

Christer Lindberg

*I love the people who have always made me welcome to the best they had.  
I love a people who are honest without laws, who have no jails and no  
poorhouses.  
I love a people who keep the commandments without ever having read them or  
heard them preached from the pulpit.  
I love a people who never swear, who never take the name of God in vain.  
I love a people "who love their neighbors as they love themselves."  
I love a people who worship God without a Bible, for I believe that God loves  
them also.  
I love the people whose religion is all the same, and who are free from religious  
animosities.  
I love the people who have never raised a hand against me, or stolen my property,  
where there was no law to punish for either.  
I love the people who have never fought a battle with white men, except on their  
own ground.  
I love and don't fear mankind where God has made and left them, for there they  
are children.  
I love a people who live and keep what is their own without locks and keys.  
I love all people who do the best they can. And oh, how I love a people who don't  
live for the love of money!*

George Catlin

Portraying Rafael Karsten as an ethnographer and americanist makes certain episodes of his life and aspects of his writings especially important. However, as we can learn from the biographical sketches, he was active in a number of scientific fields besides anthropology and comparative religion - sociology and philosophy, just to mention two of the most important. Moreover, Rafael Karsten was not only a scientist but a human being

living an every-day life in a rapidly changing world. In a sense you always write what you are, or to put it in other words, the experiences of your life are projected in your writings. Thus, I like to make a presentation of Rafael Karsten moving in an opposite direction, i.e. depart from some of his fundamental notions of the world and use them to mirror the variety of his work. After reviewing most of his writings, as well as some private correspondence<sup>1</sup>, the concepts of truth and moral seems to connect even the most diverse aspects of his work. Together his notion of truth and moral formed what I refer to as the code of honour - something he always tried to live up to, and something he also required from others. The concepts themselves has something of a puritan spirit, and the way that Rafael Karsten perceived them did not in any way made them easier as commandments of life. At best they guaranteed high scientific quality, but at worst they could very well mobilize blind fury and suspicion towards contemporary scholars.

Making his career between the first and second international generations of social scientists, Rafael Karsten was introduced to the fields of anthropology and religion through the classical works of Lewis Henry Morgan, Edward B. Tylor and James Frazer. Most important became his tutor, colleague and friend Edward Westermarck - in almost everyone of Karsten's books one finds some reference to Westermarck, many of them written in appreciation while a few harbours mild criticism. Following his sense of truth and morality, Karsten did never surrender to trends either in his private life or in his scientific convictions. He was a consistent person, a person who stuck with his positions. Thus, he remained a straightforward evolutionary theorist throughout his life - going his own way without theoretically bothering about the functionalist school of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski in Great Britain or the Boasian school in the United States. Surprisingly, he did not even comment the revival of social evolutionary theory through the works of Julian H. Steward and Leslie White.<sup>2</sup> He never made his view of evolution fully explicit, although it is obvious that he treated processes of general evolution (thus siding with White and not with Steward's theory of specific/particular evolution). It is not clear, however, if he perceived cultural evolution in the Lamarckian/Spencerian sense, i.e. as unilinear and moving towards perfection, or in the true Darwinian outline as multilinear and developing from primary forms. Obviously he did not perceived any of counter schools as truly anti-evolutionary, even though they formulated some severe criticism against thinkers like Morgan, Tylor and Frazer. He agreed with some of this criticism - especially the call for extensive fieldwork and less speculation. French sociology never met his approval since it formulated theories upon what he considered to be unsatisfactory documentation - he seldom missed an opportunity to dismiss Lucien Levy-Bruhl's theory of savage pre-logical thinking. Together with R. R. Marett of Oxford, Levy-Bruhl is responsible for more nonsense concerning primitive mentality than any other anthropologist during this century, Karsten wrote in 1947<sup>3</sup>. Frazer's work, however, was characterized by a scientific method as well as sober criticism, he said, and in Taylor he found a systematic thinker.<sup>4</sup> He was always open to discussions concerning sources and methods of research, but in the end the value of these tools depended upon the personality of the researcher, his judgement and intellectual honesty.<sup>5</sup>

In retrospect, Karsten's evolutionary perspective becomes both the strength and weakness of his legacy. It made him a systematic thinker by letting him pose similar questions to a number of phenomenas,

and it also makes it possible to see his entire production as a meaningful whole and not merely as touchdowns in a wide range of disciplines. On the other hand, his post second war claim that the methods of natural sciences were to guide ethnology, sociology and comparative religion was a thing of the past.<sup>6</sup> The separation from the natural sciences' was one of the major achievements of Twentieth Century sociology and anthropology. Moreover, the limitations of evolutionary theory are the implications of progress as something natural, as well as its mono-causality. Karsten, and other representatives of the old evolutionary ideology, devoted all their time trying to outline the curse of evolution, and thus never really treated the question of non-elaboration, or even processes of de-evolution.

### **The first intellectual emancipation**

A young man's rebellion against parental authority was marked that very day when a teenage Rafael Karsten arrived to college in the township of Vasa. Left behind was the priesthome in Kvevlax and a sweet, respected, but yet a very dominant mother. In the Seventeenth Century city of Vasa, with its open eye towards the sea and its broad and busy streets, he confronted not only geographical and social space, but also a degree of intellectual space. Surely, Nikolaistad - the official name of Vasa - was still hold in an iron grip by the Russian empire, but as a centre of trade and commerce the city offered all the temptations and possibilities that rural Kvevlax had denied. Maybe he already at that time sensed that the world could provide some other career for him, than that of an military officer or priest.

Of even greater importance was the next transfer in time and space. When the Twentieth Century was announced by church bells all over the country, Rafael Karsten symbolically took off the black robe that his parents so badly wanted him to wear. He did so by entering the Capital city of Helsingfors, enlisted at the university for studies in theology. With a safe distance from home, he immediately directed his education towards comparative religion and philosophy. The majestic buildings of the university, crowned with words of wisdom written in latin, was a new and exciting world - the houses of truth that were to be his for the rest of his life. Into the classroom walked a heavy-set and powerful man in his late thirties, introducing himself as Edward Westermarck.

It did not take long for Rafael Karsten to realize that he had in Westermarck found someone to follow; a man with a superb intellect and critical mind, outspoken, well-read in the international literature, with own ideas, and above all, the courage to stand up for his ideas. Moreover, Edward Westermarck represented the great, wide world that Karsten was so desperately searching for - a world that was ready to listen to all those thoughts of him that were forbidden by the priesthood in Kvevlax. The young man and his teacher also shared strong anti-Czarist views although they never could say so in public. Westermarck was

neither priest, nor an army officer. He was a scientist and a cosmopolitan, based in Helsingfors but with the world as his laboratory. He corresponded with people from all the corners of the world, consulted the books in the reading room of the British Library in London, and practised fieldwork in Morocco. Karsten's initial strategy, with or without the encouragement of Westermarck, was to improve his knowledge in foreign languages. Within ten years he was capable of fluent conversation in english, german, french and spanish. In addition he spoke both his native languages, i.e. swedish and finnish, and later on a couple of native languages that he picked up during his fieldwork in South America.<sup>7</sup>

Before the age of twenty-seven, already in 1889, Westermarck had published his *magnum opus* entitled *The Origin of Human Marriage*. In sociology he declared the object of research as to "...explain social phenomena, to find their causes, to show how and why they have come into existence."<sup>8</sup> In the other major area of his teachings, philosophy, he argued that moral judgements are ultimately based not on intellect but on emotions - a theme that he elaborated into *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* and much later into his provocative philosophical work *Ethical Relativity*. He never feared to challenge the European notions of civilization - when great men like Moore, Ross and Sidgwick hailed ethics and moral values, Westermarck immediately replied that there were a peculiar similarity between these so called objective values and those held in high respect by British gentlemen.<sup>9</sup> He traced the origin of moral in language, and tried to show that it through biological evolution had developed towards a central position in human culture. It is not much use to say that a moral judgement is true or not true, Westermarck argued. We ought to care more about the right way to behave - to search for a good life - instead of concentrate upon rules and duties.<sup>10</sup> To his student Rafael Karsten that statement meant truth and honesty, the cornerstones in his code of honour.

Karsten bid his geographical farewell to Kvevlax by writing a minor article called "Kveflaks" (1900) about swedish-speaking communities in the finnish region of Österbotten. His final intellectual take-off took place under the guidance of Westermarck, first in his doctoral thesis *The Origin of Worship: A Study in Primitive Religion* (1905), but certainly much clearer in his second major publication in comparative religion, *Hedendom och kristendom: Studier i jämförande religionsvetenskap* (1910). By that time he was no longer a respectful pupil of Westermarck - he was a colleague and friend. Together with Gunnar Landtman, Westermarck and Karsten appeared in London. Westermarck had been appointed professor in sociology at the London Schools of Economics, while Landtman and Karsten prepared themselves for fieldwork in the South Sea and South America respectively. They were introduced to anthropological authorities like Alfred Cort Haddon and W. H. R. Rivers, but also to a slim young man with thick glasses who went under the strange name of Bronislaw Malinowski. At the time nobody could guess that this polish gentleman was destined to make himself the culture-hero of anthropology.

## Law and religion in modern society

The scholarly contributions of Rafael Karsten before his Chaco adventure in 1911 were concentrated to the fields of religion and sociology. In 1906 he presented "Till frågan om förhållandet mellan religion och moral" which, as the Swedish title suggest, treats the relationship between religion and moral. It was a "study of origin", typical of those days. Karsten traces two paradigms of thoughts within the field of modern ethics. The first, *theonomy*, claims that all kinds of morality is the result of worship, while the second of *autonomy* holds that moral steams from man himself, totally independent of religion.<sup>11</sup> He sided with the second of course (that of theonomy belonged to his family back in Kvevlax), and presented a variety of empirical material in order to show that religion and moral had different origins. In the related publication *Hedendom och kristendom*, he almost made his case as something of a personal revenge against a Christianity fettered in dogmas and cursed by its intolerance.<sup>12</sup> On occasions, he said, religious fanaticism could lead directly towards unmoral conduct.<sup>13</sup>

Referring to "primitive religion", many of Karsten's early publications stress that most Gods worshipped by mankind do not posses or require any ethical virtues. Yet, primitive man behaves according to a certain moral etiquette, although very simple.<sup>14</sup> Taken as an indication of the parallel evolution of religion and mind by Karsten, he argued that the historical alterations of the notions of morality has been subjected to the law of evolution. Kant had been right when he claimed that ethics was a product of reason. Unfortunately, Karsten continued, he was blind for the historical processes involved and thereby denying every psychological or historical explanation of the ethical law.<sup>15</sup> I guess that some readers may have objections concerning a young Karsten's interpretation of Kant, but this is not the place to carry such a discussion any further. Anyway, Karsten concluded his "Till frågan om förhållandet mellan religion och moral" by an implicit hailing of the western civilization: Some people still need an outer authority in order to accept ethical rules.<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that he regarded the high cultures of Europe as having left that stage in the human evolution long time ago.

Close to the field of ethics is the subject of philosophical jurisprudence - a science that, in Karsten's opinion, had improved by its shift from a pure theoretical standpoint to that of empirical and comparative studies. In "the ethics of punishment" (*Till straffets etik*, 1909), he outlines four different theories of crime and punishment, including rehabilitation, revenge and societal self-protection. In the article, which clearly indicates the intellectual presence of Westermarck, he at length also discusses crimes related to sexuality (including homosexuality). Such crimes, in particular child molestations, are of pathological nature and ought to be medically treated and not punish by inprisonment. In the case of homosexuality and sodomy it shall not at all be regarded as a matter of jurisprudence due to its dependency on a relationship of free will.<sup>17</sup>

## The second intellectual emancipation - encountering *The Other*

George Catlin's words of introduction illustrates very well the message given by Rafael Karsten in popular as well as scholarly accounts of the South American Indians. Indeed, some of these very words are to be found in Karsten's books. The natives, although by Karsten and others regarded as belonging to an inferior stage in the chain of human evolution, were seen as carriers of some of the virtues that had been lost in civilization. There was no need to reinvent the noble savage of Rousseau, or as Ferdinand Tönnies, to make up a Golden Age picture of a lost *Gemeinschaft* against a horrifying *Gesellschaft*. In the same way as Catlin, Erland Nordenskiöld, Curt Nimendajú and others, the man from Finland experienced the differences of an industrialized civilization from that of another kind housed in a virgin forrest. Even if the natural surroundings of Chaco and Ecuador made a profound impression, the meeting with *the Other* - Indian men, women and children - made a far more greater and ever-lasting impression. In the Tobas and Jivaros he found 'the people who made him welcome to the best they had' - the people with 'no jails and no poorhouses'. In foreign land he was cheated and robbed a couple of times, but never by anyone belonging to the people 'without laws to punish it'. In South America the civilization of modernity clashed with the cultures of savagism and it was impossible to face reality without choosing side. We may assume that it was quite difficult for Karsten to accept the fact that the civilization he had held in such high esteem, still could be responsible for slavery and genocide. The message of Henry Schoolcraft and Lewis Henry Morgan proclaimed that the savage will improve as soon as he comes into contact with civilization, but they were dead wrong. Truth in the spoken word, honesty, hospitality and moral conduct were not to be found in cities or missionary villages - only far beyond the frontier of civilization. Under the influence of catholicism the Indians becomes lazy liars, Karsten wrote. At the mission the natives old ideals are constantly undermined, a process that ultimately results in moral nihilism.<sup>18</sup> For Karsten *the Other* could no longer be a savage - he was just another human being 'doing the best he could' by adapting to natural conditions. Living in an Indian village made him feel free and happy - it provided him with some kind of spiritual fulfilment that he was never able to regain at home. It was easy to sympathize with 'a people who don't live for the love of money'.

Karsten's defense of the Indian extended far beyond the societies in Chaco and Ecuador. He characterized the colonization of North America as extraordinary ugly and an "embarrassment to the entire white race."<sup>19</sup> Indian feuds are almost harmless compared with the English and French warfare of extermination, or the Spaniards greedy search for gold. Karsten did also refer to the slavetrade in the rubber districts of Putumayo<sup>20</sup> - he had in mind Arana Rubber Company and the 1912 revelations made by Hardenburg in *Putumayo, the Devil's Paradise*. One of the few lights in the entire conquest of the Americas, was the mighty humanistic propaganda spread by Bartolomé de las Casas in the 16th Century, Karsten said.<sup>21</sup> In *Bland indianer* ("Among Indians") he did his best to falsify the popular notion of the savage as a cruel and bloodthirsty being without consciousness or any recognized authority. The truth of primitive man can be formulated somewhere between Rousseau and Darwin, perhaps closer to rousseauism than the extreme

darwinism, he said. As a matter of fact, Karsten continued, some of our customs and beliefs are more barbarian than those of primitive man.<sup>22</sup>

The primary goal of Karsten's fieldwork among Jivaros and other tribes, was of course to secure data for his scientific production. In addition, however, his material enabled him to make a type of humanistic and political statements that in those days were considered highly controversial. The humanistic appeals, like those already presented, focused upon false notions concerning the so called primitive peoples of the world. His political statements were twofolded; on one part making public the injustices carried out by the White man, and on the other to criticise political and social conditions in his own society. Such is the strategy of the primitivist's appeal, and some of us may find it contradictory to his notion of progress embodied in the evolution of mankind. But, as a matter of fact, very few primitivists denies the process of evolution - they only find it regrettable. Before his first personal encounter with *the Other*, Karsten had understood materialistic progress as something enriching, but by now his view of the world had begun to take an opposite position. Modernity was no longer a guarantee for a better world, it left too many of the basic human virtues in vacuum.

### **A time of humbug par excellence**

Intellectuals in Europe experienced a collective emotional depression following World War I, a feeling that later was to grab everybody during the great economical depression of 1929-1939. Oswald Spengler perhaps came closest to the core when he, in *Die Untergang des Abendlandes*, announced that our productive culture in its spiritual sense has come to an end. The only thing left is the predatory human animal desperately searching for power through technology. For Karsten the first international war, together with his field experiences, forced him to seriously reflect upon the benefits of his own civilization. The outbreak of a second World War more or less terminated his hopes for a true Western civilization. By the fifties, he was considered himself as living in a time of *humbug par excellence*.<sup>23</sup>

Rafael Karsten remained pro-German throughout both World War I and II. He was deeply disappointed with the treaty of Versailles in which Germany was made solely responsible for the war according to article number 231. "The peace is just a continuation of the war with other means," was a quotation from Clémenceau that he often made public.<sup>24</sup> His defence of the German cause was strengthened by his friendship with Eric von Rosen and Sven Hedin in Sweden, both intimately associated with the German Nazi regime in the thirties. That Karsten did not alter his pro-German stand during any of the events leading up to the outbreak of World War II, or even during the war, calls for two possible interpretations. The first reflects the position of Finland in the events of a new international conflict, i.e. the nationalistic notion that only a strong Germany could save his country from the aggressions of Russia. In that case the 1939 Molotov-

von Ribbentrop Pact of nonaggression must have been a tremendous alarm clock. The second, and surely not contradicting explanation, is that Karsten was totally deceived by the positive and romantic post-war propaganda, including all the assurances given by von Rosen, Hedin and their German friends. In addition, there was a certain amount of primitivism (nature worship, purity, etc.) in the intellectual ideology of Nazi Germany. During the course of the war, Finland was to a large extent isolated from any international news and with all of those reassurances in his mind, Karsten refused to pay attention to rumours of German warcrimes. After the war, Karsten was too proud to admit that he had been wrong, at least he never delivered any public statement upon the holocaust. Maybe he could not believe that the Germany he had known as a cultural centre of Europe had committed such a crime against humanity. Maybe he just felt sorry for the German people who, like himself, had been politically betrayed. One senses disbelief or even an apology for Germany in the 1951 publication "The moraliska framåtskridandets problem" (an article marked by disillusion over the failure of moral progress) when he says that "the winners are always right".<sup>25</sup>

Truth and moral are always at stake in a war situation, and as teacher and scholar in the field of practical ethics Karsten stated that every war produces a spirit of untruthfulness.<sup>26</sup> He regarded both of the international conflicts as results of the French foreign politics against Germany, reinforced by numerous postwar-alliances. The objective notion of moral that he believed in had almost disappeared in the western civilization after 1914, it could not be found in politics, not in war, and even too seldom in the neutral ground of science. It was time to pose the old question of Rousseau once more: Do progress in science, art and technology improve human ethics? Karsten answered the question twice, first in his "Krig och moral" ("War and moral") dated 1933 and for a second time nineteen years later in "Det moraliska framåtskridandets problem". Perhaps higher civilization may improve the human being, but it is a doubled-edged sword which, under certain circumstances, also can make her seven times worse, he argues in "Krig och moral". At this point in the human evolution the differentiation of emotions is taking place, and it may strengthen a feeling like hate.<sup>27</sup> In 1951 Karsten's disillusion had reached the same level as Spengler's in the twenties - man is a terminator and the achievement of high civilization increases his raw animal instincts. Moral and ethic are like pieces of clay, he said, and everybody shapes them at their own will. Nothing is ever to be compared to that cruelty, savagism, humbug, untruthfulness, etc. that has been exposed during World War I and II.<sup>28</sup>

This time of *humbug par excellence* did of course not only affect the international arena of politics, but also national and local realities. He saw himself living in a time of ethical degeneration, where the word honesty had no other meaning than not being caught in the act of committing a crime. Karsten returned to the question of law and punishment in his 1932 article called "Samhällets straffrätt". Crime rates has increased everywhere and the Finnish society has failed to response in a proper manner due to a stereotypical and liberal use of pardoning.<sup>29</sup> Indirectly, Karsten here defended the call for death penalty by comparing acts of crime with war. One may in theory hold that war is unworthy any civilization, he said, but nobody can deny the right to bear arms in order to defend ones nation from outside aggression.<sup>30</sup> Crime was social decease that needed to be taken care of, not handled with "juridical formalism", he concluded.

Lack of truth and moral in science was attacked by Karsten in a number of polemics and

newspaper articles. Where can anyone find intellectual honesty in these days when headlines are made up by the sensational and speculative, he asked. His bad temper increased with his failing health, and by now he raged at anybody daring to make a public statement regarding *his* Jivaros, may it be the Swedish filmmaker Rolf Blomberg, the American adventurer Up de Graff, or a French explorer like Bertrand Flornoy.<sup>31</sup> As the greatest fraud of them all, he considered Thor Heyerdahl. The old controversial question of America as an isolated island in pre-Columbian times, or as a place visited by seamen from the South Sea or vice versa, became a matter of importance for everybody with Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki expedition of 1947. Karsten took his hat off for the sportsmanship showed by Heyerdahl, but his theory has no scientific value at all, he stated in a number of newspapers. In Scandinavia, Karsten was second only to the Tiahuanaco expert Stig Rydén in criticizing the romantic hyper-diffusionism of Heyerdahl. The latter's own position has moved from time to time, in the days of Karsten he was claiming that a profound cultural exchange had taken place in pre-Columbian times, but due to severe criticism he later changed his statement (in 1978) to be that of a possible one.<sup>32</sup> Yet, in a very recent interview pertaining to his forthcoming book, Heyerdahl once more makes scientific claims for the same theory.<sup>33</sup> Forty years ago, Karsten finally decided to ignore him and refused to meet him in a public debate scheduled to take place in Helsingfors. Has the world not seen and heard enough of Kon-Tiki, sounded his rhetorical question.<sup>34</sup>

### **The question of old and new sociology**

The 1930's and 40's were no easy decades for Rafael Karsten. Besides the international political instability, he also faced a changing intellectual climate in Finland and abroad. Right or wrong, I have above claimed importance to the fact that he entered sociology and anthropology between the first and second international generations of scholars in these fields. Since he gained his international reputation in a time when Spencer, Morgan and Tylor were already gone, he could not really identify himself with that generation. On the other hand, he was theoretically quite apart from the second generation of anthropologists, in Europe guided by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Such an interpretation taken to the university campus of Helsingfors, shows that he nationally was caught up in a similar situation. A younger generation of scholars had begun moulding Finnish sociology towards the American model of Parsonian functionalism with its focus on quantitative and attitude research. The academic fight concerning the question of old and new sociology was of course one of theories and practices, but also one of career strategies. As Pierre Bourdieu has shown us in *Homo Academicus* the campus is not only a field of dialogue and debate, but also a sphere of power in which reputations and careers are made or destroyed.

In the early thirties Karsten experienced that the friend- and tutorship of Westermarck had

become a burden instead of an access. Perhaps it was only the need to reinforce his own identity as a scientist, but it could also have been the result of increasing differences in opinions. We must even consider a third possibility; that of a pure strategic manoeuvre by Karsten. After all, Westermarck was a falling star after his failure with the rewriting of *The Origin of Human Marriage* and the controversial *Ethical Relativity*.<sup>35</sup> The question of body-painting and tattooing in South American treated by Karsten in *The Civilization of the South American Indians* (1926) called for the first intellectual debate between Karsten and Westermarck. Although without referring to Westermarck, Karsten clearly has him in his mind when he, in "Krig och moral", rejects ethical relativity. To claim subjectivity in every moral opinion is an exaggeration, he said. The most important moral codes like 'thou shall not kill', 'thou shall not steal, and 'thou shall not lie and cheat' has been known and recognized by all societies.<sup>36</sup> In 1941 Karsten published *Filosofisk etik* which, although presented as a textbook, clearly also was intended to be a response to Westermarck's *Ethical Relativity*. There is and must be an objective measurement of ethics, Karsten argues. To put it simply, some human behaviours are good, others are bad. The codes of conduct are not objective in the sense of absolute, but because they are fundamental in human social interaction.<sup>37</sup> It is regrettable that the death of Westermarck two years earlier did not permitted a counter-reply. Karsten's liberation from the spirit of Westermarck was further manifested by his refusal to join the Westermarck-Society formed in Helsingfors. Sociology must look towards the future and not be frozen in its old forms, sounded his motivation.<sup>38</sup>

Sociology did indeed take its step forward, but not in the way Karsten had expected. Under the parol of "a new sociology" it left the Westermarckian tradition of ethnology behind - moving away from a empirical and comparative approaches towards a pure philosophical and theoretical position. Karsten's position held that the social sciences must always be empirical, and that any scientist in these fields not familiar with modern ethnology and its field research was not fit for his or her task.<sup>39</sup> With sociology going in the american direction and a sudden spiritual finnicism within ethnology, Karsten and his South American "ethno-sociology" was not given any place in the school of "modern sociology" or that of finno-ugrian ethnography in the late forties. In his historical account of the ideological clash between anthropology and sociology in Helsingfors and Åbo, Arne Runeberg goes even further by saying that there was "holy eagerness" to clinch every trace of anthropological teaching and research.<sup>40</sup> A possible continuation of the ethno-sociology research tradition that had started with Westermarck and been carried on with Karsten was definitively broken when Helsingfors University refused to appoint a professorship in comparative religion.<sup>41</sup>

## **The last stand**

The last controversy was a triangular drama involving, in addition to Karsten, Societas Scientiarum Fennica or the Finnish Academy of Sciences, and the Bureau of American Ethnology in Washington. It was fired by the

1946 publication *Handbook of South American Indians*, edited by Julian H. Steward - a reference work in seven volumes, "...where the scattered works and articles on the South American Indians, published in many languages and many places, are collected and presented so as to be available to ethnological scholars..."<sup>42</sup> Originally scheduled to be mainly a European work task under the leadership of the Swedish anthropologist Erland Nordenskiöld, the *Handbook* was delayed some twenty years due to financial shortcomings. When Robert Lowie later on secured the necessary means, Nordenskiöld was no longer alive and the project was turned over to Steward. Thus, it became more or less an American project, although the tradition of Latin American studies in the United States was younger than in Europe. The geographical shift did indeed affect the contents of the *Handbook*, especially since the editing of Steward's also came to express a special theoretical approach, i.e. that of cultural materialism and cultural ecology. Steward rejected the old diffusionary interpretations of South American cultures and revised the entire culture area classification - the essence of cultural materialism is that it directs attention to the interaction between behaviour and environment as mediated by the human organism and its cultural apparatus, as Marvin Harris puts it.<sup>43</sup> Altogether, the consequences of this alteration of an European-American project into an all-American meant that Scandinavian, German and French sources were ignored to a certain extent, especially material not dealing with archaeology. The underlying explanation to the use of such selective sources may mainly be understood as due to the contracting of American scholars (with the exceptions of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Alfred Métraux), and these scholars' ignorance of first-hand accounts published in Europe, but also a false notion that all anthropological scholarship of European origin did qualify within diffusionist's quarters.

It was only natural for Karsten to react with frustration and anger when volume after volume of *Handbook of South American Indians* reached his hands. After all they were "...to provide a concise summary of existing data that will serve as a standard reference work for the scholar, a textbook for the student, and a guide for the general reader."<sup>44</sup> Not only a percentage of all those data originated from his extended researches and publications - and when it did, it was under somebody else's name. At home representatives of the "new sociological school" had done their best to ignore or discredit his "old ethno-sociology", and now he also experienced that his international reputation was undermined. These must have been his *feelings* - but in retrospect we also face the difficulty of sorting out which feelings that may be defended and those to be looked upon as an over-reaction. Such a task would require a chapter of its own and I will restrict myself to a few comments. In harsh words Karsten criticises Alfred Métraux and Robert Lowie for disregarding his fieldwork in Gran Chaco, Peru and Ecuador in favour of others. (Actually, much of his criticism should have been directed against Steward and Métraux who were responsible for the chapter on the Jivaros in volume three of the *Handbook*.) Unfortunately, Karsten does not restrict himself to point out that he had made extended participant observations in those areas, but goes on with severe criticism against a number of scholars. In does not take more than four pages in *Some critical remarks* for him to rule out the Chaco investigations by Nordenskiöld, von Rosen, Max Schmidt, Lehmann-Nitsche and Métraux, as well as Rivet's historical investigation concerning the Jivaro headhunting practices.<sup>45</sup> The words seem just to have run away with his emotional frustration - making him try to protect his own work by discrediting those of others. As on

earlier occasions he certainly offended people, those living as well as those dead long ago, by calling them ignorant, unexperienced, laymen, or simply not knowing the topics.<sup>46</sup> Karsten's strong point in *Some critical remarks* is the case against Matthew W. Stirling, especially the part concerning the blood revenge practised by the Jivaro. Comparing quotations from Stirling's *Historical and Ethnographical Material on the Jivaro Indians* with his own paragraphs in *The Head-Hunters of Western Amazonas*, Karsten was able to show how a long statement was almost word for word borrowed with no indication to the original text.<sup>47</sup> "Still it is clear that my own work, although seldom referred to, has been much more used or consulted by Stirling than his quotations seem to indicate, but unfortunately the facts have, almost all the way through, been distorted," added Karsten.<sup>48</sup>

The thirty-two pages of criticism against *Handbook of South American Indians* stirred up several of members in the Finnish Academy of Sciences. Old enemies belonging to "the new school of sociology" teamed up with those who were afraid that the pamphlet would offend Smithsonian Institution and Bureau of American Ethnology, and thus damage the reputation of the Finnish Academy. *Some critical remarks on Ethnological Field-research in South America* was delayed for almost two years by authorities outside and members within the Academy. Eventually it was published in the summer of 1954. Most of us would perhaps have considered it a victory, but for Karsten the whole incident was one of the greatest disappointments of his life. The actions taken by the Academy were directed to hinder the freedom of speech - no better than the Russian censorship he had experienced as a young man. It was the sign of hypocrisy to officially hail the liberty of science and at the same time try to prevent a publication in order not to offend a fellow institution - that was the game of politics, not science. And as Karsten had shown in so many of his publications, moral do not go together with religion, war, or politics. In the final page of *Some critical remarks*, Karsten proclaimed once more that "science is international, its only aim is scientific truth."<sup>49</sup> Did he still really believe in such a naive notion? I truly doubt it. But, as every human being, Karsten did need to believe in something greater than mankind, and it was more than a half Century ago that he had put religion aside in favour of the absolute objectivity of science. It hurt to realize that, after all, science was just another form of religion or politics. His last struggle penetrated both truth and moral, and Karsten acted exactly in accordance with his code of honour. He defended his position, accomplished what he had set out to do in the first place, and then turned in his resignation to the Academy on October 5th, 1954. It was an act of integrity and dignity that ended a remarkable career by a remarkable man. We were guided into these realms of Rafael Karsten's life by the words of George Catlin and it feels proper to make our exit through the poetic skills of the late Joseph Campbell: "Stand with truth, live with truth, and die with truth; what doth it damage a man if he lose the world yet rest in the truth of which his heart is witness."

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## Notes

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1. I am grateful to Eva Karsten, Lund, and Rolf Karsten in Helsingfors for the opportunity to review their private collection of letters. My indebtedness also goes to Sven Erik Isaksson who provided copies of the Karsten-Nordenskiöld correspondence at the Gothenburg Ethnographical Museum.

2. Between 1945 and 1950 Finland was more or less intellectually isolated due to its post-war financial situation. Perhaps this interruption prevented Karsten from involvement in the international debate.

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3. Karsten, *Stridsfrågor inom den moderna sociologien* (1947), p. 74.
  4. Karsten, "Primitivt tänkande" (1931), p. 4-5.
  5. Karsten, *Stridsfrågor inom den moderna sociologien och religionsvetenskapen* (1947), sid 80.
  6. ibid, p. 133.
  7. Runeberg, "På spaning efter den tid som flytt" (1976).
  8. Westermarck, "Sociology as a University Study" (1908).
  9. Nordin, "Vilde eller människa" (1992).
  10. ibid.
  11. Karsten, "Till frågan om förhållandet mellan religion och moral" (1906), p. 1.
  12. Karsten, *Hedendom och kristendom* (1910), p. 277.
  13. ibid, p. 279.
  14. Karsten, "Till frågan om förhållandet mellan religion och moral" (1906), p. 5-6.
  15. ibid, p. 10.
  16. ibid, p. 13.
  17. Karsten, "Till straffets etik" (1909), p. 35.
  18. Karsten, *Bland indianer*, Vol 1 (1920), p. 389 & 392.
  19. Karsten, "Nordamerikas indianer" (1937), p. 125-126.
  20. Karsten, *Bland indianer*, Vol 1 (1920), p. 339.
  21. Karsten, "Indianernas rättsliga ställning i spanska Amerika" (1950), p. 8.
  22. Karsten, *Bland indianer*, Vol 1, p. 314-316.
  23. Karsten, "Litterär humbug inom vetenskapen" (Hufvudstadsbladet, Nov. 27, 1954).
  24. Karsten, "Krig och moral" (1933), p. 14.
  25. Karsten, "Det moraliska framåtskridandets problem" (1951), p. 11

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26. Karsten, "Krig och moral" (1933), p. 11.
  27. *ibid*, p. 21.
  28. Karsten, "Det moraliska framåtskridandets problem" (1951), p. 12.
  29. Karsten, "Samhällets straffrätt" (1932), p. 219.
  30. *ibid*, p. 220.
  31. Karsten, "Litterär humbug inom vetenskapen" (Hufvudstadsbladet, Nov. 27, 1954).
  32. Lindberg, "Spridning av kulturelement till och från den amerikanska dubbelkontinenten" (1993), p. 41.
  33. Svenska Dagbladet, Nov. 21, 1993.
  34. Hufvudstadsbladet, Oct. 3, 1953.
  35. Runeberg, "På spaning efter den tid som flytt" (1976).
  36. Karsten, "Krig och moral" (1933), p. 21.
  37. Karsten, *Filosofisk etik* (1941), p. 34-36.
  38. Karsten, "Sociologins nuvarande ställning i Finland" (1948), p. 157.
  39. Karsten, *Stridsfrågor inom den moderna sociologien och religionsvetenskapen* (1947), p. 20 & 40.
  40. Runeberg, "På spaning efter den tid som flytt" (1976), p. 56.
  41. Karsten, "Sociologins nuvarande ställning i Finland" (1948), p. 157.
  42. Karsten, "Some critical remarks on Ethnological Field-research in South America" (1954), p. 3.
  43. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968), p. 659.
  44. Quoted in Karsten, "Some critical remarks on Ethnological Field-research in South America" (1954), p. 3.
  45. *ibid*, p. 4-7.

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46. Karsten, *Stridsfrågor inom den moderna sociologien och religionsvetenskapen* (1947), p. 12-19.
47. Karsten, "Some critical remarks on Ethnological Field-research in South America" (1954), p. 24.
48. *ibid*, p. 13.
49. *ibid*, p. 32.