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Editorial

For more than 100 years, the British Academy has held public lectures, lectures that have been cumulatively published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, which has thus provided a unique record of a century of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences.

In 2011 the Academy reviewed its lecture programme and the way that it was published. It decided that traditional print publication, within the *Proceedings* series, should be replaced by a new form of publication, an open access online journal that would meet the expectations of modern scholars and be more easily available for new readerships.¹ It also concluded that the purpose of the Academy's public lecture series—to provide a conspectus of the state of scholarship across the British Academy's disciplinary interests—would be better met if the lecture programme was extended to cover the range of subject areas in which the Academy is now interested,² and if the new *Journal of the British Academy* included not just these lectures but also additional articles, commissioned by its editors to enhance the overview of the Academy's scholarly concerns.³

In combining the best of 'old' and the 'new' methods of academic publication the *Journal* will maintain the Academy's high standards for scholarship. The *Journal* has two Editors, Professor Simon Frith, FBA (for humanities subjects) and Professor Janet Carsten, FBA (for social sciences subjects) and an **Editorial Board**, the British Academy's Publications Committee. All articles will be refereed. That said, the *Journal* is also clearly distinct from most other academic journals. It is, by design, multidisciplinary; articles will cover a great variety of topics using a great variety of approaches, drawing on methodologies and concepts from across the humanities and social sciences. We therefore hope and expect that the *Journal's* readers will be interested in reading articles from outside their usual disciplinary expertise, and will find such articles an illuminating and effective way of getting a sense of scholarship in other disciplines. With this in mind, Academy lectures are expected to be both significant for

¹The *Proceedings of the British Academy* series itself continues in existence, publishing themed volumes of essays in the humanities and social sciences.

²A list of the various lecture series contributing to the *Journal* can be found at www.britac.ac.uk/journal/lecture_series.cfm.

³Publication in the *Journal of the British Academy* is by invitation. Unsolicited articles are not accepted.

specialists, and accessible to scholars in different disciplines and to a broader readership; articles commissioned by the *Journal's* editors will have the same brief.

We are well aware that what is required here—to present specialist research in a way that is illuminating for both specialist and non-specialist audiences and readers—is a challenge, but this is the challenge with which the British Academy has always been concerned and the *Journal* is thus rooted in the Academy's best traditions. At the same time, we will be taking advantage of the technical facilities of digital publication. All articles will be published as downloadable PDF files and each article will be posted as soon as it is ready for publication. A 'volume' of the *Journal* will be composed of the articles that have been posted online in the course of a calendar year. The *Journal* will also make the most of the opportunities offered by online technology—for example, increased use of colour and the possibility of supplementing an article text with supporting data or with a recording of the original lecture. Indeed, in some instances, a video or audio recording may stand as the 'record' of a lecture.

The Academy is committed to open access dissemination of its lectures, and all articles published in the *Journal of the British Academy* are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. For readers who still value hardcopy publication, the text content of each 'volume' will also be made available in an annual print publication, purchasable through Oxford University Press.

This marks an exciting new stage in the British Academy's long history of disseminating scholarship. We welcome you to the *Journal of the British Academy*.

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Andaman Islanders and Polar Eskimos: emergent ethnographic subjects *c.*1900

Radcliffe-Brown Lecture in Social Anthropology
read 24 October 2012 by

KIRSTEN HASTRUP

Fellow of the Academy

Abstract: In this lecture the focus is on A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's ethnographic work, notably his fieldwork in the Andaman Islands in 1906–8. About the same time, the Danish ethnographer Knud Rasmussen studied the Polar Eskimos in North-West Greenland. While sharing a general quest for ethnographic description of little-known groups, they styled their fieldwork in different ways, saw colonialism in different terms, adhered to different knowledge traditions, and not least, worked in different natural environments. This resulted in very distinct portraits of 'the natives', which were to cast long shadows into the present, within which the history of first encounters is firmly embedded.

Keywords: ethnographic fieldwork, spatial history, colonial encounters, narrative styles.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology took off from an enlightenment tradition of empirical studies of the world, and aimed at systematic classification and general understanding of its workings. While many proto-ethnographic observations and descriptions made by naturalists, merchants or missionaries circulated well before 1900, it was not until then that systematic long-term ethnographic observation, took off. As stated by Tim Ingold in his Radcliffe-Brown lecture in 2007, anthropology and ethnography are not the same thing, even if closely connected in our practice; while anthropology pursues 'the great questions of social life', 'ethnographers describe, principally in writing, how the people of some place and some time perceive the world and how they act in it' (Ingold 2008: 90).

On this definition, my two main characters certainly qualify as ethnographers, both making their first contributions shortly after 1900, through their engagements with particular fields that were as wide apart as were their inspirations and ambitions. The first one, of course, is Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) to whose memory this series of lectures is dedicated, and whose first fieldwork took place in the Andaman Islands in 1906–8 (Radcliffe-Brown 1922). He is a very well known figure in British and international anthropology, and often seen as the key figure in modernising the discipline (Kuper 1977a; Ingold 2008). The second is Knud Rasmussen (1879–1933), a largely self-taught Danish ethnographer of the Eskimo peoples of Greenland and Arctic North America, who were to prove the intimate linguistic and cultural connection between all Eskimo groups from Greenland, through Canada and Alaska, and onto the eastern tip of Siberia. Among other things, this was to earn him an honorary doctorate at St Andrews University in 1927, at the time when the Norwegian explorer and statesman Fridtjof Nansen was Lord Rector. However, his first substantial ethnographic work was the book about the Polar Eskimos, a tiny group of people (counting 250 souls) in the far North Western corner of Greenland, among whom he sojourned in 1903–4 (Rasmussen 1905; 1906; 1908). This region was later to become known as the Thule District, invoking ancient images of a place where partly mythical northern barbarians lived (Hastrup 2007).

Located in the Indian Ocean and the High Arctic, respectively, the two men's fields were not only wide apart, they were also known to different degrees and through rather different historical trajectories. I shall argue that the historical difference deeply infiltrated later ethnographic perception of the localities studied. Beyond the individual peculiarities and regional differences, my hope is to show how distinct ethnographic subjects emerged in the course of ethnographic writing, and how the ethnographic moments, as proposed by Marilyn Strathern (1999), are replete with previous encounters and perceptions. Even today, I argue, we seem to be caught up with the particular ethnographic subjects that grew out of the first (professional) ethnographic descriptions.

In pre-anthropology times there were few terms by which to classify people. Mankind was by canonical standards something in itself, defying incorporation into natural systems. In the 18th century, much to the consternation of the Pope, Linnaeus included people in his classification of animals, and invented the term *homo sapiens* (Pratt 1992: 32). By 1758, *homo sapiens* had been divided into six classes summarised by Mary Louise Pratt in the following way:

Wild Man. Four-footed, mute, hairy.

American. Copper-colored, choleric, erect. Hair black, straight, thick; nostrils wide; face harsh; beard scanty; obstinate, content, free. Paints himself with fine red lines. Regulated by customs.

European. Fair, sanguine, brawny. Hair yellow, brown, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by laws.

Asiatic. Sooty, melancholy, rigid. Hair black; eyes dark; severe, haughty, covetous. Covered with loose garments. Governed by opinions.

African. Black, phlegmatic, relaxed. Hair black, frizzled, skin silky; nose flat, lips tumid; crafty, indolent, negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice.

Monster. Including dwarfs, giants and eunuchs. (Pratt 1992: 32)

As Pratt observes, such categorisation of humans is explicitly comparative. What is more, clearly social values and political facts creep in upon the physical appearance—naturalising the idea of European supremacy in the process. A hundred years later, Lyell and Darwin put forward a theory of unity of the human race, which was still disputed on ethnographic grounds, however, as we can read in an article published in the *Transactions of the Ethnographical Society of London* (Crawfurd 1865: 60).

The two different peoples portrayed by Radcliffe-Brown and Rasmussen were also only known in rather general, racial terms before the two men entered upon the scene. These pre-established images of course affected their writing, which again influenced future ethnographies, as I have experienced very forcefully myself, during recent work in North West Greenland, the very place where Rasmussen's ethnographic career began (Hastrup 2007; 2009). This raises the question of the nature of anthropological knowledge more generally, and not least how it may contribute to answering 'the great questions of social life' (Ingold 2008: 90). The challenge is one of getting beyond simple allegations of regionalism (cf. Fardon 1990), while still being perceptive to real difference. I shall argue that the persistence of particular images has a lot to do with narrative styles, which again are favoured by particular landscapes and social forms. Elsewhere, I have suggested that in the field we move about in particular emotional topographies, loaded with past and present stories and events, as well as the features of the landscape (Hastrup 2010a).

My argument moves towards such larger questions through, first, a discussion of spatial histories as formative of distinct topographies of knowledge, featuring their own values and sensations, and second, by presenting the different methodological strategies of the two ethnographers, displaying remarkable differences in their personal engagements with people. Third, and last, I shall discuss how the narratives of the two men cemented particular views and historical realities in their featuring distinct historical

topographies. My references to their rich work are of necessity highly selective, but I hope readers will sense how, by looking closely into the makings of ethnography, one actually gets close to large questions about anthropological knowledge.

SPATIAL HISTORIES: KNOWING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

History is always in some sense spatial; it is both configured by and configures particular topographies of being and knowing. In Lucien Lefebvre's view, space is where a historical plot unfolds, while simultaneously constituted as a place by the history itself (Lefebvre 1991). This idea of a spatial history resonates with David Turnbull's notion of a 'knowledge space' as an 'interactive, contingent assemblage of space and knowledge, sustained and created by social labour' (Turnbull 2003: 4), stressing the fact that all knowledge is entrenched both in particular places and in social communities. Once established, knowledge spaces take on a kind of naturalness that tends to hide both of these features. 'Societies' and 'cultures' are equal examples of this, as are disciplines, as we have come to know them. However, these domains are best seen as located fields of practices rather than networks of concepts and statements (cf. Rouse in Turnbull 2003: 10). This certainly sits well with the practice of ethnographic fieldwork in particular conjunctures of history and space.

In both of my cases, it is clear that colonial map-making (in brief) resulted in placing and perceiving the Andaman Islands and the Thule District as frontier zones, whose inaccessibility and remoteness, when seen from the different colonial centres, were forever to be inscribed on the people living there (Vaidik 2010; Hastrup 2013c). Modern ethnographic work in both places inevitably is linked to earlier descriptions and histories (see e.g. Pandya 2007; 2009; and Hastrup 2013a). While there are very few likenesses between the Andamans in the Indian Ocean and Thule in the High Arctic, they share a feature of having been rumoured to be wild places, inhabited by equally wild people, before they became subject to ethnography. The insularity of the places was inscribed upon their inhabitants, well before the ethnographers entered the scene, as was their position in the larger scheme of peoples and its basic distinctions. Black and white, Negrito and Eskimo, were seen as natural facts. Thus, in an article on 'Wild men and beast-children' from 1863, E.B. Tylor wrote matter-of-factly: 'The native Australian and the Andaman Islanders may be taken as fairly representing the lowest state of human society of which we have any certain knowledge' (Tylor 1863: 21).

In a similar fashion, the first person to report on Polar Eskimos (before they were known by the name), labels them within a general scheme. I am referring to Captain John Ross, reporting on his voyage to the North on behalf of the British admiralty to explore a possible NW Passage in 1818. Ross did not find such a passage, but he met

some of the unknown people that dwelled in North West Greenland, far north of the Danish colonies and outside any colonial interest—while also virtually inaccessible due to the ice-packed sea. His was actually the earliest written report of an encounter with these people, whom he affectionately referred to as Arctic Highlanders—establishing his own analogy of the familiar. Ross wrote:

The origin of the Arctic Highlanders, or inhabitants of Prince Regent's Bay, is a question as yet involved in peculiar obscurity. They exist in a corner of the world by far the most secluded which has yet been discovered, and have no knowledge of anything but what originates, or is found, in their own country; nor have they any tradition of how they came to this spot, or from whence they came; having, until the moment of our arrival, believed themselves to be the only inhabitants of the universe, and that all the rest was a mass of ice. (Ross 1819: 123–4)

It is his own astonishment as well as theirs that he gives away here: How had they happened upon this godforsaken, deep-frozen land; and how could they still be so strikingly merry? When the far northern peoples again came into view with Peary's expeditions in the 1890s they were portrayed as excellent and ingenious companions, as honest, hard-working and artistically gifted—even if outwardly rather 'uncivilised'. In his brief description of the Smith-Sound Eskimos, Robert Peary stated that, 'I have merely endeavoured to sketch an outline picture which shall show this most interesting people in their true light, and do justice to the fearless, hardy, cheerful little tribe for whom I have the warmest regard' (Peary 1898: 479, n. 1). He went on to suggest that there was an untouched mine awaiting work in this Arctic Oasis, and over and again he stressed the kindness and ingenuity of the people. Yet in his introduction, even he attempts to stand back and *position* the group within a larger scheme:

Scattered along the shores of the Arctic oasis already described, this little tribe, or perhaps more properly speaking, family of Eskimos—for they number but two hundred and fifty-three in all, men, women, and children—is found maintaining its existence in complete isolation and independence, under the utmost stress of savage environment. Without government; without religion; without money or any standard of value; without written language; without property, except clothing and weapons; their food nothing but meat, blood, and blubber; without salt, or any substance of vegetable origin; their clothing the skins of birds and animals; almost their only two objects in life, something to eat and something with which to clothe themselves, and their sole occupation the struggle for these objects; with habits and conditions of life hardly above the animal, these people seem at first to be very near the bottom scale of civilisation; yet closer acquaintance shows them to be quick, intelligent, ingenious, and thoroughly human. (Peary 1898: 479–81)

Peary spent many years there on and off in the period 1891–1909, while he mapped northern Greenland, mostly in the interest of finding the best possible place to head

out for the North Pole (and succeeding in 1909), and he depended totally upon their skills for his survival (first) and (later) his success. He stresses that this simple, cheerful, and hospitable people surpasses any other known people in endurance, and 'in their ingenuity and the intelligence displayed in making use, to the fullest extent, of every one of the few possibilities of their country which can assist them to live and be comfortable, they are, in my opinion, ahead of any other aboriginal race. Of arts, sciences, culture, manufactures, and such other adjuncts of civilization, they know nothing' (Peary 1898: 492).

If insularity and lack of civilisation were thus constant features in descriptions of the Arctic Highlanders (or Smith Sound Eskimos), they were also attributed to the Andaman Islanders. The latter had come into view at a much earlier time, however, and their fate had been to be originally perceived as hostile and barely human, where the Eskimos were mostly seen as friendly, humorous, intelligent, and totally dependable by disposition. Thus, when Radcliffe-Brown met the Andaman Islanders, they were already well-known savages of the Indian Ocean, who had only recently been (partly) tamed by the British.

Descriptions go back to early Arabian travellers and to Marco Polo. Radcliffe-Brown quotes Marco Polo in his introduction, setting the scene: 'Angaman is a very large island, not governed by a king. The inhabitants are idolaters, and are a most brutish and savage race, having heads, eyes and teeth resembling those of the canine species. Their dispositions are cruel, and every person, not being their own nation, whom they can lay their hands upon, they kill and eat' (Marco Polo, in Radcliffe-Brown 1922: 7; see also Vaidik 2010: 18). Marco Polo never visited the islands, but rumours had the islands feared and best avoided. In the fourteenth century, John Mandeville continued the misanthropic depiction of cannibals, and added that in one of these islands 'there is a race of great stature, like giants, foul and horrible to look at; they have one eye only, in the middle of their foreheads. They eat raw flesh and raw fish' (quoted by Vaidik 2010: 18). Here they fall out of humanity proper and into the category of monsters.

Among the persistent images throughout the centuries is the view of the Andaman Islanders as cannibals. Edward Horace Man, whose description of the Andaman Islanders from 1885 is the baseline of Radcliffe-Brown's work, suggests that 'the origin of the belief . . . may possibly be traceable to the inveterate hostility which they have manifested towards all strangers approaching their shores, but for which abundant excuse can be found in the accounts given by Capt. Miller of the malpractices of the Malay and Chinese traders who visited these islands in search of *bêche de mer* and edible birds' nests' (Man 1932: xviii). The reference to Captain Miller indicates the re-entrance of the British upon the scene, and this was the beginning of a gradual redemption of the islanders' humanity and morals.

The first British encounters had been less embracing. In 1789 the islands were annexed by the British in a general move to conquer the sea and the trade routes towards the east, and also to establish a penal colony. This was done after a survey made by Lieutenants Colebrooke and Blair; Colebrooke claimed that the islanders were ‘a race of men the least civilized, perhaps, in the world; being nearer to a state of nature than any people we read of’ (in Anderson 2011: 70). Direct encounters were few, however, and when they occurred they seem to have been marked by hostility, and apparently only by downright kidnapping did it seem possible to study them more closely, and to measure these humans. The details are many, but lack of space prevents me from delving into them. I shall just note that in the first British move towards the islands, c.700 Indian convicts were transported there between 1793 and 1795. Already in 1796 the colony was abandoned, however, due to sickness and immense death tolls on the infested islands. Here the killer was tropical humidity and insects, while it had been pack ice and cold in the early 19th century expeditions to the Baffin Bay, in search of the North West Passage.

The second British attempt at colonising the islands was more successful, although not based on any particular kindness towards the inhabitants. In 1856, the commissioner of Burma, Henry Hopkinson, wrote about the magnificent position of the islands, its many fine harbours, and the unmistakable fertility of the soil, and found it ‘astonishing’ that,

instead of offering a refuge to the miserable storm-driven vessel, they should be a snare in her path leading to utter destruction, and in place of engaging the enterprise, and furnishing subsistence to thousands of colonists, they should be left in the possession of a handful of degenerate Negroes, degraded in habits and intelligence to a level little above the beasts of the forest with which they dwell. (Hopkinson 1856; in Anderson 2011: 71)

Colonisation was resumed soon after, when the mutiny in India made the need for new penal institutions urgent, but also clearly with a view to other colonial interests (see Anderson 2007). Soon after, a new wish to establish friendly relations with the natives was voiced by more enlightened officers, as we saw above. Thus, the modern, colonial history of the Andaman Islands effectively dates back to 1857, as noted by E.H. Man (1932: xix). It was E.H. Man’s father who in January 1885 took possession of the Andaman Islands in the name of Queen Victoria, and took charge of the penal colony. It was also he who urged his son to make a proper description of the people, which was first published in (successive issues of) *Man. Journal of the Anthropological Institute* in 1885 (and later reprinted as a monograph published by the now *Royal Institute* in 1932). E.H. Man was quite taken by the scenery of the islands:

The natural beauty of the scenery of the Andamans never fails to awaken the admiration of every visitor, and has been deservedly eulogised by various writers, one of whom (Prof. Ball) says: 'Of all the places I have seen in Europe, Killarney can alone convey an idea of these scenes. The Blue waters, the luxuriant emerald green vegetation down to the margin of the coast, and the passing showers which brighten all the aspects of nature, have their counterpart there.' (Man 1932: xvi)

This is clearly the vision from the ocean, clad in an analogy from home. From within, the landscape was far more forbidding, as the early colonisers had experienced. In fact, the two different landscapes made Radcliffe-Brown distinguish between coast-dwellers and forest dwellers, the latter being less nomadic in their habits than the former (1922: 30). 'One of the reasons for this is that as they cannot convey their belongings from one place to another by canoe, but must carry them overland, the moving of a camp is a more tiresome business with them than it is with the coast-dwellers' (*ibid.*). This is not so surprising in itself, but what is lacking in his discussion is whether they are actually two distinct groups, or whether everybody moves about. In his introduction to the monograph, Radcliffe-Brown lists the names of various groups, or tribes, and refers to a map from 1858, and to a note made by Colebrooke in 1790 (1922: 13–15), but it is unclear whether they are still relevant. The question is raised indirectly, when Radcliffe-Brown admits that it 'is not possible to give accurately the area occupied by each tribe, as the boundaries are difficult to discover' (1922: 15). He notes that in 1858, the estimated population of all the islands was about 5,500 (*ibid.*: 18–19).

In 1901, a census was made, enumerating some 625 natives of the Great Andaman and 1,257 on the four other islands, and in discussing these numbers we hear about the movements he himself made on the islands, and we implicitly understand that Radcliffe-Brown hardly ventured inland on Great Andaman, but mostly talked to people in the Port Blair region. He claims that he saw a total of 500 natives at different times (1922: 18), and in small slippages of language, referring to the 'friendly Andamanese' he worked with in the more heavily colonised part of the Andaman Islands, we understand that his subjects were mostly people coming and going in the colony, and to some extent mixing with the prisoners. In actual fact, he seems to rely rather heavily on earlier works, such as the one made by E.H. Man, to which I referred above (see also Kuper 1975: 58).

At the time, the Andamanese hostility or resistance to the British had gradually broken down; it became increasingly difficult to escape to the inland areas that were gradually turned into forestry reserves and cultivated in other ways, and the original inhabitants were incorporated into the labour regime as were the prisoners. In the process, their numbers were decimated to the point of extinction, not least due to syphilis, a new killer disease. It was at that moment that proper recording began, and

when the fierce natives were narratively tamed. The historian Aparna Vaidik writes (in 2010):

With time, several conscientious officials who witnessed the destruction of the tribes took it upon themselves to document the lives and mores of the Andamanese. E.H. Man, M.V. Portman and R.C. Temple were the earliest to get down to this task. By the early twentieth century, ethnographers and anthropologists such as A.R. Radcliffe-Brown also made their way into the Settlement. The anthropological enterprise became the handmaiden of empire. Thereafter the presence of the Andamanese in the *space* that the British created came to be defined by their quarantined existence within the confines of academia. (Vaidik 2010: 130)

The allegation of anthropology being the handmaiden of empire is not new, but it is somewhat surprising that academic anthropology is seen to confine the islanders even further than colonial history itself. Truly, anthropology added new weight to the spatial history, but one could argue that it was so much part of it that it is difficult to uphold a distinction. Both colonial administrators and anthropologists were parties to a spatial history that affected them all. Radcliffe-Brown certainly saw no conflict of interest with colonialism, and explicitly saw anthropology ‘as a study which has an immediate practical value in connection with administration and education of backward peoples’ (1929, in Radcliffe-Brown 1958: 39). Such practical value was entrenched in his view of anthropology as a comparative sociology, aiming at discovering general laws; this was seen in opposition to Boas’s historical method, which Radcliffe-Brown saw as ‘ethnology’, best kept apart from social anthropology (Radcliffe-Brown 1951; in Kuper 1977a: 53–4).

Boas provides the cue for letting our second protagonist enter the scene in the Arctic, where he was destined to study the Eskimos, pioneered by Boas himself (1888). In one of his writings, Knud Rasmussen poetically says: ‘From the bottom of my heart I bless the fate that had me born at a time where polar research by means of dog sledges had not yet become outdated’ (1932: ii). His chosen mode of transport was not only a means to get from one place to another in the ice and snow-covered landscape, but also to inscribe himself into the High Arctic topography, in a way similar to that of the Eskimos themselves. From this position it was impossible to keep an external perspective upon the people. For better or worse, Knud Rasmussen was as much part of the environment as the Eskimos were, and by travelling like them and with them, he came to share their sense of place (Hastrup 2006). This meant that his ethnographic work was to contribute to, and elaborate on, the spatial history of the locals rather than the colonisers.

In 1905, Knud Rasmussen published his first book, *Nye Mennesker* in Danish (‘New People’), based on his two years’ expedition (1902–4) to the northernmost settlements in Greenland, the land of the Arctic Highlanders or the Smith Sound

Eskimos (Rasmussen 1905). The book appeared in an English translation together with another early work, *Under Nordenvindens Svøbe* ('Under the Lash of the North Wind'), from 1906, in which material from other parts of Greenland was also presented (Rasmussen 1908). In the preface, he writes how the inspiration for the expedition derived from a tale, told to him by an old Greenlandic woman, about how 'far away North, at the end of the world, there lived a people who dressed in bearskins and ate raw flesh. Their country was always shut in by ice, and the daylight never reached over the tops of their high fjelds. Whoever wished to go there, must travel with the South wind, right up to the Lord of the wild northern gales' (Rasmussen 1908: xix). If Knud Rasmussen was driven by a wish to discover an unknown people, by referring to the old woman's tale—as told to himself—he had already incorporated it into his own story. It was he who named these bearskin-clad people 'Polar Eskimos', and in that sense, he discovered and defined them in one move. Yet, the tiny Eskimo population in the region was not totally unknown to westerners when Rasmussen arrived in 1903, as I have hinted at above.

Apart from the reports made by Captain Ross in 1818 and Robert Peary in the 1890s, Eivind Astrup—who took part in Peary's earliest expeditions—had also written a whole book about the Polar Eskimos, giving a vivid and generous portrait on their intelligence and skills. His book was published first in Norwegian (which was almost the same as Danish at the time), under the title 'Among the Neighbours of the North Pole' (1895); when it was later translated into English, its title had—significantly—become *With Peary near the Pole* (Astrup 1898). The titles were catering for different markets, which by the end of the nineteenth century had become increasingly influenced by the sensationalist press in America (and Britain), while not yet so in Scandinavia (Riffenburgh 1993). The development of the press entailed that heroism increasingly adhered to Arctic expeditions. No doubt this was also an implicit feature in the general emphasis on 'first encounters'. Having finally ventured upon human dwellings, Astrup thus told about the first meeting on 23 July 1891:

Of the eleven inhabitants of the place, the men immediately came down to the beach to meet us, whilst the women and children cautiously kept in the rear. A couple of us involuntarily extended our hands towards them in friendly greeting; but to our surprise, instead of grasping them they stood staring at us, without the slightest idea of what such an advance should signify. Soon, however, they saw that we intended well, and then they gave us a warm welcome. (Astrup 1898: 73–4)

Astrup adds that 'it was evident that they had never been in touch with the civilised world, or seen a vessel, which was to their eyes most remarkable' (1898: 74). There are significant echoes of John Ross here, becoming more conspicuous in the ensuing descriptions of the filthiness and general appearance of the Eskimos. The thickness of

Astrup's ethnographic description far exceeds Ross's, however. In conclusion of a lengthy discussion of their sociality, and their natural good disposition, Astrup says: 'It may be safely said that liberty is the guiding principle among these happy citizens; not that liberty which is bounded by the strict letter of the law, but liberty as complete as one could hope for in this world, the liberty of mutual confidence' (Astrup 1898: 290).

When Knud Rasmussen published his book about the New People, he certainly under-communicated the fact that others had been there before him, even if it is evident that earlier accounts weave themselves into his imagery and stories (and he does mention Astrup in passing). While explicitly framing his narrative by the old woman's tale and his own dream, in actual fact he was as much guided by earlier accounts. He knew *of* the new people, before he met them. When, finally, after an extremely demanding journey on their sledges across the dreaded Melville Bay, which had cut off these people for centuries, he and his Greenlandic companion, Jørgen Brønlund, spotted a black dot in the distance, and it gradually grew into a sledge, he relates:

We were half mad with delight, and could only call out each other's names. Speed signal! The dogs drop their tails and prick up their ears. We murmur the signal again between our teeth, and the snow swirls up beneath their hind legs. A biting wind cuts us in the face. At last! at last! people, other people, the new people—the Polar Eskimos! (Rasmussen 1908: 6)

Incidentally, they were not yet Polar Eskimos when Rasmussen met them; this was a name that he bestowed upon them in his book. The Eskimo couple first seen on the sledge were clad in bearskin and fox and met them with curiosity and astonishment. They were perfectly able to understand each other's language (Knud Rasmussen being fluent in West-Greenlandic from his upbringing until the age of 12 in his father's vicarage further south), and when introductions had been made, the man turned to his wife and exclaimed: 'White men! white men! . . . White men have come on a visit' (Rasmussen 1908: 7). If Knud Rasmussen did not know what to expect, the Eskimos did. The 'first' encounter was understood through received categories of mimesis and alterity on both sides (Taussig 1993).

Let us read Knud Rasmussen's first impressions on approaching the dwellings at Agpat where his first new friends took him; when they arrived within calling distance, the man from the sledge screamed out a deafening 'White men! white men!'

The people, who had been moving briskly about among the houses, stood still, and the children left off their play.

'White men! white men!' repeated the young fellows who had joined us. Our dogs drooped their tails and pricked up their ears as a many-tongued roar from the land reached us. And then, like a mountain slide, the whole swarm rushed down to the

shore, where we had pulled up—a few old grey-haired men and stiff-jointed old crones, young men and women, children who could hardly toddle, all dressed alike in these fox and bear-skin furs, which create such an extraordinarily barbaric first impression. Some came with long knives in their hands, with bloodstained arms and upturned sleeves, having been in the midst of flaying operations when we arrived, and all this produced a very savage effect; at the moment it was difficult to believe that these ‘savages,’ ‘the neighbours of the North Pole,’ as Astrup called them, were ever likely to become one’s good, warm friends. (Rasmussen 1908: 9–10)

They did become friends, however, and I would venture that it happened instantaneously; from his unpublished diaries, there is no doubt that he saw them eye-to-eye the minute he met them, and he mused about how to present them, and not least the problem of finding a title for the book that could convey how ‘the Polar Eskimos are a free people, living in an un-possessed, free country, *outside of any law*’. (Diary from *Den danske literære ekspedition til Grønland*, 1902–4, book 7, unpaginated; The Royal Library, Copenhagen). Rasmussen felt compelled to underscore their unknownness and potential wildness to attract readers who otherwise, and for the first time, would be able to read about Eskimos as individual and impressive humans—and *New People* was the choice made. More generally, I want to note that he began ‘writing’ long before he sat down to it.

It may be that lawlessness was seen as a more general feature of primitive society at the time, but what is striking about Knud Rasmussen’s work is his deep respect for Eskimo social life outside the law, for which Astrup’s book might have prepared him. They lived in blissful freedom, he seemed to think, while also knowing the limitations put upon it by nature itself. An example is provided by his description of the old bear hunter Sorqaq, who declared one morning that a man who idled about the house when spring had arrived was wasting his life. Consequently, he called his dogs and harnessed them to his sledge, and prepared to take off travelling and hunting.

‘It has come to pass that a man starts on his travels!’ he called abruptly in at a window: that is the Polar Eskimo’s farewell. ‘Great Sorqaq is going!’ echoed from within, and the people rushed to accompany him as far as the ice.

‘Without a wife—old man’s fashion!’ one called jestingly after him.

‘Quite right! Old men are always satisfied with the women they happen upon. And where men are gathered together, there is pretty well always a woman as well,’ retorted old Sorqaq, with a laugh. Then he swung his whip high over his head. The dogs sprang yapping across the ice and tore off in a playful gallopade. Soon the sledge was out of sight.

Happy Sorqaq! Thou wast born with an energy that will never let thee rest. Thou must live travelling because thou canst not stand always and every day to return to the pen. The domestic animal nature has never formed part of thy disposition.

The world is large that men may take it in possession. And so, when the traveling fever comes over thee, then do thou fling thyself on thy sledge, lord of the day, master of thy dogs! (Rasmussen 1908: 42–3)

The reported freedom and bliss should be seen against the stark poverty in which the Polar Eskimos found themselves in early 20th century; Marcel Mauss reports (on the basis of collected evidence from all available sources) that this particular group of Eskimos was exposed to more hazards than anyone, and that their material culture had declined considerably, due to a long period of packed ice, which had walled them in and prevented any driftwood from reaching them (Mauss 1979). This destitution had been somewhat relieved by Peary, who had brought rifles and ammunition that allowed them to hunt more efficiently, and it was the main inspiration for Knud Rasmussen to establish a permanent Danish presence in the region (Rasmussen 1921).

The great paradox in the life of this freedom-loving, moving ethnographer is actually that he was the one to finally ‘colonise’ the Polar Eskimos—who until then had lived in an unclaimed region of Greenland. He tried to persuade the Danish state to extend their colonies to the far North, but that was of no interest, access being far too complicated and the gains non-existent. So he took it upon himself to establish a colony, in terms of a mission and a trading post in 1910. This was the Thule Station, by which the primary ethnographic ‘conquest’, if you wish, was definitively lifted out of the mode of exploration and expedition, and into the mode of colonisation and a more professional ethnographic interest. It was also the moment, when Ultima Thule finally found a fixed place on the map.

The historical moment itself fuelled two contradictory trends in Knud Rasmussen’s own writings, one of nostalgia for aboriginal man, another of modernist mission. The latter was epitomised in the Thule Station, allegedly designed to help the Polar Eskimos make the transition from an isolated hunting community to a modern society. The means were Christianity, trade, modern technical equipment, health care and local laws (Rasmussen 1921). The Thule Station and the profits from the fur trade were meant to fulfil this ambition. The profits also financed most of Rasmussen’s seven Thule expeditions, of which the Fifth Thule Expedition (1921–4)—charting the links between the various Eskimo groups from Greenland across Canada to Alaska—is the best known to anthropologists (Rasmussen 1925–6). As observed by Johannes Fabian for central African explorations, once stations—however scientific and friendly—were established, the political relations between hosts and guests changed; at the station ‘exploration reached the end of the road and turned into colonization’ (Fabian 2000: 48).

Looking back upon the two ethnographers’ appropriation of their fields, Radcliffe-Brown arrived in a colonised place with a long and complex history of hostility and bad press, to which he added his own observations to those of Portman and Man