

Between Science and Life: A Comparison of the Fieldwork Experiences of Bronislaw Malinowski and Kirsten Hastrup

Marta Kolankiewicz-Lundberg¹

Abstract

*Through two cases discussed in this article, I compare the personal experiences of anthropologists doing fieldwork in another culture. The first is that of pioneer Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), transplanted to London, and his journey to Mailu on the island of New Guinea and later the Trobriand Islands. The second is that of contemporary Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup and her fieldwork in Iceland. Material is drawn from Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, written between 1914 and 1918 and published in 1967. I used the entire text published for the first time in Polish in 2002 to analyze his social interactions in fieldwork settings, as well as to show how his diary has influenced contemporary anthropology. For Hastrup's field experiences, I draw upon published works of hers listed here as well as upon her work with the Odin Theater of Holstebro, Denmark. I have tried to present the being there of these two anthropologists not only as cultural phenomena with phase changes over time, but also to highlight crucial epistemological and ethical dilemmas for anthropology.*

Introduction: Bronislaw Malinowski and Kirsten Hastrup

The two anthropologists I focus upon made their field journeys during two different moments of the twentieth century – Bronislaw Malinowski in the initial part and Kirsten Hastrup in the latter part – and are examples of Western anthropologists experiencing *being there*, that is, of journeying to, contacting, and engaging those of another culture. The importance of Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) in this context is beyond question as he played an essential role in the foundation of modern anthropology. His long-term influence consisted not only in developing the functionalism that was his theoretical contribution, but also in revolutionizing the very practice of this field of science. He was to European anthropology what Franz Boas (1858-1942) was to American anthropology. Both emphasized the importance of fieldwork for the study of man. And both stressed that different cultures should be understood in their own contexts. Malinowski's studies of the Trobrianders turned out to be as influential as Boas' fieldwork among peoples of the Northwest Coast of North America like the Kwakiutl (Boas 1966). Fieldwork was the distinguishing feature and

most significant achievement of Malinowski's school, so to speak. It transformed scientists shut away in libraries and museums into explorers who had to travel and literally enter another culture. It tore them from books and threw them into life. This alteration not only gave birth to anthropology as we know it today, but it also had a very strong influence on these scientists. By confronting them with a new kind of challenge, it helped shape their lives.

Malinowski is both the author and main character of and in *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, hereafter referred to as *A Diary*. It is an exceptional document. We find a record of the anthropologist's expeditions to Mailu and the Mailu people on the island of New Guinea and then to the nearby Trobriand Islands in the period between 1914 and 1918 where he lived in native villages and conducted his famous studies. As such, *A Diary* is for me the basis for analysis of Malinowski's fieldwork experiences. It was first published in 1967, which was about five decades later and two decades after his death in 1942. *A Diary* is important as a text that shook the world of anthropology by providing so-called scandalous data about how Malinowski generally unflatteringly saw those with whom he was working and studying. It also led to a dynamically meaningful shift in the paradigm of

anthropology via self-reflection among anthropologists.

Bronislaw Malinowski completed a doctorate in 1908 with honors in philosophy, physics, and mathematics at Jagiellonian University. Encountering the encyclopedic *Golden Bough* (1951) by Sir James Frazer (1854-1941), which was first published in 1890, Malinowski began his enthusiasm for anthropology. After contact with the newer psychologies and economics in Leipzig, he came in 1910 to the London School of Economics and Political Science, where anthropology had been recently established as a discipline.

The second anthropologist I write about is Kirsten Hastrup, a full professor of anthropology at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She earned her D.Phil. degree at the University of Oxford, England, in 1978 and later completed a D.Sc. at the University of Copenhagen. In her two respective dissertations, she focused on Iceland, which became and is her major cultural area of interest reflected not only in her writings, but also in a play performed by the Odin Theater Company. This international Denmark-based group, led by Eugenio Barba, is both a theater and a school of theatrical anthropology. It constitutes a place where actors, performers, dancers, directors, and scholars can meet and share their techniques, knowledge, and experiences. It is a "laboratory for research into the technical basis of the performer in a trans-cultural dimension" (Odin Theater 2008). Hastrup became a de facto prototype of the main character of the Odin Theater's spectacle titled *Talabot* by cooperating closely with the group during the production. This experience gave her an insight into situations of actors as informants and enabled her to understand the work of anthropologists from another perspective. As source material, I use various anthropological texts of hers, as well as her analysis of the Odin Theater, and try to show how the main dilemmas of anthropology, revealed by Malinowski's *A Diary*, are reflected in Hastrup's work and life. Her story serves as a counterpoint to that of Malinowski. The comparison of these two figures helps, I hope, to illustrate not only what has changed within anthropology, but at the same time highlights what is still problematic.

Looking at Bronislaw Malinowski in the Field

Got up with a bad headache. Lay in euthanasian [euthanasic?] concentration on the ship. Loss of subjectivism and deprivation of the five senses and the body (through impressions) causes direct merging with surroundings. Had the feeling that the rattling of the ship's engine was myself; felt the motions of the ship as my own – it was I who was bumping against the waves and cutting through them (Malinowski 2002: *A Diary*, 2 November 1914).

From *A Diary* we get to know that Malinowski looked forward to the oncoming journey with enthusiasm and excitement. When boarding the boat that was going to carry him to Australia, he was well-prepared and eager to live an adventure. Already during breaks in the trip and short stops in ports he was offered the possibility of first contact with different cultures. Early impressions reached him from all sides, but at the same time they did not seem real to him. The exoticism, so tempting and attractive before the journey, in reality paled.

First contact with a completely new culture, from which god knows what one was expecting, first impressions of a completely new country, religion, landscape are always full of such disappointments. Sometimes only, very rarely, lucky coincidence: fresh, rested thought, well-disposed sensibility and lucky arrangement of the conditions in a given place make it possible to at once capture the content of a new world, the value of beauty in new surroundings. Then clairvoyance happens, a grasp, sudden and profound, of things unheard and beautiful, since true – one of the happiest kinds of experience. Unfortunately, during this journey I do not have this lucky coincidence, among other things because of a concern about the future, about the acclimatization in the tropics and the big tiredness from the heat (Malinowski 2002: *A Diary*, 4 July 1914).

The biggest problem seemed to be a certain dissonance between his expectations – that which had been imagined and looked forward to

– and reality. Malinowski's interests had been stimulated a long time before he went to Asia and New Guinea. Books, not only scientific but also novels were one of the principal sources of these images. The imaginary world appeared much more attractive than the actual surrounding exoticism. As a result the reality of being in contact with another culture, and experiencing what he had thought would be an enjoyable adventure, turned out to be unbearable. The clash between imagined representation and perceived reality made discovering the charm and authenticity of the world he visited difficult and rare.

Traveling to New Guinea meant moving to the tropics and living among all new and unknown scenery of a different nature, landscape, and climate that provided strong sensations. Sometimes attracted, other times repulsed, Malinowski could not stay indifferent to this environment. It influenced his perception, physical condition, and frame of mind. Many times he felt displaced and alienated.

Marvelous. It was the first time I had seen this vegetation in the moonlight. Too strange and exotic. The exoticism breaks through lightly, through the veil of familiar things. Mood drawn from everydayness. An exoticism strong enough to spoil normal apperception, but too weak to create a new category of mood. Went to the bush. For a moment I was frightened. Had to compose myself (Malinowski 2002: *A Diary*, 30 October 1914).

Apparently the moments when Malinowski had a sensation of being in harmony and agreement with the surrounding world were not frequent. The positive impressions were instantly romanticized and captured in a poetic description. The practice of transforming sensations into words facilitated their absorption. It is here that *A Diary* played an important role. Many times one has the impression that he felt real pleasure only by this process of creating images. As if Malinowski was not able to be there and enjoy it in a direct way; as if he needed some kind of transformation of the surrounding world to make it possible to feel and immerse himself in reality. "I am going to the jungle; not very exotic;

tiredness; I dream of how I will recall these strolls after the return." (*A Diary*, 4 July 1914).

Of course, we find moments of real satisfaction and well being, when Malinowski felt that he was "*in the middle of things*" (*A Diary*, 2 April 1918). He had a "lovely, pleasant and amusing picnic" (*A Diary*, 8 May 1918) and "*good fun*" (*Diary*, 6 January 1918) camping. Sometimes he apparently experienced "the joy of being with real *Naturmenschen* (men of nature)" (*A Diary*, 20 December 1917). He lived "in harmony with reality, actively, without spells of dejection" (*A Diary*, 1 November 1914) and had "such pleasure to explore, to make contact to the tropics" (*A Diary*, 21 March 1918). These moments, though, were uncommon. In fact *A Diary* is extremely somber and its author seems to go through a deep depression. Instead of harmony we find isolation and estrangement; instead of enthusiasm – apathy and resignation; instead of adaptation – nostalgia and homesickness; and instead of tranquility – irritation and rage. Most of the time Malinowski was "fairly depressed, afraid [he] might not feel equal to the task before [him]" (*A Diary*, 20 September 1914). "The work did not interest [him]," and he "thought of civilization with *pang*" (*A Diary*, 14 December 1917). He had "moments of frightful longing to get out of this rotten hole" (*A Diary*, 11 February 1918).

The most important aspect of Malinowski's new situation was his contact with native peoples. This was the central part of Malinowski's alienation, which shook the foundations of his cultural and social self and threw him into a new world, where all he was familiar with disappeared. Malinowski's first meetings with non-Europeans, during this trip, were made in Egypt and Ceylon. The only sensation noted was that of superiority. "Black monkeys imitating Europeans in the tram give me a feeling of superiority of the white race" (*A Diary*, 4 July 1914), – he wrote in Ceylon. Later, already in New Guinea: "the crew of fuzzy-headed savages in government uniforms gave me very much a 'Sahib' feeling" (*A Diary*, 13 September 1914). He had this strong feeling of superiority, especially towards the Europeanized people. The sensation was somehow related to a kind of disregard towards mixed cultures. He was looking for *noble savages*, pure men of nature as he called them. Isolated tribes

attracted him. These were found in settings where time supposedly had not left its mark and intercultural changes had not much occurred.

During Malinowski's interaction with native groups, their usefulness to his work constituted the most evident criterion to evaluate them. And the main relation he established with them was that of informant-questioner. He liked or disliked people depending on the quality of information they gave and on the degree of difficulty in making them speak. "Collected information which here bubbled out as fast as I could take it in.... Very intelligent natives. They hid nothing from me, no lies." (*A Diary*, 1 November 1914). "At 4, I began to work with Mataora – garden. They lied, concealed, and irritated me. I am always in a world of lies here." (*A Diary*, 25 March 1918).

In these cases, it is difficult to talk about a personal relationship between two human beings; it is rather, a purely technical contact between scientist and subject, a subject who sometimes is difficult to dominate and thus irritating. Getting information did not seem to be an easy task. Normally, Malinowski treated it in terms of exchange: when he wanted a Native to talk about familiar relations, taboos, magic or gardening, he paid with tobacco or other goods. He got furious each time somebody took his gifts and left him without any answers. He seemed conscious about the character of his investigation; he had the impression that it was similar to a battle, a hard process of getting something, of taking it away by force. "Then I went to Towakayse. There I had to do a lot of urging [*gwałcenie* in Polish means not only *urging* but also *rape* or *violation*] before they were willing to talk." (*A Diary*, 13 December 1917).

Extracting information gave Malinowski a sensation of violation and it normally required a lot of patience and energy. It was as well his main, if not the only, form of participation in the life of the village. Observing, talking, or any other kind of interaction with informants was motivated by the wish to pump information out of them. Of course, occasionally, such meetings had effects on Malinowski. In a way, he had to be involved in the situations he was taking part in. Nevertheless, there is only one description in *A Diary*, which shows Malinowski taking the initiative and in a very active way encouraging his

informants to act – the only moment, when he really participated.

In the evening I went to Tukwa'ukwa, where the Negroes refused to *mwasa* (play).... To encourage them to play (there was no one on the *baku* (main square)), I began to *kasaysuya* (a kind of dancing game) myself. I needed exercise, moreover I could learn more by taking part personally. Much more amusing than the *petits jeux* (little games) organized a few days ago in Nyora. Here at least there is movement, rhythm, and moonlight; also emulation, playing of parts, skill. I like naked human bodies in motion, and at moments, they also excited me (*A Diary*, 24 May 1918).

This fragment reveals a high intensity of personal involvement in the research process. The fact that Malinowski initiated the dance, and that he took pleasure in performing it, indicates that he was able to enter whole-heartedly into an alien culture. We cannot state, though, that any sort of identification with the Trobrianders occurred during the stay on the islands. Most of the time, his *A Diary* was far from being a reflection of empathy. It was rather a vent to great distance, lack of interest, irritation and antipathy. Malinowski fell "into a rage" (*A Diary*, 20 January 1915). He "dislike[d]" Natives (*A Diary*, 18 December 1917), had "general aversion for...[the indigenous people], for the monotony" and felt "imprisoned" (*A Diary*, 23 December 1917). In these moments the object of study seemed to him "utterly devoid of interest or importance, something as remote from [him] as the life of a dog" (*A Diary*, 27 December 1917). At one point he developed an attitude towards the indigenous inhabitants that he termed "exterminate the brutes" (*A Diary*, 21 January 1915). This literal quotation from *Heart of Darkness* shows that Malinowski, in a way, played with a cultural role so well presented in Conrad's story. He used the words of Kurtz to express his own desperation in the deep isolation, and – by identifying with this literary character – tried to find a way to act in this overwhelming situation. Of course, Malinowski did not repeat Kurtz's life story. But he discovered in this character a ready role to play, that of colonizer. And actually, A

Diary gives us dozens of examples of situations, where power relationships between Malinowski and his informants corresponded to that of the colonial world.

It was completely natural for him to have his own “boys.” They pitched his tent (*A Diary*, 20 March 1918) and served him all the time. But most of all they were getting on his nerves by eating too many betel nuts (*A Diary*, 18 January 1918) or just by irritating him, like mosquitoes so to speak (*A Diary*, 27 April 1918). Malinowski could recognize that he needed them, but he could not stand their presence. He even went to the extreme of beating Ginger, one of those who worked for him (*A Diary*, 15 April 1918). He used *Gwadi* (children) who not only helped in gathering information about the inhabitants of the village, but who also carried around the chair on which Malinowski sat as part of his participant observation (*A Diary*, 15 December 1917).

The sense of power and the “delightful feeling that now [he] alone [was] the master of this village with [his] boy” (*A Diary*, 25 March 1918) gave Malinowski a lot of satisfaction. It offered him a sensation of enjoyment and corresponded to his ambitions. But it was not only this mere feeling of domination that Malinowski liked; being the lord meant for him much more. It was in fact related to a strong conviction of possessing this tropical village and its people by transferring them into his writing. “Joy: I hear the word ‘Kiriwina’. I get ready; little grey, pinkish huts. Photos. Feeling of ownership: It is I who will describe them or create them.” (*A Diary*, 1 December 1917).

Anthropological description with its presentation of so-called exotic tribes meant, in a way, bringing them to life. This attitude, so characteristic of early discoverers and explorers, continued in the activity of later scientists. Enlargement of knowledge about the world overlapped at this point with domination (Kieniewicz 1986). A typical colonial split was embedded between a sense of superiority and a sense of responsibility. The relationship in general between Europeans and what some have called *primitive peoples*, and in particular between anthropologists and their informants, bore at that time a resemblance to that of an adult with a child – an asymmetry typical for the world of colonial power (Asad 1973:16-18).

Asymmetrical power was present not only during day-to-day life, but also during anthropological work. On many occasions, scientific interest remained completely detached from a humane way of treating informants. They were above all “specimens.” Malinowski would even go to the lengths of carrying out small experiments to collect his data.

I came back in the dark and once again frightened a little boy whom I call Monkey; he utters strange sounds when frightened; I persuaded him to come a stretch of the way with me, bribing him with tobacco, then I would suddenly disappear in the bushes, and he would begin to squeal (*A Diary*, 13 January 1915).

Malinowski’s attitude in the field towards women went beyond their being interesting anthropological subjects. Even as informants capable of irritating him for alleged disobedience, a different feeling applied to them, a kind of attraction. Actually, the only moment, when Malinowski expressed in his diary *A Diary* a wish to be one of those he studied was in relation to a woman.

At 5, I went to Kaulaka. A pretty, finely built girl walked ahead of me. I watched the muscles of her back, her figure, her legs, and the beauty of the body, so hidden to us whites, fascinated me. Probably even with my own wife, I’ll never have the opportunity to observe the play of back muscles for as long as with this little animal. At moments, I was sorry I was not a savage and could not possess this pretty girl (*A Diary*, 19 April 1918).

Malinowski did not surrender completely to nostalgia for familiar life styles and to frustration over strange ways, all provoked by isolation. He did everything to emerge unharmed from the experience. But he had to fight hard to achieve this status. *A Diary* can be read as a record of his ups and downs because it shows clearly how much he had to struggle to persevere against moments of crisis. Not forgetting himself in the surrounding world, sometimes, these ups and downs bore resemblance to a struggle between rational solutions – which would lead to an improvement of character and life – and irratio-

nal escapisms. The whole experience of *being there* was like a hard battle to keep one's head above water. It was a task to remain conscious in a situation where all that was known and usual became distant and substituted by a completely new environment. He needed to secure his own cultural identity and his normal stream of thoughts in conditions that threatened to alter them. Solitude combined with freedom from the control and the restrictions of his culture offered unexpected liberty. And this freedom exposed the self in a dangerous way. Malinowski was, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, passing through a test. Confrontation with apparent *wilderness* was in fact a confrontation with oneself. As Wengle notes, an individual who is removed from his normal surroundings and placed under pressure may eventually get his sense of personal inner continuity destroyed while facing an emotional collapse. The cultural alienation that an anthropologist undergoes during fieldwork may lead to his or her symbolic death (Wengle 1988:6-7).

For Malinowski, the field was a struggle to maintain his cultural integrity. It had much to do with not surrendering to a strange, unreasonable fear. And one could see it as a struggle between giving up to overwhelming cultural alienation and maintaining the interior order, which for him was a familiar, clear and logical grasp of reality. In these moments of crisis, Malinowski's belief in all that was related to the security of rationality offered by his own culture was used as a protective measure to drive away uncontrolled sensations. In fact, during these moments a battle was fought for his cultural integrity, a battle against new instincts and beliefs imposed in an invisible and unconscious way by the new environment. Malinowski was fighting to remain himself.

At night, a little tired, but not exhausted, I sang, to a Wagner melody, the words "Kiss my ass" to chase away *mulukwansi* (*A Diary*, 19 December 1917)

Mulukwansi is the spiritual equivalent to the *yoyova*. Both names are used by the Trobrianders to describe the flying witches inhabiting the eastern islands famous for eating raw, human meat and for bringing death to sailors. Hence dread (*A Diary*, 19 December 1917).

Publication of Malinowski's *A Diary*

The publication of *A Diary* should be seen in the context of both the immediate scandal it gave rise to and the later reflections and discussions it provoked. It certainly led to great disappointment with Malinowski. The proclaimed father of modern anthropology turned out to be a racist full of disdain for and, on occasion, even hatred towards "his" informants. The criticism *A Diary* met with was significant because it was not limited to the mere condemnation of Malinowski. What may have been much more important was that the text strongly undermined the credibility of anthropologists in general and thereby the science as a whole. With painful sincerity at times, the text clearly showed some of the most difficult, but crucial, problems that anthropology had to face. It exposed anthropologists during their fieldwork, showing the dangers and complexity of the situation they found themselves in. The criticism therefore had a more fundamental importance than the simple dethronement of Malinowski. It was obvious that personal experience inscribed into fieldwork should not merely be treated as such, since it is strongly connected to issues of methodology.

A Diary was a distorting mirror in which anthropology had to look at itself. The first and most obvious reflections the image provoked were of an ethical nature. The colonial context only strengthened the feeling of ambiguity related to the anthropologists' presence in the field. Moreover, the question of problematic inequality within power relationships was not restricted to the political question. It evoked deep discussions about the possibility of cognition of other cultures. *A Diary* also showed the complexity of the fieldwork situation for researchers, bringing the problem of their identity into focus. The experience of *being there* appeared as a walk on a tightrope, a situation in which the anthropologist's cultural self is threatened and in which each step could mean a fall into the surrounding reality. Thus, *A Diary* illustrated above all else a fundamental flaw in current anthropology and, in the long-term, the text would be used as a starting point for discussion in search of better solutions for this branch of knowledge. Kirsten Hastrup offers a solution.

Kirsten Hastrup's Experience

Kirsten Hastrup's experience of *being there* occupies a really special place in her texts. On many occasions she refers to episodes and events from her stay in Iceland. She not only recalls happenings but also reveals her fears and emotions during her fieldwork, trying to present herself unveiled, without a *writer's mask*. Yet, it does not mean that we as readers are given access to all aspects of the experience. The episodes are carefully chosen, serving a specific purpose.

We see Hastrup, for example, when she received letters from home in which her friends say they miss her and want to make preparations for her return; they try to arrange classes for the next semester and ask about her plans. We witness her throwing the letters away, not willing to read or answer them (Hastrup 1995:15). And we follow her in maybe the most significant story she tells:

Staying for some months during the autumn on an Icelandic farm, I once took part in an expedition to collect stray sheep in a rather rough mountainous region. At a certain point in time I was left on a rock ledge to hold an ewe that had just been recovered from another ledge where it had been entrapped.... I had a beautifully clear view down toward the flat coastal lands where "my" farm was situated.... Suddenly, a dense fog came rolling down from the upper mountains and with an icy cold. In the subarctic area you know never to trust the sun, and I was prepared to meet the cold; but in the long run not even woolen clothes could prevent a degree of fear from creeping in. It was not so much a question of fearing to get lost, even though I knew that I could never descend alone. It was a kind of fear related to the place where I found myself.... In that particular place the fog was a very specific veil over the Icelandic landscape, of which I had become a part. And there, a nebulous human figure appeared in the mist. I knew instantly that it was a man of the "hidden people" (*huldufólk*) who visited me in the small space of vision left to me and my ewe by the fog. Ever since the Middle Ages *huldumenn* have been known to seduce Icelandic

womenfolk, and especially shepherdesses in misty mountains. Apparently he did not touch me, but who knows if he did not seduce me in one way or other without my sensing it? When the fog lifted, and I was finally rejoined by my own people, the only thing that remained clear in my mind was the real experience of the materialization of the unreal (Hastrup 1987:52).

Here we get a clear message of what the fieldwork experience means to Hastrup as she helps us to correctly interpret the episodes, giving explicit clues how to decipher their meaning.

We notice that working in the field places her in an unusual position towards both her own culture and that of the other. Hastrup felt that she did not want to belong to her own world. She rejected it abruptly and desired to maintain a double distance – on the one hand, real, physical absence, on the other, emotional detachment and a negation of the interior cultural affiliation. She wanted to cut ties that linked her to her country, her job, and all that she usually was. Not only was she denying her own culture, but at the same time she was rejecting her so-called normal self. She did not want to be Kirsten Hastrup the Danish professor any more, but rather somebody else.

Kirsten Hastrup, The Icelandic Shepherd Girl

As we follow this turnabout, we see how she turned into *Kirsten*, an Icelandic shepherd girl or a peasant working among the fishermen. We see how she entered the culture of *the other* to such a degree that she herself grew to be a part of that she was to describe. The transformation was profound and multifaceted. It was closely related to her physical presence there in the world of *the other*. She not only observed and learned about the reality of *the other*, she entered it; she learned how to act in it and how to be a member of it. Hastrup really participated. She worked in the fish factory and grazed her sheep. This situation had at the outset a lot to do with entering and adapting to local routines and ways of living. She sought to experience the Icelandic world in the same way as she saw her informants and decided

to immerse herself completely.

According to Hastrup, fieldwork does not only involve investigating and researching the other culture. It has to do with a radical experience of estrangement (Hastrup 1995:14-15). Hastrup felt she was not herself in Iceland. When afterwards she wrote about the things that had happened to her, the sensations or the fears she had had, she did it in the third person. This grammatical change in language reflects a shift in identity. The person doing the fieldwork was not the same as the one who wrote down her observations, analyzed them, and tried to offer explanations. There were two different *Kirstens* (Hastrup 1992:116-134).

The Fieldwork Experiences of Malinowski and Hastrup Juxtaposed

If we juxtapose the fieldwork experiences of Bronislaw Malinowski and Kirsten Hastrup, some clear differences stand out. In Malinowski's case, *being there* was important as a condition of his credibility. The validity of his ethnographical writings was based largely on the fact that the author had been on the islands he described and had lived among the people he wrote about (Geertz 1988:1-24). Nevertheless, his personal experience itself remained in the shadows. Fears and frustrations felt in the field were only reflected upon in a hidden, intimate diary not intended for publication. In the same way, the problematic relationship between Malinowski and his informants remains behind curtains. There was never any question of anthropology's validity or ethics. Inequality was so strongly inscribed in the historical and political context that it did not provoke any particularly profound reflections. And actually, the context caused anthropologists to appear in a completely different light to other Westerners. They were the only ones deeply interested in the culture and society of the *other*, and the only ones eager to preserve them, proclaiming the equality of all humans. But it did not mean that in their work they did not practice violence.

In the case of Hastrup, issues of inequality and complexity involving the anthropologist-informant relationship occupy center stage. Anthropology is "a child of Western imperialism" (Gough 1968:403) with its validity in ques-

tion ethically and epistemologically because anthropologists had worked on behalf of colonial oppressors. Their position in the field turned out to be ambiguous. They could never cease to represent their own culture, which for their so-called primitive informants signified colonizing power (Asad 1973:16-18). And anthropological knowledge connected to the European scientific tradition is seen as accused of being based on an imaginative representation of other cultures created by the scientists (Said 1978) instead of empirical observation, albeit recognizing the complex issue of the frontiers of cognition of other cultural realities.

Under these circumstances, analysis of the very relation between anthropologist and informant gained a particularly important position. The interest in and explanation of the issue by Hastrup should be seen as a part of this trend. From the 1960s on, many texts were produced to create awareness and encourage analysis of the condition and the problems of anthropology. This self-reflection impelled many to include their autobiographies in the scientific discourse. We come across not only isolated episodes from the fieldwork, but also very private, almost confessional, accounts of the author's experience (Ruby 1982). In this context, Hastrup's openness and sincerity when it comes to confessing her feelings during fieldwork, are not so out of the ordinary. They are deeply rooted in the discourse of the time, just as Malinowski's silence and secrecy were earlier.

Basic Questions as Impacts of Fieldwork

In the same way, the importance of the personal experience changed diametrically (Clifford 1986:109). It became a central issue. Contemporary doubts and criticism concerning the methodological basis of anthropology put matters in a new light. The simple fact of anthropologists' *being there* was no longer sufficient to give epistemological foundation to the presentation of an alien reality. The weakening of realism and positivism in the social sciences in the late twentieth century led to the return of such basic questions as *How can we describe reality? How do we learn to know it?*

During the time Malinowski was active, *observation* seemed to be a sufficient tool to

acquire knowledge about studied cultural reality. Vision therefore played a central role in the process of empirical cognition. The aim was to make scientific observation perfect. And that is why methodology and fieldwork techniques were so important as they were supposed to guarantee the most exact *measurements* of cultural reality. Participation in the lives of *others* was merely a way to obtain the best and most faithful data possible, by watching informants constantly in all possible moments of their daily life. To have all elements of the culture within eyeshot was the main aspiration. (Clifford 1986:11)

Hastrup openly expresses her doubts about getting to the essence of a culture solely by means of visual observation. She believes that Western people have a distorted capacity to see things. Cognition can, in her opinion, occur only by fully identifying with the object of study. Anthropologists must then consider themselves a tool in fieldwork. Both mind and body should be involved in the research process to the highest degree possible. Personal experience cannot be eliminated from the scientific investigation; it is its base and foundation. Only by incorporating the other culture, feeling it from the inside and performing it like an actor performs a character, can anthropologists have real insight into it. And in this process of identification the border between object and subject is blurred; the border that Hastrup calls "an artifact of modernism" (Hastrup 1992:117). In this sense, Hastrup's understanding of the reality she lived in during fieldwork provided valuable and precious data.

The field experiences of Malinowski and Hastrup were extremely powerful, especially as each was tested in a very intense way. Both of them balanced dangerously on the edge, so to speak. In a very definite way, they were caught between two different worlds. What was culturally usual and normal suddenly disappeared. Even the aspects of life so deeply rooted in the self that appeared to be an inherent and essential part of it, suddenly turned out to be acquired and relative to the culture one grew in. The examination of *the other* thus led to a discovery that had important consequences for the self. In both cases, we get the impression that the journey to the *exotic* place was not only motivated by

science. But also, the attraction to *the other* was somehow provoked by a personal need to experiment with the self. *Being there* is in the case of anthropologists followed by going back home. It is like an adventure that is supposed to shed light on those sides of the self that are normally in the shadows. Playing in the world of *the other* leads to the discovery and definition of the cultural self.

The Old Self of Malinowski and the New Self of Hastrup

Bronislaw Malinowski's and Kirsten Hastrup's experiences took different or even contrary shapes. Malinowski held on to his *old* self like his life depended on it. His routines were basic for him and were supposed to guarantee not only success and persistence in work, but also the cohesion and survival of his identity. He stuck to his gymnastics, defined and redefined the rules of his interior discipline and formulated resolutions in his diary – all this to keep a grip on his own self. He escaped, sometimes to the company of other Westerners, other times to novels, a piece of his world that he brought with him. His success in preserving identity was due to decisive confirmation of his own culture and brutal denial of that of *the other*. Referring to informants by derogatory names in his diary meant in fact refusing to acknowledge them as humans. He had to kill them symbolically and deprive them of their humanity. Only in this way did his cultural self remain untouched and safe. Antipathy seemed to offer the only secure refuge.

Hastrup, in contrast, was brimming over not only with sympathy but also with real and profound empathy towards "her people." Her experience was one of deep identification with them. But in order to do so, she had to deny her own culture. She sterilized herself from all she was used to. She had to forget and reject her past and her cultural being. If we venture to say that Malinowski had to symbolically kill his informants in order to remain himself, we could recognize Hastrup's symbolic suicide. Her profound identification with *the other*, her almost complete immersion in the new world could only be possible at the cost of killing the *old* Kirsten.

Hastrup, Her New Self and the Odin Theater

At the same time, she was ready and willing to experience the fieldwork situation from the side of the informant. Her work with the Odin Theater gave her opportunity to do so. She was chosen by Eugenio Barba to be a prototype for the main character in *Talabot*. Hastrup's encounter with the Odin Theatre was a very tough experience, but it offered her a possibility to switch roles. Suddenly, and not completely intentionally, she found herself in the informant's skin. And, even though she had some kind of consciousness of the nature of fieldwork research, only now could she experience it from the other side. Only now could she fully understand how the anthropologists' presence, observation, and questioning strongly influence or even disrupt the life of those being analyzed. She made herself vulnerable to a kind of experiment that would make her personal identification with *the other* possible. Her empathy was total. She simply became an informant and experienced the fieldwork process that way. This situation is seen from her initial interest in her so-called exotic character she was to play, through the slow and painful process of realizing the character of her character, to finally realizing herself as the dramatic Kirsten – her *new* self. She was simultaneously herself and not herself, if you will (Hastrup 1995).

Hastrup's way of experiencing during her anthropological journey was not only shaped by the search for a more adequate tool of ethnographic methodology. It was also, in a way, a powerful response to the despair of her times. Hastrup's manifesto has indeed double significance. On the one hand, it tries to offer an alternative, to overcome the impasse created by criticisms that led scientists down a blind alley. She insists that cognition of *the other* is possible, that one is not necessarily restricted by one's own culture to the point at which it renders a true dialogue impossible. She believes so strongly in the chance for an encounter of an open-minded nature that she reaches the point of participating in *the other's* (un)reality. Her meeting with the man of the *buldufólk* is thus a good confirmation of the capacity of Western scientists to rise above their own cultural determination.

On the other hand, though, the manifesto is an affirmation and a clear expression of the crisis of Western culture. After all, Hastrup has to abandon her own self to be able to embody her Icelandic alter ego. The very experience of entering the reality of *the other* is a metaphor for her European condition as a wish to obliterate her own identity and a desire to immerse herself in an alternative, which she expresses unequivocally.

The task of anthropologists is for Kirsten Hastrup something more than a simple description and analysis of human culture in all its different variants. Their scientific work resembles a real mission that should help Western culture to find answers to its own failings and so revive *true life* within it. They should become a bridge that joins together two separated worlds. Hastrup compares her anthropological profession, or maybe better, her condition to that of a prophet (Hastrup 1995:24-25). She claims that both figures represent somebody who has access to two different realities: belonging to the old they give voice to the new. The key to the prophetic condition of anthropologists is their ritual presence in the other world (Hastrup 1995:25). Fieldwork is seen here as a *rite de passage* (Hastrup 1995:20). It is a way to mark the anthropologists' place in the world *in between*.

Hastrup as Romantic Poet

I propose another comparison in that Hastrup could be associated with the image of a romantic poet. Similarities are visible in many different features of the figure of the anthropologist created by Hastrup. Her experience of *being there* is presented as an experience of *becoming*. She enters a special state, abandons the rational part of her cultural identity. Her cognition of the other culture – the message of truth so needed by the Western civilization – occurs beyond her normal self. All she comes into contact with is absorbed by her senses and not by rationality.

Romantic poets are also mediators between two worlds. Their capacity to write poetry is attributed not to the mastery of the poetic techniques or the ability to use different metres and poetic images, but to their special condition. This permits them to get to a source of real inspiration and thereby to create a truly genial

work of art (Young 2001:16-18). Romantic poets reach a peak inaccessible to ordinary human beings. Their creation draws more from this ability to transcend realities than from the work of reason. Romanticism values the irrational and supernatural highly.

Romantic poets have a special status among the people with whom they live. Poets, just like prophets, are considered exceptional. They embody geniality. One cannot achieve this state without having been born with it; poets are the chosen ones, special figures that have access to another reality. This ability gives them the unique chance to touch *truth* and to see clearly – abilities others do not have. But at the same time it makes them suffer. Their existence *in between* is exhausting and dangerous and the lack of a clear affiliation provokes anxiety. In a way their messianic condition is a sacrifice.

Similarly, Hastrup's anthropologist runs the danger of exposing herself to risky experimental states. Her mission is difficult; cognition of the other (un)reality requires a special condition. When describing herself to the Odin Theatre, Hastrup later wrote that she created an image of *a lonely rider*, which meant that in her stories she completely omitted her marriage and family. She explained it as a sort of lack of affiliation, which had always been her mark and still was (Hastrup 1995:132). She had to fight for any, even temporary, feeling of belonging. Hastrup sees this feature of her personality as a central element of this special condition. The state of *an internal exile*, as she calls it, is vital to be able to carry out fieldwork, but it also results in loneliness and isolation.

The mission of the anthropologist is accomplished only when the other reality is mediated. Experience must be transformed into writing. Hastrup perceives this part of the work of anthropology as *a state of art* (Hastrup 1992:116-134). The description of *the other* is a creation of text. It does not mean that the ethnographer writes fiction. On the contrary, there is a distinct border between creation and fiction. Hastrup emphasizes that the only way to get close to *LIFE* being studied is to escape from conventionality. Blind reproduction of ethnography is the biggest enemy of the authenticity and of the real value of the text.

We hear again echoes from romantic ideology. The cult of originality and departure from classical literary forms were the strongest features of the romantic condition. Creation had to be freed from these fossilized forms. The only way to express reality was by searching originality and breaking with the conventional. The use of imagination substituted traditional forms (Novalis 2001:27-28).

The introduction of the European romantic ideology is not accidental here. Hastrup herself refers to it in her writings. The mentioning of nineteenth century Romanticism appears in relation to criticism of the positivistic vision of science and the realistic representation of the cultural world. It is deeply embedded in the project to reform anthropology as a science, both on a methodological and theoretical level. Romanticism is treated as a possible counterbalance for the dominant Western scientific vision of reality rooted in the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Anthropology may not be a prototypical member of the category of scholarship, let alone of 'science', yet its import derives from its ability to discover and describe the reality just as much as linguistics and physics. Its potential stems from its power to question the givens of western culture rather than confirming them. As such anthropology continues the Romantic reaction against the Enlightenment reason, and against the sanctification of the natural sciences. The discovery of other worlds is explicitly creative (Hastrup 1995:12).

Hastrup sees the very act of conducting anthropology, that is, of directing one's sight towards another world and a different way of dealing with reality than the Western one, as aiming to undermine all that is usual and taken for granted by a process of estrangement from one's own culture. This approach allows regarding one's own identity and habitual way of thinking, feeling, and experiencing, as a cultural product. The purpose of anthropology is then to criticize Western culture. Yet in the process, it resembles an old struggle within the European tradition between *Enlightenment* and *Romanticism*. In fact, all Hastrup does is to reject and criticize

one part of the European tradition, and refer and rely on another one. She calls out the spirit that has haunted Europe for centuries. She fights for a right to describe and define reality beyond the Enlightenment's scientific model. She wants to experience reality instead of merely observing it – to use her intuition and feeling instead of her reason. She wants to give the anthropologist the status of prophet and messiah instead of that of transparent observer. She insists on creation as part of the anthropologist's role instead of mimetic or imitative representation in writing ethnography.

Doubts

Hastrup explores the most dangerous side of fieldwork. The side that was present in Malinowski's experience, but which he tried to cover or eliminate—that of irrational fears and of sensations that habitual ways of perceiving reality were collapsing. She exposes herself to experiments, but does not do it for mere adventure. Her incorporation of *the other* has scientifically defined aims. It is intended to give a perfect insight. She tries in this way to free herself from the determinism of her own culture and to access the true reality in a direct way by experiencing it. My doubts here concern three basic problems.

My first doubt asks if it is possible to switch from one identity to another? Although I agree that cultural affiliation is something malleable that can be shaped and formed according to one's own will, I cannot imagine a total and unquestioned conversion to another culture. The conscious project of transforming one's identity is in my opinion impossible to achieve. It is not only our consciousness that is involved, but also those parts of the self that are uncontrollable, and that are to the same degree influenced by the culture.

Secondly, we should ask if the choice of *the other* by anthropologists is completely neutral, if it is equally easy to enter and embrace any *culture* or maybe there are those that are just easier to overpower. In this sense, anthropologists will always establish some kind of hierarchy between the worlds they participate in. This would be another place where unequal power relationships are articulated, since it is difficult to imagine one

of the Icelandic fishermen playing in Hastrup's academic world with the same ease. And it is here, perhaps, that the most problematic impact of anthropology's colonial heritage lies. Another aspect of this point would be the possible existence of prior attraction to some cultures, a romanticized image, which would render their description even more questionable.

My third objection concerns the method Hastrup uses to embody *the other*. My comparison of the anthropologist with the romantic poet intends to show that simple rejection of positivistic rationality does not necessarily mean liberation from cultural determinism. What Hastrup does is in fact to incorporate another discourse, one as strongly linked to Western culture as the positivistic one. The move she believed was from one culture to another can be seen merely as a switching of discourse. The romantic tradition is given voice. I would argue here that if we think of reason as shaped and determined by our culture, there is no cause not to think the same of intuition. It is probably just as deeply embedded in our cultural formation. We learn how to use it and where to apply it. We know when we are permitted to recall it and what to expect from it. It is a defined concept in our minds just like rationality is.

Conclusion

Hastrup responds to some crucial questions of anthropology revealed by Malinowski's *A Diary*. She certainly succeeds in solving the ethical problem of anthropology. She transforms the oppressive anthropologist, embodied in the main character of Malinowski's *A Diary*, into a compassionate one. She sacrifices her own self to expiate the sins of anthropology. Nevertheless, the epistemological problem was not so simple to solve. Hastrup takes a big step in the debate about what dialogue is possible and appropriate with *the other*, but her proposal, even though it could be treated as an alternative way to achieve knowledge, is not the solution to the epistemological problems of anthropology. ○

Notes

1. This article by Marta Kolankiewicz-Lundberg is a shorter version based upon her 2003 thesis for a M.S. in cultural studies from the Institute

of Sociology at the University of Lund, Sweden. She is not affiliated with any institution and may be reached by e-mail at martulapl@yahoo.com and by regular mail at Ejedervägen 1E, 227 33 Lund, Sweden. No telephone is available. She also holds a M.A. in Iberian studies from the University of Warsaw, Poland, and a M.S. in human rights from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. For this article, Lundberg translated into English quotations from Bronislaw Malinowski's *A Diary* from the 2002 first edition in Polish.

References Cited

- Asad, Talal
1973 "Introduction." In *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. Edited by Talal Asad. Pages 9-19. London: Ithaca Press.
- Clifford, James
1986 "Introduction: Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Pages 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Conrad, Joseph
1999 *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories*. Hertfordshire, United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions.
- Frazer, Sir James
1951 *The Golden Bough*. New York: The Macmillan Company. First published in 1890, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, enlarged to 12 volumes, 1911-1915; abridged edition in one volume, 1922; supplementary volume *Aftermath*, 1936.
- Geertz, Clifford
1988 *Works and Lives: the Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Gough, Kathleen
1968 "New Proposals for Anthropology." *Current Anthropology* 9(5): 403-407.
- Hastrup, Kirsten
1987 "The Challenge of the Unreal: or How Anthropology Comes to Terms with Life." *Culture and History* 1:50-63.
1992 "Writing Ethnography: State of the Art." In *Anthropology and Autobiography*. Edited by Judith Okely and Helen Callaway. Pages 116-134. London and New York: Routledge Publisher.
- 1995 *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory*. London and New York: Routledge Publisher.
- 1998 *A Place Apart: An Anthropological Study of the Icelandic World*. Oxford, England, United Kingdom and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kieniewicz, Jan
1986 *Od ekspansji do dominacji (From Expansion to Domination)*. Warszawa: Czytelnik Publisher.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw
1922 *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited.
1989 *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*. Translated from Polish to English by Norbert Guterman. London: Athlone Press.
2002 *Dziennik w ciśłym znaczeniu tego wyrazu (A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term)*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie. First time published in Polish.
- Novalis (pseudonym of Friedrich von Hardenberg)
2001 "Fragments." In *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*. Edited by Martin Travers. Pages 26-29. London and New York: Continuum Publisher.
- Olwig, Karen Fog and Kirsten Hastrup, editors
1997 *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*. New York: Routledge Publisher.
- Ruby, Jay
1982 *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Said, Edward
1987 *Orientalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Publisher.
- Wengle, John L.
1988 *Ethnographers in the Field: The Psychology of Research*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Young, Edward
2001 "Conjectures on Original Composition." In *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice*. Edited by Martin Travers. Pages 16-19. London and New York: Continuum Publisher.