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**ANTHROPOLOGY  
&  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY**



*Edited by*  
**JUDITH OKELY &  
HELEN CALLAWAY**

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## **Anthropology and autobiography**

Social anthropology, more than any other discipline in the humanities and the social sciences, has developed the practice of intensive fieldwork by a single individual. Clearly, the 'race', nationality, gender, age and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material, yet the notion of autobiography within anthropology is regarded by some anthropologists as mere narcissism.

This volume challenges that view by presenting detailed autobiographical accounts in the context of fieldwork and relationships with the people encountered. From a cross-cultural perspective, the contributors examine their work among peoples in Africa, Japan, the Caribbean, Greece, Shetland, England, indigenous Australia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and provide unique insights into the fieldwork, autobiography and textual critique of anthropologists. The collection makes a stimulating contribution to current controversial debates about reflexivity and the political responsibility of the anthropologist who, as participant, has traditionally made only stylised appearances in the academic text. The contributors show that, like fieldwork, the process of writing and the creation of the final text involve a series of choices which depend on the selective interests of the ethnographer: monographs, often presented and read as definitive and timeless, are in fact selective and historically contingent.

*Anthropology and autobiography* will appeal to students and teachers in the social sciences, especially those interested in ethnographical approaches to the self, reflexivity, 'qualitative' methodology, and the production of texts.



# Anthropology and autobiography

Edited by Judith Okely and  
Helen Callaway



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# Preface

*Judith Okely and Helen Callaway*

The chapters in this book emerge from the Association of Social Anthropologists' Annual Conference held at the University of York in 1989. The theme was the same as the ensuing title of the book; *Anthropology and autobiography*. Contributors were invited to consider one or more of the following themes:

- 1 the anthropologist as fieldworker;
- 2 the individual member of the specific culture;
- 3 the anthropologist as writer.

Social anthropology, more than any other discipline in the humanities and the social sciences, has developed the practice of intensive fieldwork by a single individual, sometimes in collaboration with a spouse. The implications of this unique experience have not been fully theorised. Yet the 'race', nationality, gender, age, and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material. Contrary to the claim that reflexivity has been incorporated into the discipline, there are few published examples. Some have begun to appear in the US. Otherwise, autobiographical accounts have been split off into novels, secreted under pseudonyms or in diaries. Alternatively, accounts appear as imagined heroism or are popularised as comic yarns for a readership indifferent to ethnography.

Participant observation involves either close or superficial rapport with a variety of individuals. Their specificity is often lost or generalised in the standard monograph which tends to present the society through the overarching authority of the named author. Increasing interest in autobiographical narratives (or life histories often reprocessed as biographies) reveals the power of the individual voice.

In the construction of the final ethnography, not only are the voices of many others concealed, but also that of the author. The occasional 'I' inserted in the text gives, as has been suggested, authorial authority but masks the intellectual and experiential biography of the ethnographer. Like fieldwork, the process of writing and the creation of the final text involve a series of choices which depend on the selective interests of the ethnographer.

There are ways of making these more explicit to show how a monograph is created. Specialists in literary texts who have begun to re-examine ethnographies as texts ignore the experiential knowledge and practice of field-work. Their work, moreover, does not emerge from lived relationships in the cross-cultural encounter.

The themes overlapped and extended certain strands from previous ASA conferences, namely those producing *Semantic Anthropology* (Parkin 1982) and *Anthropology at Home* (Jackson 1987). The words by Edmund Leach at the 1987 ASA conference effectively launched the next but one when he declared:

There can be no future for tribal ethnography of a purportedly objective kind. Ethnographers must admit the reflexivity of their activities; they must become autobiographical. But with this changed orientation, ethnographers should be able to contribute to the better understanding of historical ethnography. (1989: 45)

The papers and discussions pursued the social construction of subjectivity, identity, the fragility and intersubjective origins of material and the false line between poetics and politics. The sessions of paired papers brought out revealing juxtapositions and reciprocal insights. Many refractions of self emerged: the self as a resource for making sense of others; plural identities; gendered awareness; age and transitions when returning at later dates to the same place and people, themselves changed; bodily memory; dreams and reinterpretations; the personal as political and also as theoretical. Again, as is customary within the discipline, some anthropologists gave, in oral discussion, revealing autobiographical accounts which helped to locate their ethnographies. Although prepared to make these personalised interventions to an audience of over a hundred, they did not consider them relevant for academic publication.

Analysing relations with individuals encountered in fieldwork raised sensitive questions. What was an appropriate term for an assistant working with an anthropologist over a long period? The term 'informant' was inadequate. 'Friend' was problematic, as some of the essays in this volume reveal. Other words proved unsatisfactory or misleading. Participants recalled moments of misguided perceptions and mutual misunderstandings which themselves produced powerful insights. As this volume confirms, the necessity for hearing others' voices and other forms of autobiography is none the less through the mediation of the anthropologist as author.

Along with multiple selves and others, the topic of multiple texts emerged: diaries; fieldnotes; journals of informants; letters to and from the field; autobiographies and novels by individuals; local histories; and indigenous social science. The point was made that reflexivity was not carried through to the production of texts. Textual debates risked being too vaguely situated; poetics without politics and devoid of power relations. Monographs have too often been presented, then read as definitive and timeless, rather than selective and

historically contingent. Ethnography requires a personal lens, its historicity made explicit.

Political dimensions of reflexivity took the forefront with questions of what changes occur when ethnographies are read by the people they portray and 'informants' take part in anthropological meetings. One participant suggested that the recognition of shared meanings during fieldwork needed to be extended to the production of texts; she had sent her monograph back to the people for possible revision before publication. Another participant said that she wrote for a readership in the dominant racist society to expose their treatment of a persecuted minority.

If the chapters in this book attest to the vibrant cross-currents of discussion, they cannot convey the wit and laughter that enlivened the four days of the conference. There were also passionate disagreements. For some the notion of autobiography within the social sciences is still deeply threatening. Autobiography was also confused with self-aggrandisement, despite the evidence to the contrary from many of the papers. One participant commented afterwards that an ASA conference provides an unusual forum for debate and open disagreement because only one session is organised at a time. Those who disagree with a specific theme cannot avoid hearing the detailed analysis. Those with shared assumptions have to learn about the opposition.

Besides the usual publishers' displays, a photographic exhibition was mounted of anthropologists and their hosts in the field. We thank Pat Caplan, Joy Hendry, Margaret Kenna, Roland Littlewood and Paul Spencer for these. As is usual at these events, more papers were presented than those included here. Owing to publishers' constraints, there was not adequate space. Some of the papers included had to be rigorously pared down. Others were in any case withdrawn for publication elsewhere. We thank Anne Akeroyd, Haim Hazan, Tanya Luhrman, Ian Edgar, Judith Ennew and Alison James for their excellent and original contributions. We are grateful to those who chaired sessions: Peter Riviere, Parminder Bhachu, Rosemary Firth, Raymond Firth, Claire Wenger, Jerry Eades, Jonathan Webber, Valdo Pons and Shirley Ardener; and to discussants Elizabeth Croll, Ladislav Holy, Malcolm Young, Marilyn Strathern, Lidia Sciana, Nick Allen, Joke Schrijvers, Elizabeth Tonkin and Adam Kuper. Special thanks must go to David Parkin for highlighting key issues and integrating themes of self/lives/ and text (derived from the etymology of auto-bio-graphy).

Our warmest thanks are due to Anne Akeroyd who worked for many months as local organiser to provide congenial conditions for this lively meeting. Finally, we thank Heather Gibson for her encouraging and patient support for this project from its inception through to publication.

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# Chapter 1

## Anthropology and autobiography

### Participatory experience and embodied knowledge

*Judith Okely*

This collection is not concerned with the autobiographies of individual academics who *happen* to be anthropologists. It asks questions about the links between the anthropologist's experience of fieldwork, other cultures, other notions of autobiography and ultimately the written text. Autobiography for its own sake is increasingly recognised by the literary canon as a genre (Olney 1980) and, together with individual biographies, is being used within history (Bertaux 1981; Vincent 1981; Bland and John 1990). Doubtless anthropologists could make innovative contributions in those domains. Within the discipline of anthropology, there is further scope for its insertion. Here the anthropologist's past is relevant only in so far as it relates to the anthropological enterprise, which includes the choice of area and study, the experience of fieldwork, analysis and writing.

In the early 1970s, Scholte saw reflexivity as a critical, emancipatory exercise which liberated anthropology from any vestige of a value-free scientism:

Fieldwork and subsequent analysis constitute a unified praxis...the ethnographic situation is defined not only by the native society in question, but also by the ethnological tradition 'in the head' of the ethnographer. Once he is actually in the field, the native's presuppositions also became operative, and the entire situation turns into complex intercultural mediation and a dynamic interpersonal experience. (1974:438)

Scholte did not specify how this 'interpersonal experience' should be written up, but his advocacy of a reflexive approach can be seen as a necessary preliminary to the inclusion of the anthropologist in the analysis. In this volume, Kirsten Hastrup draws attention to the peculiar reality in the field. 'It is not the unmediated world of the "others" but the world between ourselves and the others.'

While reflexivity or some autobiographical mode may have been incorporated within specific interest groups elsewhere, there is considerable reluctance to consider autobiography as a serious intellectual issue within

British anthropology. In a pioneering paper, David Pocock (1973) suggested a reflexive examination of anthropologists' texts in the light of their biography. He gave examples from his own work. The details remain unpublished, although the notion of a personal anthropology is used imaginatively in an introduction to the

discipline (1975). Fifteen years since Pocock's paper, Ernest Gellner has written against a reflexivity of the mildest, least personal form found in Geertz's *Works and Lives* (1988):

My own advice to anthropology departments is that this volume be kept in a locked cupboard, with the key in the possession of the head of department, and that students be lent it only when a strong case is made out by their tutors. (1988:26)

A popular put down is that reflexivity or autobiography is 'mere navel gazing', as if anthropology could ever involve only the practitioner. The concern for an autobiographical element in anthropology is to work through the specificity of the anthropologist's self in order to contextualise and transcend it. In other instances autobiography or reflexivity in anthropology has been pejoratively labelled 'narcissism' (Llobera 1987:118). This use of the classical Greek myth is even more confused. Self-adoration is quite different from self-awareness and a critical scrutiny of the self. Indeed those who protect the self from scrutiny could as well be labelled self-satisfied and arrogant in presuming their presence and relations with others to be unproblematic. Reflexivity is incorrectly confused with self-adoration (Babcock 1980).

A fundamental aspect of anthropology concerns the relationships between cultures or groups. The autobiography of the fieldworker anthropologist is neither in a cultural vacuum, nor confined to the anthropologist's own culture, but is instead placed in a cross-cultural encounter. Fieldwork practice is always concerned with relationships (cf. Campbell 1989). The anthropologist has to form long-term links with others across the cultural divide, however problematic. All of the contributors to this volume, in so far as they write of themselves, consider the self in terms of their relations with others. The autobiographical experience of fieldwork requires the deconstruction of those relationships with the rigour demanded elsewhere in the discipline. There have indeed been poor autobiographies by anthropologists who have perhaps believed that the genre is more exhibitory than exploratory, especially where 'the other' is used as a trigger for the writer's fantasies. Where the encounter is exoticised, the autobiographical account merely embodies at an individual level the discredited practice of fictionalising the other in order to affirm western dominance.

In promoting dialogical modes, Clifford retains a defensive and pejorative view of autobiography; the former 'are not in principle autobiographical; they need not lead to hyper self-consciousness or self-absorption' (1986a: 15). While recognising the validity of 'acute political and epistemological self-consciousness', he is obliged to reassure the reader that this is not 'self-absorption' (ibid.: 7). The 'armchair' anthropologist, as sedentary and solitary researcher, has tended to interpret anthropological autobiography in this way. By contrast, the autobiography of fieldwork is about lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge; whose aspects ethnographers have not fully theorised.

Recent developments of the 'production of texts by means of texts, rather than by means of fieldwork' (Fardon 1990:5) and a near exclusive focus on the writing as activity risks diverting attention from fieldwork as experience. Geertz (1988) has, for example, reduced fieldwork to an instrumental account. As Carrithers has noted: 'on Geertz's showing, research seems only a frustrating and solipsistic appendage of the supreme act itself, writing' (1988:20). The new emphasis on fieldwork as writing sees the encounter and experience as unproblematic. When Fabian (1988) cleverly distinguishes fieldwork as 'writing down' from the construction of a monograph as 'writing up', there is none the less a danger of simplification.

In an extreme stance, fieldwork has been downgraded to the mechanical collection of ethnography which is contrasted with the superior invention of theory (Friedman 1988). Anyone apparently, can *do* ethnography, it is for the desk-bound theoreticians to interpret it. This brahminical division assumes that the field experience is separable from theory, that the enterprise of inquiry is discontinuous from its results (Rabinow 1977). Participant observation textbooks which reduce fieldwork to a set of laboratory procedures rest on the same assumptions. Before the textual critics, fieldwork was also considered theoretically unproblematic by much of the academy. Its peculiarity, drama, fear and wonder were neither to be contemplated nor fully explored in print. Neophytes were simply to get on with the job with tight-lipped discipline (cf. Kenna). Veracity was confirmed by faith in what Fardon calls 'experiential positivism' (1990:3). Here, positivism destroys the notion of experience which I wish to evoke. The experience of fieldwork is totalising and draws on the whole being. It has not been theorised because it has been trivialised as the 'collection of data' by a dehumanised machine. Autobiography dismantles the positivist machine.

An interest in the autobiographical dimension of the anthropological encounter has been conflated with a suggestion that ethnography has no other reality than a literary make-believe (e.g. Gellner 1988). Yet, as Smith argues, the autobiographical contract is not as fluid as that which binds the fiction writer and the reader:

In autobiography the reader recognises the inevitability of unreliability but suppresses the recognition in a tenacious effort to expect 'truth' of some kind. The nature of that truth is best understood as the struggle of a historical rather than a fictional person to come to terms with her own past. (1987:46)

Another confusion is that between textual concerns and an apolitical dilletantism. Scholte came to regret a fusion between literary 'scholarly gentlemen' and reflexivity (1987). Yet a reflexivity which excludes the political is itself unreflective. A critique of the anthropologist as 'innocent' author can be extended to the anthropologist as participant, collaborator or, in some cases, activist (Huizer 1979). The existing and future personal narratives of anthropologists in the field



can be examined not only for stylistic tropes and their final textual construction, but also as a record of the experience, the political encounter and its historical context (see Huizer and Mannheim 1979; Okely 1987). In this way the anthropologist as future author is made self-conscious, critical and reflexive about the encounter and its possible power relations (Street 1990).

Postmodernism which challenges master narratives and total systems has itself been understood as an extreme form of relativism where, in an atmosphere of valueless cynicism, anything goes. The disintegration of totalities, however, can be differentially interpreted as the unleashing of the full range of creative possibilities (Nicholson 1990). The cultural past can also be re-examined. Alternative paradigms have always existed at the margins; in this case, autobiographical texts which defied the master canon. Postmodernism may have created a climate where different autobiographies elicit new interest, but the former did not create the latter.

Hesitations about incorporating and expanding the idea of autobiography into anthropology rest on very western, ethnocentric traditions. Autobiography, as a genre, has come to be associated with a 'repertoire of conventions' (Dodd 1986: 3). The tradition has been constructed by 'inclusion, exclusion and transformation' (ibid.: 6). This is not to deny that autobiography can ever be more than a construction (Spencer, Kenna, Rapport, this volume), but the specific criteria for its acceptance within a genre has been confined to the Eurocentric and literary canon. The western origin of the form is St Augustine with other major examples from Rousseau and J.S.Mill. A 'Great Man' tradition which speaks of individual linear progress and power has defined what constitutes a meaningful life (Juhász 1980:221). While there will have been historical fluctuations in the tradition, western writers have worked within and against it. Dodd suggests:

vocation...is central not only to St Augustine's *Confessions*, but to Victorian autobiography...the point of closure...is vocation, the resolution of self-determination. (1986:5)

Other forms of autobiography are marginalised or excluded. Working-class autobiographies have tended to be excluded from the literary genre and 'bequeathed to social historians' (Dodd 1986:7). Autobiographies from seemingly vocationless women have been judged neither culturally nor aesthetically significant by earlier normative criteria (Smith 1987:8). Women have 'internalised a picture of themselves that precluded the kind of self attention which would generate autobiography' as recognised by the canon (Kolodny 1980:241). There is another non-literary category by politicians which is explicitly addressed to political historians, but is still a message of individual public success.

What has been labelled the 'confessional', as opposed to St Augustine's or even Rousseau's, is not included as part of the genre (ibid.: 240), and implies a series of indiscretions which give the lie to prevailing assumptions and dominant ideals. The confessional has also come to be regarded as concerned only with salacious

indiscretions. Instead, in the context of anthropological fieldwork, it could be an attempt to analyse the actual research process in place of an idealised, scientised presentation. The confessional also implies loss of control. This again defies a carefully constructed tradition in which 'Omissions and deletions have constituted the very art of the form' (ibid.: 240) and where 'detachment' is 'a prescription that comes...out of the entire accepted canon of western autobiographical writing' (ibid.: 239). A genre of autobiography has focused on a constructed public self with the private made separate and discussed in terms of its threat to the public persona. Alternatively, the private is confronted only to be highly controlled and rationalised, as for example Rousseau's confessions about auto-eroticism (Derrida 1967/76).

The linear public progress established within the dominant western tradition has emphasised the individual as all-powerful isolate. Edward Said has voiced regret over an increasing interest in autobiography precisely because the subject is presented as outside time and context (1982:17). But as Dodd argues, Said has 'confused autobiographies and the Autobiography constructed by the Tradition' (1986:11). Similarly, anthropologists who are reluctant to consider autobiography may be reacting to the carefully constructed tradition which sees autobiography as 'egoistic'. Raymond Firth's controlled, near invisible insertion of personal narrative as part of his 'background to anthropological work' in Tikopia is followed by an apology for a:

somewhat egoistical recital not because I think that anthropology should be made light reading...but because some account of the relations of the anthropologist to his people is relevant to the nature of the results. (1936/65: 10)

Firth thus has to overcome several western associations with autobiography - that it risks being 'light' or trivial and that it is self-inflating. The western tradition both defines autobiography as egoism and in turn demands it.

Anthropologists have inserted the 'I' only at key junctures in ethnographic monographs in order, it is argued, to give authority to the text (Clifford 1986b; Pratt 1986; Rosaldo 1986). Otherwise they produced accounts from which the self had been sanitised. To establish authority, it seems, requires only the briefest of appearances. The 'I' is the ego trip, and in 'arrival' accounts emerges not so much from the practice of fieldwork, but more from writing traditions in western culture (ibid.). That the anthropologist soon disappears from the text is, as I have argued above, consistent with the belief that autobiography is no more than the affirmation of individual power or confessional self-absorption.

The western tradition of autobiography has been most clearly articulated by Gusdorf, writing in the 1950s, and validated by Olney (1980:8-9). Gusdorf either ignores non-western autobiographies or dismisses them as 'a cultural transplant' (Stanford Friedman 1988:35). Autobiography is associated with western individualism and, according to Gusdorf:

is not to be found outside of our cultural area;...it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe. (1956/80:29)

Gusdorf asserted that autobiography does not develop in cultures where the individual:

does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community. (1956/80:29–30)

Gusdorf's definitions of the genre, effectively the Great White Man tradition, drew upon pre-existing western assumptions both about autobiography and about other cultures. Despite their rejection of the monolithic stereotypes of non-western cultures, western anthropologists have not escaped these assumptions.

A corollary of the autobiographical tradition which emphasises individualistic and public linear development, is a clear demarcation between the autobiography and the diary. The latter is the place for the personal, if not the secret. A diary is also the 'classic articulation of dailiness' (Juhasz 1980:334). Gender differences noted in women's autobiographies carry aspects otherwise consigned to diaries. Juhasz suggests that:

women's stories show less a pattern of linear development towards some clear goal than one of repetitive cumulative, cyclical structure...dailiness matters—by definition it is never a conclusion always a process... The perspective of the diary is immersion not distance. (ibid.: 223–4)

It is that very dailiness and immersion, along with insights into the personal, which make Malinowski's *Diary* (1967) so informative about the experience of fieldwork, his relations with others, and the cultural encounter. In an earlier paper, I advocated that self-awareness of the anthropologist in the field be explored through such forms as the diary, which should be seen as integral to the anthropological endeavour. Malinowski did not treat his diary as such, but as a place where the self could be split from the would-be scientist which his official publications had aimed to present. The fieldwork practice recorded in the diary did not fit the methodological exhortations outlined in *The Argonauts* (1922). Thus for example, Malinowski mingled intimately with white men, while officially abjuring contact (Okely 1975). The posthumous publication of the diary surprised and scandalised many of his followers. Geertz's response diverted a discussion of the self to generic notions of the person (1974). In his postgraduate Malinowski course at Cambridge in 1970, Leach declared to us that it should never have been published. His later interest in autobiography (1984, 1989:45) suggests a change of mind.

The anthropologist, imbued with western notions, is torn between the Tradition of Autobiography as public achievement by lone hero and its antithesis which undermines it. Once autobiography is set up as the celebration of power then its opposite always threatens, namely the loss of power, the loss of face. The confessional, belittled by the canon, then becomes what autobiography is defined to exclude—namely the loss of control. That in turn is invidiously confused with self-analysis. So long as the self is rigorously split off and secreted in diaries, then self-analysis in anthropological practice is perceived as loss of professional armour. Yet anthropologists, more than most, are in a position to question western definitions of autobiography, since they are made aware of cross-cultural alternatives.

In the Great White Man tradition, the lone achiever has felt compelled to construct and represent his uniqueness, seemingly in defiance of historical conditions, but actually in tune with the dominant power structures which have rewarded him. By contrast, those on the margins may first learn through an alternative personal experience their lack of fit with the dominant system. Their individual experience belies the public description at the centre. Out of their experience have arisen alternative forms on the margins. Autobiographies from the marginalised and the powerless—those of a subordinate race, religion, sex and class—have not inevitably been a celebration of uniqueness, let alone public achievement, but a record of questions and of subversion. The most personal, seemingly idiosyncratic, hitherto unwritten or unspoken, has paradoxically found resonance with others in a similar position. A solidarity is found through what seemed only an individual perspective. Stanford Friedman notes that:

the individualist concept of the autobiographical self that pervades Gusdorf's work raises serious theoretical problems for critics who recognise that the self, self-creation and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-western peoples. (1988:34)

Contrary to the expectation that an autobiography which speaks of the personal and specific should thereby elaborate uniqueness, autobiographies may, as has been found among the marginalised, evoke common aspects. The reader is invited to recognise similarities, 'individualistic paradigms of the self ignore the role of collective and relational identities in the individuation process' (ibid.: 35). In a study of de Beauvoir's autobiography, I have argued that the *Mémoires* (1958) invite the woman reader to identify with common aspects of a young girl's childhood (Okely 1986:22–50). Stanford Friedman explores how the autobiographies of women and members of minorities may expose historically generated differences from dominant groups, depending on sex and race:

Isolate individualism is an illusion. It is also the privilege of power. A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of

himself as an 'individual'. Women and minorities have no such luxury. (1988: 39)

Neither do anthropologists have such luxury when in another culture. But the specificity may be lost in the thinking and the writing.<sup>1</sup> Any autobiography by the anthropologist, while emerging from a unique and personal experience, evokes resonances of recognition among others. There are solidarities as well as contrasts to be examined, and systematised for the enrichment of the discipline. The autobiography is not a linear progress of the lone individual outside history, let alone outside cultures and the practice of anthropology. There are ways of breaking from the individualistic western paradigm both in the autobiography of the anthropologist and through autobiographical forms in other cultures. Other peoples have varying notions of self and ways of describing them through experiential narrative in both oral and written traditions. These await fuller exploration.

Whereas in literary studies a concern has been to move the analysis of others' autobiographies into the literary canon, if autobiography were fully incorporated into anthropology, it would be about the construction of both the anthropologists' autobiographies in the field and those of others. An anthropological perspective concerns reflexivity in the field and the process of autobiographical construction, not simply the critique of others' existing texts. Here social anthropology has characteristics especially apt in relation to any genre of autobiography. The practice of intensive fieldwork is unique among all other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The bounded periods of participant observation conducted by sociologists bear no comparison. Long-term immersion through fieldwork is generally a total experience, demanding all of the anthropologist's resources; intellectual, physical, emotional, political and intuitive. The experience involves so much of the self that it is impossible to reflect upon it fully by extracting that self. Under pressure to be 'scientifically objective', anthropologists have traditionally compartmentalised that fieldwork experience.

An example appears regrettably in the Marxist *Critique of Anthropology*. Kielstra regrets the confusion in status between anthropologists as specialised professionals and as general intellectuals:

Fieldwork is a strongly emotional experience. If a fieldworker has some creative talents that does not necessarily make them interesting from a scientific point of view...People who are insecure about their academic positions and doubtful about their status as intellectuals may mix them up ... One should not be afraid to accept that anthropology...is a partial activity, dealing with only part of human experience. (1987:90)

The splitting of reasoned from emotional activity which Kielstra advocates is embedded in the European Enlightenment. He also confuses 'creative talents' with (denigrated) emotions. I would suggest the very opposite to Kielstra, that

those who are most insecure about their identity as intellectuals may cling to a professional and instrumental facade. Moreover, a division of labour advocated in a Marxist journal which privileges professional activity, as opposed to intellectual and other work, goes against the spirit of Marx's celebrated passage in *The German Ideology*: (1846, 1960 edition: 22). Marx was arguing against a division of labour which separates critical thought from action, mental from manual labour and one intellectual pursuit from another.

In 'The Self and Scientism' (1975) I argued that the emotional and personal cannot be so easily separated from intellectual endeavour. Malinowski's response in moments of anger against the Trobrianders, recorded in his diary, cannot be seen as merely idiosyncratic and private, since it reveals the racist overtones of his European cultural heritage. In the 1970s, the Women's Liberation Movement argued that 'the personal is political'; I contend also that in an academic context 'the personal is theoretical'. This stands against an entrenched tradition which relegates the personal to the periphery and to the 'merely anecdotal': pejoratively contrasted in positivist social science with generalisable truth. Yet, anthropologists are steeped in the anecdotal.

The pressure to split off the self and the autobiography of fieldwork from its total practice owes a great deal to the positivist history of social anthropology which emphasised the neutral, impersonal and scientific nature of the enterprise. This involved a peculiar combination of intensive fieldwork by means of participant observation with the ideal of the objective observer. Dumont has noted the paradoxical consequences:

more 'empathetic involvement' was achieved in the field experience... At the same time, the more that 'involved sympathy' emerged during the fieldwork experience, the more 'disciplined detachment' was found in the published reports under the pretext of objectivity. (1978:7)

The self's engagement in fieldwork could not be naturally suppressed, but had to be self-consciously worked at. The autobiographical mode was highly controlled within mainstream ethnographies. But the self would leak out; in the oral culture of the academy, secreted in diaries, transformed as fiction or split into separate and hitherto marginalised accounts. In this volume, Helen Callaway examines in greater detail some of these earlier texts by women.

In the now classic *Return to Laughter* (1954) by Laura Bohannon, alias Smith Bowen, we see the transformation of autobiography into fiction under a pseudonym. In the preface, Bohannon describes the familiar split between the academic and the whole person, one of which others such as Kielstra might approve:

When I write as a social anthropologist and within the canons of the discipline, I write under another name. Here I have written simply as a human being, and the truth I have tried to tell concerns the sea change in one's self that comes from immersion in another and alien world. (1954: xix)

Thus Bohannan's reading of 'the canons of the discipline' excluded autobiography and analysis. The self and its narrative of experience had to be split off into 'fiction'; a creative mode viewed with suspicion by social science.

Powdermaker's *Stranger and Friend* (1967), breaking from pseudonym and fiction, integrated autobiography with theories and methodologies in her varied fieldwork. Of an earlier generation than Bohannan, but writing at a later stage, she successfully analyses relevant aspects of her earlier life and her academic training under Malinowski to confront the implication of class, sex and ethnicity in her work. This happy integration of the anthropologist's self with fieldwork practices was rare and, significantly for academic orthodoxy, was written near her retirement. Later texts on participant observation either ignore the self (Wax 1971) and gender of the researcher (Freilich 1977), or tend to recognise gender in order to control for 'bias' (Whitehead and Conaway 1986). Now that so-called qualitative methodology is being increasingly institutionalised within the social sciences, it seems that social anthropologists have either abdicated responsibility in describing it or deferred to those (especially sociologists) who would routinise the practice in the form of simplistic flow charts. Yet there are ways of reflecting upon and theorising the total experience of fieldwork which cannot be reduced to a set of neo-positivistic techniques. And that would include autobiographical reflection.

From the 1960s, and especially the 1970s and 1980s, some anthropologists, mainly outside Britain, began to write separate semi-autobiographical accounts. Some gave chronological accounts of the fieldworkers' entry, immersion and departure using the 'I', but not necessarily showing reflexivity (Okely 1975). Some are explicitly addressed to a popular readership with no interest in the rest of anthropology (Barley 1983). They risk exploiting the very stereotypes about exotica and eccentric academics which anthropology would hope to dismantle. In a postmodern era when the orthodoxy of classical ethnographies has been more readily challenged within the academic canon, later autobiographical accounts have been unconvincingly hailed as innovative contributions (e.g. Rabinow 1977). Their acclaim within specific academic circles may be in part explained by patronage and peer group solidarity (Geertz 1988:91). Others have remained on the margins. Caplan (1988) has echoed the outrage felt by many women anthropologists at Clifford's exclusion of women anthropologists (1986a) on the grounds that feminists had contributed nothing to his definitions of theory and experimental texts. In fact, many of the later autobiographical accounts lack the breadth and subtlety of Powdermaker or Bohannan who were experimental in an era when this quality was not judged relevant within the academic canon. Others have again been published under pseudonyms (e.g. Cesara 1982) and classified as a confessional; too embarrassingly uncontrolled or unedited for mainstream acceptance.

An outstanding contribution to the autobiographical mode integrated within a monograph about the people, the other culture and the fieldwork encounter is Dumont's *The Headman and I* (1978). This was in part a response to *Tristes*

*Tropiques* (1955) which held the promise of an autobiographical account, but where Lévi-Strauss—‘remains outside... There is no back and forth movement between experience and consciousness’ (Dumont 1978:10). Given this absence of the self as problematic and personal, *Tristes Tropiques* was correctly read as part of the heroic questing tradition which western autobiography celebrates, and is confirmed in the collection title, *The Anthropologist as Hero* (Hayes and Hayes 1970). Consistent with this absence of self, Lévi-Strauss (1988) has rejected the specifically personal in any autobiographical mode.

In Britain questions of reflexivity and personal aspects of fieldwork were made most apparent during the 1985 ASA conference Anthropology at Home (Jackson 1987), because the anthropologists were obliged to be self-conscious about the similarities or contrasts in the context of fieldwork in their native country. Alongside political concerns of intrusion and partisanship, questions of national, ethnic origins were confronted and, in some cases, gender by women. Those who pursued these implications were in effect writing autobiographies, but in few of these cases had the anthropologists approached fieldwork at the outset with thoughts about having to analyse and write these details in an academic context. Reflexivity has rarely been seen as significant for the total project in the same way that pre-fieldwork acquaintance with ‘the ethnographic literature’ has been prescribed (Fardon 1990). We have rarely gone into the field with the self-consciousness of preparing an autobiographical account either within or in conjunction with a monograph. Some examples from European anthropology attempt to interlink the two, e.g. Favret-Saada (1977/80, 1981), Favret-Saada and Contreras (1981) and Loizos (1981).

Dumont, unlike for example Fardon (1990:7–8), has suggested a significance in the fact that it was women who wrote the earlier accounts of fieldwork, as has Helen Callaway in this volume. Women were:

left with the task of conjuring the impurities of experience. They had to cope with the blood, sweat and tears aspect of fieldwork—feelings and sentiments included—while the men were exclusively doing ‘the real thing’. (1978:8)

Although an explanation which draws on expressive roles stereotypically associated with women is unconvincing, none the less there is a hint in Dumont of the contrast, described by women, between public presentation and lived practice. To describe the dailiness and minutiae of personal encounters in the field is to question the ‘fine distinctions’ between public and private which Kolodny (1980:240) suggests have served as guides for the male autobiographer. The split between public and private self has been contested as gender specific. Theorists of sexual and textual difference have explored how men and women have acquired a differing sense of self and relationship to a master discourse. Given that both sexes, at least in dominant western cultures, have tended to have had a female adult as primary carer in infancy, Chodorow (1978) suggests that the resulting ‘feminine’ identity is marked by more flexible, permeable ego boundaries than



those for a 'masculine' cultural identity (*pace* Bordo 1990). There are differing narratives of the self; the 'feminine' one being open to representing experience as interpersonal while the 'masculine' one privileges individualism and distance (Smith 1987:12–13). Moreover, the girl/woman enters a world where the dominant paradigm is that of masculine experience. The differing formation and life experience of persons according to their sex/ gender have implications for theorising and for self-presentation. Women writing about anthropological fieldwork may show aspects similarly considered unacceptable in the literary canon of western autobiography. Significantly, earlier fieldwork texts were written by women whose professional position was relatively marginalised (Silverman 1989:294).

When women have difficulty in seeing themselves as self-important and with less professional face to lose, it follows that the use of 'I' and its dailiness in the text are expressions of neither authorial authority nor of egoism. Rather, the I is the voice of individual scepticism from the margins; in many instances not only the I of *difference*, but one of subversive *diffidence* in the face of scientism. The individual 'I' is not making claim to generalisations within a dominant discourse (cf. Davis). The 'I' says 'but in my experience...'. This, in the final analysis, cannot be falsified from the outside. It is knowingly but defiantly open to a critique of being non-representative. This specificity challenges also the orthodox canon of autobiography which demands that the supreme example be a 'representative' and 'eminent person' (Misch 1951). The woman ethnographer does not fit the norm of the generalised male. This is a different 'I' from an impersonalised authority. In the most creative sense it is a way of exploring an alternative identity and 'those previously, silent, unrecorded areas of experience' (Anderson 1986:64). The master narrative both for autobiography and for ethnography is subverted.

The suggestions offered by Pratt (1986:32–3) for overcoming the contradictions in ethnography between personal and scientific authority, the repression of the experiencing 'I', and the ensuing impoverishment of knowledge focus primarily on matters of style. The concern is more a matter of writing, especially the finished product, than also thinking about the content and experience of fieldwork. Both the style and the content are affected by the extent to which the anthropologist has privileged some aspects at an early stage and not others. While it is taken for granted the fieldworker writes extensive and personal notes in the field about the others, it is not considered necessary to analyse and take notes about his or her relationship with them (Okely 1975). We simply do not know how to explore the specificity of the fieldworker in those relationships, in order to theorise participation. Autobiographical accounts, when they do appear, are judged in terms of professional ethics, or as voyeurism or humanistic testimony. We are like pre-Freudians presented with the plain narratives of dreams whose significance we are not called upon to decipher. The personal narrative and encounter need to be confronted far earlier than the writing stage. The dilemma

and internal struggle for example between self and positivist, noted by Pratt (*ibid.*), is there long before pen is placed on notepad.

The focus on culture and anthropology as written rather than experienced is consistent with Derrida's deconstruction theories (1967/76). Derrida suggests that in the west, speech is considered superior to the written and that the latter has been taken to be an unproblematic record of speech. Instead, Derrida argues that the written text is a construction in its own right. His insights have made us more self-conscious about the production of texts and, in this case, the production of ethnographies. These may be read as inevitably partial and historically specific. The author is also decentred, since a text may have a life of its own in ways which the author did not intend (*pace* Davis, this volume). Derrida looks for contradictions with which the author may be consciously and unconsciously grappling. Similar observations can be found in Freud (1900, 1914/48).

The suggestion that the author is no longer in control of the text has been resolved for some by mechanistically interpreting Bakhtin's dialogical mode where a text might be envisaged as the product of multiple voices (1981). Whereas Freud offered forms of analysis to expose hidden conflicts and wish fulfilments, the move to multiple voices, or dialogue, presented like tape transcriptions, may avoid all authorial intervention. In so far as interpretation is left entirely to the vagaries of the reader, we are back to a pre-Freudian era where dreams and statements are considered plain tales and stories without underlying significance. As Hastrup reminds us in this volume, ethnography involves more than mere recording. The informants' voices, however many direct quotations are included, do not penetrate the ethnographer's discursive speech.

The 'arrival' stories where the anthropologist/author has been most visible, but is not yet in dialogue, are only the start of it. The anthropologists' opening descriptions focus predictably on the superficial, visible contrasts and first encounters. The account cannot by definition convey the responses and insights from the hosts. In the long run it is important to know how they viewed and related to the anthropologist as stranger, guest, then apprentice, perhaps friend and scribe. The key incidents, where the anthropologist is initially treated as outsider, rebuked for rule breaking and by varying degrees incorporated or rejected, all speak of the self-ascribed marks of one culture and its relations with representatives of others.

The relations with the anthropologist as outsider reveal both the specificity of that rapport and its potential generalities. The relationship between the anthropologist and hosts is ever changing, with continuing implications for mutual comprehension. While an anthropologist's gradual disappearance from the monograph is commented on with approval (Carrithers 1988:20), what we do not learn is how the changing daily relationship and experience give sense to an accumulation of illustrations forming a coherent whole. Where the anthropologist continues to insert (or reflect upon) the particularities of her discussions through the length of the field experience, the material does more than describe the type of relations between the anthropologist and the people concerned. We are also

able to see how the interrogator acts as a catalyst in eliciting defining aspects for specific members (Rabinow 1977:119; Omvedt 1979). That continuing dialogue is worked out both between persons as representatives of differing cultures *and* between specific individuals. Here the 'race', sex (Golde 1986),<sup>2</sup> class origins, age and persona of the anthropologist are significant. All ethnographers are positioned subjects (Hastrup this volume).

An early exclusion of reflexivity has implications for the later texts. Since anthropological questions of autobiography or reflexivity were never raised in the academy before or during my fieldwork in the early 1970s, this absence therefore affects the subsequent writing. Some examples already exist (Okely 1975, 1983: ch. 3, 1984, 1987). There were several reasons why self-awareness was excluded and they are not personal, but consistent with the historical, political and academic context. When approaching the Gypsies, I found myself acting and thinking *against* the romantic tradition epitomised by George Borrow, Merimée, Bizet and all the stereotypes which are significant in the dominant society's construction of Gypsies. Borrow and others were the equivalent of the exotic travel writers that anthropologists seek to distance themselves from (cf. Kenna), or the only equivalent to the ethnographic 'regional' literature with which the orthodox anthropologist has to engage (Fardon 1990). Like other anthropologists, I needed to establish my identity as a social *scientist* and maintained a sceptical distance from the folklorist literature; the 'orientalism' of Gypsies. Perhaps there was a fear of contamination, the exoticism could be overwhelming.

The need for distance was not merely a reading and library matter. Most non-Gypsies I spoke to, were themselves caught up in the romance. Their eyes lit up when they heard what I was doing. They projected their longings on to me, and were compelled to tell me about the Gypsies. I was treated as the silent therapist who triggered off their fantasies and monologues. This projection was continuous: I was typecast and given a fictive Gypsy identity, not among Gypsies but among Gorgios (non-Gypsies). This even happened at a university party for social anthropologists where I had dressed up for the festive occasion. It was not interpreted as my celebration of being away from the field and its constraints—including the necessary frumpy and controlled clothes required among Gypsy women. Instead my long velvet dress was labelled 'Gypsy' by one of the lecturers.

Forced into this stereotyping, I decided to push it to its limits, to test the Gorgios' reactions. At a suburban party, a few miles from the Gypsy camp, I was talking to a young solicitor. After some preliminaries, I informed him that I was of Gypsy descent. Tears came to his eyes; brimming with uncontrollable emotion. He seemed unable to reconcile the juxtaposition of my educated, middle-class talk with my alleged genetic origins. His reactions were unnerving and informative. Through this vicarious experience of being 'the other' to others, I was perforce led back to the stereotypes, which are part of the Gypsies' reality made by Gorgios. The Gypsies also, I learned through participatory experience, manipulate those stereotypes.