

IN MEMORY OF GEERT VAN DEN STEENHOVEN

Fons Strijbosch

Geert van den Steenhoven's name was already a memory for most of his colleagues when he died on November 18, 1998. When he resigned as professor of folk law and legal development in non-western societies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Nijmegen in 1981, he broke off almost all of his connections with his former scientific endeavours and retired to his home and garden far from the city. Nevertheless, memories of him remained strong, both as a colleague and friend, and as a striking personality. While he initiated numerous collaborative ventures, he remained a solitary figure, someone who went his own way throughout his academic career. Graced with a mixture of charisma and modesty, he managed to exercise great influence on his surroundings.

In looking back on his life I will not limit myself to his academic career but will also consider what preceded it, his youth and some of his formative experiences. His early years were marked by some important choices that led him to develop his own scientific style and also perhaps help to explain his premature departure from academic life. Occasionally I will quote from a short text Geert wrote around 1992, possibly the only thing that has remained from his later years. It is a one-page sketch of his life written at the request of the club of fellow ethnology students of Leiden University, who continued to meet from time to time over the years. It was meant to be the introduction to an article for an anniversary anthology. Typically for his later years, he never finished it. He had evidently reached a point in life where he no longer wanted to express himself in that way.

Geert's Life in a Nutshell

Born in The Hague in 1919, Geert grew up in a family whose fortunes had recently taken a turn for the worse. When his father returned to his plantation in

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Argentina after World War I, he found it completely wrecked by mismanagement and economic depression - a catastrophe that was almost immediately followed by another, when he lost his hearing shortly after his return to The Hague. Unable to take up another career, he moved his family into a small flat in the centre of the city where his wife supported the family with her typing.

His father was a non-believer, his mother a Catholic. They had agreed to raise their children as Catholics but nevertheless their only son attended a public high school. By the time of his graduation, however, he had consciously opted for Catholicism. This choice was as strong as his character — unconditional, decisive and clear. Anyone who had more than a passing acquaintance with Geert knew how deeply inspired he was by his faith. The missionary zeal that apparently marked his youth, changed later on into a completely personal faith.

During his high school years he was also exposed to another, very different, influence. He joined the NJN, the well-known nature organisation for Dutch youth. In the NJN Geert came into contact with ethical socialism. Heated discussions about politics and society were the rule. The flourishing section in The Hague was run by the Tinbergen brothers.¹ Equipped with binoculars and nature guides, the members criss-crossed the countryside on their bikes every weekend. But the NJN offered more than an exploration of nature. It provided a milieu where young people received a general education. “The NJN shaped me,” he wrote, “more than anything else”.

From 1937 to 1947 he studied law at the University of Leiden. The fact that it took him so long was a direct result of his family’s poverty. He had to finance his own studies by working at odd jobs - “office, secretarial and copy editing work, among others for KLM”. The war slowed him down even more. He was present when Professor Cleveringa, rector magnificus at the University, gave his famous speech condemning the anti-Jewish measures of the occupying forces. Geert knew what he had to do and joined the active Resistance. He spent the war years in the countryside under a pseudonym. He does not mention this in the sketch of his life.

After finishing his studies he continued briefly to work for KLM before signing up as a sailor in 1950. His ship cruised the northern waters. The North was his region of romantic predilection. He disembarked in Toronto in 1951. There he went back to university, this time to study cultural anthropology, again at his own expense. He spent long summers in the northern forest working, often alone for weeks at a time, as a forest ranger or a lumberjack. His second study opened a

¹ Both later won the Nobel Prize, Jan Tinbergen for economics, Nico Tinbergen for medicine.

whole new world for him. In the sketch of his life he writes: "I would say that, after studying anthropology, in a certain sense I love people more, both close by and far away (and I bet that after their study nowhere near all sociologists would be able to say that)." He used the words sociology and anthropology often in a metaphorical sense. Anthropology was more than a discipline for him. He saw it as a way of really meeting other peoples. In his view, it represented an attitude of wonder and fundamental respect for the Other. Sociology was its dry antipode, a science that, with its technical jargon and belief in numbers and statistics, reduced human beings to objects and categories.

Back in Leiden in 1954, he began a training course to become a governmental researcher in New Guinea. He was planning to get his Dutch degree in anthropology at the same time. These plans were abandoned, however. The reasons are not entirely clear and his sketch states cryptically that "[For Leiden] I was not good enough, for Hollandia [capital of the former Dutch New Guinea] too strange a fish." A few queries on my part revealed a possible conflict with his thesis supervisor in Leiden, but nothing about the reasons for it. The reference to Hollandia probably concerned his faith. It is likely that the governor at that time, Van Baal (who later on himself became a professor of anthropology and Geert's friend) thought that his religious enthusiasm might strain the rather delicate balance in the colony.

In 1955 he returned to Canada at the request of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs in Ottawa to study 'the legal ideas among the Caribou Eskimos'. A second study among the Netsilik Inuit followed in 1957. This research eventually led to the preparation of a doctoral thesis for the Law Faculty in Leiden. Again he supported his studies with ordinary work, this time for the Dutch universities' organisation for international academic co-operation (NUFFIC). Work on his thesis was delayed when he suffered from a paralyzing virus infection. Although he recovered almost completely, his sense of balance remained diminished. After his recovery he married the nurse who had taken care of him.

In 1963, when he was already 44, he accepted his first academic post, as lecturer in the 'theory of the institutions in developing societies' at the Catholic University in Nijmegen. "In Nijmegen I settled down into a largely bourgeois existence," he writes. Before long he shifted his attention to indigenous (folk) law, and in particular to Indonesian customary law (adat law). He was promoted to professor in 1972. Still a young woman, his wife died in 1980 and Geert went into early retirement a year afterwards.

Publications and Projects

Geert's scientific work falls into three different periods, including an Arctic period that finished with his thesis in 1962, and an Indonesian period that started in 1966 and was almost entirely dedicated to Indonesian customary law. The years in between were devoted to the study of development issues, the topic of his inaugural lecture in 1964. His approach to anthropology changed over the course of the years. During his Arctic period he approached the field as a traveller and an amateur. He loved fieldwork the way he had loved his boyhood excursions with the NJN. During his later work he became increasingly conscious of his role as a researcher and the significance of his studies for non- western societies. Reflection on his work led to commitment. In particular, he came to believe that anthropological research should be in the service of the country studied. We will see how this development revealed itself in his work.

Thesis

His thesis, *Leadership and Law among the Eskimos of the Keewatin District, North West Territories* (1962), is exactly what one would expect in the light of the foregoing remarks. Before dealing with issues of law, he extensively describes the society where he spent three summers and its natural environment. That he felt at home there is obvious from the first sentence: "Even Eskimo country has its summers when the tundra is covered by a colourful tapestry of flowering plants and when the air is filled with the cheerful song of countless birds" (1). His study then turns to climate, soil, hunting and fishing strategies and from there to the superstructure — politics, kinship and cosmology. He dwells for a long time on magic, gossip, dance, song and poetry. All the while, however, the central theme remains clearly visible. The ethnographic detail is in service of the study of law. Attention shifts gradually in that direction and one reads with increasing frequency of "the substantive rules" that govern the relations between the sexes, property and inheritance, the distribution of food and catch, the borrowing of goods, and compensation for injury. It appears that mockery, poetry and song have a role in the normative system — the song duel is one of the ways to settle a dispute.

Then comes the central issue — whether Hoebel's intercultural legal concept, as set out in his standard work, *The Law of Primitive Man* (1954), applies to this society. Hoebel distinguishes three elements in law: regularity, force and authority. Geert introduces a fourth element, taken from the Leiden anthropologist J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong: non-spontaneity. Applying this fourfold legal concept to the findings of his research leads to the surprising conclusion that this Eskimo

society is without law. Having analysed a large number of trouble cases, he writes: "My research into the social phenomenon of law among the Keewatin Eskimos then, must be said to have had a negative result: in this community, force, authority, regularity and non-spontaneity as a combination, are conspicuous in their absence" (112; in English in the original). The thesis is still worth reading because of its rich ethnography and surprising conclusion that a certain society can apparently be law-less if tested against Hoebel's definition.

However, that was not to be the last word on the issue. In 1971 Pospisil published his *Anthropology of Law: A Comparative Theory*. Its central premise is that law is present in every society. The book opens with criticism of the opponents of that concept, the first and most prominent one being Van den Steenhoven. Pospisil obviously considers his criticism devastating. Van den Steenhoven's concept of law is dismissed as completely inept: it is "intuitive, arbitrary and naive". Pospisil concludes that if Van den Steenhoven had not used such an ethnocentric concept and had been more observant of what was going on around him, he would surely have found a certain kind of law in the society he studied (Pospisil 1971: 11-12). Geert rubbed his eyes, stunned. He considered reacting, reflected for a while and remained silent.

To answer Pospisil would not have been very difficult. Geert must often have thought of the answer himself. He had, after all, not used his own concept but Hoebel's influential concept of law. (The added element of non-spontaneity had also come under attack, but Pospisil's criticism targeted the concept in general.) Why did Pospisil overlook this? If he had reflected on the author's intent, he should rather have congratulated him. It can only benefit science when a theory is tested empirically. Objections to the content of the concept should have been addressed to Hoebel. Instead, what Pospisil did was shoot the messenger.

Geert could also have asked a counter-question: What does it matter if, under certain conditions, we call a certain society law-less? Why is that so reprehensible? Is it not Pospisil himself whose position is ethnocentric? The premise that every society in the world has law could be considered typical of western researchers and their preoccupation with law. However all this may be, on rereading, Geert's thesis does not seem impaired by the concept of law that he used. In fact, he was ahead of his time. It was only in the 1970s that lawcentered studies increasingly began to make room for the study of general issues of order and dispute.

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Inaugural lecture

In his inaugural lecture, *Development Aid* (1964), Geert revealed for the first time his social commitment and his special views about development studies. His position was surprising at the time and remains unusual. His reasoning was original and quite radical.

He first argued that the debate on development aid should no longer be conducted in terms of charity. He considered it wrong to focus on marginal increases in development aid from 1 to 2% of GNP. To do so only distracted one from the fundamental solution, which was “a wide-ranging political and economic restructuring within the Western world that would require us to sacrifice some of our own well-being” (5). The position was radical because it lacked any prospect of realisation. Asserting it was an expression of his social commitment and seems to reflect the continuing influence of the ethical socialism of his youth.

His second argument was more realistic and may very well have affected certain policies. He mercilessly criticised the indiscriminate export of western models and systems. The central butt of his criticism was the economic liberalism of the Manchester School, but his thesis opposed all export of western systems, economic or not. He had come to a completely different view of development aid, one which limited and devoted itself to facilitating local institutions and ideas. He spoke of “the need for a principled respect for the local lifestyle and a local autonomous development process of which we do not yet know the outcome” (9). This vision was not important just because of its content, but also for its underlying belief that other cultures were essentially other and should develop according to their own internal laws. He went on to say that he was worried about the dangers posed by the activities of western industrial concerns in non-western countries. Plans for industrialisation, where deemed necessary, should be very carefully designed. The new managers should not seek to “restructure the psychology” of workers and indoctrinate them with our punctual but unobtrusive sense of time. This is not so much an argument as the heartfelt cry of a person who once exchanged his office job for the open seas, and much later, looking back on his academic career, would call it “bourgeois”.

His final point was maybe even more personal. We must be careful, he argued, not to see only failures and abuses in developing countries. There are also positive sides of the picture. The individual “is solidly supported by a network of human relations that make the misery bearable and from time to time shine a light on his existence that fills him with inner peace” (6). He asked for respect “for the Other as he is — and not because of what he has.”

The lecture caused a stir among his colleagues and in the press. Geert received numerous letters, generally of a positive tenor. A number of political and cultural heavyweights, including Jan Tinbergen, expressed their agreement. He even received a letter from the aged poet A. Roland Holst, at the time very highly regarded, whom he had quoted in the lecture as follows: “the fight of Time against Space — that is to say between ‘having’ and ‘being’ — and making Death into an enemy, are Western problems”.

In its essence the lecture is evidence of a forward-looking spirit. Dutch policy has in fact moved in the direction he proposed. The export of funds to central government agencies has been replaced by policies that try to create conditions favourable to local development in co-operation with small-scale institutions and initiatives. I do not believe, however, that the distinction between having and being, used to distinguish ‘our’ way of thinking from that of the ‘Other’, is helpful. There seems to be great similarity in this respect between all peoples, all being driven by the same desire for material well-being. This opinion of mine, which Geert might have considered cynical, does have an advantage that he would have appreciated. Respect and empathy for others, for which he pleads so ardently in his lecture, appear in this light to rest on a very natural foundation. The ‘Other’ is fundamentally just like ourselves.

Indonesian Adat Law Studies

Geert’s discovery of Van Vollenhoven in 1966 changed his life. In retrospect it seems strange that this should have happened so late. He had studied at the University of Leiden, had done his doctorate there in customary law under a thesis supervisor who held the Van Vollenhoven chair, yet had written a doctoral thesis without any reference to the Adat Law School. However, he quickly caught up. It was in a state of euphoria that he read Van Vollenhoven’s books and those of his disciples and made acquaintance with their ethical commitment, their enlightened vision of research and their struggle to secure official recognition for adat law. What in his own inaugural lecture he had expressed imperfectly and with difficulty, he now discovered in the form of a developed philosophy, of a system that once had been actually applied in Indonesia. And he admired Van Vollenhoven for his style, which had earlier attracted many other supporters to his point of view. He learned that “customary law is a people’s matter”, that “the East should be viewed with Eastern eyes” and that some day there would arise an “Indonesian Blackstone” under whose leadership adat law would at last come into its own.

When Geert was reading Van Vollenhoven in Nijmegen in the mid-1960s, the tension between the Netherlands and Indonesia had already put an end to the study

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of adat law. The last researchers in Leiden, including Sonius, Keuning and Holleman, had turned their attention to Africa. However, when the borders of Indonesia suddenly opened soon afterwards, Geert without hesitation decided to breathe new life into the study of adat law. His organisational talents allowed him to make quick headway. He had the subject of his chair changed and started teaching customary law, and added countless volumes on adat law to the library of the University of Nijmegen. He became the first Dutch researcher to study adat law in independent Indonesia when, in 1970, he made a short field trip to Karo Bataldand in Northern Sumatra. His publications on the administration of justice at the village level clearly reflect the spirit of the Adat Law School, as when he emphasises the importance of the administration of adat law for development of a genuine Indonesian legal system.²

Geert was more an organiser and an initiator of large projects than a researcher. During his Indonesian period, these projects allowed him to give expression to his conviction that the task of the West was to support local initiatives. His most important project, although it was never officially called that, was his unstinting support for Dr. M. Koesnoe, professor of adat law in Surabaya. The relationship started with Koesnoe's guest-professorship in Nijmegen in 1968 and continued for many years after that. Geert supported his friend, and gradually also his staff and networks, scientifically, morally and financially. He organised guest-professorships, study visits, introductions, conferences and receptions. He helped with fundraising and writing. He translated the work of his friends into English or Dutch, intensively editing it as he went along, and sometimes he rewrote it entirely. What he continued to call 'collaboration' gradually turned into radical altruism. Increasingly he subordinated his own work to that of others. He must have seen in Koesnoe the Blackstone of Indonesia.

The largest of his official projects began in 1970 and involved large-scale research into adat law in Bali and Lombok. The participants included researchers from the Netherlands and Indonesia, jurists and anthropologists. Koesnoe and he were the project leaders but he left responsibility in the field to Koesnoe, who was also to write the final report. Although amply financed, the project was a failure. When it ended on January 1, 1975, none of the researchers had filed their reports and only fragments were available to Koesnoe whose final report (1977) was inevitably rather meagre.

The failure was greeted with general amazement. Nothing had been expected to go wrong. The preparation and planning time had been careful. A small army of experts had been deployed to initiate the researchers in all aspects of the issue.

² See inter alia Van den Steenhoven 1970, 1973.

Logistically everything had been thought of and when the researchers arrived the jeeps were waiting for them and their families. The terrain to be covered was the same as that treated by the Adat Law School. After Koesnoe's death, Govaert van den Bergh, a member of the advisory committee of the project reflected on it in the Dutch journal for legal sociology and legal anthropology, *Recht der Werkelijkheid* (1998). His analysis is light-footed and to the point. He calls attention to the project's many problems: the inexperience of the team members and supervisors, defects in theory and method, inept planning and the failure of co-operation. Co-operation was supposed to occur at all levels - between persons, teams, disciplines and cultures - but failed miserably everywhere. I do not disagree with this matter-of-fact analysis. However, when I look back at that project I still see something noble in it. If Geert fell so hard it was because he tried to reach so high.

The key problem that constantly interfered with the progress of the research was a direct consequence of his idealism, in particular his loyalty to the Adat Law School. Until the end he clung to Van Vollenhoven's ethical principles and his conviction that adat law should be the foundation of Indonesia's modern legal system. He believed that to contribute to this end, the project needed to use the method which, at least in his view, had been applied by the scholars of the Adat Law School, namely the method of ordinary positivist legal scholarship. However, such an approach to adat law in the post-colonial period was made difficult by an ethical consideration. The researcher who studies customary law from a positivist legal point of view inevitably engages in the creation of law. To do that, however, was considered taboo for the Dutch researchers (who were in the majority); it was acceptable only in the case of the Indonesian researchers. All this was complicated by a third factor, almost mystical in nature: the idea that adat law in its essence is only accessible to local, Indonesian researchers.

There were endless discussions about these axioms. Geert and his collaborators searched in vain for a form of legal scholarship that did not involve any element of law creation, but also did not degenerate into a sort of socially uncommitted anthropology. When the team members arrived in their research areas, they had no clear idea of what was expected of them. They also lacked examples, since none of the publications or traditions of either Dutch or international origin that could have served as a reference point had been deemed appropriate. For the adat law of the 1970s, even the best of existing scholarship was not good enough. And so it was that a project born of ethical considerations foundered for precisely that reason. Furthermore, once the project was underway, it was impossible to adopt a new theoretical perspective or even to adjust course when necessary. This was the result of a second paradox, deriving from the strong personality of the organiser. The very charisma with which he had won support for his ideas stood in the way

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of correcting the course of the project. Everything was up for discussion except the central premises.

The amazing thing is that the project, in spite of everything — confusion, quarrels, lack of understanding — might have succeeded had it not been for a second mistake, even more fatal than the first. It revealed itself, as large as life, when the time came for analysis and writing. The preparation stage had taken one-and-a-half years, the fieldwork two; how could anyone have thought that reporting the results could be done in one year? All experience with this sort of research teaches that the ratio of fieldwork to reporting should have been the other way around. One could see the disaster coming years in advance, but for some reason it seemed that once the operation had been set in motion it was fated to run its predestined course. Long before the end was reached it was obvious that all would be for nought. The team members knew there was no possibility of having the deadline extended or even of finding other work in the same sector, and well before the end of that last short year they were looking for other jobs.

The saddest thing is that an extension of a year probably could have saved the project. In spite of the endless debates, the researchers had gone to work, not worrying about whether they were doing juridical, anthropological or whatever type of research, nor about whether the essence of adat law was accessible to them. At the end of the project their writings were nowhere near finished but full of promise. With extra time, maybe three of the four Dutch reports could have been finished. Without knowing it, the crew was close to land when the ship sank, not because they were short of ideas, but because of a banality that in the light of everything that had gone before seems tragic: a lack of money.

I do not know whether Geert experienced the demise of the project as I did: as a tragic fate. I do not think so. He accepted its failure gracefully and took full responsibility for it. Maybe he found some consolation in the idea that the project had been undertaken with laudable intent — the support of another culture. Not giving up, he went on to devote himself to other projects. All of these were successful. Among other things, he edited and published two series: *Publications on Adat Law* (5 volumes) and *Publications on Folk Law* (10 volumes), featuring both established and new authors. He also supervised four doctoral theses: Strijbosch (1980), Slaats and Portier (1981) and K. von BendaBeckmann (1984).

His greatest success came in 1978 with the official recognition of the Commission on Folk Law and Legal Pluralism by the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). The Commission's Constitution perfectly expresses his commitment to local cultures. It provides that the Commission

aims at assisting in making a sympathetic and constructive contribution to the solution of problems connected with the interaction of folk law and state law, and thus to the future of indigenous, ethnic and social groups governed by folk law in the modern world.

Under Geert's leadership the Commission developed into a global association that publishes a Newsletter and books and organises congresses and courses. In 1981 he invited 25 colleagues to Bellagio for a large constitutional meeting. It was to be his last action as President. It was also his last public appearance as a member of the academic community. In Bellagio he handed over the reins to Marc Galanter and retired.

Later Years

At his retirement and in the years afterwards, when Geert kept himself withdrawn, people speculated about his reasons. He himself remained tight-lipped about this. He never said more than "There isn't much else I can contribute" or "I can't keep up anymore". Such remarks were dismissed as expressions of the excessive modesty which was so typical of him. He had done so much the last few years; it was true that he had stopped writing, but had that not been a conscious choice? Had he not decided to help others do research? There was, however, a kernel of truth in his words. He had played the role of organiser with great verve. His radical altruism had been based on a conviction that he had expressed years earlier in his inaugural lecture. But his modesty was sincere. He really did not know how to proceed further with scholarship. The unfortunate outcome of the Bali-Lombok project had eroded his theoretical foundation. He had placed all his hope in a positive-law model of customary law, but he could not see a way to develop that model in a contemporary form.

Of perhaps greater importance is that he felt less and less attached to his chosen field of study because of the increasing professionalisation it was undergoing. He himself had discovered anthropology by accident during his travels and had fallen in love with it. In his eyes anthropology was more than a science, it was a refuge where you could meet the Other and yourself in total honesty. That was why Pospisil's critique had been such a disillusionment. He was not so much affected by Pospisil's sneering remarks — although his pride had been hurt — as by the fact that the code had been broken. He had really believed that in anthropology he had found a world free of dishonesty and power games. He had been badly mistaken. If he was naive, it was because of this belief, not because of the concept of law mocked by Pospisil.

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In the years that followed he became ever more alienated from anthropology's development as a discipline. In his early days anthropological studies had had the form of a tale. This had gradually changed and now he read texts so technical that the living cultures behind them were unrecognisable. He watched this development with dismay although he himself had contributed with his own organisational work to the process of professionalisation. "They are so clever," he would say of the young foreign scholars he met. He tried to understand their concept of law, so different from Van Vollenhoven's and Hoebel's, came across terms such as 'legalness' or 'evaluation of situation images', and would close his book. The old anthropology was in a metaphorical sense changing into sociology. In his modesty he did not resist this and tried sincerely to believe that this was an inevitable or meaningful development. But it was not for him. He began to think of ways to escape.

In this he was helped along by more pleasant reflections. Retirement attracted him. It did not matter to him that his pension would be relatively small because of the limited number of years he had spent in academia. The frugal life, familiar from his childhood and youth, did not scare him. He had lived for extended periods in the North, in primitive conditions, and loved it. And at home he found exactly what he wanted: nature. His house was simple but the garden was large and abundant. He and his wife had planted it together, and after her death he took charge of it alone. It was a task he loved. Nature was his element and he felt completely at home in it.

It was at home that I met him, a few times a year, during the last years of his life. He would shake my hand firmly, with a smile on his tanned face, happy to see me. He was always wearing rubber boots, an army jacket and a fisherman's sweater. A tower of strength, in spite of his precarious sense of balance. We would walk through the garden looking at this or that flower or bird, and then go inside where he would offer me something to drink.

He still enjoyed talking about work. He wanted to know what was happening at the university. I indulged him by making things look even bleaker than they were. I told him about the flood of rules and directives, about visiting inspection commissions and the new system of conditional financing of research. He was aghast. As I described one academic horror after another, he sought words to express his dismay, but his emotions rendered him speechless. The idea of having to account for one's time seemed the worst to him. He had always been afraid that eventually the tyranny of Time would come to the university, and now it had happened.

I did not tell him the worst. He never found out that new, 'critical' scholars, after his retirement, had taken a close look at the Adat Law School and had

'discovered' that it was really just another form of colonialism; that Van Vollenhoven's love for adat law was just a mask to cover up his real intent — keeping the masses in the dark and subjected to colonial interests. Nor did I mention the name of E. Said, one of these scholars, who had developed the notion of 'orientalism' and was continually looking for persons exhibiting this repulsive attitude. Geert, a romantic who wrote the 'Other' with a capital O, was undoubtedly at the top of the list of suspects. Maybe I was afraid that his reaction would be too mild, since I myself had immediately recognised this new approach as just another power game and a new form of dishonesty.

My tales about the Commission made up for everything. The Commission was the apple of his eye. When I sent him the Newsletter, he would immediately respond with congratulatory remarks and the occasional rebuke when there were too many typing errors. He was happy that the Commission continued to be active and that his original idea had prevailed. In Bellagio it had nearly come to a schism between theoreticians and practitioners. Over the years, however, the latter group had grown in strength and had kept the ideal of supporting local customary law alive. The Commission's success made him proud.

Towards the end Geert no longer lived alone in his house. His daughter and her family came to live with him. He lived in a wing of the house containing a small upstairs room, a sitting room, a tiny kitchen and a shower. However circumscribed his world had become, he inhabited it with a smile. A host who still did all the honours. Although it took longer every time before he totteringly reached the door, he always opened it with a wide, welcoming gesture.

Inside the house nothing changed. Just as he had earlier at the university, he avoided artificial lighting and tried to enjoy the dusk as long as possible. Still reflecting the influence of his experiences as a youth, he prized the natural state of things. For the same reason, or maybe because of his experiences in the North, the heating was always kept low and the windows stayed open well into the winter. The cold did not bother him. He wore a heavy sweater but even without it he could resist the elements. I always took the precaution of dressing well when I visited him in winter, but the cold would always be quickly forgotten because of the warmth of his company. We would sit on collapsible stools at the camping table in his kitchen and drink our whisky. I would praise the quality of the peanuts and he would excitedly explain that he bought them from the delivery truck of the local co-op. He was continually surprised by the comfort that surrounded him, how close by everything was.

His domain also included a small piece of the outside world — the garden on his side of the house and a small terrace. Also what adjoined his garden, the village

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church of Hernen and its churchyard with the grave of his wife. Although he was able to drive his car until the end, he generally stayed within his own world, which he considered large enough. When the church was open he would always drop in, as the pastor told us at his funeral mass. He never talked about this with me. We only discussed the things I have mentioned above. That was enough. We understood each other. That is why I never asked him why he had retired early.

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