MALINOWSKI THE MODERN OTHER: AN INDIRECT EVALUATION OF POSTMODERNISM[1]

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Abstract: This article outlines how postmodernists construct a version of Malinowski to serve as a Modern Other against which they define their own postmodern ethnographic standards. They do this by emphasizing only one side of what I argue is Malinowski's dualistic approach, neglecting aspects of his method that could be regarded as a precursor to an interpretative approach. Where Malinowski's interpretative features are recognized, they are dismissed and anachronistically criticized as a mode of rhetorically establishing "experiential authority." As such, postmodern critiques succumb to the charge of narrating interested "partial truths."

Résumé: Dans cet article, j'expose brièvement comment les postmodernistes construisent une version de Malinowski en tant qu'Autre Moderne par rapport laquelle ils définissent ses standards postmodernes de l'ethnographie. Ils accomplissent cela en mettant l'emphase sur une seule perspective de ce que j'appelle l'approche dualiste de Malinowski, négligeant de fait certains aspects de sa méthode qui pourraient être considerés comme étant à l'avant-garde dans une approche de type interprétative. Lorsqu'on reconnaît les caractéristiques d'interprétation de Malinowski, on les rejette aussitôt et on les critique de façon rhetorique une autorité basée sur l'expérience. En tant que tels, les critiques postmodernes succombent devant l'accusation de ne rapporter que les vérités partielles qui les intéressent.

Malinowski, it would appear, has played many different roles, representing the Anthropologist and the Ethnographer, in both the Modern and Postmodern context. It seems now that he can no longer be discussed without distinguishing between various "Malinowskis" who have been introduced into the discourse. One becomes acquainted with both "Malinowski the Fieldworker," who is more of a contemporary, and "Malinowski the Theoretician," who is

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an ancestor located in a particular historical period (Fardon 1990b:2). There also exists a "Malinowski the Hero," the inventor of the genre of ethnography, the founder of modern-style field work, and the mythical founder of modern anthropology itself. This "Malinowski" is closely related to "Malinowski the Pedagogue," the figure of the "Oriental father-teacher" (Firth 1957:8-9). Conversely, there exists a "Malinowski the Anti-hero," the private and controversial protagonist of his *Diary*. One is introduced to "Malinowski the Self-fashioned Persona," a marriage of Frazer and Conrad (Clifford 1988b), not to mention "Malinowski the Champion-Ass at Asking Damnfool Questions" (Kuper 1973:18).

As Richard Fardon (1990a) has aptly remarked, what remains constant in any age of Malinowski scholarship is the fact that Malinowski comes to represent a particular *value*. Here I examine the postmodern picture of Modernist ethnography as it is set up as a foil against which postmodern goals are defined and measured. I look specifically at the postmodern story of "Malinowski the Ethnographer," as he represents an antipodal point of reference for defining and legitimating the postmodern agenda. As Fardon notes (1990a, 1990b:2), the narrative on Malinowski is governed by current ethnographic, methodological and epistemological concerns. This is evidenced by the fact that Malinowski is said to have represented various epistemological positions: according to Leach (1957:121), Malinowski was a pragmatist influenced by William James; according to Stocking (1986:17, 31-32), Malinowski was unimpressed by James, and his methodological individualism and psychologism are traceable to the positivist influence of Ernest Mach and, later, to the influence of Freud. According to Thornton and Skalnik (1993:5-7), the link between Malinowski's positivism and his pragmatism was attributable to the influence of Nietzsche. Such historical accounts represent an attempt to arrive at the epistemological roots of modern anthropology. Identifying the epistemological species of anthropological ancestors facilitates uprooting old paradigms and forging "new" methodologies.

In the postmodern age such histories construct a Malinowskian Other; how this Other is defined and deconstructed articulates the values that postmodernists wish to integrate into the ethnographic enterprise. According to much the same dynamic by which the Modernists defined themselves vis-à-vis the Primitive Other, postmodernists define themselves vis-à-vis the Modern Other. As Fardon notes: "Given its anti-foundationalism . . . postmodernism can be delineated and accorded value only in so far as it engages with various modernisms. The very term post-modern-ism describes a dependence upon an imagined past" (1990a:572).

Postmodernism, as it is represented by the contributors to *Writing Culture* (1986), involves more than a dependence on an imagined past; it is the product of a kind of anxiety on the part of contemporary anthropologists to be original,

distinguishable from their ancestors, improved. Harold Bloom (1973) argues that the history of poetry is the process of poetic influence and that influence involves "a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation" (Bloom 1973:30). In this way anthropologists, like poets, "clear imaginative space for themselves" (Bloom 1973:5). Thus, the difference between postmodernists and modernists must be insisted upon because, in many cases, it is not obvious.

I am not arguing here that Malinowski was more postmodern than he has been said to be. Rather, I suggest that certain characteristics that appear to be the mark of good postmodern ethnography are not altogether absent from Malinowski's ethnography, and are, therefore, not ethnographic characteristics that postmodernists can claim to have invented. I refer, specifically, to the *interpretative* dimensions of Malinowski's ethnography, his distinctly *humanistic* methodological contributions and his sensitivity to narrative technique in evoking a sense of Trobriand life. All of these characteristics are evidence that there is a very definite line of continuity from Malinowski to the postmodernists—a line of continuity that is muted as postmodernists attempt to differentiate themselves from their ancestors.

Postmodernists maintain that historical accounts are fictitious, multiple and interested, reflecting the historical circumstances and biases of the narrator; ethnography is shot through with history and politics and thus ethnographic representations disclose only "partial truths" (Clifford 1986a:7-10). The self-reflexive character of this statement allows that the historical narratives which postmodernists accept should also be understood as fictitious, multiple and interested.

The Postmodern Program

The ethical goal of Clifford et al. (in *Writing Culture*) is to undermine overtly conspicuous modes of authority and to demonstrate that ethnography is intricately bound up in the *invention* of, and not the representation of, cultural Others. This process unfolds within the context of power relationships (Clifford 1986a:2). Clifford argues:

> A scientific ethnography normally establishes a privileged allegorical register it identifies as "theory," "interpretation," or "explanation." But once *all* meaningful levels in a text, including theories and interpretations, are recognized as allegorical, it becomes difficult to view one of them as privileged, accounting for the rest. (1986b:103; italics in original)

Starting with the proposition that conventions of ethnographic writing are politically directed inasmuch as they validate certain theoretical statements and eliminate others, two prongs of the criticism of representation converge: (1) the critique of scientific authority, which targets the power/knowledge dy-

namics involved in representations, and (2) the critique of rhetoric, which targets the narrative devices used in constructing authority. Although it is the textual, or rhetorical, level that the contributors to *Writing Culture* focus on, other issues implicit in their critiques include, *inter alia*, the political contexts which allow ethnographers to represent other cultures and the historical processes which change political contexts and literary conventions. The central issue for these postmodernists is how these determinants establish the ideological conditions which lend ethnographic "fictions" their representational authority. The goal behind deconstructing representational authority is to eradicate the politically loaded, narrative dynamics through which the Other becomes objectified, defined and represented, and to destabilize the politics of defining "Primitives" vis-à-vis the West.

The postmodern critique of authority targets two Malinowskis: "Malinowski the Scientific Authority" and "Malinowski the Experiential Authority." Citing Clifford, Rabinow states: ". . . from Malinowski on, anthropological authority has rested on two textual legs. An experiential 'I was there' element establishes the unique authority of the anthropologist; its suppression in the text establishes the anthropologists' scientific authority" (1986:244).

It is useful to look at Malinowski's work with these points in mind, and then ask the following questions: (1) Are the characterizations of Malinowski's work fair and do they provide just grounds for the criticisms postmodernists raise? (2) Does the postmodern agenda offer research strategies and narrative formats that are distinguishable from modernist practices and hence avoid the political-rhetorical problems they identify? I now turn to the first prong of criticism which defines Malinowski as a *scientific* ethnographer.

The Critique of Science

A primary objective of the contributors to *Writing Culture* is to "fight against the received definitions of art, literature, science and history" (Clifford 1986a:4). The tension between "art" and "science" is at the heart of the postmodern criticism of Modern ethnography; specifically, postmodernists target *scientific* ethnography, and the authority it claims:

> The authority of a *scientific* discipline, in this kind of historical account, will always be mediated by the claims of rhetoric and power. (Clifford 1986a:11; emphasis mine)

And:

> . . . that as a "*scientific* text" it eventually becomes a privileged element in the potential store of historical memory for the non-literate society concerned. (Asad 1986:163; emphasis mine)

And:

> ... ethnographic writing enacts a specific strategy of authority. This strategy has classically involved an unquestioned claim to appear as the purveyor of truth in text.... The discussion that follows first locates this authority in the twentieth-century *science* of participant observation. (Clifford 1988a:25; emphasis mine)

Deconstructing the authority-claims of Modernist ethnography involves, first, undermining the authority that science itself claims and, secondly, undermining the scientific status of Modern ethnographies. Before such criticisms can be levelled, Modern ethnography must be defined as "scientific" (particularly positivist), a definition which only makes sense when the interpretive elements indigenous to those texts are dismissed as "rhetoric" or "authority-claiming."

I suggest that this prong of the postmodern attack fails to consider in any serious depth the intrinsically interpretive nature of Malinowski's ethnography (see Strenski 1982; Stocking 1968, 1986, 1992; and for a more cynical description of Malinowski's humanism see Geertz 1988). In fact, far from challenging received wisdom, postmodernists adopt the positivist picture of Malinowski drawn by Jarvie (1967) and Leach (1957).

At this point it may be useful to draw a distinction, albeit contentious and arbitrary, that seems to be at the core of Clifford's "received definitions" of art and science—that is, the distinction between *explanation* and *interpretation*. According to this distinction, science offers explanations, corresponding to cause/effect relationships, whereas interpretation entails an effort to understand, for example, intentions, feelings and desires, and offers "reasons" rather than "explanations." Modern ethnography, particularly that of Malinowski, is "scientific" in that it is sometimes biologically reductionist, seeks cause-effect relationships and offers generalized "explanations": the aim is to get to the bottom of behaviour. Postmodern ethnography, on the other hand, is "interpretative" in that it offers plausible, and multiple, "reasons" for behaviour, and seeks to understand and interpret its meaningfulness: the aim is to comprehend the "cultural logic" of behaviour.

This distinction between explanation versus interpretation (*verstehen*) would have corresponded, in Malinowski's time, with the difference between a humanistic and a scientific approach (see Bohman, Hiley and Shusterman 1991 and Winch 1958). In the contemporary context this rigid distinction is considered tenuous; both are interpretive, but just in different ways. As Kuhn states: "No more in the natural than in the human sciences is there some neutral, culture-independent, set of categories within which the population—whether of objects or of actions—can be described" (1991:21).

There is no denying that in his more theoretical moods, Malinowski did proselytize for positivism, the avant garde ideology of science at that time (see, for example, Malinowski 1984 [1922]:12-17), and that his attempt to

blend ethnography and theory, particularly in his essays *Magic, Science and Religion* (1948b [1925]) and *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1948c [1926]), resulted in his strongest statements of functionalism and his most overt forays into "grand" theory. In this case postmodernists are right to set themselves against the naïve positivism and reductionism of Malinowski's theory. However, it should be remembered, first, that Malinowski was setting himself against *a priori*, armchair anthropology and, secondly, that he was trying to rescue the "primitive" from being relegated to the world of mystical irrationality (where they had been condemned by many of Malinowski's predecessors, most notably Lévy-Bruhl) (see Malinowski 1948b [1925]:25); and, finally, that his major ethnographies went well beyond his theoretical framework. To classify Malinowski's *ethnography* as "scientific," as opposed to methodologically pluralistic, is at best a partial truth, serving to define and condemn his ethnography according to that aspect of his work from which current interpretive anthropologists wish to distance themselves.[2]

Clifford (1988a) claims to approach ethnography in "the anti-positivist tradition of Wilhelm Dilthey," insofar as he treats ethnography as the product of interpretation, not explanation (1988a:22 n). But to say that all ethnography is interpretive by nature is not the same as recognizing the indigenously interpretive elements of Modern ethnography. Indeed, Clifford requires that Modern ethnography be seen as scientific so that he may argue that participant observation is "misleading" and should be "reformulated," in Diltheyan "hermeneutic terms" (1988a:34).

However, Malinowski's method involved its own recognizably "interpretive approach" and should be seen as standing within a "Diltheyan tradition." Dilthey insisted that the goal in human studies is to get at *meaning* through empathetic "understanding" and that one's reading of behaviour and events will in turn appeal to one's prior understanding of human beings (Rouse 1987:42). Rouse notes:

> ... the interpretation of meaningful objects is thought always to rest on some prior understanding of the social context within which their meaning functions. Dilthey characterized this knowledge as an understanding of life; we might find it more familiar if described as an understanding of a particular society or culture. (Rouse 1987:45)

Strenski (1982) argues that Malinowski was in fact influenced by Dilthey (and indirectly by James). Although he does not document any direct influence, Strenski does draw significant parallels in each man's thinking; specifically, he notes that both Dilthey and Malinowski were methodological and philosophical dualists, each advancing a scientific version of a New Humanism (1982:769-770; see also Malinowski 1949 [1923]:298). In the Diltheyan tradition, immersing oneself in the culture of the Other, that is, participant observation, is a method of arriving at a humanistic "understanding." The postmod-

ern answer to such an approach is to argue that this "prior understanding" is inseparable from the anthropologist's interpretative framework. I suggest that this is not a deconstruction of the Malinowskian project so much as a logical extension of the interpretive scope: the field of meaning is broadened from what is independent of the interpreter to include the interpreter.

The postmodern claim that all ethnography is interpretive by nature is meant to undermine the authority claims (and pretensions) of "scientific" ethnography. Consider the following statement made by Malinowski concerning the ethnographer's task in collecting the "imponderabilia of actual life": "All these facts can and ought to be scientifically formulated and recorded, but it is necessary that this be done . . . not by untrained observers, but with an effort at penetrating the mental attitude expressed in them" (1984 [1922]:19). To an unsympathetic reader, this passage reads like a claim to representational authority. To a sympathetic reader, this passage may imply that the "scientific" observer is more qualified than, say, interested and prejudiced missionaries and colonial administrators, to *empathetically* observe and narratively formulate what is observed without moral prejudgments. Although this assumption is now held to be false, it is posited as a means to a decidedly humanistic end. Although Malinowski insisted upon a scientific approach, his method of participant observation strikes me as a fundamentally interpretive tool—contra Clifford, who describes it as "the *science* of participant observation" (1988a: 25)—and one that appears to serve postmodern ethnographers quite well.

In *Baloma: The Spirits of the Dead*, Malinowski's attempt to comprehend Trobriand procreative beliefs produces the following methodological statement:

> I was forced to make the above distinction [between impregnation and sexual intercourse] under the stress of the information I was gathering, in order to explain certain contradictions which cropped up in the course of inquiries. And it must be therefore accepted as a "natural" distinction, as one which corresponds to and expresses the native point of view. (1948a [1916]:221)

I submit that there were solid methodological grounds at the time for privileging the anthropologist's account over others, specifically those of the missionary or the traveller, and that the anthropologist's authority in this case is not simply a matter of muting the political relationship between the Observer and Observed. As the above remark suggests, Malinowski, like any good scientist, privileged evidence over theory. Evidence that would falsify uncharitable theories of the Other was gathered by living among the people being studied, a practice which distinguished the anthropologist (Fardon 1990b:3). In this case, good science *does* translate into good ethnography. Thus, far from assuming a stance of distanced objective authority, it would seem that he insisted on allowing the conversational input from "interlocutors" to govern his ethnographic account of native attitudes and mental habits. The remarks I have quoted suggest that this practice involves absorbing and synthesizing the as-

sumptions and premises of one's subjects to arrive at the inner logic of social life; this approach appears to represent an inchoate version of more contemporary attempts to arrive at the "cultural logic" of Others, and not an approach diametrically opposed to the standards of postmodern ethnography.

There is no question that Malinowski attempted to reduce "data" to general laws, and that he tried to subordinate "chaotic social reality" to general rules in an effort to formulate scientific explanations. However, it is also the case that the "reality" Malinowski was attempting to subordinate was to be arrived at, by his own prescription, through an empathetic understanding of native social reality, which could only be achieved if the fieldworker "put aside camera, note book and pencil, and . . . join himself in what is going on" (Malinowski 1984 [1922]:22).

Clifford dismisses Malinowski's mode of interpretation as a "naive claim for experiential authority" (1988a:38)—an authority that is bogus because it buttresses politically loaded fictions—and states: "Experiential authority is based on a 'feel' for the foreign context, a kind of accumulated savvy and a sense of the style of a people or place" (1988a:35). Malinowski, however, anticipated such criticisms of his claims to ethnographic authority:

> The natural reflection on this description is that it presents the feelings of the Ethnographer, not those of the native. Indeed there is a great difficulty in disentangling our own sensations from a correct reading of the innermost native mind. But if the investigator, speaking the native's language and living with them for some time, were to try to share and understand their feelings, he will learn to distinguish when the native's behaviour is in harmony with his own, and when, as it sometimes happens, the two are at variance. (Malinowski 1984 [1922]:107)

Because this "rebuttal" could be taken as further evidence of naïveté, it is important to add some context to this issue and give Clifford's charge some extended consideration.

I have attempted to demonstrate that Malinowski's ethnographies were more interpretive then is generally acknowledged. However, the fact that Malinowski's ethnographies contained their own distinctly interpretive components would not, in itself, satisfy postmodern standards for "good" ethnography: the real issue is the philosophical basis of interpretation. This is made clear when anthropologists from Malinowski to Clifford Geertz are criticized (Rabinow 1986:244; see also Crapanzano 1986) for constructing omniscient, monological narratives on the basis of "experiential" and "scientific" authority. This line of criticism is an attack on realist, as opposed to dialogical, ethnographic accounts.

It is important to historicize the term "realism" in order to understand Malinowski's view of meaning. Malinowski argues explicitly against "the *realist fallacy* that a word vouches for, or contains, the reality of its own mean-

ing" (1949 [1923]:336; emphasis mine), and so combats a form of realism about meaning that was common in his day—Platonic realism, according to which the meaning of a word is, first, an abstract entity associated with the word: ". . . how erroneous it is to consider Meaning as a real entity, contained in a word or utterance" (Malinowski 1949 [1923]:308); and, secondly, serves as a norm for the correct usage of the word with which it is associated: ". . . where truth is found by spinning out meaning from the word, its assumed receptacle" (ibid.:308). Against Platonic realism, Malinowski insisted on contextualizing meaning, emphasizing that "language is essentially rooted in the *reality of the culture*, the tribal life and customs of a people, and that it cannot be explained without constant reference to the broader contexts of verbal utterance" (1949 [1923]:305; emphasis mine). Thus, Malinowski was certainly a "realist" in the sense that there was a *reality of the culture* that could be accessed by the ethnographer—something postmodernists may not accept; however, unlike, for example, Geertz and Lévi-Strauss, Malinowski insisted on tying meaning to the contexts of the culture being studied. As Firth notes: "Even in the most abstract and theoretical aspects of human thought and verbal usage, it seemed to him that the real understanding of words was ultimately always derived from active experience of those aspects of reality to which the words belonged" (1981:31-32). If meanings are there to be "found" in the cultures in which they are forged, then Malinowski's method of immersing himself in the native's world was not inappropriate.

Clifford limits his criticism of authority to the "*science* of participant observation," treating "scientific" and "naive" as coterminous, with the implication that non-scientific methods would not also be "naive." One reason Clifford finds Malinowski's interpretative efforts naïve may lie in the fact that he paints Malinowski and Geertz (and Modernists generally) with the same realist brush. He neglects to appreciate that Malinowski's own view of meaning is set against the form of "realism" prevalent in his day, and this leads Clifford to criticize Malinowski's interpretative methods anachronistically, from the quite recent perspective of meaning as something dialogically constructed.[3] Clifford fails to appreciate that ideas and concepts *evolve*, and that before one can have a view of meaning as dialogical, one must first dispense with Platonic realism.

In order for mutual translation and construction to be possible a dialogic approach must presuppose, as did Malinowski, some "common ground." In this instance, the postmodern program does not strike me as so very far removed from that of Malinowski. Consider Michael Lambek's description, quoting from Richard Bernstein, of the hermeneutic approach: "Rather than Cartesian monological reflection, it is only through 'dialogical encounter with what is at once alien to us, makes a claim upon us, and has an affinity with what we are that we can open ourselves to risking and testing our prejudices' " (1991b:46).

This "dialogical approach" seems to echo Malinowski's statements concerning the *kula*:

> The net result will be the acquisition of a few dirty, greasy, and insignificant looking native trinkets, each of them a string of flat, partly discoloured, partly raspberry-pink or brick-red discs threaded one behind the other into a long, cylindrical roll. In the eyes of the natives, however, this result receives its meaning from the social forces of tradition and custom. . . . It may help us towards this understanding to reflect, that not far from the scenes of the kula, large numbers of white adventurers have toiled and suffered, and many of them given their lives, in order to acquire what to the natives would appear as insignificant and filthy as their *bagi* are to us. (1984 [1922]:351)

Malinowski set out specifically to deconstruct the dominant notion of Primitive Economic Man and challenge the notion that "savages" were pathologically oversexualized. Therefore, I suggest that the "affinity with what we are" and the "opening ourselves to risking and testing our prejudices" is not unique to the hermeneutic approach.

The authority that is lent to the experiential "I" of the scientific observer is vociferously criticized by postmodernists on the grounds that science owes its authority to politics. They are concerned with how the power dynamics which govern the ethnographic enterprise are implicated in the narrative construction of authority. Thus, the interrogation of the rhetorical devices and literary conventions employed in the narrative construction of ethnographic authority constitutes the second prong of criticism.

The Critique of Rhetoric

It is a postmodern proposition that "scientific" authority is textualized and buttressed through rhetorical strategies: the process of writing ethnography is, intrinsically, politically asymmetrical. Pratt (1986) notices that classical ethnography conforms to the literary traditions and conventions of earlier travel writing, employing regionally specific tropes that were common in travel accounts. Hence, Malinowski's famous arrival scene may be read as the evocation of a stereotypical castaway image and should be held suspect because it obfuscates the political/power relationship between the ethnographer and the "natives." According to Pratt, such an image is one of an unintrusive castaway as opposed to the unintentionally intrusive ethnographer. In this sense, it is significant in what it veils, namely, the material (colonial) relationship:

> Anthropologists customarily establish a relationship of exchange with the group based on Western commodities. That is how they survive and try to make their relations non-exploitative. But of course this strategy is enormously contradictory, for it makes anthropologists constant contributors to what they themselves see as the destruction of their objects of study. (Pratt 1986:38)

First of all, it is difficult to perceive a cosmopolitan anthropologist from Poland, surely a country that rivals the Trobriands in experiences of conquest and alien domination, as a self-conscious carrier of colonial culpability. What was obscured was an issue that contemporary anthropologists have rightly been forced to acknowledge and integrate into their collective consciousness. Pratt anachronistically condemns this narrative technique as politically suspect, although it was employed within a context where the conditions for appreciating this rhetorical issue were absent.

Secondly, the image of the ethnographer as the contradiction-ridden, gypsy-scholar is a far more apt description of Lévi-Strauss (see, for example, *Triste Tropiques*) than of Malinowski. Malinowski promoted "enlightened" interaction, and went to great lengths to demonstrate how an anthropologist could be trained to assume the role of a sensitive, non-destructive participant-observer. As a romantic primitivist Malinowski believed that the presence of the anthropologist could be valuable in a battle against the colonial "destruction" of primitive cultures (Stocking 1992), and his deepest ethnography, *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1978 [1935]), is reminiscent in its detail of the kinds of "nature texts" characteristic of the Boasian approach. Although Malinowski was not given to "Great Rescue Operations," he did complain that "Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic, position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity" (1984 [1922]:xv). Although this was a commonly held essentialist and isolationist view of "primitive" cultures, Malinowski despaired of the "signing on" of Trobriand migrant workers and of colonial administrative policies and missionary interference more than of the "contaminating" presence of an ethnographer. Some even suggest that Malinowski's cosmopolitan character made him particularly open to the possibility of a pluralist world order (Fardon 1990a:576; Firth 1981:119; Stocking 1986:26 n).

Finally, not being politically innocent does not always mean being politically "guilty"—politically obtuse may be more accurate. When anthropologists are accused of blatant, political self-interest, the only method of correcting this flaw is to eliminate anthropologists, a solution that fails to consider the positive contributions that competent anthropologists can make. If prior anthropologists are recognized as being politically naïve and obtuse, the solution is to enhance the political awareness of anthropologists and sensitize them to these political issues. This is clearly a more pro-active stance, and one that must be the motivation behind these postmodern criticisms in the first place, despite that fact that many postmodernists would suggest that inherent communicative inequalities make such a solution next to impossible (see, for example, Crapanzano 1986 and Asad 1986).

Before we decide that the politics of ethnographic writing involve an intrinsic, political self-interest, it is useful to try to understand the political conditions that may have informed the ethnographer's motives. Malinowski's narrative strategy, which created a "long ago and far away" in the form of an "ethnographic present," corresponds to the ahistorical and synchronic nature of Malinowski's functionalism; both the theoretical and stylistic aspects of this static representation have been rightly criticized. However, it is not a trivial point that some of the most vociferous criticisms of Malinowski's functionalist model, in his own time, came from missionaries and colonial administrators on the grounds that the model did not allow for change (Richards 1957:19), by which they implied the sort of "change" they desired. In criticizing Malinowski's "ethnographic present" and his theoretical intolerance for social change it is useful to keep in mind the fact that the notion of "change" itself has changed from the colonial to the post-colonial context. "Change" now assumes more positive connotations in a world where political units are granted, at least in principle, "the right to self determination." As Lucy Mair noted: "Malinowski's own experience, as a Pole under Austrian rule, of the situation of ethnic minorities in Europe, was never far from his mind when he was considering the problems of the imposition of change by external authority" (Mair 1957:232). Furthermore, the conventional story of Malinowski's functionalist ethnography omits Malinowski's own theory of cultural change which was concerned with the industrialization process and its impact on small-scale societies in Africa (Mair 1957:234).

Malinowski's textual authority is said to have its literary foundation in both Conrad and Frazer (Clifford 1988b). The literary aspect of Malinowski's ethnography, according to Clifford, is usually distinguished from its "rigorous," scientific core. Clifford challenges this marginalization of the writing process by insisting that narrative strategies affect the way cultural phenomena are interpreted and expressed (Clifford 1986a:4-7). He states:

> A work is deemed evocative or artfully composed in addition to being factual; expressive, rhetorical functions are conceived as decorative or merely as ways to present an objective analysis or description more effectively. Thus the facts of the matter may be kept separate, at least in principle, from their means of communication. But the literary or rhetorical dimensions of ethnography can no longer be so easily compartmentalized. (Clifford 1986a:4)

This may in fact not be an entirely fair representation of Modern ethnographies, particularly those of Malinowski. Malinowski was aware of the importance of narrative structure as more than merely a matter of "style" or "decoration" and he self-consciously used his discursive tools to augment his humanistic attempt to arrive at "the native's point of view." Consider the following passage in *Argonauts*:

> The frequent references to the scenery have not been given only to enliven the narrative, or even to enable the reader to visualise the setting of the native customs. I have attempted to show how the scene of his actions appears actually to the native, to describe his impressions and feelings with regard to it, as I was able to read them in his folk-lore, in his conversations at home, and in his behaviour when passing through this scenery itself. (Malinowski 1984 [1922]:298)

Kaberry points out that "His attempt to recreate incident and setting was not an introduction of a little local colour to enliven the narrative, but sprang from both his scientific and humanistic approach to social anthropology" (Kaberry 1957:72).

Tyler states that in the 20th century the "savage" became "only 'data' and 'evidence,' the critical disproving instance in the positivist rhetoric of political liberalism" (Tyler 1986:128). Conversely, Audrey Richards described Malinowski's treatment of the Trobrianders as much more than merely descriptions of "data": "His islanders strained at societies' rules, fell in love, committed adultery, jumped off palm trees, bragged, cheated, quarrelled and were subject to the romantic call of dangerous overseas 'Argonauts' " (Richards 1957:28).

Postmodernists aim to invalidate the anthropologist's "objectivity," supplant the validity of "representation" in favour of "evocation" and challenge "realist" narrative strategies (Fischer 1986; Marcus 1986:190; Tyler 1986: 130). Once again it is useful to historicize Malinowski's ethnographic narrative. Consider Kaberry's description of Malinowski's literary form: "Lastly, in his vivid eye-witness accounts of ceremonies, economic activities, domestic and village relations and quarrels he records the imponderabilia of everyday life. Some anthropologists have regarded his technique in this respect to be impressionistic and subjective" (Kaberry 1957:85). Malinowski recognized that narrative governs how cultural phenomena are expressed, even if he could not be accused of having the hermeneut's sensitivity to the way narrative governs how cultural phenomena are registered. However unsophisticated when compared with more modern hermeneutic theory, Malinowski's "interpretive" approach cannot be fairly described as merely embellishing a description of "facts" with purple prose.

The narrative arrangement of "I"-witnessed events has been targeted, specifically because it privileges the ethnographer's view over that of the Other. The recent call for ethnographic evocation (Tyler 1986) is a logical extension of Malinowski's attempt to transmit a *feel* for Trobriand life in his narrative. Toward this same end, postmodernists offer the narrative strategy of "polyvocality" to allow the voices of the host community to be heard in the text and to undermine the privileged voice of the ethnographer. For his part, Malinowski states: "I have tried to present everything as far as possible in terms of concrete fact, letting the natives speak for themselves . . ." (1984 [1922]:516). According to postmodernist standards, Malinowski's "monolog-

ical" text did not achieve the ideal of perspectival democracy that appears to be the mark of a competent dialogical ethnography. However, first, the goal of "letting the natives speak for themselves," or allowing the voices of the "natives" to be heard in the text, is not the sole property of a postmodern program. Secondly, it is legitimate to question whether or not the standard of polyvocality is even realistic, given that writing up field notes is a task that the ethnographer usually does on her own and, therefore, in practice the ethnographer has the final edit and the final "word." Thirdly, the standard of polyvocality can only be applied, as I have argued above, in a context where meaning is understood as something dialogically constructed. This compels me to reassert that there is an undeniable continuity from Malinowski to the postmodern agenda.

The critique of experiential authority was offered ammunition by the scandal and "crisis of objectivity" occasioned by the publication of Malinowski's *Diary* (1967). The field experience was shown to be a messy and often undignified business—not an experience worthy of generating a great ethnographic work. The *Diary* disclosed the reality of chaotic subjectivity in the field, a problem which compelled Clifford to claim that ethnographic understanding is the product of *writing*, rather than the field experience (1988b:110). Tyler goes further, claiming that "no experience proceeded the ethnography. The experience was the ethnography" (1986:138). Here we find a significant point of departure between modernism and postmodernism. As the above comments suggest, postmodernism is a post-field-work orientation which emphasizes the politics of writing ethnography, yet it does not offer concrete strategies for addressing political issues in regard to the actual field-work process.

Given that the field experience is no longer considered a primary vehicle for the acquisition and presentation of ethnographic knowledge, Clifford, therefore, claims that the *Diary* forces us to "treat all textual accounts based on fieldwork as partial constructions" (1988b:97). Such a proposition contains two implications: (1) that ethnographies would be less partial if they contained more autobiographical, or "confessional" components, and, indeed, many ethnographers have experimented with this genre; and (2) that ethnographies are "lies" in the sense that they are constructed "truths" relative to the "truth" of a (hypothetical) diary.[4] Clifford builds his interpretation of Malinowski's *Diary* around this second line of reasoning by reading it in reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and reading Malinowski himself as a Conradian protagonist. The "famous lie" in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* offers the key to the analogy: *Argonauts* is the "famous lie" to the Intended, a relational truth (1988b:99). By implication, the *Diary* would represent the words that were truly spoken: "the horror." The question, however, is this: whose horror? Obviously, the horror belongs to those anthropologists who are them-

selves fashioning an anthropological persona based on the ethical principle of the equality of cultures inherent in the original Malinowski Myth.

The *Diary* provided the weapon for an anthropological Oedipal episode. Malinowski had written of his dislike for "the niggers." Of course, any anthropologist would rightly denounce such an attitude. However, few have commented upon Malinowski's attitude toward missionaries, a stance which anthropologists often adopt. For example: "This man disgusts me with his [white] 'superiority,' etc. But I must grant that English missionary work has certain favourable aspects. If this man were a German, he would doubtless be downright loathsome" (Malinowski 1967:16). The infamous passage where Malinowski assumes his Conradian persona and states ". . . my feelings toward the natives are decidedly tending to '*Exterminate the brutes*' " (1967:69; italics in original) is followed immediately by "[I]n many instances I have acted unfairly and stupidly" (p. 69), a comment which should alert the reader to Malinowski's ironic voice. Clifford recognized that Conrad holds "an ironic position with respect to representational truth" and states that Malinowski's ethnography is only implicitly ironic (1988b:100). What Clifford fails to appreciate is the acidic irony that saturates Malinowski's *Diary*, and this leads Clifford to claim, somewhat melodramatically, that *Heart of Darkness* represents a paradigm for ethnographic subjectivity (1988b:100).

I do not intend to defend Malinowski's private statements. However, I suggest that the fact that Malinowski was not always "coolly objective" should not lead to the conclusion that objectivity is not possible and therefore not a viable standard. For example, Putnam offers a contextual definition of objectivity:

> This may mean giving up a certain metaphysical picture of objectivity, but it does not mean giving up the idea that there are what Dewey called "objective resolutions of problematical situations"—objective resolutions to problems which are *situated* in a place, at a time, as opposed to an "absolute" answer to perspective-independent questions. And that is objective enough. (1990:178; emphasis in original)[5]

It is precisely such a standard of objectivity that makes *Argonauts* a better ethnography about the Trobrianders than the *Diary* could ever be. Only those with the most hyper-positivist standards of objectivity would take the angst and contradiction-riddled narrative of the *Diary* as evidence that objectivity is impossible: to do so would be to demand that the ethnographer have no feelings.

Because "objectivity" has been destabilized, postmodernists claim that all is "fictitious," in the sense of "something made or fashioned" (Clifford 1986a:6). Thus, Clifford claims that Malinowski achieved two things through writing: (1) the fictional invention of the Trobrianders and (2) the construction of an anthropological persona (1988b:110). The claim that Malinowski's account of the Trobrianders is fictitious employs a conception of the "fictional" that absorbs, rather than contrasts with, the "factual." Nothing is left to count

as factual except what meets standards that the most vulgar positivists would not advocate. Therefore, I suggest that, in a scientific vocabulary, saying that Malinowski's ethnography is factual is to say the same thing postmodernists say when they claim that it is fictional. Consider Malinowski's comment: "The observer should not function as a mere automaton; a sort of camera and phonographic or shorthand recorder of native statements. While making his observations the field-worker is constantly constructing..." (Malinowski 1978 [1935]:317).

Both prongs of postmodern attack converge on the criticism of the power dynamics which govern the production of knowledge. Science and rhetoric buttress the political programs anthropologists bring to the field, and operate to construct a vision of the "primitive" that is useful for advancing this program. Thus, ethnographies reveal more about the direction of the will-to-knowledge of the Western world than about the realities of the group under study. Anthropological knowledge is embedded in, and directed by, institutionalized power-relations, which means that ethnographic representations are interested fictions. It is to this issue of how Others are used that I now turn.

The Function of the "Other"

Torgovnick notes that the "primitive" (meaning "original" or "ancestor") existed as a series of dichotomies—gentle, tame and in tune with nature, or violent and in need of control—depending on the intellectual needs of the time (1990:3). The politics of "Othering" is discussed extensively by Said (1978) who describes "Orientalism"—a discourse encompassing anthropological, philosophical, artistic and institutional dimensions—as the politically directed expression of the European ethnographic imagination which created a fossilized and exoticized vision of the Oriental Other: the Orient was constructed as Europe's dark alter ego against which European identity was defined. Similarly, the "primitive," as a monolithic category constructed in opposition to the West, was an image that had its own use-value; it was a construct that operated as a yardstick to evaluate Western social arrangements. This use-value governed the conception of their relationship to the West, that is, that "primitives" were "contemporary ancestors," and also governed the way they were narratively represented, that is, as living in an "ethnographic present" (Torgovnick 1990:8).

Lyons and Lyons note that Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages*, among many of his works, was strongly informed by the issues preoccupying the social reform movement of the 1920s (1986:51-52). Lyons and Lyons (1986:53) suggest that in this way Malinowski's ethnography assumes the status of a psychiatric case history of an exotic group, which implicitly invited the reader to compare the practices of the "primitive" to European social arrangements: "Science, by revealing and publicizing the objective truth about human sex-

uality, would in the minds of such reformers as Ellis, Russell and Malinowski, lead to social arrangements more in tune with what science was best equipped to discover: the real facts about human nature" (Lyons and Lyons 1986:58). In this way, representations of the Other are largely trope-governed constructs that speak to the ethnographer's concerns and the concerns of the ethnographer's society. Thus there is no ethnographic representation that is politically innocent. This being acknowledged, it must now be asked: Is this an intellectual habit that characterizes Modern ethnography alone?

Just as in Malinowski's time the primitive Other commented upon Western social and sexual practices and institutions, in the postmodern context the Other (be it a cultural Other or a Modern Other) is meant to comment upon contemporary *methodological* and *epistemological* concerns. For example, Rabinow denaturalizes epistemology by contrasting Western practices with what Others might be up to: ". . . Epistemology must be seen as a historical event . . . [therefore] we do not need a theory of indigenous epistemologies or a new epistemology of the other. We should be attentive to our historical practice of projecting our cultural practices onto the other . . ." (1986:241). Jean Comaroff, advancing a "praxis"/hermeneutic approach, demonstrates how Tshidi mental habits are grounded in everyday, bodily, practice. She "artificializes" (non-praxis-oriented) Western intellectual habits by contrasting them with non-Western styles of reasoning: ". . . what does appear distinctive about precolonial Tswana culture—and others which lack a complex division of labour, monetarized exchange, and literacy—is the absence of an awareness of the process of objectification itself" (1985:125). Michael Jackson (1989), advancing an existentialist epistemological program, states that there are "striking parallels between existential and traditional West African conceptions of free will and determinism" (p. 43).

Here our yardstick has been relocated from the world of institutions to the world of mental habits. The consistent convention problematizes received wisdom by contrasting practices cross-culturally in a manner that "artificializes" Western practices.

Postmodernists point out that ethnographic accounts are modes of arranging knowledge about Others, that is, modes of narrating, so that they "speak to" issues that are on an ethnographer's agenda. However, this "use-value" of ethnographic Others depends upon the audience the ethnographer is addressing; Malinowski was speaking to an audience of social reformers as well as anthropologists. A good many postmodern ethnographers speak primarily to each other and address anthropologists' methodological concerns. I suggest that, although the premise of Malinowski's approach to studying the Primitive—the evolutionary paradigm of "human nature"—has been debunked, his self-reflexive approach still features in the diverse postmodern program. This is one practice we share with *many* of our modern ancestors. However,

Malinowski himself contributed to our tool kit in ways that go largely unrecognized.

Malinowski had been attempting to "make sense" out of "exotic" practices by demonstrating their usefulness or "function." According to Fardon, Malinowski's attempts to demonstrate the viability of cultural practices represents a precedent that has since become a given position: the conviction of the inherent equality of cultures has become the standard anthropological stance of cultural relativism (1990a:575). That this "principle of charity" has since become a "given" within the postmodern program, and that it is not generally attributed to Modernists, is evidenced by that fact that Lambek (crediting Gadamer) argues that "the maxim of the ethnographer" should be to "always recognize in advance the possible correctness, even superiority of the conversation partner's position" (Lambek 1991a:3). Malinowski's account of Trobriand conduct indicates a strong disposition toward recognizing the value and reasonability in Trobriand social practice. It was Malinowski's opinion that one could "Learn a great deal of healthy stuff from savages" (cited in Lyons and Lyons 1986:57). Now consider the following statement by him: "The natives of our Archipelago order their marriages as simply and sensibly as if they were modern European agnostics, without fuss, or ceremony, or waste of time and substance" (1929:76). The recognition of "possible correctness" suggests a prefigured idea of what could count as correct and incorrect. Malinowski himself was an agnostic, and thus this passage could be read as Malinowski's recognition of "correctness" according to what he already saw as proper procedure. What the hermeneut could learn from Modern ethnography is this: (1) a willingness to recognize "possible correctness" does not distinguish postmodern from modern ethnography, and (2) *both* camps risk overlooking the fact that a willingness to recognize possible correctness is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for avoiding ethnocentrism.

Historicizing Malinowski's approach provides an insight into the historically specific nature of postmodern criticisms. The study of the primitive Other as a means of commenting upon one's own society as well as formulating a theory of human nature in general was positively evaluated by Firth:

> He wrote much of savages . . . but he always thought of man in the savage, of those impulses and emotions which are common to savage and civilized alike. So his teaching was never remote from reality. . . . Anthropology was not simply the study of the savage, but the study through which by understanding the savage we might come to a better understanding of ourselves. This "coefficient of reality," as he once jokingly called it, was one of the reasons for his superb work in the field. (Firth 1957:9)

Clifford argues that "deploying a consistent manner of quoting, 'speaking for,' translating the reality of others" (Clifford 1986a:7) amounts to an exercise of power and authority (see also Torgovnick 1990:5). However, it could

also be seen as an early humanistic attempt at arriving at intentions, beliefs and desires. Malinowski's concern with the native's point of view was seen by his near contemporaries (particularly his students—not all of whom liked him personally) as a positive aspect of ethnographic writing: "Malinowski as 'the chronicler and spokesman of the Trobrianders' gave ethnography a dimension it had hitherto lacked: actuality of relationships and richness of content" (Kaberry 1957:71). This "actuality of relationships" is still a goal in ethnography, and the appropriate extension of this original innovation is to question its political implications. Fardon has convincingly argued that Malinowski set the precedent of cultural equality in anthropology and that his method of participant observation was "the bodily image of equality" (1990a:574). It is significant that Malinowski's ethnography is criticized by postmodernists precisely according to this principle of equality.

Conclusion

The postmodern argument that ethnographic representation is a product of, and a participating factor in, the power/knowledge dynamic of Western discourse on the Other has led to the rejection of various methodological and stylistic features of Modernist ethnography. In order to reject the features of a genre of ethnography, they must first be delineated and described. I have attempted to demonstrate not that postmodern criticisms are defective, but that the postmodern descriptions of Modern ethnographies are interested and partial *visions* of Modernism which are used to express postmodern values. The postmodern representations of the various "Malinowskis" are as fictitious, interested and "partial" as the ethnographies they deconstruct.

Postmodern criticisms mute the humanism in Malinowski's approach. The fact that Malinowski had conceived a "New Humanism" which focussed on the "living man, living language, and living full-blooded facts" (Stocking 1986:27) is largely ignored. Malinowski is narratively constructed as a unidimensional scientist/observer whose attempt at understanding "the native's point of view" amounted to little more than the exercise of "experiential authority" in the text.

What Geertz refers to as the literary event of "High Romance" meeting "High Science" (1988:76) does not expose the extent to which the keystone of Malinowski's method, that is, participant observation, has provided the precedent for what now seems to be the current raison d'être of more recent ethnography—an interpretive attempt to arrive at the "cultural logic" of the Other. Without sensitivity to the historical and cultural context, and to the nature of the historically specific theoretical concerns of prior ethnographers, the authors of postmodern critiques commit the very sin they condemn: the objectification of the Other—in this case, a constructed version of "Malinowski" as a Modern Other (Fardon 1990b:25). Vincent (1991) argues that promoting

textual criticism over historicism privileges the ethnography as text, removing the ethnographic process from its socio-political context:

> Textual isolationism can surely be carried to an extreme. Malinowski's ethnography . . . is trimmed to suit the needs of successive representations. His romanticism has been trivialized, and its rebelliousness obscured. . . . Malinowski's interpretivist critics, collectively it would seem, fail to recognize his thickest description, his deepest ethnography, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*. . . . They overlook his field trips to Africa and Mexico and they ignore his statement that the greatest mistake he made in his ethnography was to neglect the colonial situation. (Vincent 1991:57)

Postmodern critiques imply, but do not clearly outline, a vision of an improved narrative format. Literary analyses do not supply coherent, evaluative standards by which one may distinguish a "good" ethnographic account from a "bad" one. As Fardon notes:

> . . . would [Argonauts] without the waving palm trees be more useful to us than the waving palm trees without the [kula] ring? Although the new criticisms claim to believe that there are better and worse accounts, it is not clear that these textual exercises, although interesting, can help us decide which are better or why. (Fardon 1990b:20)

The postmodern position is that ethnographies are "powerful lies" and are the direct product of the power dynamics of the ethnographer's society. I am not entirely convinced by their arguments and I suggest that such a proposition begs the question of what kind of narrative strategy one could adopt to avoid this problem of "authority." There is no guarantee, nor compelling evidence to suggest, that "dialogic," "polyphonic" and "evocative" narration escapes this authority problem. Although a dialogical narrative style may textually fit the field experience more closely, the fact that all ethnography dislocates context into text suggests that the issue of representation, and of representational authority, is not likely resolved by these means.

Postmodernists claim that science is a social process enmeshed in politics. I have argued that the authority-claims of what Clifford describes as a "scientific" discipline were not necessarily the authority-claims of a discipline that was *only* scientific. The "deconstruction" of the "scientific" aspects of Malinowski's ethnographies neglects to consider their more humanistic aspects. Deconstructing the authority-claims of "science," especially where "science" is mischaracterized, offers no guarantee that the authority-claims of an interpretative approach will not be just as tenuously buttressed by such knowledge/power dynamics. It is not my intention to defend or justify colonial anthropology; however, I do suggest that it would be of no benefit to the ethnographic enterprise to replace a hegemony of science with a hegemony of hermeneutics. It is useful to note Barbara Johnson's query: "to what structure

of authority does the critique of authority belong?" (cited in Lambek 1991a:6).

The body of postmodern criticism itself has promoted its particular vision(s) of ethnography in the vocabulary of *crisis*, particularly a "crisis of representation" and often an "identity crisis." But it is difficult to regard a state of affairs that has proceeded for approximately a decade as a *crisis* rather than the status quo. The crisis vocabulary of postmodern commentators is a form of rhetoric that lends an urgency of purpose to the postmodern program. Yet it would seem that for all the urgency of purpose in deconstructing previous ethnographies, the postmodern values are not so very far removed from their Modern predecessors; many of the more humanistic goals have remained, the means have been updated. The lesson that I draw from this examination of postmodernist retrospective criticism is this: it is often a great deal easier to criticize one's intellectual heritage than to acknowledge one's inheritance.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the referees and editors of this journal for helpful suggestions and comments, Rockney Jacobsen for lending his philosophical expertise and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting this research.
2. Although I focus here on "Malinowski the Ethnographer" rather than on "Malinowski the Theoretician," it should be noted that one significant line of postmodern attack on Modernist ethnography is rooted in a hostility toward grand theories. I suggest that such a line of criticism, when applied to Malinowski, exhausts itself fairly quickly when one considers the fact that Malinowski's ethnography was quite theoretically sparse. Indeed, his functionalism itself was tautological and, therefore, theoretically thin. Malinowski wrote his major ethnographies *as if* he had a grand theory, rather than as an attempt to elaborate one; he was more concerned to provide detailed descriptions of Trobriand life as a way of offering evidence to challenge Eurocentric theoretical constructs such as "primitive economic man."
3. This notion of "meaning" comes from the later Wittgenstein and those that followed. See Ian Hacking's history of the meaning of meaning in *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (1975).
4. The consequence that there are no "truths," but only constructed half truths, arises out of the postmodern view that ethnographies are not accurate transmitters of the "meaning" of cultural phenomena because subjectivity, politics and biases get in the way of the ethnographer's ability to access "the native's point of view" and represent this point of view in text. This view of truth and meaning leads to the problem of incommensurability. The idea that the meanings of others are in principle inaccessible to an interpreter requires the very independence of meaning from interpreters that is the hallmark of Malinowski's version of realism. So, although Malinowski is more optimistic about the prospect of understanding than those who claim that meanings are incommensurable, it is not clear he is more realist about meaning than they.
5. The issue here is not only about whether objectivity is obtainable, it is also about what it is. There are many post-positivist positions that reject a "God's eye-view" definition of objectivity (see, for example, Putnam 1990:25, 28, 122, 178 and Rorty 1982:195; for a definition of objectivity as a set of institutional practices which build community consensus see Rorty 1991:41). Such a definition of objectivity, when married to a Foucauldian picture of institutionalized power relations, is congenial enough to a postmodern approach (see Rabinow 1986). However, this definition of objectivity is not applied to Modernist ethnographies when

the claim is made that objectivity is impossible; if it were, then it would have to be conceded that many Modernist ethnographies achieved "objectivity." Postmodernists critique Modernist ethnography, somewhat anachronistically, from a position that has its roots in a Marxist theory of knowledge. Thus, baldly put, the "objectivity" of Modernist ethnographies is seen as a product of politics. Such a view implies that postmodernist statements are, themselves, products of political power-relations. What is needed is a clearer picture of the interrelationship between "objectivity," "truth" and power if we are to take postmodern claims seriously and not dismiss them as merely "powerful lies."

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