THE NAKED ANTHROPOLOGIST

TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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The Naked Anthropologist
Tales from Around the World

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The Naked Anthropologist

The Wadsworth Modern Anthropology Library

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For Kelley:
This will never make up for all the years I was away.

This volume, as well as the first, begun by both of us years ago, is dedicated to the memory of Edwin Aubrey Cook (1932–1984), friend and mentor, committed anthropologist, the wearer of so many hats and that rare, occasionally irascible human who most often knew what was best for those for whom he cared, but not necessarily for himself.

I see you now
(even in this present sunlight)
Clay feet and all
Whistling and dancing finally

EXCERPT FROM A POEM BY
KEN HOECK, ONE OF ED'S
STUDENTS AT FLORIDA STATE

Foreword to the Series

Modern cultural anthropology encompasses the full diversity of all humankind with a mix of methods, styles, ideas, and approaches. No longer is the subject matter of this field confined to exotic cultures, the "primitive," or small rural folk communities. Today, students are as likely to find an anthropologist at work in an urban school setting or a corporate boardroom as among a band of African hunters and gatherers. To a large degree, the currents in modern anthropology reflect changes in the world over the past century. Today there are no isolated archaic societies available for study. All the world's peoples have become enveloped in widespread regional social, political, and economic systems. The daughters and sons of yesterday's yam gardeners and reindeer hunters are operating computers, organizing marketing cooperatives, serving as delegates to parliaments, and watching television news. The lesson of cultural anthropology, and this series, is that such peoples, when transformed, are no less interesting and no less culturally different because of such dramatic changes.

Cultural anthropology's scope has grown to encompass more than simply the changes in the primitive or peasant world, its original subject matter. The methods and ideas developed for the study of small-scale societies are now creatively applied to the most complex of social and cultural systems, giving us a new and stronger understanding of the full diversity of human living. Increasingly, cultural anthropologists also work toward solving practical problems of the cultures they study, in addition to pursuing more traditional basic research endeavors.

Yet cultural anthropology's enlarged agenda has not meant abandonment of its own heritage. The ethnographic case study remains the bedrock of the cultural anthropologist's methods for gathering knowledge of the peoples of the world, although today's case study may focus on a British urban neighborhood or a new American cult as often as on efforts of a formerly isolated Pacific island people to cope with bureaucracy. Similarly, systematic comparison of the experiences and adaptations of different societies is an old approach that is increasingly applied to new issues.

The books in the Wadsworth Modern Anthropology Library reflect cultural anthropology's greater breadth of interests. They include intro-

ductory texts and supporting anthologies of readings, as well as advanced texts dealing with more specialized fields and methods of cultural anthropology.

However, the hub of the series consists of topical studies that concentrate on either a single community or a number of communities. Each of these topical studies is strongly issue-focused. As anthropology has always done, these topical studies raise far-reaching questions about the problems people confront and the variety of human experience. They do so through close face-to-face study of people in many places and settings. In these studies, the core idiom of cultural anthropology lies exposed. Cultural anthropologists still, as always, go forth among the cultures of the world and return to inform. Only where they go and what they report has changed.

James A. Clifton
Series Editor

Preface

> One of my professors, when asked what to do in the field, responded that I should go find myself. If this was to be the goal, pity the poor community of my choice.
>
> *George N. Appell (1989:48)*

In August of 1983, Ed Cook and I sat talking on a porch overlooking Lake Champlain. There I proposed the ideas for a collection of articles by Pacific anthropologists which was originally to be edited by both of us. For the remaining three days of his visit, we retreated to my farmhouse in the Adirondacks, where we formulated strategies and developed scenarios for the completion of what we believed was to be a unique set of essays by anthropologists—essays which focused on unexpected encounters in Oceanic fieldwork, written in a style comprehensible to a general audience and, hopefully, of some interest to the specialist.

I had developed the idea for a single Oceanic volume. Ed enthusiastically argued that we develop two volumes, one on the Pacific Islands, a second to similarly focus on ethnographic problems throughout the world. That was vintage Ed Cook. For him, there was always something reachable beyond what was the readily imagined. He was a kid in an intellectual candy shop who wouldn't settle for the jelly beans. His sights were set on the jars beyond ordinary vision . . . those undiscovered, extraordinary goodies on the topmost shelves. The first volume was published in 1990 (*The Humbled Anthropologist: Tales from the Pacific*). This, also published in Ed Cook's memory, is the second volume—his original idea.

The ideas for the collection germinated over my fourteen years of friendship with Ed Cook. They derived from four essential issues which had coalesced during that junction of Ed's pilgrimage to visit old friends—a pilgrimage which Ivan Brady and I suspected was, more honestly, a farewell journey. First, Ed's great success in the classroom, especially at the undergraduate level, was due to his genuine concern for his students as participants in the anthropological experience. As a graduate student, I sat in on many of his undergraduate classes. Whether teaching an introductory cultural course, a course on the Pacific, on kinship, or on language and culture, he had a rare, engaging habit

of emphasizing a critical intellectual issue by referring to a particular personal event wherein he, a most rigorous and dedicated social scientist, had either misunderstood the situation or had screwed up in his fieldwork. Unknowingly, I stole this practice from him and soon thereafter employed similar practices in my own teaching. I have found this method of accenting an issue by displaying oneself with "egg on the face" to be most successful—not as a strategy for amusement, but as a means of providing a personalized account to complement, and often confound, a particular anthropological point.

Second, from attending national anthropological meetings for the primary purpose of spending time with Ed, I discovered another fact. During our extended social hours many of *his* friends, colleagues, and former students would join us, and I listened to humorous tales of how they had also screwed up in their fieldwork. However, as with Ed's classroom stories, these anthropologists were telling more than humorous stories. There were, in most cases, important lessons embedded in the content of their experiences. If one listened closely and paid attention to not only what was said, but also what was left unsaid, there were lessons to be learned—lessons about the anthropologist, about the people being studied, and about human experiences in a cross-cultural context. I stole these stories also and, where applicable, used them with success in my lectures.

Third, especially in teaching the introductory course in anthropology, I earlier decided not to make the mistake that I'd found evident during my undergraduate training in engineering, mathematics, and philosophy. Whether valid or not, I remain convinced that the problem which most educators have is with their approaches to teaching the particular subjects in their particular discipline. I've publicly argued in guest lectures, especially to students and professors of mathematics and computer science, that they might seriously reconsider their pedagogical approaches to the general classroom audience. If they are, as seems the case, teaching to train students to become mathematicians, or computer scientists—to become *like them*—they might be severely missing the boat. A more pragmatic and successful approach might be to teach students—who, at the undergraduate level, are more generally enrolled in these classes simply to fulfill some college-wide requirement—"what" mathematics or philosophy can teach them about such issues as problem solving, decision making, or universal social issues, and how the subject matter might further contribute to the excitement of logical thinking and a sensitivity to the vast complexities of the human situation.

Whether or not this approach has been as successful as I intend, it is how I approach my lower-division classes. I do not teach to convert students to the discipline of anthropology. I make every deliberate effort to introduce the introductory audience to "what" anthropology can teach us about others and ourselves—to help us to better understand the complex nature of the human condition, ours and others', especially

in this rapidly shrinking world. In the introductory course, the less traditional, more personal, literate, and humanistic writings of Bohannan (1966), Chagnon (1983), Hayano (1990), Lee (1969), Turnbull (1962), Ward (1989), and a few others have measurably tendered more productive seeds to the inititates to this discipline. These writings have been the honey that makes the vinegar more palatable, the humanistic interlude that breathes life into the otherwise sterile, theoretical, and methodological concepts in anthropology. Where, in anthropology, beyond the classroom, do our students discover the social scientists to be the humanists that they are—*someone* so much more than a reference in a text or an author in a collection of readings?

The fourth feature behind the form and substance of this project has a direct relationship to the enterprise of ethnographic fieldwork. I had spent approximately fifteen years living outside the United States—not as an anthropologist, but in various capacities on sailing and motor vessels. I'd prefer to forget many of the personally embarrassing encounters in foreign places but cannot. Too many times, especially when younger, I found myself screwing up on someone else's turf—doing something that I believed proper in my own country, but later learning that the behavior was quite inappropriate in the host's arena. As the years passed and as I grew (hopefully) wiser, I developed a strategy whenever finding myself in new places: Keep my big mouth shut and drink a lot of water!

I had to learn to not impose my behavioral rules and expectations on others. I had to learn *how to learn* about others instead of innocently-but-inconsiderately operating within a set of preconceptions based on my own Western value orientations. I was, after all, a guest in someone else's home.

Once I began to open my eyes, to develop a sensitivity to the contrasting worlds of my new friends in South American jungles or South Pacific islands, I, in turn, began to learn another important fact. From all the traveling, from these wondrous experiences, I was indeed learning about others but, more importantly, I was also learning about myself, about my own society's values, and about my place in a world of differing realities.

The focus of this and the first volume is not on the significant "others" that are so important in the ethnographic enterprise. The focus is foremost on ourselves as anthropologists and the lessons we've learned in living with and trying to understand others.

The projects did not turn out entirely as Ed Cook and I had envisioned. First of all, Ed died five months after we began the project. In working to complete a memorial to a special friend, I discovered that many of his colleagues did not wish to commit to writing those precious stories they had shared in a private forum. Second, in the seven years it has taken to complete these two editorial projects, I've discovered that, unlike Ed in his fieldwork and me in my sailing adventures, most

anthropologists haven't really screwed up as much as we thought, or else they have chosen not to write about these experiences.

However, as will become evident from the readings in both collections, we learn that much of what anthropologists have learned about themselves and others was totally unanticipated. These lessons, none for which their academic training had prepared them, remain, perhaps, the most memorable and critical lessons of ethnographic fieldwork. They are lessons about *us,* which we learned from *them.*

The longer I labored with the tasks of editing both volumes, the more manifest became the sense of underlying structures. These were not stories about screwing up in the field. These were tales of human experiences where, in most instances, the ethnographic stranger stumbled into a situation where he or she learned something for which he or she had not been trained or prepared. And, in the enterprise, important lessons were learned: lessons about the contact culture, about the ethnographer, about the ethnographic process. Moreover, in nearly all cases, there were significant contrastive lessons learned about issues of cross-cultural humanity and humanness, derived more often than not from serendipity than from the deliberate practice of social science.

For the reader expecting Indiana Jones sans clothing, the title is most seriously meant, with a margin of tongue-in-cheek, to imply a different type of nakedness. Mac Marshall, or more accurately, Margery Wolf, finally hit on the perfect title for the first volume. It is from Mac's poignant introduction to *The Humbled Anthropologist* (1990:xix–xxiv) that the title for this volume derives justification. Mac compared the anthropologist to the fabled emperor who, in the fieldwork experience, may in so many instances have no clothes. We often go so very naked and childlike as strangers into unfamiliar settings, having first to learn to crawl before we can walk. And in these new worlds of bewilderment, we stumble, and fall, and sometimes cry.

It has been argued that American cultural anthropology, at least, lacks the rigorously defined methodological principles that are both traditionally and contemporarily part of archaeology, linguistics, and physical anthropology. We may be practitioners of a subdiscipline still in search of a methodology.

These collections of fieldwork experiences represent new exercises in learning, in the epistemology of fieldwork. These exercises, to reflect on Gregory Bateson's (1942) concepts of deutero-learning, apply to the ethnographic processes. We may have to learn to learn about how we learn as cultural anthropologists. Richard Feynman, in speaking of his own discipline, physics, advises, "In summary, the idea is to try to give *all* of the information to help others to judge the value of your contributions; not just the information that leads to judgment in one particular direction or another" (1985:312–313). Further, he argues:

> But this long history of learning how not to fool ourselves—of having utter scientific integrity—is, I'm sorry to say, something that we haven't specifically included in any particular course that I know of. We just hope you've caught on by osmosis.
>
> The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool. So you have to be very careful about that. After you've not fooled yourself, it's easy not to fool other scientists. You just have to be honest in a conventional way after that.

The late Nobel scientist could have been directly talking to the form and substance of these ethnographic reflections: "I would like to add something that's not essential to the science, but something I kind of believe, which is that you should not fool the layman when you're talking as a scientist." Cultural anthropology may be further advised by Feynman's critique: "If you've made up your mind to test a theory, or you want to explain some idea, you should always decide to publish it, whichever way it comes out. If we only publish results of a certain kind, we can make the argument look good. We must publish *both* kinds of results" (314).

There are many people responsible for the completion of these memorials to Edwin Aubrey Cook. The earlier, unwavering enthusiasm of Mac Marshall, Jim Watson, and Dorothy and David Counts was especially instrumental at a time when I was ready to scrap the projects in favor of a more traditional collection of ethnographic readings. Sue Pflanz-Cook, a friend since graduate school, remained close at the annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, knowing full well, especially without Ed, that I am not at all comfortable at public gatherings. My respected friend of many years, Dr. H. Z. Liu, Dean of Arts and Sciences, must be thanked for his unending confidence in me and these nontraditional projects by digging for funding to support my attendance at the annual Oceanic meetings. Jim Clifton's early commitment and editorial efforts were the cornerstones on which all of us were able to build. I'd like to thank James Funaro, Cabrillo College; Alice Pomponio, St. Lawrence University; and Miles Richardson, Louisiana State University, for their reviews of the manuscript.

Most especially, profound gratitude must be tendered to Sheryl Fullerton and Peg Adams for their willingness to gamble on publishing the Oceanic volume at a time when other publishers were interested only in this one. Debbie Cogan, Wadsworth Publishing's professional and understanding production editor, has been more help than she will ever comprehend. And, again, I owe thanks to Sherwood Keyser for his splendid work on the maps for this volume.

Finally, I'd like to thank each of those anthropologists for their patience and willingness to share their personal experiences in ethnographic fieldwork.

Phil DeVita
Plattsburgh, N.Y.

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Goy in the Promised Land; or, Murphy's Law and the Outcome of Fieldwork

JAMES ARMSTRONG

Most sociocultural anthropologists, modeling the writing of those by whom we have been trained, hide who we are and the roles we play in our research when writing for our professional colleagues. Although increasingly there are exceptions, we are often invisible, uninvolved narrators who supposedly offer objective portrayals of the cultures we study. In other settings we share the problems we encounter in the field with each other and use these adventures to spice up our lectures to students. Recently, however, we have begun to more frequently reveal the personal experiences, mistakes, and self-discovery that are the inevitable meat and potatoes of field research. *The Naked Anthropologist* belongs to this genre. It brings together a variety of articles that explore the personal side of fieldwork.

I was excited when Phil DeVita described the original project he and Ed Cook were about to begin in 1983 (DeVita 1990). I thought that accounts which focused on learning from the mistakes of fieldwork would begin to tilt the balance toward honesty in our professional presentation of self. I was sure that it would make us appear more human, while making the cultures we work in and the way we work more accessible to our students and other readers, including our colleagues. I was a bit disappointed, I must admit, by the fact that the original project was going to focus only on Pacific Ocean cultures because I would have a difficult time using it in any of my classes. Thus, when Phil told me that he was planning a second volume of articles of the same kind with no geographic limitations, I was pleased. This would be a book I could use in my classes, I thought to myself. Students would read it without much prodding or protest. They would learn about doing cultural anthropology as it really happens, full of mistakes, false starts, and accidental insights. As a result, their own beginning attempts at fieldwork wouldn't be burdened by the false ideal that there is a secret formula for successful research in anthropology.

Although many of the articles deviate from the "mistake-then-insight" scenario of the original plan for the book, this collection hangs together with its anthropologist as human being, field research as adventure, and method as accident theme. It presents anthropologists as people who don't have all of the answers and, by doing so, provides students with the message that there isn't just one right answer. And, perhaps most importantly, we can all see more clearly that the fieldwork process, doing cultural anthropology, isn't strictly formatted but rather stems from human beings interacting with other human beings.

Included in this volume are a variety of articles illustrating the ways we try to understand others along with the problems this creates. Still, the one thing that struck me most when reading this collection for the first time, was how much I had in common with the authors. It occurred to me how significant going to the field is as part of the anthropological identity.

This rite of passage is perhaps the main trial that gives us something in common, that creates a community out of a diverse group of people. We can come together, swap "tales of the field," to use Van Maanen's (1988) term, and immediately feel affinity for one another, even if we share little else. At the same time, the articles in this book build community among us, because they remind us that we do have much in common.

As I mentioned above, these articles reminded me of the ritual, coming-of-age aspects of fieldwork. In the past, not much training was given to those about to undertake the ethnographic enterprise. The prevailing attitude through the 1960s was that fieldworkers are born not trained, or that learning can take place only in the field itself. That is not to say that anthropologists went to the field unprepared; on the contrary, during this era most cultural anthropologists did everything they could to prepare themselves through reading the history and ethnography of the region to which they were going. Relevant languages were also learned when possible. But cultural anthropologists weren't prepared to do field research, except through the idealized descriptions of it in the ethnographies they read.

My training was different. During graduate school I took a year-long sequence of methodology courses designed to prepare me for fieldwork. I learned interviewing techniques, collecting genealogies, mapping, sampling, constructing questionnaires, not to mention statistical analysis, photography, field-note management, description and inference. In addition, I spoke the language and had spent a substantial amount of time in Israel with the people I hoped to study. I really can't imagine anyone better prepared to enter this rite of passage.

Thus, in the fall of 1977 I arrived in Israel full of optimism. My wife and two-year-old daughter were with me, anxious to discover why I was so enthralled with this relatively new society with ancient roots. My original plan had been to return to a kibbutz where I had worked several