

The Power of the Periphery

THE ALLURE OF LIFE LOST

In the 1960s the homes of the vanishing class of hardworking Norwegian fjord fishermen and mountain peasants were bought by vacationers seeking to fill their leisure-time with country-style activities of the past. This trend was part of a boom in outdoor recreation in the nation's most scenic places, which turned nature from a place of work into a place of leisure. Thousands of cottages were built in the mountains and by the fjords to satisfy back-to-nature lovers seeking harmony with their holiday environment. By 1970 fifteen percent of a total 3.7 million Norwegians had their own private vacation place, totaling 190,000 cottages. And the numbers were growing radically, as twenty-five percent of these places were built after 1965. The overwhelming majority did not have their own vacation home, but surveys show that they either borrowed or rented a cottage, or stayed in hospices, or sports hotels.¹ Indeed, in 1970, only sixteen percent of the population did not participate in some sort of outdoor recreation, and this group consisted mostly of the elderly.

Despite imagined and real historical precursors, this cult of the outdoors was a new phenomenon, reflective of the growing wealth of the nation.² Norwegians had for decades – perhaps centuries – discussed environmental issues, including pollution and landscape degradation.

¹ Statistics Norway, *Holiday House Survey* (Oslo: Statistics Norway, 1970); *Outdoor Life* (Oslo: Statistics Norway, 1974); *Holiday Survey* (Oslo: Statistics Norway, 1968).

² Bredo Berntsen, "Nasjonalparker," *Naturen*, 96 (1972), 195–204. Bredo Berntsen, *Naturvernets historie i Norge: Fra klassisk naturvern til økopolitikk* (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1977). Olav G. Henriksen (ed.), *Kvinner i fjellet* (Lom: Norsk fjellmuseum, 2002). Gunnar Repp,

A series of legal bills, such as *Lov om naturfredning* (The preservation of nature law) from 1910, *Jaktloven* (The hunting law) from 1951, *Lov om naturvern* (The conservation of nature law) from 1954, and the oil pollution law (1955), point to a rich history of environmental protection in Norway. Yet the most important of these legal milestones for environmentalism was *Friluftsløven* (The free-air-law) of 1957. The Norwegian word for outdoor life, *friluftsliv* (free-air-life), captures the sense of freedom when vacationing in spectacular natural environments. The free-air-law granted an *allemannsrett* (everyone's right) for cross-country skiing, walking, camping, and harvesting wherever one wants, including on private properties. For sure, there are some restrictions in the law with regards to farming, commercial berry picking, hunting, and fishing. A tent, for example, has to be set up at least 150 meters (492 feet) from a private home. On government-owned land (and most land in Norway is owned by the government), one has to pay a reasonable fee to go fishing, and have a license to hunt, while fishing and hunting are restricted on private land. Yet, despite these minor restrictions, the "free-air-law" has not been undermined over time. Indeed, it has a status of an untouchable holy grail in Norwegian political culture. The freedom to roam, walk, cross-country ski, and set up a tent wherever you want is as ingrained in Norwegians as, say, the right to freedom of speech is among people from the United States. "Norwegians walk, run, creep into nature to get rid of whatever represses them and contaminates the air, not only the atmosphere," a devoted "free-air-life" enthusiast noted: "They don't talk about going *out*, but *in* and *into* nature. There they find themselves, who they are, what they stand for."³

It is also there, in the wild, Norwegians would find the source of all things good, and problems would as a consequence have to be solved in better contact with the natural. Thanks to this sentiment and the free-air-law, outdoor vacationing grew into a sizable industry with its own

"Norwegian relationships to nature through outdoor life," in *Outdoor Activities*, Jan Neuman, Ivar Mytting, and Jiri Brtnik (eds.) (Lüneburg: Edition Erlebnispädagogik, 1996), pp. 32–42. Oskar Solenes, "Friluftsliv og klassekamp: To sider av samme sak?" *Arbeiderhistorie*, 21 (2007), 7–25. Alf-Inge Jansen, *Makt og miljø: En studie av utforming av den statlige natur og miljøvernpolitikken* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1989), pp. 51–101. Eivind Dale, Hilde Jervan, Atle Midttun, Jan Eivind Myhre, Dag Namtvedt, *Ressursforvaltningens historie* (Oslo: Resource Policy Group, 1984), pp. 35–84. Ulf Hafsten, *Naturvernets århundre* (Oslo: Norges Naturvernforbund, 1977).

³ Arne Næss, "The Norwegian roots of deep ecology," *The Trumpeter*, 21, no. 2 (2005), 38–41, quote p. 38. Næss's emphasis.

interest groups defending the environment as a place of leisure. The political battles to create national parks, which grew in intensity between when the first park was created in 1962 and when a series of parks were established in 1971, bear witness to the growing power of the environmental tourism business. This post-war turn toward outdoor life, and tent and cabin vacationing, would frame much of the environmental debate in Norway.

Outdoor life emerged in the context of Labor Party politics, which was the dominating political party with a majority vote in the Parliament from 1945 to 1963. The promotion of outdoor life by the Labor Party was an integral part of a policy of fashioning Norway as a healthy socialist welfare state with a solid democratic footing. Though several political parties would compete for power to their left and right, the Labor Party became so dominating that political historians of Norway describe the post-war Norway as a one-party-state.⁴ Few would question the dogmas of the welfare state, namely free healthcare and education for all, and easy recreational access to the environment, along with a series of social security services that made sure no one would starve, or lack housing and other basic needs. After the war, Norwegians would take comfort in that the State would take care of you, no matter what. However, the policy was accompanied by melancholic voices of protest from the wealthy seeing their fortune distributed accordingly.

The Labor Party politicians regarded themselves as being part of a larger international movement echoing Marx's famous slogan: "Workers of the world, unite!" Though they were not communists, they used every opportunity to participate in international politics with the aim of helping those in need. This aspiration would, as will be apparent, also apply to environmental affairs. Empowered by pristine Norwegian nature in the remote, science-activists and environmental politicians alike would envision the nation as an ecological standard for the world to admire. The worldly outlook had its historical legacy in Norway's Lutheran missionary legacy: the country has had more missionaries per capita than any other European country. The long crooked coastline has plenty of excellent harbors for Norway's fishing industries and, as a consequence, a significant history of shipping merchants. Indeed, at the time period of this book the nation had the fourth largest merchant navy in the world.

⁴ Jens Arup Seip, *Fra embedsmannsstat til ettpartistat og andre essays* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963).

To work on a ship sailing the seven seas was for many Norwegians a way of seeing the world.

The welfare state was partly possible because Norway has a relatively small population of about four million people (reaching five million by 2012). Despite – or perhaps because of – a long crooked coastline facing the Atlantic, numerous high mountains, long fjords, and deep valleys, the population has been fairly homogeneous, socially, ethnically, and spiritually. Though the historical homogeneity of Norwegians may be a factual myth, it was an ideal during the post-war period for the Labor Party which sought to modernize and industrialize the nation. The two communities that stuck out, the Sámi and the Romani, have been subject to harsh policies of rectification (i.e. being punished for speaking their own language). Being gay was illegal until 1972, as was women's right to abortion until 1978. More generally, simply being different – in whatever fashion that might be – was not socially helpful. To give an example, Norwegians love cross-country skiing. When schools arranged competitions in the sport, the aim was generally not to be the fastest, but to be the one who is closest to the “ideal time” (the mean average of all the competitors). To compete, to excel, to win would cause suspicion within a culture in which the tall poppy syndrome (Law of Jante) prevails.

The Norwegian mountain environment with its numerous rivers and waterfalls was seen as a place for social recreation and healthy vacationing. Yet that did not hinder the Labor Party in seeing the environment a natural resource for hydropower developments, which, in the post-war period, enabled electrification of the country and its industries. Indeed, the chief political doctrine of the Labor Party was *kraftsosialisme* (power-socialism), which meant turning as many waterfalls in the high mountains into hydropower as possible. In the lower land, the post-war policy was intensive forestry and farming. The homogeneous culture of Norwegian people would translate into homogeneous use of the land. After the war, agricultural politics were focused on making sure forests were planted with the same trees, fields with the same wheat, grassland with the same grass, and that farms would breed the same animals. A diverse stock of locally bred cows, for example, were engineered into one homogeneous race, the *Norsk rødt fe* (Norwegian Red Cow), which provided the nation with one standardized milk from one nationalized state-owned dairy.⁵

⁵ Torben Hviid Nielsen, Arve Monsen, and Tore Tennøe, *Livets tre og kodenens kode: Fra genetik til bioteknologi, Norge 1900–2000* (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2000), pp. 124–50.

When Norwegians were vacationing, they were vacationing from this standardized society. Yet the mode of vacationing was pretty standard. The longing for a primitive lifestyle that so many Norwegians pursued during their vacations and contact with pristine environments was a reaction to the rapid modernization of the country. Vacationing in remnants of old mountain homes or fjord farms was alluring because it suggested a life lost and spoke to the way of life of the peasants and fishermen that the vacationers had replaced. For the growing counter-culture, these peasants and fishermen would gradually come to represent both the origin of and future for Norway. The vacationers imagined that these first citizens had lived in self-sufficient harmony with their environments, and they thus became heroes of future environmentally friendly lifestyles. At the same time these peasants and fishermen served as a contrast to the unhealthy and polluted life in the cities, especially Oslo, which was believed to be corrupted by material lifestyle and lack of direct contact with clean environments.

The admiration for peasants and fishermen among the environmentalists did not come solely from vacationing in their remnant homesteads. Many – perhaps most – city dwellers and academics would have direct family relationships with rural communities. Having grandparents, aunts, or uncles in some remote part of the country was the norm, as the transfer from an agricultural to industrial driven society happened later in Norway than in other European nations. As will be argued, environmental concerns among activists and radicals often blended visions for an ecologically sound future with both imagined and real relationships with the land of the recent past. “Scratch a Norwegian, and you’ll generally find a peasant, even if he lives in Oslo [...] at least if he calls himself radical,” Helge Høibraaten rightly points out.⁶

Yet, despite the admiration for the peasants and fishermen, personal family, such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles still living on small farms, were rarely used as idols of sound environmentalism. They were too close for comfort and not ideologically reliable. They were corrupted by the advancement of modern goods, such as electricity, hot showers, cars, and so forth. Instead, faraway people and environments from the other side of the world would serve as vehicles for defending the true values of returning to nature by living as mountain peasants and coastal fishermen. These faraway places were of such social and geographical distance that

⁶ Høibraaten, “Norway in 1968 and its aftermath,” p. 191.

the way of life there could more easily serve as ideals for reimagining Norway's past and environmental future.

Three scholars in the field of archeology and anthropology were prime movers in setting the stage for this reimagining of Norwegian identity: Thor Heyerdahl, Helge Ingstad, and Fredrik Barth. Their explorations and research into life on the Pacific island of Fatu-Hiva, hunter-gatherers living in North America, Viking settlements in Newfoundland, and the ecological order of the people of Swat in Pakistan allowed a larger reflection about what one could learn from the Norwegian heritage.

CHASING PARADISE

“Back to nature? Farewell to civilization? It is one thing to dream of it and another to do it. I tried it. Tried to return to nature. Crushed my watch between two stones and let my hair and beard grow wild. Climbed the palms for food. Cut all the chains that bound me to the modern world. I tried to enter the wilderness empty-handed and barefoot, as a man at one with nature.”⁷ So began Thor Heyerdahl his 1974 account of his move to the remote island of Fatu-Hiva in the Pacific in 1937.

Heyerdahl (1914–2002) grew up in the picturesque town of Larvik, south-west of Oslo. Though small in size it had a global orientation with an active shipbuilding industry that over the years had built some of the best seafaring boats in Norway. This included supplying the nation's booming whaling industry. The pride of the town was *Fram* (1892), designed by Colin Archer (1832–1921), and used in various Arctic and Antarctic expeditions between 1893 and 1912. It was most famously used by Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) in his quest to reach the North Pole and by Roald Amundsen (1871–1928) in his successful journey to reach the South Pole. Though the era of such wooden boats was over when Heyerdahl grew up, ocean expeditions were still very much an integral part of the town's identity, as was the Larvik fjord with its archipelago of beautiful islands. Its “[n]ature became to me in early childhood what a church was to many of the adults in my town,” he would say. He consequently decided to learn more about it, and enrolled to study zoology and geography at the University of Oslo in 1933. He was set for disappointment. Supervised by the zoology professors Kristine Bonnevie and Hjalmar Broch, Heyerdahl sliced up intestines of animals

⁷ Thor Heyerdahl, *Fatu-Hiva: Back to Nature* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 1.

and looked at them under a microscope, which did not fit his idea of exploring wilderness. What he did learn at the university was the importance of evolution, along with diffusionist ideas of how species' traveling habits could explain their evolutionary development.

It was a friend of his father, the wine merchant Bjarne Kroepelin (1890–1966), who first told him about the importance of traveling to explain human evolution. In Oslo he gave Heyerdahl access to what was known to be the world's largest library collection on the topic of the Polynesian islands. The young man immersed himself in this 5,000-volume collection, and came out convinced that he had to buy a "ticket to paradise" and leave Norway and the modern world for good.⁸ Like a voluntary Robinson Crusoe he soon found himself in the remote island of Fatu-Hiva in 1937, accompanied by his newlywed wife Liv Heyerdahl (Coucheron Torp, 1916–69). Here they would build a primitive hut, begin gathering food, swim in pristine waters, and enjoy the beautiful environment. Yet this return to nature was not as easy or pleasant as expected, as the couple was soon troubled by tropical rain and diseases. Even more problematic was the growing hostility from the local Polynesians, whom Heyerdahl portrays as already having been corrupted by the modern world. After only one year they abandoned Fatu-Hiva. Back in Oslo, Heyerdahl wrote a charming account of their attempt to return to primitive life in *På jakt efter paradiset* (Chasing Paradise, 1938), which received little attention.⁹

That would most certainly change when Heyerdahl rewrote the book in 1974 and published it in several languages as *Fatu-Hiva: Back to Nature*. Heyerdahl was, by now, an international celebrity and his striking account of life on a remote tropical island appealed to a younger audience who shared his longing to leave modernity in favor of a life in harmony with the natural world. He rose to world fame, as the historian Axel Andersson has shown, thanks to his ability to re-invent the meaning of expeditions within the culture of the Cold War. Most famously in the Kon-Tiki expedition, but also in the Ra 1 and Ra 2 expeditions, Heyerdahl spoke up, not only against archeological and scientific dogmatism but, more importantly, against the bipolar political culture of the Cold War. His basic message was that the world was united. By showing that travel between two distant places could have happened in the historical

⁸ Heyerdahl, *Green Was the Earth*, pp. 33, 36. Snorre Evensberget, *Thor Heyerdahl: The Explorer* (Oslo: Stenersens Forlag, 1994).

⁹ Thor Heyerdahl, *På jakt efter paradiset: Et år på en sydhavsø* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1938).

past, he also nurtured a dream of unity between distant political ideologies and nations of his own time. “Borders? I have never seen one. But I have heard they exist in the minds of some people” is a quote attributed to him that certainly reflects his thinking, though it has been impossible to trace it.

In *Fatu-Hiva: Back to Nature*, Heyerdahl reframes his 1937 voyage as a travel back in time to a pre-civilized harmonious natural society, which is juxtaposed to the evils of modern environmental degradation. The revisions are substantial when compared to the 1938 edition. One telling example is the introduction of the remote island of Motane (or Mohotane), which they visited for a day during their trip back to Norway. It was not a pleasant place. “Scattered everywhere were bleached bones and complete skeletons: twisted horns of rams, animal craniums, ribs, and leg bones,” among windswept stones on a dry and vegetation-less earth.¹⁰ The inhabitants of the island had gone or died for unknown reasons, and left behind an unchecked population of sheep, which had multiplied and eaten up everything green. When the boat party arrived, they found only a handful of starved animals (which they slaughtered and ate). Heyerdahl saw in the island a larger story. “The whole island was [to him] an arena, or battleground, where modern man had beaten up nature.” Confronted by “his own shadow,” Heyerdahl saw in Motane a possible environmental disaster for the Earth as a whole.¹¹ What was once a fertile tropical forest had, thanks to the sheep, turned into an “Island of Environmental Holocaust,” which would haunt Heyerdahl for the rest of his life as “a terrifying example of what would happen if nature was titled out of balance.”¹²

The same was true for Fatu-Hiva. The fact that Heyerdahl and his wife were forced to leave Fatu-Hiva only proved how hard it was for modernized people to return to nature’s harmony. Yet the possibility of returning to Eden appealed to an audience of environmentalists longing for a harmonious ecology for the future. At the same time, the exotic natural beauty of Fatu-Hiva, contrasted with the environmental disaster of the Motane, became opposing images of two different environmental paths for the world. For Christian cultures, including that of Norway, these two islands had the sotto voce of Heaven and Hell for the environmentally inclined reader to reflect on.

¹⁰ Heyerdahl, *Fatu-Hiva*, p. 186. ¹¹ Heyerdahl, *Fatu-Hiva*, pp. 186–9.

¹² Heyerdahl, *Green Was the Earth*, pp. 161, 170.

One of these readers was Erik Dammann (1931), who, in 1974, founded *The Future in Our Hands*, an organization devoted to environmental and developmental issues. Dammann had taken his own family on a similar trip, living for a year in a palm hut in the Pacific in 1967.¹³ This back-to-nature experience had convinced him that we all should search for a less materialistic and more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

As an amateur archeologist, Heyerdahl was known for hyperdiffusion, or the theory that “a single common cradle of all civilizations” once existed from which all other cultures have diffused.¹⁴ He tried to prove in his spectacular expeditions that all cultures had their origin in ancient Mesopotamia and that its people had then diffused to other cultures. “Man hosted sail before he saddled a horse,” he would typically say.¹⁵ Humans and their know-how had travelled by boat from Samaria to the Red Sea and Egypt (the Tigris expedition), from Egypt to Latin America (the Ra expeditions), from Peru to the Pacific islands (the Easter Island and the Kon-Tiki expeditions), and so forth. Ancient knowledge (such as how to build a pyramid) was thus passed from one civilization to another, most importantly by sea. Implicitly, the traveling of the white-culture-bearing race was an integral part of his vision.¹⁶ Many – if not most – archeologists would disagree, and Heyerdahl would, as a consequence, not enjoy the respect he thought he deserved in scholarly communities.

Theories of ancient history aside, his hyperdiffusionist view became important for his understanding of the environmental problems. The link between the Edenic ecological past and the ecological havoc of Heyerdahl’s own time was, to him, explainable by diffusion. It was not only humans who traveled, but also their livestock and, most problematically, their pollution. It was humans who had diffused sheep by boat to Motane, and they were thus responsible for its destruction. This came to the forefront of his attention in the summer of 1969. He was in

¹³ Erik Dammann, *Med fire barn i palmehytte* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1968); *Ny livsstil – og hva så? Om samfunnsutviklingen fra en ny og bedre livsstil til en ny og bedre verden* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1976).

¹⁴ Thor Heyerdahl, “Isolationist or diffusionist?” in Geoffrey Ashe (ed.), *The Quest for America* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 115–54, quote p. 115.

¹⁵ Thor Heyerdahl, *Early Man and the Ocean* (Carden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), p. 3.

¹⁶ Axel Andersson, *A Hero for the Atomic Age: Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon-Tiki Expedition* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010). Thor Heyerdahl and Per Lillieström, *Jakten på Odin: På sporet av vår tapte fortid* (Oslo: Stenersen, 2001).

the midst of the Atlantic Ocean with his first Ra expedition when he and his team discovered pollution in the form of clumps of oil. This he would tell in his daily radio reports to journalists covering the voyage. Likewise to the United Nations, which was a formal patron of the expedition by lending its flag to the boat. “Whatever be the cause, this pollution is so widespread that it calls for a planned investigation and explanation,” Heyerdahl pointed out in a summary of his findings for the journal *Biological Conservation* in the spring of 1970.¹⁷ The issue caught the attention of U Thant, the General Secretary of the United Nations, who personally asked Heyerdahl to do another round of pollution sampling over the Atlantic during the second Ra expedition of that summer. The result came in an equally troubling report, which was also published in *Biological Conservation*, where Heyerdahl found pollution in the water on forty-three out of fifty-seven days they were sailing. He concluded that the Atlantic Ocean was about to become a major “dumping ground” for asphalt-like material, plastic, and other garbage.¹⁸

In the early 1970s, in his numerous public appearances, Heyerdahl would remind his audiences of the growing problem of ocean pollution. This included addressing the United Nations committee on the Convention on the Law of the Sea and committees within the United States Congress and Senate, lecturing at the USSR Academy of Sciences, and so on. The ocean was contested Cold War territory, and in talking about oceanic pollution Heyerdahl saw an opportunity not only to better the environment but also to bring people of the world together. Humanity had, in the ancient past, shared a common harmonious Edenic origin, he argued, and now was the time to unite the people of the world again in joint pursuit for a green common environmental future.

This, at least, was the message Heyerdahl gave to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972. Upon entering the rostrum at the Mirror Ballroom at the Grand Hotel he began by saying:

¹⁷ Thor Heyerdahl, “Atlantic Ocean pollution observed by Expedition Ra,” *Biological Conservation*, 2, no. 3 (Apr. 1970), 221–2. Ragnar Kvam, *Mannen og havet* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 357.

¹⁸ Thor Heyerdahl, “Atlantic Ocean pollution and biota observed by the ‘Ra’ expeditions,” *Biological Conservation*, 3, no. 3 (Apr. 1971), 164–7, quote p. 167.

“At least five thousand years ago man started to rebel against the nature that had bred him, and successfully nourished him for perhaps a million years or more. It has been five thousand years of technological progress and a continued series of victories for the human rebel, the only mutineer among the descendants of nature. Nature has yielded, tree by tree, acre by acre, species by species, river by river, while man has triumphed.”¹⁹

However, this opening heroic narrative was soon tempered by Heyerdahl’s account of all the environmental ills the human “rebel” had caused throughout history. People had once diffused from their shared origin across the ocean, he argued, and now was the time for people of the world to recognize that common origin and come together again. “Let us hope they bear in mind that the ocean currents circulate with no regard for political borderlines, and that nations can divide the land, but the revolving ocean, indispensable and yet vulnerable, will forever remain a common heritage.”²⁰

Numerous scholars and activists talked at various venues in Stockholm. Heyerdahl’s lecture, however, was one of only seven given a semi-official blessing by the United Nations (together with talks by Barbara Ward, René Dubos, Gunnar Myrdal, Carmen Miró, Solly Zuckerman, and Aurelio Peccei). The lectures were organized by the International Institute for Environmental Affairs in cooperation with the Population Institute, both of which were think tanks that reported directly to General Secretary U Thant.

It was not only Heyerdahl’s fame as an explorer that appealed to the UN leadership. He had, over the years, actively endorsed the organization by sailing his ships with the UN flag as the official flag. Heyerdahl was an active leader in the World Federalist Movement that tried to improve international cooperation during the Cold War and saw a more powerful United Nations as a vehicle for bettering the world. To Heyerdahl, ocean pollution was an example illustrating the necessary importance of world-cooperation in solving shared problems. The UN leadership agreed, of course, and Heyerdahl soon found himself on the UN selection committee for its Environmental Protection Prize.

After 1972 Heyerdahl would continue raising environmental concerns.²¹ In an article from 1985 he stated: “With respect to environmental

¹⁹ Thor Heyerdahl, “How vulnerable is the ocean?” in Barbara Ward (et al. eds.), *Who Speaks for Earth?* (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 45–63, quote p. 45. Barbara Ward and René Dubos, *Only One Earth: The Care and Maintenance of a Small Planet* (New York: Norton, 1972).

²⁰ Heyerdahl, “How vulnerable is the ocean?” p. 63.

²¹ Frank Dehli, “Heyerdahl om miljøvern,” *NRK Dagsrevyen*, June 5, 1982. Online archive of the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation.

issues we must all collaborate across national boundaries and go beyond national disagreements. Wind and ocean currents do not know national boundaries, it makes us inseparable. We are all passengers on the same round globe in outer space.”²² In this spirit he became involved in the World Wildlife Fund International, which was known among the more hardcore environmentalists in Norway as anything but radical. In this capacity, in 1987, he managed to enrage Norwegian conservationists by giving an interview for BBC TV near the controversial hydropower dam of the Alta-Kautokeino River where he talked about the beauty of local wildlife, but did not condemn on the destruction of the river.²³ The interview marginalized him among activists. Nevertheless, in 1993, he made a moving plea for protecting the environment as the keynote speaker at the 5th World Wilderness Congress at the University of Tromsø.²⁴

Despite this it would be an overstatement to say that Heyerdahl was a devoted environmentalist. His chief concern was ancient history and archeology. He does not portray himself as an environmentalist in his autobiography, for example, nor do his biographers.²⁵ Among the activists and scholars he was regarded as either a larger-than-life genius or an arrogant fool. In either case he was detached from the nitty-gritty details of environmental politics. Yet his vision of a shared human globe, his longing for a harmonious Edenic past, and his plea to nations to unite through the United Nations in order to solve dire ecological problems all rang true to Norwegian friends and foes.

THE RETURN TO THE WILD

Another explorer who rose to fame within the Norwegian culture of outdoor life was Helge Ingstad (1899–2001). He was a prominent nature writer, and also an eminent lecturer, who in his numerous public appearances showed slides and documentary films from his travels at a time when these mediums were still uncommon.

At the age of twenty-five, Ingstad decided to leave the modern world and settle among the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation people in

²² Thor Heyerdahl, “Mennesker og miljø i romfartsalderen.” In Arne Fjørtoft, Jahn Otto Johansen, Thor Heyerdahl (eds.), *Befolkningsbomben: overbefolkning, krig og fred* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1985), pp. 89–110, quote p. 90.

²³ Thor Heyerdahl, “Altademningen og norsk dyreliv,” *Norsk natur* 1 (1987), 28.

²⁴ Thor Heyerdahl, “The creative wilderness,” in Børge Dahle (ed.), *Nature: The True Home of Culture* (Oslo: NIH, 1994), pp. 9–13.

²⁵ Thor Heyerdahl, *I Adams fotspor: En erindringsreise* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2006).

northern Canada. He had just finished his law degree in the city of Bergen, and was thus most certainly not trained for a life in wilderness as a hunter-gatherer. Yet he felt that a law degree and modern society could not offer much of an adventure. After three years of stinging frostbite, wolf howls, and arctic weather, Ingstad returned to Norway to write his book, *Land of Feast and Famine* (1931).²⁶ It was an instant success and bestseller, and has since been regarded as a must-read for any Norwegian aspiring to think and talk about the wild.

The book is a story of how the arctic climate builds one's disposition and manhood, and how much one has to learn from the wisdom of First Nation people living in these harsh environments. It is also a book that questions the modern world's distance from basic survival knowledge of how to live in the arctic wilderness. Ingstad would tell his readers that there were many things that needed to be learned from the Chipewyans, a point he would reiterate again and again in subsequent lectures in Norway and abroad, such as at the Explorers Club in New York.

Being trained in law and also having the ability to thrive in harsh weather conditions made Ingstad an ideal candidate for the job of the Norwegian Governor of East Greenland, which he accepted in 1932. The status of the area would soon become topic of a heated legal battle, which ended in the International Court of Justice in The Hague where Denmark won its claim on the entire Greenland landmass. These events unfolded despite the fact that Indigenous Inuit saw the land as theirs. To Ingstad East Greenland was very much Erik the Red's Land in reference to the Norwegian Viking who once settled and named the landmass "Greenland."²⁷ Ingstad's action was ultimately moved by evidence in the Viking sagas, pride in his country as caretakers of the land, and his connection to its natural environment.

The verdict in The Hague put an end to Norwegian imperialism, and a restless Ingstad went to the United States where he worked as a cowboy (among other things). He then traveled with the Apaches, with whom he lived for over a year at the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation. Upon his return to Norway he wrote a moving book about the Apaches, hailing their wisdom and ability to live in the wild, while at the same time maintaining a careful distance between the Apaches and

²⁶ Helge Ingstad, *Pelsjegerliv blandt Nord-Kanadas Indianere* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1931); *Land of Feast and Famine* (London: V. Gollancz, 1933).

²⁷ Helge Ingstad, *Øst for den store bre* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1935); *East of the Great Glacier* (New York: Knopf, 1937).

Norwegians in the language that he used, discussing how “they” have more wisdom than “us.”²⁸

The year with the Apaches would remain with him in the subsequent years as he pondered if the Vikings had ever met Indigenous Americans. As a popular author, playwright, novelist, and lecturer, Ingstad became fascinated with the saga of the Viking Leif Erikson and his Vinland Colony. To make a long story short: with his wife, the archeologist Anne Stine (Moe, 1918–97), they discovered a Viking settlement in North America. They made their initial discovery at the L’Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, in 1960, after which they would undertake yearly archeological excavations until 1968 under the leadership of Anne Stine. By this point they finally found hard evidence for their thesis, specifically a bronze ring-headed pin that only Vikings could have made.²⁹ The fact that Norwegian Vikings, not Christopher Columbus and his men, were the first Europeans to arrive in America was the key point Ingstad would stress again and again in his many public appearances.³⁰

It is important to point out that this was not a Eurocentric, but a patriotic Norwegian point of view. In the early 1970s Ingstad joined hands with the anti-European Community organizers mobilizing against Norwegian membership in the Community in a national referendum scheduled for the fall of 1972. Here he would unite with most of the environmentalists mentioned in this book, including the ecologists and the ecophilosophers. Ingstad’s name and fame was most welcome to the activists who saw him as a powerful ally from the conservative side of Norwegian politics. At this time, it was the importance of Norwegian self-determination and agricultural self-support that motivated Ingstad’s political stance, and not necessarily environmental issues.³¹

This would gradually change during the 1970s when Ingstad became more and more involved with environmental affairs, particularly with hydropower developments. His stance came to the forefront of his many public appearances with the proposed hydropower development at the Alta-Kautokeino River, which is located at the heart of where Sámi

²⁸ Helge Ingstad, *Apache-indianerne: jakten på den tapte stamme* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1939).

²⁹ Helge Ingstad, *Westward to Vinland* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1969); *Land under the Pole Star* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966).

³⁰ Helge Ingstad, “Norse explorers,” in Geoffrey Ashe (ed.), *The Quest for America* (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp. 96–112. Ralph Maud, *The Man Who Discovered America* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1981).

³¹ Frode Skarstein, *Helge Ingstad: En biografi* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2010). Benedicte Ingstad, *Oppdagelsen: En biografi om Anne Stine og Helge Ingstad* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2009).

people live and work. The Sámi, it is worth noting, had been living for centuries in the northern part of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia under various degrees of political and cultural oppression. Ingstad would, at the age of eighty, go on a lecture tour around the country, discussing Sámi civil rights and the importance of learning from them in order to save a shared environment. Drawing upon his experiences with the Chipewyans and the Apaches, he pointed to the ancient wisdom of the Sámi relationship to nature from which modern society had so much to learn.

To the environmentalists, Ingstad was a living legend whose lectures on Vikings and life in the wild easily filled the largest auditorium. Yet his age and conservative leaning would set him apart socially from younger scholars and activists. What they admired in him was his Rousseau-style argument of the human “savage” being a source of inspiration for a noble environmental future. Many found his discussions of ancient Vikings along with Chipewyans, Apaches, and the Sámi appealing when searching for a way out of the modern world’s eco-disaster. The fact that long-gone Vikings had once settled America was intriguing to Norwegians with global aspirations, as was his idea that arctic climate and outdoor life would help to build a nobler disposition.

LEARNING FROM THE PEOPLE OF SWAT

The social anthropologists were the first to agree with both Heyerdahl and Ingstad on the importance of studying tribes and people who had not been tainted by modernity. And first among Norwegian anthropologists was Fredrik Barth (1928–2016). He was not interested in environmental issues, nor was he particularly concerned about the rights or social status of the Indigenous Sámi living in Norway. His importance lay in his theoretical and descriptive anthropology, though, as will be argued, he also encouraged his students to engage the world politically. But perhaps most importantly, he was the first academic to introduce the science of ecology to the Norwegian scholarly community.

He was the son of the geologist Thomas Barth, who, in 1946, took his son along to the University of Chicago where he gave a guest lecture. The young Barth soon enrolled, and he graduated in 1949 with a Master of Arts in paleoanthropology and archaeology. It was during his graduate studies that he, as part of the course requirements, came to read the work of the ecologist Warder Clyde Allee. As the historians of ecology Gregg Mitman and Eugene Cittadino have shown, the University of Chicago

was, at the time, a hotbed for animal, social, and human ecology.³² It was not only Allee's ecological research that caught Barth's attention, but also Marjorie and Allee's daughter Mary ("Molly") (1925–98) with whom he fell in love and married in 1949. After their marriage, the couple moved to Norway, where Allee would visit them in 1950.³³ The bond with the Allee family provided Barth with firsthand knowledge of ecology, which he used as an analytical tool to understand human behavior, an example of which is present in his famous study "Ecological Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan" (1956).

Barth was not the only Norwegian academic to visit this tribal region of Pakistan. The Norwegian Alpine Club arranged a trip to the area in 1950 accompanied by the philosopher and climber Arne Næss, the events of which will be discussed later in this book (Chapter 3). Also, the renowned professor of linguistics at the University of Oslo, Georg Morgenstierne, had been there frequently and knew the tribal languages and dialects by heart.³⁴ It was Morgenstierne who taught Barth how to speak Pashto so that he could understand the language spoken in this green mountain region of Pakistan. With a point of departure in the ecology that he had learned from Allee, Barth analyzed the ecological division of labor (or niche) among the people of Swat, arguing that the region's political structure reflected its natural environmental conditions. The ecological niches of the tribes in Swat were "analogous to that of different animal species in a habitat," Barth argued, and relationships between them were both stable and static just as in the ecology of animals.³⁵ The ways in which the landowner, the tenant farmer, the commodity dealer, and so forth engaged with each other, he argued, depended on a semi-annual harvest and other static environmental

³² Warder C. Allee, Alfred E. Emerson, Orlando Park, Thomas Park, and Karl P. Schmidt, *Principles of Animal Ecology* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1949). Gregg Mitman, *The State of Nature: Ecology, Community, and American Social Thought, 1900–1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). Eugene Cittadino, "The failed promise of human ecology," in Michael Shortland (ed.), *Science and Nature* (Oxford: BSHS Monographs, 1993), pp. 252–83; "A 'marvelous cosmopolitan preserve': The dunes, Chicago, and dynamics ecology of Henry Cowles," *Perspectives on Science* 1 (1993), 520–59.

³³ Karl Patterson Schmidt, *Warder Allee 1885–1955* (Washington: National Academy of Sciences, 1957), p. 24. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Fredrik Barth: En intellektuell biografi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013).

³⁴ Nils Johan Ringdal, *Georg Valentin von Munthe af Morgenstiernes forunderlige liv og reiser* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2008).

³⁵ Fredrik Barth, "Ecologic relationships of ethnic groups in Swat, North Pakistan," *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 58, no. 6 (Dec. 1956), 1079–89, quote p. 1079.

conditions. In short, what he described as occurring in the Swat communities resembled traditional Norwegian coastal fishing and mountain farming communities.

The ecologically informed research in Swat and related work was done under supervision of the British anthropologist Edmund Leach at Cambridge University, from where Barth received a PhD in 1957. Barth subsequently became a lecturer at the University of Oslo where he began lecturing on using the field of ecology as a novel approach to anthropology and ethnology. These were the first lecture series about ecology in Norway. An article from this period by one of his students, for example, would credit Barth with introducing ecology to the study of humans in Norway by focusing on human adaptability to different environments.³⁶

Despite having a significant audience in Oslo, Barth would not stay long as he accepted a professorship at the University of Bergen in 1961. In Bergen he would establish ecologically informed social anthropology as the way forward, which, after his divorce from Molly in 1972, would move gradually away from ecology toward economics as a methodological reference. Following Leach's famous call for humans to "become like gods," Barth advised his students to actively engage the world and assume the power to change it. In pursuing "a dynamic study of society," he argued that rather than understand the social structure that enables human action, one should focus on what action people are actually taking.³⁷ In his work, he would adapt from ecology the idea of the search for the universal, in particular when studying people's behavior in remote places that occupied the world's periphery. The task of social anthropology, he would say, was to investigate the local so that one could get "a deeper understanding of the human condition."³⁸

Instead of subscribing to a functionalistic model of society, Barth encouraged his students to investigate how people as individuals or as groups act to understand social processes. As a charismatic professor in Bergen in the 1960s, he came to inspire a new generation of students with his ecological approach. The fact that ecology was introduced to the

³⁶ Helge Kleivan, "Økologisk endring i Labrador," *Naturen* 86 (1962), 200–13, note 1. Lecture by Kleivan given in Oslo in the spring of 1961.

³⁷ Fredrik Barth, "Preface," in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *The Role of the Entrepreneur in Social Change in Northern Norway* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1963), 3; "Moral og miljøkrise," in Svein Gjerdåker, Lars Gule, and Bernt Hagtvet (eds.), *Den uoverstigelige grense* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1991), pp. 149–53.

³⁸ Fredrik Barth and Colin Turnbull, "On responsibility and humanity: Calling a colleague to account," *Current Anthropology*, 15, no. 1 (1974), 99–103, quote p. 99.

Norwegian academic community by a social anthropologist, and not by the biologists, may explain why the field never narrowed to only focus on one type of subject matter. Thanks to Barth, humans would remain a key factor in ecological debates. Barth also thought that many Norwegians could learn from Indigenous people living in the periphery (such as farmers in Swat) to understand and envision humanity in general.

THE FISHERMAN-PEASANT

One particularly important student of Barth was Ottar Brox (b. 1932). Born in the remote village of Torsken in Troms in the North of Norway, he has a soft-spot for rural life. Formally he was a trained agronomist, though his first work of importance came in an article in the anthology *The Role of the Entrepreneur in Social Change in Northern Norway* (1963), edited by Barth and containing papers written by his first group of Norwegian students.

At the heart of the anthology was the concept of the willing human agent – the entrepreneur – trying to adapt to his or her ecological niche. The entrepreneur was, to both Barth and Brox, someone who mobilized a niche in an ecological system, and thus came to change the system as a result. Brox's description of the relationship between the herring boss, crew, and merchant may serve as an example: "The herring boss and his crew exploit the same niche, but their interaction is symbiotic rather than competitive, they are dependent upon each other for survival." The herring merchant, on the other hand, is changing the stable symbiotic system, for the worse. He is "an exploiter who is extracting profit from the clientele, i.e. 'eating' the fisherman, ecologically speaking."³⁹

Though Barth would keep himself separate from the politics of trying to halt such ecological exploitation, he actively encouraged his students to engage in local communities, while, at the same time, thinking about the world as a whole. Inspired by his teacher, Brox would turn his anthropological investigations of fishermen into action on behalf of the ecologically oppressed. As he saw it, social anthropologists should not only understand the world, but also change it for the better. His questioning of economic growth, technocracy, and industrialism was, from now on, informed by populist agrarian socialism, which placed greater value on

³⁹ Ottar Brox, "Three types of north Norwegian entrepreneurship," in Fredrik Barth (ed.), *The Role of the Entrepreneur in Social Change in Northern Norway* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963), pp. 19–32, quote p. 25.

rural communities and traditional lifestyles. This he expressed in the *Hva skjer i Nord Norge?* (What's happening in North of Norway? 1966). It became a phenomenal success and a must-read within the growing Norwegian counterculture. It's a book that reflects the bipolar Cold War world, in which the evils of centralized "technocratic assumption of power" should be fought in order to protect the virtues of seasonal fishermen-peasants living in harmony with their environments in the country's most pristine regions.⁴⁰ There was ancient wisdom in the ways of life of people in the coastal region of the North, Brox argued. His book was a call to action to defend rural communes from centralized urbanization efforts. He would soon enjoy wide support from an emerging group of radical ecologists, ecophilosophers, and environmentalists, who also pinpointed economic growth and industrialization as the root cause of the ecological crisis.

In the wake of his book's enthusiastic reception, Brox would, in the academic year of 1966/1967, visit Newfoundland to explore and learn about its fisheries and subsistence production, making numerous comparisons between rural Newfoundland and the north of Norway, including an allusion to Ingstad's work on Norwegian Vikings who had "rediscovered the island."⁴¹

Brox had an impact, especially, on the young leftist activist Hartvig Sætra (1933–2004), who, inspired by Brox, became somewhat of a celebrity among environmentalists, thanks to his 1971 book *Populismen i norsk sosialisme* (Populism in Norwegian Socialism), later reissued in 1973 as *Den økopolitiske sosialismen* (The Ecopolitical Socialism). He dreamed of a steady-state, ecologically informed society, with zero population growth, modest use of technology, recirculation of natural resources, and decentralization of political power, and initiated a call to arms against technocracy, centralized power, and exploitation of natural resources. Ecology was at the heart of his thinking: "It's through biology that we will get the best arguments for introducing socialism."⁴² Following Brox, Sætra argued that true socialists should bring to an end their longing for the blue-collar worker adored by Marxists. Instead, socialists should find home in emulating the rural

⁴⁰ Ottar Brox, *Hva skjer i Nord-Norge?* (Oslo: Pax, 1966), p. 23.

⁴¹ Ottar Brox, *Newfoundland Fishermen in the Age of Industry* (Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1972), p. 1.

⁴² Hartvig Sætra, *Den økopolitiske sosialismen*, 3rd ed. (Oslo: Pax, 1973), p. 45. Odd Gaare, "Hartvig Sætra: Økopolitisk sosialist," *Prosa*, 2 (2019), 50–7.

fishermen-peasants, who lived in steady-state harmony with the natural world. The coastal fishermen-peasants were threatened by the industrial society generating, among other things, carbon dioxide pollution that inevitably would cause “climate change,” Sætra warned, causing “the ocean to rise several meters all over the world.”⁴³ At the heart of this concern was not carbon dioxide pollution, however, but capitalism itself with economic growth threatening the steady-state society. Instead of capitalism, Sætra imagined a world in which one would not consume more resources than nature could produce, where there would be modest use of technology, decentralized decision making, no growth in human population, and biodiversity built upon recirculation of resources. This was not armchair theory to Sætra, who ended up settling in the municipality of Gratangen in the north of Norway where he tried to live according to his own teachings.

Though his main target was capitalism, the book caused tension among the socialists. What was the source of revolution? Was it the industrial factory workers or rural fishermen-peasants? Sætra would look to Chinese agrarian communism for inspiration, arguing, “China under Mao Tse-tung practices a more conscious ecopolitics than other countries.”⁴⁴ As will be argued, Sætra was not the only one among ecologically informed academics who found events in China inspiring. That did not go down well with socialists, who argued that the revolution would come from factory workers (and not fishermen-peasants), such as was the case in the Soviet Union.

One of Sætra’s stern opponents was the left-leaning German intellectual Hans Magnus Enzensberger (b. 1929). He spoke Norwegian as he had lived in Norway between 1956 and 1964 at the beautiful island of Tjøme in the Oslo fjord. After that, he would, for the next thirty years, visit his rural picturesque farm in Valdres during his summer vacations. What he saw in rural Norway was not a steady-state ecological future, but instead a charming agrarian “anachronism.” Norway did not harbor any revolutionary potential due to its large fishing-dependent and agrarian population, Enzensberger argued. Instead, the country had fallen out of step with the evolving dialectics of European history. This he would state in no uncertain terms. To him, Sætra was just a “low-voiced Berserker” and “a real pent-up lone wolf,” who did not comprehend the true teachings of Karl Marx. “With a rage bordering on self-hatred

⁴³ Sætra, *Den økopolitiske sosialismen*, p. 71.

⁴⁴ Sætra, *Den økopolitiske sosialismen*, p. 103.

he demands merciless consequence, a forced restriction on consumption, [and] an ecological dictatorship,” Enzensberger pointed out.⁴⁵

Sætra was radical, but not a “Berserker.” The ecological steady-state society was to him “not an herbal-tea party,” but a revolutionary break with industrial growth.⁴⁶ The revolution was to come from the fishermen-peasants, revolting against the ecological evils of capitalism, after which they would establish an environmentally harmonious, steady-state communist society. To Brox and Sætra, the allure of this lost way of life represented a new possible environmentally friendly beginning for Norway and the world. They were not alone. To many Norwegians the peripheral nature of mountain peasants’ and coastal fishermen’s cabins that were bought up in the 1960s as vacation homes for outdoor life enthusiasts came to represent something more than just a beautiful place to relax. Such vacationing was a partial return to the nation’s origin and gave people pristine places from which to reflect on a possible new beginning. As will be argued, the ecologically informed steady-state society that Brox and Sætra promoted was based on support from a growing number of ecologists (Chapter 2) as well as philosophers (Chapter 3).

The next chapter will visit Finse where the High Mountain Ecology Research Station was located. This was also the site for exciting archaeological excavations of Stone Age-era hunter-gatherer culture. To ecologists, as well as laymen vacationers, the site came to represent the ability of a pre-industrial society to live self-sufficiently. As one nature writer observed, outdoor life was a “partial return to the state of nature” in which vacationers with modern houses choose to “cook in the open air” and live in “tents for weeks” in order to reconnect with the Stone Age abilities that they have lost.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Norwegische anachronismen,” published as *Norsk utakt*, Lasse Tømte (trs.) (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984), pp. 77–8.

⁴⁶ Hartvig Sætra, *Jamvektssamfunnet er ikke noko urtete-selskap* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1990).

⁴⁷ Nils Borchgrevink, “Naturfølelse og naturvern,” *Samtiden* 77 (1968), 360–6, quotes pp. 360, 361. Arne B. Johansen, “Hardangervidda skal utforskes: Et prosjekt for tverrvitenskaplig kulturforskning i gang fra 1970,” *Forskningsnytt*, 14 (1969), 26–9. Anders Hagen, “Fra Hardangerviddas historie,” *Forskningsnytt*, 15 (1970), 31–5.