



Fig. 1—in *extensional semiotics* we are interested in signs in aspects that precede and exceed sign-function (R. Barthes, 1964): specifically, in extensional aspects of nested studies of fieldwork, and a cartographic take on such nested groups of studies; that can be used to evaluate the completeness of studies, and also the truth-value of signs.

Umberto Eco repeatedly explained the sign as something that can be used to lie: if it can be used to lie, then it is a *sign*. My point of departure has been fiction: that fiction—contrary to illusion—can and will be marked by reality. That is, fiction is *heterostructural* (in the sense of being structural *and* other). When a pattern of signs emerges, arises the possibility of verbal language: which is to ask and articulate questions. By articulating questions they can improve, and as they improve they facilitate the interceptions of new/keener patterns. That is, the orienting moments of ongoing work.

As I am slowly reading through an article in Spanish on ethnicity by [Thomas Hylland Eriksen](#), who carefully lays out how [Fredrik Barth](#)'s errand with the topic departed from structural functionalism, I am becoming aware of how the mathematical notion of structure—explained to the humanities by [Marc Barbut](#) (and taken on by e.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss)—contrasted with the functional aspects of the sign, pointed out by Roland Barthes, in the wake of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistically founded semiotics. This functional aspect is also present in Louis Hjelmslev's expression/content.

What also dawns on me struggling my through the article in Spanish is how potentially rich and consequential the topic of ethnicity can be. But it is important in the same sense that ecology and politics are important: they switch at taking place at the core as a lens to study social life as it is (and under the *aegis* of social organisation). In the 360° study of social organisation politics, ecology and ethnicity. What comes with these lenses—on the backdrop of social organisation—is the importance of *extension*: in the cartographic sense of *pattern* and *incidence*.

To put it plainly, without social organisation as our backdrop, we are prompted to walk around and study neither politics, ecology nor ethnicity in relation to time, place or process. Without the backdrop of social organisation our approach to these areas will readily become *hermeneutic*. On the backdrop of social organisation our practical understanding has a chance of becoming *generative*. I underscore a potential which is surely not automatically realised: in recent years, [Tim Ingold](#) has championed the importance of the walkabout, but his understanding is by no means generative (by nature or nurture).



Fig. 2—Kohistani at Kandol Lake in Upper Swat. Photo: Saffy H.

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Up to this point, my errand of rethinking the sign has been extensional—featuring an attempt at extensional semiotics—scoping the walk and work of what it takes for a *sign* to appear as such and ending up with a notion of *sign-value* (contrasting with Barthes' notion of *sign-function*). That is, intercepting and working up signs to the point where they will signify and can be assigned linguistic meanings. Essentially

moving from the agent intellect (Aristotle) to the logical intellect (Plato), or from an operational to a distributive intellect through the variety of mapping that I have attempted to tease out analytically from the notion of *homomorphism* (in an attempt to level-up Ingold's meandering venture).

A *sign-value* is developed through a process of *screening*, *interception* and *framing* (that works contrary to simulation, substitution and erasure) determined by completeness and cartographic reference *before* signification and meaning: which means that sign-value is *undivided* in terms of signifier and signified (Saussure) or expression and content (Hjelmslev). It is subject to such division—to signification and meaning—as is clearly indicated by the possibility of show and tell that the investigations that I have done up to this point, clearly depend on. But not only.

What is attractive with the notion of *homomorphism*—understood within the framework of *graph-theory*—is that it lends itself to conceive boundary crossing (in the analysis of the generative dynamics of ethnicity) as a *mapping*. Its challenge is its duplicity: i.e., whether we are conceiving mapping as a *relation* (between a domain of departure and of arrival) or as an *object*—a map. As a relation we will tend to think of it in *functional* terms, while as an object it can be laid out as a *graph*. The same question can be asked about *ethnicity*: is it a relation, an object, a thinking thing?

How is this duplicity sorted out in practice? We can focus on *ethnicity* as long as it is in question through an ongoing exchange (relation), while once it is *acquired* we will readily pass *from* ethnicity *to* ecology (as F. Barth did in the ethnography on the Pathans and the Kohistanis in Swat). When a *map* comes out of mapping, we will respond by shifting the lens (here, from ethnicity to ecology), and also shift the domain of mapping *again*: mapping ecology unto political resources. Once this map is acquired, we can pass unto F. Barth's mapping economic transactions and allegiances.

In this model—which is based on graph-theory—the studies F. Barth did in Swat appear to be covered if we change the lens *thrice*: in the present account, moving from ethnicity to ecology, and from ecology to political alliances (moving from group identities [ethnicity] to similarities [ecology], from similarity to differences [political organisation]). But then, to remain within the paradigm of the field, F. Barth about twenty years after he did his formative fieldwork in Swat, will in 1985 publish *The last Wali of Swat*. Featuring the disorderly political leadership of a local cast of Saints.

Had the point he made of the acephalous dynamics of political alliance and allegiance at the level of local chieftains found a counterpoint in a leader of a fledgling state—the Wali—balancing between local councils (*Jirgas*) and a prefecture (*Sharia*), with a basis in what later evolved into what became the [Taliban](#) (the Students)? Or, is a fourth mapping, exceeding the framework of the fieldwork in the 50s, emerge as the ethnographic map that Fredrik Barth managed to conjure, as he explained to experts & laymen on the Norwegian radio, the workings of politics in Afghanistan?

Let it be said that—if considered as a fourth lens in the scope outlined above—the problem is not less intractable in the scope of homomorphism: because if we consider ethnicity as *automorphic*, ecology as *endomorph*ic and transactions as *isomorph*ic, then what is the nature of the fourth mapping that we might call *exomorph*ic? In terms of spanning the *same*, *similar*, *different* and other, we are now looking at the *other*: hetero-structural patterns emerging at a cross-pressure:

e.g. between ethnicity and ecology (two faces of the *domestic* politics of chieftains).



Fig. 3—Jirga in the Yusufzai State of Swat (ruled by the Wali). [Swatencyclopedia](#).

That is, what F. Barth called *disordered systems* (cf, Oman). A recent example: 1) during a Nazi march in [Wunsiedel](#), protesters recently acted by crowding and cheering for the marchers, because they had the townspeople commit to donate €10 for each step the Nazis made [making them unwittingly supporters of the forces counteracting them]; picking up on this 2) an initiative called [Jewmerang](#) mustered for donations to Israel at each anti-Semitic act witnessed by Jews around the world (*un-domestic* politics as the Taliban in Afghanistan). A lens to be further developed.