

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA TO THE ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT OF “CULTURE SHOCK”

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“**C**ULTURE SHOCK” IS A WIDELY examined model of how expatriates and other sojourners react to new cultural environments (e.g., Furnham and Bochner 1986, 47; Ward, Bochner, and Furnham 2001, 270). The most commonly known culture shock model – cited either explicitly or implicitly by many intercultural communication scholars, business scholars, social anthropologists, and popular writers (e.g., Marx 2001, 5; Weaver 1998, 10; Furnham and Bochner 1986, 47; Irwin 2007; International Student 2010; Oxford University International Student Handbook 2010) – is the Four Stage Model espoused by British Columbia-born Kalervo Oberg (1954, 1960). According to Oberg, people begin their sojourn in a “honeymoon stage,” during which they find the new culture endlessly fascinating. This eventually gives way to stage two (“reaction”), which is characterised by a strong dislike of the new culture, a romanticizing of the home culture, general anger, and obtuse stereotypes about the natives that one develops with other expatriates and co-nationals, with whom one socializes almost exclusively. In stage three, there is a sense of “resignation,” and some coping strategies are developed. Finally, in stage four, having understood the culture, there is a breakthrough in which one realizes that the new culture is “just another way of living.” This so-called “u-curve” model has been modified and debated by numerous researchers (e.g., Smalley 1963; Bock 1970; Adler 1975; Befus 1988; Black and Mendenhall 1991; Lin 2006; Brown and Holloway 2008); however, it is broadly accepted, even if precise details are disputed and the final stage – or complete adjustment – may only be evidenced when the sojourner returns home to experience “reverse

culture shock,” thus introducing a “w-curve” model (Gullahorn and Gullahorn 1963).

But, despite its apparent veracity, we cannot divorce Oberg’s model of culture shock from Oberg himself. Why did Oberg, rather than another scholar, happen to develop culture shock? Why did he infuse his model with certain assumptions and ideas? Any answers to such questions might be tentative, but I believe that Oberg’s background helps us to better understand why he was so particularly interested in culture shock. Not only was he from an immigrant background but he was also partly raised in a theosophical-nationalist commune in British Columbia. Aspects of his later culture shock model heavily reflect both the nature of this commune (which clearly fascinated him) and its philosophy. More research is needed on this topic, and this is difficult because Oberg died in Corvallis, Oregon, on 11 July 1973 of a cerebral haemorrhage (“Death Notices” 1973), with very little having been published about his early life. Oberg married twice¹ but had no children (at least there is no evidence of them in the records), and, as his brother and two sisters died young, he did not even have nephews or nieces. Still, the information I have unearthed on Oberg is worth presenting because it casts light on why it was he who developed culture shock, why he developed it as he did, and the role that his time in British Columbia may have played in this. It also contributes to our understanding of the anthropologist who developed what remains a very popular model and whose childhood is not part of the published record.

WHO COINED THE TERM “CULTURE SHOCK”?

But first we should clear up a problem. There is a misconception, even among otherwise authoritative sources, that Oberg coined the phrase “culture shock.” Furnham and Bochner (1986, xvi) write that “culture shock” was a phrase “Oberg introduced into the English language, apparently in 1954. Oberg’s catchphrase was and continues to be interesting and very influential.” Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001, 270) write that the term was “introduced by Oberg in 1960.” However, Oberg did not coin the phrase.

The only reference in Oberg’s (1954) “Culture Shock” paper is to another paper, also entitled “Culture Shock,” given by anthropologist

¹ Oberg married first in Vancouver on Christmas Day 1926 to Annie ‘Mable’ Vance. They were still married in 1937 when they sailed from New York to Southampton in England. I have been unable to find out how the marriage ended. Oberg married again in Baltimore on 30 June 1945, to an American, Lois Pearly Rimmer (1915-95).

Cora Du Bois at "the Midwest regional meeting of the Institute of International Education in Chicago, November 28, 1951." Following this reference, Gary Weaver (1998, 10) claims that the phrase was "coined by Cora Du Bois" in 1951. Du Bois herself claims it was coined by anthropologist Ruth Benedict in about 1931 (private correspondence, quoted in Golde 1986, 11). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first published mention of "culture shock" was in 1932 in the *Economic Journal*. The dictionary does not mention that this publication (Reynard 1932) was actually a review of a book on sociology and economics published in 1931: *The Sociology of City Life* by American sociologist Niles Carpenter (Carpenter 1931). At the time of the Dust Bowl large numbers of rural Americans were being compelled to migrate to cities in search of work. According to Carpenter (1931), having migrated they fell into crime, mental illness, poverty, and "religious indifferentism." Carpenter termed this reaction to their changed circumstances "culture shock" (217), comparing it to the concept of "Shell Shock" (337). There is also a reference to "Cultural Shock," with regard to Mexican immigrants, in Gamio's 1929 article in *Pacific Affairs* (Gamio 1929). He applies the term "Cultural Shock" to immigrants, arguing that some are forced to return home because they cannot deal with life in the United States. In 1940, sociologist J.B. Holt used the term "Culture Shock" in an article he wrote for the *American Sociological Review* (Holt 1940) and in which he argues that rural people experience culture shock when they move to cities. The result of this is that they retreat into a fundamentalist religiosity that recreates something of the social life associated with living in a village. Oberg did not coin the term "culture shock," but he was the first person to look at it in depth and to provide a model of it.

KALERVO OBERG'S FAMILY

I think Oberg's childhood helps us to understand why it was he who first provided a model of culture shock, and the quest becomes particularly interesting when one considers that Cora Du Bois (the only anthropologist, before Oberg, to look at the concept in any depth) was, like Oberg, the child of immigrants (her parents moved from Switzerland to the United States) (Harvard College 2004).

Sources are few because Oberg published relatively little (McComb and Foster 1974, 359). Accordingly, in piecing together his life I rely on such sources as his obituary (McComb and Foster 1974), the available censuses and other public records in which he or his relatives are men-

tioned, the autobiography of a colleague of his father's (Halminen 1936), and a number of other historical works. In attempting to gain insight into his thinking with regard to culture shock and why he developed it as he did, I draw upon his article (Oberg 1960) on the subject and on his undergraduate graduating essay (Oberg 1928).



Figure 1. Kalervo Oberg. This picture was originally published in Kalervo Oberg's obituary. Source: *American Anthropologist* (McComb and Foster 1974, 357).

According to the Canadian National Census of 1901 there was only one Kalervo Oberg in Canada. He was born, according to the census and his obituary (McComb and Foster 1974, 357), on 15 January 1901 in Nanaimo, a city on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Oberg had two sisters: Elma, born 21 September 1897, and Hilma, born 26 September 1898, both in Nanaimo, where they were still living in 1901. Oberg's father was August Oberg, a coal miner who was born in Finland (at that time a part of the Russian Empire) on 13 July 1864; his mother, Hilma, was born in Finland on 11 November 1867. Both his parents were Lutherans, and the census specifically records that neither August nor his wife spoke English. August Oberg records having migrated to Canada in 1891, and the 1891 census records a single man named "August Oberk," of roughly the right age, lodging with other Finns in Nanaimo and working as a miner. "Oberg," it should be noted, is a Swedish surname, reflecting the fact that Finland was part of Sweden until 1809, meaning that some native Finnish-speakers have Swedish surnames. Some of my Finnish informants have noted that "Oberk" is a how a Finnish-speaker would pronounce "Oberg."² Unlike August Oberg, on the 1901 census Hilma Oberg claims to have immigrated to Canada in 1896 (though, as we will see, this is inaccurate).

Indeed, there are many contradictions in the records. Things get misremembered or misheard, people lie, and records get lost or destroyed. On the 1911 census, the years of birth and emigration that August and Hilma Oberg provided differ from those listed in 1901. Then living in Tofino, a village on the west coast of Vancouver Island, August claimed to have been born in 1866 and Hilma claimed to have been born in

² My research has been complicated by the diverse spellings of "Oberg" in the Canadian records and the fact that the name is not of British origin, thus leading to spelling mistakes. In one case, on a ship's passenger list from Ireland to Canada, I even found a particular Swede's surname spelled "O'Berg," in the Irish fashion.

1869. August stated that he reached Canada in 1896; Hilma stated that she arrived in 1901. This is despite Kalervo's birth being indicated as occurring in "October 1900" in "British Columbia." On the 1891 census, "August Oberk" said he was twenty-three, which would mean he had been born in about 1868 – a claim made by three of the five Finns who were his fellow lodgers.

It has not been possible to find August Oberg's death record.³ I have, however, found his marriage record. There were very few people in Nanaimo in 1901 with the names "August" or "Hilma," and there was nobody else in Canada called "Kalervo." Given the archival evidence, it is likely that August Oberg alternated between two different surnames, and possibly three, as surnames were relatively new and quite flexible in nineteenth-century Finland. On 31 August 1895, one August Wuorinen married a Hilma Uusitalo in Nanaimo. Both were Finns. The Christian names, nationality, and place are correct; the year is approximately right; and it is possible to translate the Swedish "Oberg" as "Vuorinen," both roughly meaning "mountain."⁴ It was actually fashionable at the time for Finns with Swedish surnames to change them to Finnish (e.g., Goss 2009, 36). (Finland currently has a five percent Swedish-speaking minority. It was thirteen percent in 1900.)⁵ Credence is added to the suspicion of name-changing when we consider that there is no birth record for a Hilma Oberg in 1898. There is, however, a birth record for a "Hilma Maria Wuorinen," born 21 September 1898 in Nanaimo. "Maria," as we see below, appears to have been Oberg's mother's middle name. The date of Elma's birth on the 1901 census is 21 September, so perhaps they mixed up their daughters' dates of birth. Similarly, there is no birth record for "Kalervo Oberg." However, a "Kalervo Wuorinen" was born in Nanaimo on 15 January 1901, Kalervo Oberg's exact date of birth on the 1901 census – a census on which he is the only "Kalervo" in Canada.

Also, the records indicate that a Finn, born in 1864 (the right year according to the 1901 census) and called August Wuorinen, sailed from Gothenburg in Sweden to Hull in northern England, departing Gothenburg on 8 June 1888. From Hull, he sailed to New York, and it may be that he eventually left that city and reached Nanaimo. Moreover,

³ However, unless he left British Columbia, he is probably the "Olof Oberg" who died on 5 November 1936, aged 74, in Comox, the district in which Tofino, where he was certainly living in 1936, is situated. In some of his wife's medical records, he is recorded as "O. Oberg – husband."

⁴ "Vuori" and "Berg" both mean "mountain." "Ö" means "island" in Swedish, but "O" on its own is meaningless. In Finnish "W" and "V" are both pronounced as "V." In the written Finnish of the time, "w" often began words that now begin with "v" (such as "vanha" ["old"]).

⁵ See Statistics Finland (2010).

the records at the Finnish Institute of Migration show that a “Hilma Uusitalo” sailed from Hanko in Finland to Quebec, via England, on 1 June 1895. “Hilma Maria Uusitalo” applied for a passport in Turku (Finland’s former capital) on 30 May 1895, indicating that she was from Merikarvia, which is a small, Finnish-speaking coastal town near Turku, on Finland’s west coast. Jaakob August Wuorinen applied for a passport on 15 May 1888. His date of birth is 13 July 1864 (just as he records on the 1901 census), and he is also from Merikarvia – specifically, from a farm called Lammela. On 13 July 1864 “Jaakob August” was born to Jaakob Mikkola and his wife Justina Heikkinen in Lammela. According to Elisabeth Uschanov (personal communication, 29 April 2011), a genealogist at the Finnish Institute of Migration, the date of birth and area mean it is very likely that this is the right person: “Wuorinen is one of those new names that people took at the end of the 1800s,” she informed me.

The records also show that “Hilma Maria Oberg” died, aged sixty-eight, on 1 March 1936 in Essondale (a psychiatric institution later known as Riverview Hospital) in Coquitlam, British Columbia. Her death certificate indicates that, like her husband, she was born in Lammela. According to the hospital’s records, Kalervo Oberg testified that his mother began to become paranoid and depressed after her son Ilmari died aged twenty-one in 1923.⁶ Her husband noted that this became a serious problem around 1930. In August 1932, Hilma’s mental condition had become so strained that Oberg’s parents visited him in Chicago with a view to finding a specialist for Hilma. While in Chicago, Hilma had a complete mental breakdown. She was convinced that her husband and other Finns in Tofino were trying to kill her and that she had only ever had one child: Ilmari.⁷ Hilma imagined she was in contact with Ilmari and could see him and talk to him. Her behaviour was described as violent and erratic, oscillating between laughter and depression, and her husband and son committed her to Chicago State Hospital in October 1932. In June 1933, Hilma was deported and committed to Essondale. It is reported that she spoke almost no English, but in June 1933 she told a doctor: “Crazy husband makes crazy wife.” Later she denied having any family. She also denied having ever been to Chicago and was convinced she was in hospital because she had a cold. Hilma was diagnosed with cerebral arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries in the brain). This can

⁶ It is specifically noted in the hospital records that Oberg is a graduate of the University of British Columbia.

⁷ As we see below, in addition to her son’s dying at twenty-one, her two daughters died in a fire when they were still children.

lead to dramatic personality changes and dementia and Hilma suffered from both. She ultimately died of pneumonia.

A FINLANDISH COMMUNITY

There were many immigrant families in the area of Nanaimo in which the Obergs lived in 1901: "Middle Ward-South." Of the twelve households visible on the census page, which includes the Obergs, there are families who mark their ethnicity as "Welsh," "Scotch," "English," "Irish" (though a few of these families had migrated from the United States), and "Finnish." The native language even of the Finnish children born in Canada is marked as "Finlandish." The language of Oberg's home is indicated by ditto marks beneath the "Finlandish" entered against his neighbours' names. "Finlandish" was commonly used in the nineteenth century to mean "Finnish."⁸ Oberg seems to have spoken Finnish as he drew upon untranslated Finnish sources when he was an undergraduate and interpreted for his mother when she was committed in Chicago. Interestingly, throughout his graduating essay (Oberg 1928), he consistently refers to Helsinki as "Helsingfors," the city's original Swedish name (and now second official name), generally used only by Swedish-speakers. However, there is evidence that, certainly at the end of the nineteenth century, Helsinki was generally called "Helsingfors" in the English-speaking world (e.g., Tweedie 1898, chap. 1). Indeed, it seems it was widely termed "Helsingfors" until at least the 1940s, certainly in US newspapers (e.g., Editorial, 13 December 1939).

From the above, I would argue that we can see, in Oberg's early childhood, evidence of culture shock. His neighbours are Finns and other non-Canadians, and his mother learns almost no English. But the plot thickens. Oberg's unpublished graduating essay at the University of British Columbia (Oberg 1928), where he concentrated on economics, focuses on a religious-political commune – "Sointula" – established by Finns who had immigrated to Nanaimo. It is not surprising that Sointula interested Kalervo Oberg. August Oberg, Kalervo's father, was one of the founders and leaders of the commune. In his memoirs, Matti Halminen (1936, 42), another leading member of the commune, makes this clear: "The men were M. Kurikka, A. Oberg."⁹ August was personally instrumental in inviting the commune's leader, Matti Kurikka (see below) to Canada, and Kurikka stayed with him: "At the

⁸ See, for example, Acerbi (1802, 337) or Latham (1854, 40).

⁹ Halminen was one of the few people who visited Hilma Oberg at Essondale.

beginning of 1901 on a Sunday, I don't remember the exact day," recalled Halminen, "I went to a meeting with Kurikka in the Nanaimo house of A. Oberg" (16). Later he lists the members of the commune's committee, beginning with "August Oberg," who is the *rahastonhoitaja* (treasurer) (43). Later August Oberg is also described as the "work organiser" (46), and this time he is called "Aug. Oberg." He worked closely with Matti Kurikka (59). In January 1903 there was a fire at the commune in which eleven people were killed – eight of them children – and Halminen lists them. The list includes "August Oberg's two children *Elma* and *Hilma*, born in Nanaimo" (55). Kalervo Oberg must have lived in the commune until he was three, when the commune collapsed. By the time of the 1911 census, the family was living in Tofino and was comprised of August (now working as a "Labourer"), his wife Hilma, and their sons Kalervo and Ilmari (1902–23).¹⁰ The daughters are absent, which fits with Halminen's recollection that they perished in the fire. We can see why Sointula fascinated Kalervo Oberg. He was briefly raised there, his father was one of its founders, and his two sisters died there.

It is necessary to rely on the census records to prove that Oberg lived in the commune because he does not mention his connection to Sointula in his graduating essay. Even when he interviews his own father (Oberg 1928, 31) he fails to mention his family connection. He has, presumably, translated the Finnish sources that he cites, but he does not mention that he has done so.¹¹ Indeed, Oberg mentions nothing about himself or his connections. It might be argued that this is irrelevant to the veracity of a historical and economic analysis, and this is true. Nowhere in his graduating essay does Oberg use the first person singular, perhaps wishing to display academic impartiality.

SOINTULA AND THE CELEBRITY DISSIDENT

Entitled "Sointula: A Communistic Settlement in British Columbia," Oberg's graduating essay describes how, by 1900, many Finnish immigrants in Nanaimo had found life intolerable and planned to establish a commune and to reject modern capitalist society. They invited the socialist leader, radical Christian, and journalist Matti Kurikka

¹⁰ Unlike in Nanaimo, in Tofino there were no other Finns in the immediate neighbourhood. Immediate neighbours included people born in the United States, Germany, Norway, England, Scotland, and China.

¹¹ In general, Oberg is not very good at citing his sources or explaining his methods, though, to be fair, this is only a graduating essay and is a mere thirty-eight pages long. All translations from Finnish in this note are my own.

(1862–1915) to come and lead them. (See Figure 2). As a journalist Kurikka had become the editor of Finland’s leading socialist newspaper, *Työmies* (the Worker).¹² According to Oberg (1928, 9), this newspaper was read by expatriate Finns in various places to which they had immigrated, particularly the United States and Canada.

In 1899, Kurikka left Finland for Australia, and it was from there that he was invited, by a committee that included Kalervo Oberg’s father, to come and lead the new community.

He arrived in Nanaimo in August 1900. While in Australia, Kurikka had established a commune of Finnish immigrants called *Kalevan Kansa* (Folk of Kaleva), a reference to “Kaleva,” the mythic Finnish homeland in Karelia, recorded in Finland’s national epic *Kalevala*.¹³ The Australian commune had broken down: Kurikka was especially unhappy about the levels of alcoholism, and, despite having encouraged working-class Finns to move to Australia and not Canada, he changed his mind and accepted the invitation from the Finns of Nanaimo. Among the new *Kalevan Kansa*, alcohol would be forbidden (Kercher 2007, 13), something Oberg does not mention in his graduating essay. By spring 1901, Kurikka and his followers had chosen Malcolm Island as the site for their commune. (See Figure 3). The government agreed to lease the island to the new Kalevan Kansa Company with various conditions, including that the members’ children be educated in English. The Finns renamed the island “Sointula,” which translates as “Place of Harmony.” By 1904, the colony had been devastated by infighting, and Kurikka left along with half the colony. Those who remained divided up the land (Kolehmainen 1941, 123).¹⁴

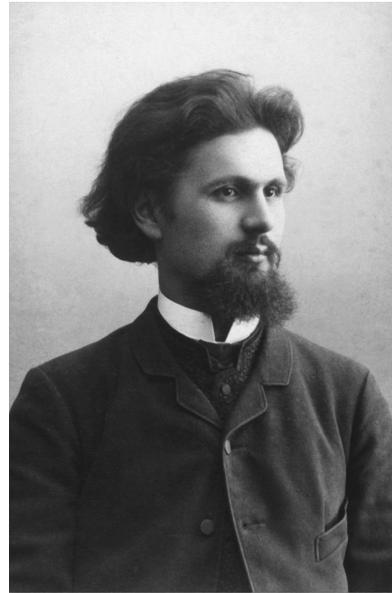


Figure 2. Matti Kurikka (1862–1915).
Source: Courtesy of the Sointula Museum.

¹² It should be noted that, at this time, Finland had a relatively high level of literacy (see Singleton 1998, 45).

¹³ Kalervo Oberg’s Christian name is taken from *Kalevala* as is that of his brother.

¹⁴ There is a large body of research on Sointula. See, for example, Wilson (1973–74); Wild (1993); Wilson (2005); Saikku (2007); and Wild (2007). For a detailed bibliography regarding Sointula, see Saikku (2007, 4n3).

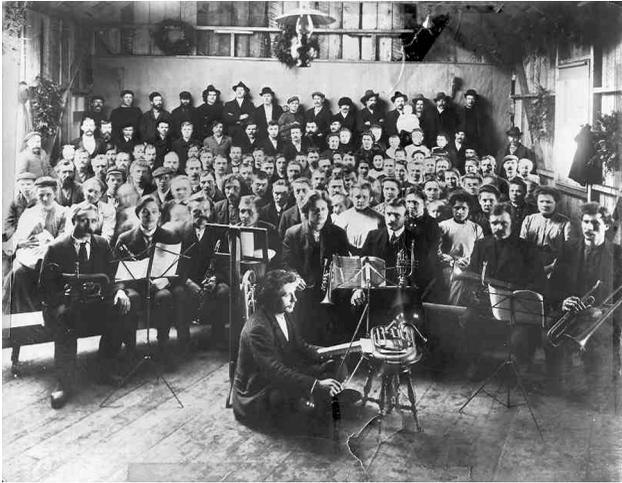


Figure 3. Kalevan Kansa, Christmas 1903. August Oberg is the narrow-faced man with dark receding hair and a moustache standing two rows in front of the bearded man third from the left in the back row (marked as such in Ravio 1979, 17). *Source:* Courtesy of the Sointula Museum.

Oberg (1928) contemplated why Sointula failed. The roughly two hundred *Kalevan Kansa* found a forested island on which they had to eke out an existence. There were wolves and bears to contend with. The group went there to begin a lumber operation – this, along with agriculture and fishing, would be the basis of their economy. They were not successful quickly enough and they could not obtain more credit. There were food shortages, a fire in which people were killed or left destitute, and, naturally, infighting, partly due to the fact that some islanders had different religious and/or political views than did their leaders. Nevertheless, what happened with the Finnish community appears to reflect Oberg’s concept of culture shock. As Kolehmainen (1941, 112) summarizes it:

[Their] grievances seemed only more intolerable when the [Finnish] immigrants, with growing nostalgia and diminishing objectivity, recalled the more attractive aspects of conditions in the Old Country: the simple life on the farms, the bright Northern sunshine and clear atmosphere, bracing winds and swaying evergreens; their proximity to and love for the soil. It was not strange, therefore, that many Finns, particularly those touched by prevailing Utopian socialist currents, yearned to “free themselves from tortuous toil in the deep bowels of the earth,” and to build a new communal home apart from the capi-

talist world, where man would not exploit man, all would labour for the common good, and life would be co-operative, just, and harmonious.

Part of the attraction to Sointula was the opportunity to rebuild a romanticized version of the life that had been left behind, something that, as Oberg (1954, 1960) stresses, tends to occur among immigrants. Oberg evidently contemplated Sointula in depth and, for obvious reasons, was emotionally affected by it, hence his decision to write his graduating essay about it.¹⁵ Sointula parallels his description of stage two of culture shock so closely that I suggest it helps to explain why Oberg became more interested in culture shock than did other anthropologists who, otherwise, were just as fieldwork-experienced.

Oberg experienced many different cultures. For his master's degree and doctorate, he moved to the United States, where he studied at the University of Pittsburgh (for his master's) and the University of Chicago (for his doctorate). He eventually married an American and became a naturalized American citizen. He conducted anthropological fieldwork in Alaska with the Tlingit (Oberg 1937, 1973). Oberg was at the London School of Economics in 1934, where he learnt Bantu before conducting fieldwork in Uganda. He also worked in Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil on various development projects as a civil servant for the American government (McComb and Foster 1974, 357).¹⁶ By 1954, Oberg had experienced many different cultures in a variety of circumstances and was in a position to articulate what he and others of his acquaintance went through when doing so. He presented "Culture Shock" to a club comprised of the wives of American expatriate technicians and businessmen – the Women's Club of Rio de Janeiro – on 3 August 1954 (McComb and Foster 1974, 359), and this paper was later published in *Practical Anthropology* (Oberg 1960).

OBERG'S IDEOLOGY AND MATTI KURIKKA

There is a case for arguing that Oberg's fascination with culture shock was sparked by his immigrant background. This is augmented by the way in which the philosophy expressed in Oberg's graduating essay – and later in "Culture Shock" – appears to be influenced by the philosophy of

¹⁵ Phelps (2004) notes that humans generally have strong emotional reasons for being interested in anything.

¹⁶ I appreciate that "Bantu" covers a number of different but related languages. I have been unable to discover which specific language Oberg learned.

Matti Kurikka, a man who exerted an intellectual influence over August Oberg, Kalervo's father. Kalervo Oberg is very much an apologist for Kurikka. The following statement surely implies support for at least some of Kurikka's views: "If Kurikka had succeeded in bringing Finnish socialists to his own high level of thinking, it is quite probable that Finland would have never suffered the horrors of the red revolution of 1918" (Oberg 1928, 8). When politically polarized Finland gained independence from Russia, who had ruled it since 1809, in December 1917 there soon began a bloody civil war, which lasted from January to May 1918, between the Whites (nationalists) and the Reds (socialists), which the former won.¹⁷ Oberg later goes even further in his praise of the charismatic leader: "Undoubtedly Finland will eventually recognise Kurikka and give him a place amongst the most worthy of her sons" (II). Sometimes it is unclear whether Oberg is paraphrasing Kurikka's views or stating his own: "Kurikka was first and foremost a Finnish patriot. To free Finland from the tyranny of Russia was the first ambition of his life but this was not possible so long as the nation was ununited, when one class tyrannised another"(10-II).

Mindful of Oberg's positive attitude towards Kurikka and his thinking, we can discern a number of similarities between their respective philosophies, as expressed in Oberg's undergraduate essay and in "Culture Shock." The first involves an apparent acceptance of what is known as New Thought Metaphysics (see Coleman 2000). Oberg writes that Kurikka was "pre-eminently a man of spirit proclaiming the supremacy of mind over matter" (1928, 2). In other words, Kurikka believed that people could change their perceptions just by thinking differently – a common view among theosophists. And, indeed, Kurikka has been termed a "theosophist" (Lindström 1999). In light of the evidence I have noted, this seems to foreshadow Oberg's belief that you can, in effect, "think away" culture shock. Oberg (1960) argues that, when you realize that the new culture is "just another way of living," then your feelings of anxiety evaporate. Thus, in effect, he seems to believe that, by thinking differently (i.e., by accepting a certain belief), you can actively change the way you feel. This is not congruent with the evidence that people gradually adapt to new environments and that their thinking changes accordingly (see Eysenck 1957; Lynn 1971). But we can see a similarity between one of Oberg's beliefs and one held by the seemingly admired leader of his childhood commune.

¹⁷ See Upton (1980) for a discussion of this war.

Second, both Kurikka and Oberg believed very strongly in free will. According to Oberg (1928), Kurikka believed that all humans are ultimately the same and that they all have free will. In speaking of culture shock, Oberg assumed that his listeners were all equally able to overcome it and to make free decisions – assuming they were not members of a minority that, according to him, simply could not cope in foreign countries at all. There is a wealth of scientific evidence that Oberg's view is not accurate and that people's decision making is limited by heredity, life development, and economic circumstances (see Wilson 1998). This being the case, it seems arbitrary to argue that some people simply cannot cope in foreign cultures but that most can; that people are equal in their ability to cope; that they will overcome culture shock if they work through its stages and finally accept that the foreign culture is "just another way of living." Oberg's model of culture shock appears to reflect a belief – notably expounded by Margaret Mead (1928) – that humans are not only much the same in their inherited capacities but that these capacities themselves are broadly irrelevant. We are restricted only by culture, which can be changed through free action. Oberg's graduating essay reflects this view. "There is no doubt that these habits can be changed," he writes, referring to "our beliefs and customs" and "everyday conduct," which he believes are entirely the product of "social heritage." This means that a "better society" can be created by a "change in social organization." He writes here with the absolute conviction later evident in his "Culture Shock" article. And he continues: "Perhaps Plato's scheme of taking children to a special colony is after all a final solution of the problem" (Oberg 1928, 33). By "problem," Oberg is referring to his belief that "communistic" groups do not have enough time to change people's most basic "habits of everyday conduct." Here it would appear that Oberg argues that all differences between societies are cultural. Societies have varied, "yet the individuals that have composed the whole process have been individually about the same" (16). The same belief – in a kind of equal free will – is implied with regard to Western expatriates who experience culture shock: they can all act positively to overcome their "ethnocentrism." And, in his paper, Oberg (1960) explains how they can do this.

Third, Oberg reflects, indirectly, Kurikka's view that all religions are equal (what we might term "religious relativism"). According to Oberg (1928, 6), Kurikka was influenced by the Romantic Movement and advocated a "pantheistic" style of religion, in which he saw all the famous religious leaders as wise men (rather than as prophets) but

tended to concentrate on the teachings of Jesus. Kurikka believed in equality, which was to be lived out in an egalitarian community in which everyone cooperated for the greater good and spent all their time in the service of God, something he saw as enacting the teachings of Jesus. This recreation of a supposedly pure way of life – and the belief that all such “natural” ways of life are unique, equal, and valuable – conforms to the thinking of such Romantics as Rousseau, by whom, Oberg (1928, 12) notes, Kurikka was influenced. In Rousseau’s philosophy, those who dissent or who are regarded as impure and corrupted are seen as “other.” They are often described in very negative and emotional terms, such as “Enemy of the People” (see Ellis 2004; Sandall 2001; Scruton 2000; Popper 1966). The Romantic Movement disdained bourgeois society and prized the materially and educationally “primitive” – that is, tribal or folk cultures – while stating (inconsistently) that all cultures are equal. In Kurikka’s philosophy, dissenters and manifestations of religion that he regards as corrupted, such as Finnish Lutheranism, are likewise dismissed as “bourgeois” or “capitalist” while he, at the same time, argues that all religions are equal.

If we replace “religion” with “culture,” Oberg’s thoughts parallel this. For Oberg, cultures are equal because different cultures are “just another way of living.” However, it appears that non-Western peoples are culturally determined and that any negative aspect of their culture is the fault not of them but of the “conditions and the historical circumstances which have created them” (Oberg 1960). This does not hold true for Western expatriates. In contrast to their hosts, expatriates, involved in their “cocktail circuit,” are blamed for their “ethnocentrism” (3). They have the freedom to modify their behaviour and to overcome culture shock but fail to do so. Their behaviour is “derogatory,” and their categorizations of natives are invariably “invidious” and, implicitly, not “honest” (3). This view is problematic because it reifies “history” and ignores the science of personality. Like Kurikka and Rousseau, Oberg constructs an enemy: the “middle-class,” “ethnocentric,” “cocktail circuit” Western expatriate. When Oberg refers to all cultures as “just another way of living” he is advocating cultural relativism. But, in reality, he appears to regard Western and non-Western peoples as fundamentally different. Non-Western peoples are the helpless products of culture and history and are not responsible for the problems in their societies (which Oberg accepts are “real”) – problems caused by their behaviour and highlighted by expatriate stereotypes. In contrast, Western behaviour – such as ethnocentrism and stereotyping – is not explained

away by Western history and culture. Oberg blames Westerners for their unacceptable behaviour and suggests that they need to reject it, implying that they have the freedom to do so and are responsible for the nature of their culture. Moreover, he condemns the stereotyping of natives but finds it acceptable to stereotype Western expatriates (e.g., as being part of a "cocktail circuit"). Thus Kurikka's "religious relativism" (and its related inconsistencies) is reflected in Oberg's "cultural relativism." On the surface, both advocate relativism, while in reality both prize one kind of religion (or culture), the primitive or supposedly pure one, above another. And they appear to judge the religion/culture they prize by different standards than they use to judge the one they dislike. Of course, cultural relativism was highly influential in anthropology by 1954. So this similarity between Oberg and Kurikka must be considered alongside other influences.

Fourth, there are other religious dimensions to Oberg's presentation of culture shock. Both Kurikka and Oberg seem to think in terms of absolutes and to employ emotive language with a fervour common to religious groups (see Boyer 2001). Kurikka dismissed marriage as a "capitalist licence to rape" (Kurikka, 15 March 1904, cited in Wilson 1973-74, 61). Oberg (1960) writes that, when American expatriates meet to "grouse" about the natives, "you can be sure" they are in culture shock. There is no possibility that you might be wrong. He also characterizes culture shock as a "malady" with a "cure," casting it as an unquestionably bad thing. This is even though one might argue that insights could be gained from experiencing the process of culture shock, a view commonly accepted by anthropologists (e.g., Irwin 2007). Here, in effect, according to Oberg's version of culture shock, the person who does not accept cultural relativism is portrayed as being essentially mentally ill, because he inherently remains in culture shock until he accepts cultural relativism. It is, of course, a well known tactic of political regimes to dismiss opponents as being mad or, if such regimes are of a particularly religious bent, as being possessed by some evil spirit (see Ellis 2004). Oberg's way of discussing culture shock comes close to religiosity.¹⁸

¹⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the religious dimensions of Oberg's model of culture shock, see Dutton (2011).

CONCLUSION

I deliberately present these findings as tentative because I am fully aware that they depend to some degree upon speculation. But this is almost always the case when one attempts to recreate the thinking of a historical figure. I think there is a case for arguing that Oberg developed the notion of “culture shock” and that he did so in the way he did because of his background. Like Cora Du Bois, his parents were immigrants. But Oberg’s childhood was marked by Sointula, which appears to offer an example of a particularly potent manifestation of culture shock. Its emotional impact on him is evidenced in his choosing it as the subject of his graduating essay. Moreover, the philosophy of Sointula’s leader – Matti Kurikka – is reflected not only in Oberg’s undergraduate essay (in which he strongly defends Kurikka) but also in his later model of culture shock. Accordingly, I think that Oberg’s childhood has the potential to permit us to understand culture shock in a new way and to understand the role that historical events in British Columbia played in its development. I remain cautious in asserting these connections, but I certainly think they are worthy of further discussion and research. This would involve tracing and interviewing people who knew Kalervo Oberg personally to discern what, if anything, he had to say about Sointula and/or culture shock.

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