Africa. What would I think of that field?" (5). In 1906 Stefansson planned to join a British Museum expedition destined for Central East Africa. In the end, however, he chose the Arctic.

During the summers of 1904 and 1905 he voyaged to Iceland to study the relationship between health and diet. In 1905 he became a teaching fellow, "looked upon as the Anthropology Department's authority on the polar regions" (6). Partly as a result of his early article on the history of the Norse colony in Greenland (7) he was invited to participate in an expedition to the Arctic, the impressively named "Anglo- American Polar Expedition"

That expedition was lead by the Danish naval adventurer Ejnar Mikkelsen and the American geologist Ernest de Koven Leffingwell. The main purpose of the expedition was to look for undiscovered lands in the Arctic, north of Alaska. Mikkelsen and Leffingwell, however, were forced to add an ethnographic dimension to the expedition; they had difficulties in funding the expedition and one backer requested that a qualified "ethnologist" accompany the group to study any natives who might be encountered on the way. Stefansson's role was to study the Mackenzie River Indians and to collect artifacts for the Peabody and Royal Ontario Museums. In 1906 the "southern" supplies on which the Inuit had become dependent (mainly foodstuffs from white whalers) failed to arrive and, as a result, the Inuit had to revert to their traditional hunting practices. Stefansson felt, Diubaldo points out, that this provided an exciting opportunity to observe the Inuit almost in their "natural" state and, moreover, "living with them

was much better from an ethnological point of view than merely living amongst them, as other white men had done" (8).

In August 1907, Stefansson severed his ties with the Mikkelsen-Leffingwell expedition and began his journey back home. He was not too impressed with the results of his scientific mission. During his fieldwork, however, he became committed to the ethnographic study of



Mackenzie  
Inuits.

Inuit culture. At Herschel Island he met captain "Charlie" Klengenbergh who told him an exciting story, claiming to have encountered and stayed with native tribes who apparently had never seen a white man and yet looked like white men in some respects. This mysterious story was supported by a small collection of knives and other implements made of native copper. While the story seemed almost too romantic to be true, it provided a glimmer of success which drove him to organize a second expedition to the Arctic. Stefansson confided to Putnam, his mentor at Harvard, that he had evidence of truly primitive Eskimos in Prince Albert Island.

Stefansson's first expedition was relatively short and his ethnography, mainly among the Inuit of the Mackenzie delta, was somewhat limited although it provided interesting sketches of early fieldwork, Inuit society and relations between "natives" and "whites." During this expedition, other scientists and explorers employed Stefansson, in a secondary role as an anthropologist and assistant, and perhaps partly for that reason his ethnographic diary entries were rather brief. Nevertheless, he provided interesting observations on Inuit society and relations between Inuit and whites as the expedition moved on. Stefansson's works on the Mackenzie Delta Inuit seem to have been underestimated; he observed and recorded the end of a way of life described by the late nineteenth-century explorer Émile Petitot. In the early days of the expedition he tended to focus on the logistics of the expedition, but later on his discussion of indigenous languages and customs grew more detailed. The Arctic clearly appealed to Stefansson, despite the difficulties it posed for Western travelers. Part of its charm lay in its exotic property rights and communitarian ethic. But while many of the early armchair anthropologists and evolutionists had fabricated ethnography and history by postulating a utopian primitive society without class divisions and private property, Stefansson had found it alive and well. During the second expedition, however, he observes that communism seems to be "disappearing fast" (9).

Stefansson was determined to return to the Arctic for a second expedition, this time as the commander of an expedition of his own. His main ambition was to locate and observe the mysterious blond Eskimo he had heard about during the first expedition and he felt confident that he would be able to face the difficulties involved. His experience of the first expedition and the sensational stories he had heard about Eskimos who had never seen a white man helped to provide the necessary connections and financial support. His popularized articles based on the first expedition also outlined a new approach to arctic travel and exploration which appealed to potential sponsors, a strategy also taken advantage of by other explorers, including Robert E. Peary. (Stefansson argued that the costs of an expedition could be significantly reduced if one was prepared to live as the Inuit did. These articles caught the attention of the leading personnel of The American Museum of Natural History, including Clark Wissler, Curator in the Anthropology Department. After a series of negotiations, Stefansson was offered a contract. A former fellow student at the University of Iowa, the zoologist Rudolph M. Anderson, was appointed to join Stefansson. Anderson, who at the time was working for a military academy, was trained in biology and his scientific background and credibility helped in providing funding for the expedition.

The stated purpose of the expedition was threefold. In a commissioning letter to Stefansson, the American Museum specified: "The intent of this commission ... is to provide you with the means of pursuing fieldwork in anthropology; of providing Mr. Anderson with the means of pursuing fieldwork in zoology, and with the design to secure to The American Museum of Natural History valuable collections in the branches of science above mentioned." An (apparently) somewhat earlier statement from the American Museum describes the uniqueness of the Stefansson-Anderson Expedition in the following terms: The present

expedition . . . differs essentially from ordinary Arctic ventures in this, that where it is usual to take along with the party everything that the party is expected to need during its stay in the field, in this case there will be taken neither food, clothing nor house materials, and there will be complete dependence on local resources. Seeing the object of the expedition is (sic.) chiefly ethnological, it is in a sense desirable that this should be so; for the only way in which one can become familiar with the real life of a primitive people is to live-., with them in their houses, and as they do, rather than to live near them in one's own 'civilized' way (italics added).

Stefansson and Anderson left from Toronto in April 1908, reaching Fort McPherson by early July. This time the two of them spent four years in the Arctic, sometimes working separately on different trails. The project turned out to be more costly and time consuming than expected. Stefansson probably knew all along that an ambitious project of this kind needed more time than the contract with the American Museum specified. Understandably, he was eager to pass on information about his successes, in the hope that necessary funding would be maintained. In a letter to Wissler at the American Museum he proudly announced the "discovery" of non-Eskimo Eskimos: West of the Coppermine we found over 200 people who had never seen a white man, whose ancestors had never seen one, who knew of no past relations with people to the west, and whose territory was supposed by geographers to be definitely known to be uninhabited (so labeled on official charts of the Canadian Government).... The general appearance was non-Eskimo - a sort of 'portly' appearance . . . It is hard to be specific in this matter, but the general impression is definite. My Eskimo companion was impressed no less than I. He said, 'These are not Eskimos, they are just like fo'cas'le men' - he has worked many years 'before the mast' as a whaler. (12) Wissler, however, had doubts at this point about the scientific merits of the results. (13) Although he would publish extracts from Stefansson's diaries a few years later, at this stage neither he nor anyone else knew how valuable Stefansson's ethnography might be. In the middle of the expedition, the American Museum withdrew its support. During the second expedition, Stefansson occupied a leading position, in charge of both logistics and research. Here he appears in the role of a more independent and alert observer than during the first expedition, keen to note minute details important for understanding social life in the Arctic. And in this case the diaries are massive, with vocabularies, dictionaries, grammatical notes, personal names, descriptions of events, ethnographic observations, and drawings. Much of the text focuses on daily activities related to the organization of camps, the collection and storing of food, interaction with Stefansson's companions (including Inuit), and travels across a complex and changing landscape. Several native informants played a particularly important role for Stefansson's ethnography, including Pannigabluk, Natk-usiak and Tannaumirk.

During the first days among the Copper Inuit, Stefansson's note keeping is unusually detailed, with several pages on the first encounter itself, as if he was driven by an ethnographic compulsion. Stefansson's enthusiasm at this point is understandable. For one thing, the whole expedition was justified by the attempt to establish whether the rumors he had heard during the first expedition about the existence of "blond" Eskimo were true or not. Moreover, anthropologists have for a long time been fascinated with "discoveries" of tribes previously unknown to "the West," with people reported not to have seen a "white man" (14), and Stefansson was no exception. Not only were such lost or freshly-discovered tribes seen as evidence of earlier modes of existence, of "disappearing worlds" ready to be mapped and recorded before the final onslaught of modernity, also the first encounter with such extreme isolates in the cultural mosaic of humanity inevitably presented a "translation" problem, a classic theme in Western thought. When Stefansson returned to Seattle and New York in the fall of 1912, his story about the "Blond Eskimos" (the Haneragmiut, Kanhirgimut, and Nuwukpagmiut) caused quite a stir. The media reported that Stefansson had discovered the descendants of the Norse colonists who had settled Greenland from Iceland a thousand years ago. The disappearance of that colony had remained a mystery and Stefansson's original reputation as an Arctic scholar was, indeed, launched by his account of the case' (15); later he would argue that the Inuit had assimilated the Norse.' (16) Stefansson complained that the newspapers had twisted his words and exaggerated his statements. Nevertheless, he seems to have seriously entertained such speculations from early on. In a letter to Wissler, Stefansson drew attention to both the philological similarities of Icelandic and the Inuit dialect in question and the physical appearance already mentioned: "These are two points that

suggest, as far as they go, the possibility of some connection with the 3000 lost Greenland colonists". (17) While critics accused Stefansson of vulgar sensationalism, others saw his statements about the Norse Inuit as an interesting hypothesis to explore. Interestingly, Stefansson's speculations about the Norse ancestry of the Copper Eskimo may have been partly triggered by his own involvement with the Inuit. A few months before he sent his letter to Wissler, Alex, the son of Stefansson and the native Pannigabluk, was born. Perhaps the physical presence of that Icelandic Inuit, his own child, helps to explain Stefansson's enthusiasm about the medieval Norse connection. For the rest of his career, his mixed identity as scientist and showman was a repeated point of attack. (18)

However distorted and unpleasant these debates may have been for him, they established his fame which turned out to be important for his career, for the funding of yet another arctic expedition. The third expedition was an extensive one, spanning five years, which is longer than most anthropological expeditions either at the time or ever since. Here, however, Stefansson's role as geographic explorer and adventurer takes precedence for a variety of reasons, some of which have to do with the geopolitics of the time and the constraints of funding large-scale expeditions, involving teams of men and expensive equipment. It took long and complex negotiations with a host of people and institutions to secure the necessary financial support, including the American Museum of Natural History (his previous sponsor), the National Geographic Society, and the Canadian Government. In the process Stefansson had to sacrifice some of his ethnographic goals.

During much of the third expedition, then, Stefansson himself was experimenting with navigation and travel routes and the mapping of particular regions of the Arctic while Jenness worked on Inuit ethnography. Much of Stefansson's diary entries focus on weather, hunting, travel across ice, inventories of food and equipment, logistics, the daily activities of his team, and his observations of his men. In this case, as a result, Stefansson's diaries are more limited and less informative anthropologically speaking than one might think. Stefansson's extensive published narrative of the third expedition, *The Friendly Arctic*, is more like a travel account than an ethnographic monograph. While he remains fascinated by the Inuit - particularly the Copper Inuit with whom he, again, spent some time - most of the volume deals with geographical issues, the politics of exploration, and the logistics, mental attitude, and technology necessitated by traveling on ice and in extreme cold. The Inuit, in a way, have been removed from the center stage and the Arctic, however "friendly," remains a natural space to be explored, conquered, and domesticated by Western "civilization." Stefansson concludes his account with a grand modernist vision:

I shall offer here my opinion that the most done. ... This expedition has contributed materially towards making easy what once was difficult .... It is human nature to undervalue whatever lands are distant and to consider disagreeable whatever is different. But we have brought the North a good deal closer ..... (19)

Stefansson finally returned from the Arctic in the spring of 1918. The expedition's geographical accomplishments - the discovery of the world's last major landmasses - were seen as a stunning success. In the following years and decades Stefansson would draw upon his arctic experience and his reputation as an explorer, lecturing and writing about the Inuit, geopolitics, health, and a series of other issues. His career as an essayist and public speaker on arctic issues was far from peaceful; repeatedly he was involved in controversies with both anthropological colleagues (including Jenness), fellow explorers (Anderson, above all), and politicians, in Canada as well as the United States. He is reported, however, to have captured his audience with skilful rhetoric and rich visual material, in particular his hand-colored lantern slides. Photographs, of course, are not only an important source of ethnographic information, they also shed light on the ethnographer and his or her project; thus, Sullivan shows how Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson used photographs as rhetorical devices to present a particular image of Highland Bali, exploiting the capacity of visual material "to simultaneously illuminate and obscure, to simultaneously draw in and stand apart" (20). Woodward provides an interesting analysis of Stefansson's choice of images and photographs, drawing attention to his focus on the "friendly" Arctic (21).

## Relations with the Inuit: "an Eskimo to the skin"

The ethnographic diaries of Stefansson and some of his publications demonstrate that he was a serious fieldworker, participating in the lives of the Inuit he visited, studying their language, living their way of life, and probing their way of thinking. He comments with reference to his first expedition: "I was gradually broken in to native ways; by the middle of October, I had thrown away my nearly outworn woolen suit and was fur clad from head to heel, an Eskimo to the skin" (22). In his account of the second expedition, he offers the following description of the method that later became known as participant observation

They took me into their houses and treated me hospitably and courteously, but exactly as if I were one of them. They gave me clothes to wear and food to eat, I helped them in their work and joined in their games, until they finally forgot that I was not one of them, and began to live their lives before my eyes as if I were not there. This gave me a rare opportunity to know them as they are. (23)

Stefansson was fond of noting that when he arrived among the Copper Inuit he already spoke Inuktitut. As Burch points out, "he was ... in a unique position - possibly in the history of ethnography - of being able to speak the language of the people he was going to study before they had ever seen a Euroamerican". (24)

The notion of the "friendly Arctic" summed up Stefansson's approach to the Arctic. Stefansson argued that arctic explorers often made the mistake of bringing their environment with them (food, clothes, and methods of transport, etc.). It would be far more productive and viable in the long run, he argued, to adopt Inuit practices and flow with the Arctic environment. Pointing out that the Inuit saw no need to wage war with the environment in which they lived, he challenged the orthodox, literary notion of the Arctic as necessarily "barren, dismal and desolate" (25). Some Of Stefansson's diary entries, however, qualify his claims about the friendly Arctic. After days of nauseating starvation, he comments:

work up here, I have been fond of asserting, entails few, hardships. But just now it is pretty hard work, and has often been so these three years. To be five or six miles from camp every morning at daybreak and about that far from home at the last daylight, to carry home heavy loads over rocky ground when successful and still heavier loads of disappointment when unsuccessful - this makes a monotonous - and a trying life. The continual nervous strain of a hand-to-mouth existence, where there is not even the shelter of a poorhouse in case of failure, has a telling and cumulative effect. Without in the least relinquishing my hopes of many more years of arctic work, I continually feel more strongly the desire to be so well equipped in future that I shall have at least a year's supply of food somewhere awaiting me to tide me over a season of failure. Just knowing of such a reserve ... would lessen by half the strain of the winter. This is a hard country for a hungry man. (26)

Stefansson's comments upon his interaction with his Inuit hosts and companions are usually brief and objective in style. Most often they focus on fairly pragmatic matters such as camping and cooking, the division of labor in the camp, the organization of hunting etc. Many of the entries in the diaries elaborate on storytelling and the role of informants. Sometimes Stefansson refers to one kind of contract or another with the Inuit, usually for the purpose of eliciting stories. On one occasion he writes about annoying one of his informants with too much "cross-examining": "If I get him tired (as I have once or twice done) he becomes careless in his answers and unreliable saying 'yes' to anything or pretending he understands my question when he does not (27)". There is a similar remark elsewhere:

The natives soon get tired of monotonous questioning, especially if a difficult point comes up - of course they don't appreciate that anything of importance can be involved. Their answers become careless and almost misleading - they try to make me think I understand things which I don't understand (e.g. by declaring verbs to be synonymous which are really not so (this to get me to quit asking questions). (28)

Sometimes Stefansson comments upon tension due to differences in the understanding of location and logistics: "When I suggested we might be too far west of this river, [the Indian] ... smiled superiously and said the people of the country , At one point Stefansson mentions understood such things better than strangers' (29). having quarreled somewhat angrily with one of his Inuit companions who said he would leave now that I was going to start treating him as a captain does a white , "I was forced to remind him," Stefansson adds, sailor, he was no dog to be starved' (30). "that by white man's law a servant hired for a year who quit work without good cause before his time was up, forfeited his wage"; often the Inuit, it seems, would not cooperate when he wanted to take head measurements or to photograph. These extracts from the diaries clearly demonstrate a conflictual and sometimes asymmetrical relationship between Stefansson and the Inuit which does not quite resonate with the egalitarian and sympathetic image he presented of himself in many of his publications.

## Race, gender, and ethnicity

The American explorer Robert E. Peary and Stefansson were probably the most visible early twentieth-century explorers. Peary was an ambitious explorer who claimed in 1909 to have discovered the North Pole, but his claim was challenged by another American explorer, Frederick Cook. Both Peary and Stefansson, Bloom suggests, "anchored the authority of their discourse under the banner of science and progress (31) Stefansson and Peary, however, represent important differences in personality and context. While Peary had no ethnographic ambitions Stefansson thought of himself as both anthropologist and explorer. No doubt Stefansson's writings on the Inuit were partly informed by the Icelandic community in Canada and North Dakota in which he grew up. In the days of early Norse exploration across the North Atlantic more than thousand years ago, the Icelandic concept of skraelingi ("native", "barbarian") - a term several times used by Stefansson in his diaries in relation to the Inuit - referred to an inhabitant of Greenland (Eskimo or Inuit). Although in Old Icelandic or Old Norse ("Danish Tongue", as it used to be called) the concept of skraelingi was obviously not a neutral one, first-hand accounts by early Icelanders of their western neighbours were far less fantastic and ethnocentric than their saga accounts of the Orient (32). The limited experiences of "real" others, and the monolithic Icelandic cultural background, were unlikely to engender serious interest among Icelanders in comparative cultural or social anthropology. Social life, however, in North America presented the immigrant Icelandic community with new experiences and pressing questions. In his autobiography, Stefansson described his encounter with members of the Sioux tribe, "the very tribe that the Icelandic community so greatly feared": "I cannot recall another time in my life when I made such a quick and thorough readjustment of long-held ideas (33)". Perhaps, such encounters sparked Stefansson's interest in exploration and ethnographic description. Also, they may have informed his lasting negative impression of Indians vis-à-vis his rather generous impression of the Inuit. For Stefansson some Aboriginal Peoples seem to have been more equal than others. He comments as follows upon his experience from the first expedition: One thing I noticed about the Eskimos in particular was their graceful, free-swinging walk. This was in direct contrast to the jerky, almost furtive movements of the forest Indians. I distinctively began to feel that the Eskimos were a superior race. (34) Later on, when reflecting in his diaries on the relationship between social and ecological change in the Arctic, Stefansson indicates that the Indians, in contrast to the Inuit, are just as afraid of the "friendly" Arctic as Westerners: At present the caribou has in winter a wide zone of safety between the Indians who dare not face the barren ground and the Eskimo who prefer the sea coast. But the Eskimo fear the woodless barrens about as much as a fish fears water ..... (35) While Stefansson usually provided the personal names of his Inuit companions, he tended to refer to others with the generic "the Indian." This practice may both reflect Inuit stereotypes and those of the North American Icelandic community. The attitude of the Icelandic community towards Aboriginal Peoples, however, was both complex and contradictory. Apparently, there was racism as well as admiration. (36) Before starting his journey back to "civilization", Stefansson settles his accounts with some of his key informants, including Pannigabluk. The settlements are described in the following manner:

Settlement with natives: [...] We owe Pannigabluk about \$25000, but she is drawing a monthly allowance from the "Rosie H." for which we pay in fox skins at ca. \$50 for skin: Anderson will get her account whenever she shall have Baillie for the Mackenzie and I am to try arrange credit for her with Cottle. (37)

Despite his important ethnographic contributions, Stefansson's texts, no less than those of most of their contemporaries, are rather weak on the context of fieldwork and the making of ethnography. Stefansson has little to say about his relations with the Inuit. Elsewhere, I have tried to account for Stefansson's reticence The larger to admit and seriously address his intimate relationships in the field. (38) The larger social context, and the relations of race, ethnicity and gender characteristic for the expanding West at the beginning of the twentieth century, is an important factor. Generally Stefansson presents himself, in both his diaries and his publications, in terms of the heroic image of a masculine hunter and explorer, engaged in dangerous excursions into the wild domain of natives and animals, extending the realm of rationality, science, and Western civilisation into "nature." For him and many of his contemporaries, fieldwork and geographical explorations were, above all, exercises for testing and strengthening the sensibilities of manhood against all kinds of odds. Accounts of such gallant journeys inevitably placed the natives in the back seat whatever their real contributions. It would be silly to force modern methodological standards upon Stefansson's approach and viewpoints. The point is not to establish that he failed to conform to our standards, which seems rather obvious, but rather to explore the differences between the two contexts. Most anthropologists nowadays would argue that it is important to be explicit about the effects of one's presence, on the scene as well as in ethnographic texts. As a result, anthropologists generally feel compelled to situate their accounts and to reflect on the texts they write as well as their relations with their hosts and their readers. Anthropologists have fiercely debated a series of issues regarding ethnographic theory and practice, including the nature and role of textual accounts, participant- observation, and cultural representation, all of which are fundamental for a discipline traditionally focused on othering and cultural translation. Interestingly, Stefansson comments in his diaries about the ethnographic importance of the literary skills that allow the anthropologist to turn routine and everyday experience into fascinating but credible accounts:

I ... have often found on belated reference to my diary that I have told to many men on many occasions ... facts and feelings which seem to have been absent at the time of an 'adventure' but which have by some mental process attached themselves to it later and have become vivid as the real facts, or have now overshadowed them and even obliterated the facts. Where my contemporaneous record of an event is meagre, these adventitious elements are bound to remain undetected and become for me and anyone who believes me, as if they had happened. (39)

## Arcticity

In recent years, historians and cultural critics have dissected the ideology and rhetoric of early explorations. Some have examined the ways in which Arctic environments and their inhabitants have been represented in text and imagery (40). Anthropology, too, as we have seen, has been subjected to an internal critical reflection. Inuit ethnography, indeed, has its own clichés and theoretical assumptions, the famous work of Mauss and Beuchat on the seasonal variations of Inuit life being one example. The somewhat perceptive generalizations of Mauss and Beuchat were over theorized simplifications, lacking the kind of realist grounding that Stefansson's ethnography provided. Stefansson did suggest that the Inuit regarded at least parts of the winter as vacation or "dancing time" (42), an indigenous notion that Mauss and Beuchat may have drawn upon. Given the length of Stefansson's stay in the Arctic, however, he was able to observe both regional and seasonal variations, how the Inuit continually adapted to the environment and the ways in which it was represented in Inuit discourse. In a letter from the field to the anthropologist R.R. Marrett he challenged armchair anthropology in a cynical mood, commenting upon an issue of ethnographic interpretation:

"In point of actual fact you are probably more likely than I to be right, but that is because ... the facts of archaeology, palaeontology, and the rest, are really more open to you than to me

who converse with Eskimo hunters while you sit in clubs and convention halls or walk in the field with learned men of your own and other sciences" (43).

This is not to say that Stefansson's approach was devoid of preconceptions, ideology, fiction, and rhetoric. On the contrary. At one point, early in the second expedition, Stefansson wrote in his diary: "the people we have seen so far are disappointingly sophisticated" (44). He did not elaborate on in what sense the Inuit were sophisticated or why they disappointed him (he added, however, that they "did not seem to have much use for 'civilized' food"), but clearly, as every ethnographer would expect, he had his own preconceptions in the early stages of fieldwork. Be that as it may, his works often had a strong rhetorical line. Woodward shows how Stefansson's photographs reflect his "obsession" with the Eskimo snow house and the technological brilliance involved in making it. "It is probably fair," she suggests, "to lay at the great explorer's feet some responsibility for the continuing stereotype that Eskimos live in igloos" (45). Stefansson, as Woodward points out, "developed and promulgated a view of Eskimo people which remains the prevailing popular image of Eskimos throughout much of our world today (46)". Stefansson, we may add, notes in his diary that "the Eskimo are the only Americans, north or south, who have ever employed the dome principle of architecture" (47). Stefansson had several agendas personal, ethnographic and political, and their relationships were sometimes more conflictual than complementary. Thus, while he seems to generally have subscribed to the cultural relativism of Boas, he sometimes advocated a strong version of geographical determinism, even with a tinge of racism. He argued, for instance, partly drawing upon the work of S. Columb Gilfillan, that nations that lay in the higher latitudes bordering the arctic seas would be the home of future empires as this was according to available evidence and sensible extrapolation the "path of supremacy" (48). Such an environmental determinism, reversing a longstanding ethnocentric trend from Hippocrates to Ellsworth Huntington that associated "civilization" with warmer climates and lower latitudes, was part of Stefansson's arctic rhetoric.

Arnold provides a useful account of the invention and history of the category of the "tropics," another extreme zone in western discourse; topicality, he argues, emerged as one manifestation of Orientalism, providing a contrast to the apparent normality of temperate regions (49). The zoning of the world became "a Western way of defining something culturally alien, as well as environmentally distinctive, from Europe ... and other parts of the temperate zone. ... Topicality was the experience of northern whites moving into an alien world - alien in climate, vegetation, people and disease". (50) With Stefansson's works, the Arctic Zone was similarly established, if not invented, as a fertile but somewhat slippery discursive space, as a relatively demarcated and monotonous site useful for the exploration of particular themes in contrast to the temperate Euro American world. The notion of arcticity implicit in his work made the Arctic both the home of howling, exotic wilderness (the source of "strange" knowledge and ancient wisdom) and a semi-domestic space (a "friendly" domain). Mixing ethnography and geopolitics in his peculiar fashion, Stefansson both emphasized the lessons the Arctic invited for "us" (Western readers at home) and the future opportunities it provided out there for "civilizing" missions and the expansion of empire - in particular mining and international travel by airlines and submarines.

I have dwelt upon some of Stefansson's rhetoric and biases because it is important to critically examine his anthropological practice. It is necessary, however, to situate his life and work in the age in which he operated. And his shortcomings should not distract from his many accomplishments. In many ways Stefansson was ahead of his time. Indeed, he made quite an impression on the twentieth-century. As an explorer, he was highly successful, discovering and mapping some of the last remaining land on earth. His contribution to Inuit ethnography and anthropological field methods should not be overlooked, however. Along with some others, he pioneered the standard model of participant observation.

Stefansson's approach to ethnography, perhaps, may be characterized as both archaic and hyper-modern. It is archaic partly in its radical separation of the local and the global, the primitive and the modern. Stefansson notes in his diary:



Unfortunately, the sixteen years of Herschel Island whaling that preceded the writer's first visit to the Mackenzie Delta had made it difficult to determine for that locality what ideas were local there or of ancient introduction, what ones were borrowed recently from the Alaskan Eskimo, whom the whalers brought with them, and what had been absorbed from the white men directly. Nevertheless a comparison will be attempted on the basis of what seems to be local and primitive in the Mackenzie district. (51)

Stefansson's emphasis on continual travel is also rather old-fashioned. He traveled 20,000 miles by sled and dog team, moving from one camp to another, often, however, along the trail of the Inuit. While such excessive movement is not the preferred model nowadays, it clearly has many advantages to the traditional functionalist doctrine about extended stay in a single location. Not only does the migratory approach prove particularly useful among the Inuit and other seasonally transhuman populations, it allows the fieldworker to understand regional and international connections that would otherwise be missed. Interestingly, Stefansson's approach to his Inuit fieldwork may resonate with recent emphases on interconnections and multi-sited fieldwork, "studying through," as Shore and Wright put it, rather than "up" or "down" the social scale, "studying the localization of global processes". (52)

In recent decades, an extensive ethnography has emerged which documents Inuit and Indian society in the current age of the "snowmobile generations" (53), relations with the colonial past and the problems posed by the future (54). In one way or another much of this rapidly growing body of literature draws upon and critically engages with Stefansson's work on the Arctic. Burch concludes, summing up the relevance of Stefansson's work for contemporary anthropology, that given his knowledge of Inuit languages and the ethnographic challenge, in the case of the Copper Inuit, of working with people who had never seen a Euro American, Stefansson's work "must be regarded as a disappointment":

His results, while informative and important, were far below what one has a right to expect, given his training and the extraordinary opportunities he had [among the Copper Inuit as well as in the Mackenzie Delta and Northern Alaska]. Stefansson was just too interested in being an explorer and an iconoclast ... and not interested enough in being an ethnographer, to put together a systematic ethnographic account of what he learned. One subject he did treat with insight and attention, however, was Inuit religion. We may still read with profit what he had to say on that topic. . . (55)

Mark Nuttall suggests that Stefansson offers particularly perceptive observations on Inuit kin relations, naming practices, and name spirits - particularly in the Coronation Gulf area. If Stefansson's anthropological publications are disappointing, is it, we may ask, because his ethnography, the very material from which he had to work, was negligible, dull or devoid of insight? Or is it because he never really "wrote up" the material at his disposal, however rich it was, preoccupied with fame, publicity and exploration? Or is his ethnography somehow submerged? Only by attending to Stefansson's field diaries are we able to firmly answer these questions. The diaries allow for a systematic comparison of Stefansson's field experiences (to the extent that they are recorded and represented in the text) and Stefansson's publications, for exploring the similarities and differences in the two kinds of text.

I suggest that the ethnography of the diaries of the first two expeditions rescue Stefansson the anthropologist from the showmanship of early twentieth-century exploration. During these expeditions his ambitions were truly scientific and he managed to identify and record a variety of interesting and useful "facts" on Inuit society, although later on these ambitions would be pushed to the margin, for a variety of reasons. Stefansson thought of himself in the Arctic as "a spectator with no material interests at stake," admitting (and regretting), however, that he "had a part in bringing . . . change about" (56). More than anyone else, perhaps, Vilhjalmur Stefansson both mapped and defined the Arctic in Western discourse, paving the way for authentic accounts of Inuit society, more informed and less ethnocentric than those previously available.

## Notes

1. See V. Stefansson 1964.
2. See, for instance, D.M. LeBourdais 1963, R.J. Diubaldo 1978, and W.R. Hunt 1986.
3. H.B. Collins 1962: 8.
4. V. Stefansson 1964: 45.
5. V. Stefansson 1964: 55.
6. V. Stefansson 1964: 55.
7. V. Stefansson 1906.
8. R.J. Diubaldo 1978: 21.
9. On 12 December 1908.
10. B. Riffenburg 1993.
11. 13 April 1908.
12. 5 December 1910.
13. V. Stefansson 1914.
14. See, for instance, E.L. Schieffelin and R. Crittenden 1991 on first contact in some Papuan societies.
15. V. Stefansson 1906.
16. V. Stefansson 1938.
17. December 5 1910.
18. P. Goldring 1987, E.S. Burch, Jr. 1995; see also V. Stefansson 1945.
19. V. Stefansson 1921: 687.
20. G. Sullivan 1999: 1.
21. K.E. Woodward 1998.
22. See R.J. Diubaldo 1978: 28.
23. V. Stefansson 1913: 2.
24. E.S. Burch, Jr. 1995: 15.
25. See M. Conefrey and T. Jordan 1998: 12.
26. On 26 November 1910.
27. 3 March 1910.

28. 15 February 1912.
29. 9 January 1911.
30. 20 April 1910.
31. L. Bloom 1993: 128.
32. G. Pálsson 1995: 77.
33. V. Stefansson 1964: 19.
34. V. Stefansson 1964: 69.
35. 10 April 1911.
36. See G. Guttormsson 1975.
37. 29 March 1912.
38. G. Pálsson 1998.
39. 10 December 1909; emphasis added.
40. B. Lopez 1986, J.C.H. King and H. Lidchi 1998.
41. See G. Pálsson 1991.
42. The diaries, 9 October 1906.
43. 12 November 1914.
44. On 9 November 1908.
45. K.E. Woodward 1998:179.
46. K.E. Woodward 1998:175.
47. 13 November 1909.
48. V. Stefansson 1922.
49. D. Arnold 1996.
50. D. Arnold 1996: 142.
51. 9 April 1911.
52. C. Shore and S. Wright 1997: 13.
53. W. Oswald 1999: 284.
54. See, for instance, R.F. Spencer 1959, J.F. Vanstone 1962, H. Brody 1987, N.A. Chance 1990, I. Krupnik 1993, M. 1. Nagy 1994, E.S. Burch, Jr. 1998, J. Cruikshank 1998, M. Nuttall 1998, P.R. Stern 1999.
55. E.S. Burch, Jr. 1995: 15.
56. 10 April 1911.

## References

- Arnold, David 1996. *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansio*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bloom, Lisa 1993. *Gender on fee: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Brody, Hugh 1987. *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Burch, Ernest S., Jr. 1994. North Alaskan Eskimos: a changing way of life. In *Portraits of Culture*, edited by M. Ember, C. Ember and D. Levinson. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- ---- 1995. The history of Arctic ethnography - as seen from the Conodoguinet. Paper presented at the 22nd annual meeting of the Alaska Anthropological Association, March 24.
- ---- 1998. *The Iñupiaq- Eskimo Nations of Northwest Alaska*. Fairbanks, Alaska: Uinesrity of Alaska Press.
- Chance, Norman A. 1990. *The Iñupiat and Arctic Alaska*. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.
- Collins, Henry B. 1962. Stefansson as an anthropologist. *Polar Notes* 4: 8-13.
- Conefrey, Mick and Tim Jordan 1998. *Ice men: A History of the Arctic and Its Explorers*. London: Boxtree.
- Cruikshank, Julie 1998. *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Diubaido, Richard J. 1978. *Stefansson and the Canadian Arctic*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Goldring, Philip 1987. Scientist and showman. *The Beave* , April-May: 59-6 1.
- Guttormsson, Guttormur J. 1975. Tveir þættir: 1. Indíaninn John Ramsey. *Andvari*, 75-83. Reykjavik.
- ---- 1976. *Kvæði, úrval*. Reykjavik: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs og Þjóðvinafélagsins.
- Holland, Clive (ed.) 1994. *Farthest North: A History of North Polar Exploration in Eye-Witness Accounts*. London: Robinson Publishing.
- Hunt, William R. 1986. *Stef. A Biography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Canadian Arctic Explorer*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Jenness, Diamond 1957. *Dawn in Arctic Alaska* . Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- King, J.C.H. and H. Lidchi (eds) 1998. *Imaging the Arctic*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- Krupnik, Igor 1993. Arctic Adaptations: Native Whalers and Reindeer Herders of Northern Eurasia. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- LeBourdais, D.M. 1963. Stefansson. Ambassador of the North. Montreal: Harvest House.
- Lopez, Barry 1986. Arctic Dreams: Imagination and desire in a northern landscape Toronto: Bantam Books.
- Mauss, Marcel 1979[1906]. Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo: A Study in Social Morphology. In collaboration with Henri Beuchat. London: Routledge. Translated with a Foreword by J.A. Fox.
- Mirsky, Jeanette 1970[1934]. To the Arctic!: The Story of Northern Exploration from Earliest Times. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Nagy, Murielle Ida 1994. Yukon North Slope Inuvialuit Oral History. Occasional Papers in Yukon History No. 1. Yukon Heritage Branch.
- Neijmann, Daisy 1997. The Icelandic Voice in Canadian Letters. Carleton: Carleton University Press.
- Noice, Harold. 1924. With Stefansson in the Arctic. New York: Dodd, Mead.
- Nuttall, Mark 1998. Protecting the Arctic: Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Survival. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Oswalt, Wendel H. 1999. Eskimo Explorers. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. Second edition.
- Paine, Robert (ed.) 1977. The White Arctic: Anthropological Essays on Tutelage and Ethnicity . Toronto: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Pálsson, Gisli 1991. Coastal Economies, Cultural Accounts: Human Ecology and Icelandic Discourse. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- ---- (ed.) 1993. Beyond Boundaries: Understanding. Translation and Anthropological Discourse. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- ---- 1995. The Textual Life of Savants: Ethnography. Iceland, and the Linguistic Turn. Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- ---- 1998. The intimate Arctic: an early anthropologist's diary in the strict sense of the term. Ethnos 63(3): 413-40.
- ---- (ed.) 2001. Writing on Ice: The Ethnographic Notebooks of Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Rasmussen, Knud 1932. Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske boghandel. Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24. Vol. ix.
- Remie, Cornelius H.W. 1993. Changing contexts, persistent relations: Inuit-white encounters in Northern Canada, 1576-1992. Native American Studies 7(2): 5- II.
- Riffenburgh, Beau 1993. The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographical Inquiry . London: Belhaven Press and Scott Polar Research Institute.

- Saladin d'Anglure, Bernard 1996. Arctic. In Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology , edited by Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer. London: Routledge. Pp. 51-57.
- Sanjek, Roger (ed.) 1990. Fieldnotes: The Makings of Anthropology. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Schieffelin, Edward L. and Robert Crittenden (eds) 1991. Like People You See in a Dream: First Contact in Six Papuan Societies. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Seltzer, Carl C. 1933. The Anthropometry of the Western and Copper Eskimos, based on data of Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Human Biology (3): 313-318.
- Shore, C. and S. Wright 1997. Introduction. In C. Shore and S. Wright (eds) Anthropology and Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power. London: Routledge.
- Spencer, Robert F. 1959. The North Alaskan Eskimo: A Study in Ecology and Society. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 171. Washington.
- Srebrnik, Henry F. 1998. The radical "second life" of Vilhjaimur Stefansson. Arctic, 51(1): 58-60.
- Stefansson, Georgina 1961. My grandfather, Dr. Stefansson. North, 4:25.
- Stefansson, Vilhjalmur 1906. The Icelandic colony in Greenland. American Anthropologist, 8(2): 262-270.
- ---- 1909. The Eskimo trade jargon of Herschel Island. American Anthropologist 11: 217-232.
- ---- 1913. My Life with the Eskimo. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- ---- 1914. Stefansson-Anderson Arctic expedition. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, v. 14. New York: AMS Press. Editor Clark Wissler.
- ---- 1921. The Friendly Arctic. New York: Macmillan.
- ---- 1922. The Northward Course of Empire. London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd.
- ---- 1925. The Adventure of Wrangel Island. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd.
- ---- 1936. Adventures in Error. New York: Robert M. McBide & Company.
- ---- 1938. The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher. Vol. 1 and 2. London: The Argonaut Press.
- ---- 1945. Great Adventures and Explorations, From the Earliest Times to the Present as told by the Explorers Themselves. New York: The Dial Press.
- ---- 1964. Discovery The Autobiography of Vilhjalmur Stefansson. New York: McGraw-Hill Company.
- Stem, Pamela R. 1999. Learning to be smart: an exploration of the culture of intelligence in a Canadian Inuit community. American Anthropologist 101(3): 502-514.

- Sullivan, Gerald (ed.) 1999. Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Highland Bali: Fieldwork Photographs of BayLing Ged6. 1936-1939. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- The Traditional Land Use Inventoiy for the Mid-Beaufort Sea, vol. 1. N.d.. North Slope Borough on History and Culture.
- Vanstone, James W. 1962. Point Hope: An Eskimo Village in Transition. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Woodward, Kesler E. 1998. Persuasive images: photographs of Vilhjaimur Stefansson in the Stefansson Collection on polar exploration at Dartmouth College. In Imaging the Arctic, edited by J.C.H. King and H. Lidchi. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

#### **Unpublished source**

- Stefansson, Vilhjalmur, correspondence and diaries. Special Collection, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover.