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ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE UK: NEVER MIND THE BIOGRAPHIES, HERE'S THE REFLEXIVE SYMBOLS

Patrick Laviolette

Fardon, Richard. *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography*. London: Routledge, 1999. xx + 315 pp.

Grinker, Roy Richard. *In the Arms of Africa: The Life of Colin M. Turnbull*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001 [2000]. xii + 368 pp.

Tambiah, Stanley J. *Edmund Leach: An Anthropological Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xvii + 517 pp.

Van Tilburg, Jo Anne. *Among Stone Giants: The Life of Katherine Routledge and Her Remarkable Expedition to Easter Island*. New York: Scribner, 2003. xiii + 351 pp.

Young, Michael W. *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist, 1884–1920*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. xxix + 690 pp.

Focusing on the concept of the intellectual biography, I explore the relational and symbolic importance of life histories for the reflexive history of



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anthropology. Legacies of questioning disciplinary self-awareness exist for fieldwork, data analysis, writing up, and academic social networks. The intellectual biography, as a newly developing self-conscious genre, is becoming central to the way in which the discipline writes its own history. This article situates five recent biographies of “British” anthropologists into a theoretical, methodological, and intellectual landscape that encompasses the international development of a century of social anthropology in the United Kingdom.

Keywords: British intellectual landscapes, disciplinary life histories, epistemology, reflexivity

INTRODUCTION

Don't know what I want
But I know how to get it.
—Lydon 1976

This ironic dictum from the Sex Pistols' song “Anarchy in the UK” helped launch the counter-cultural punk movement just over thirty years ago. It can also be said to encompass some of the tensions that occur between practical experience and intellectual conceptualization. Such epistemological negotiations through the disciplinary self-awareness of methodological and theoretical construction in the development of British social anthropology from the turn of the 20th century provide the rationale for this essay, the main objective of which is to examine five recent biographical texts about some of our anthropological elders in the United Kingdom.

But as my subtitle suggests, most of these books are not quite biographies in the strict sense of the term. On the whole they portray a vast, complex, intellectual landscape and cover a deep and troubled investigative heritage. Given the fairly extensive impact of British social anthropology, which has been quite rich in terms of interpretive texture and political and cultural capital, this legacy has occasionally been followed, felt and sometimes even feared the world over. Hence in themselves, and as a collective “bio”-regional assemblage, these books are symbols of anthropology's reflexive history (Ruby 1982; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). That is, they form part of a discursive turn that dates to when anthropologists began taking seriously the understanding and study of an unusual “species”—themselves (Bourdieu 1988).

This turn was itself largely influenced by the early developments of ethnography and the struggle that anthropologists from Europe had

to face in light of the discipline's imperial, colonial, and paternal associations (Kuklick 1991; Urry 1992). Yet it is important to single out that a certain reflexivity through biographical and autobiographical writing is nothing new. Such accounts of Victorian anthropologists began to appear as early as the 1940s (Marett 1941; Quiggin 1942). This intermittently continued through the next five decades with the publication of life histories, diaries, interviews, lecture notes, and obituaries of the more recent founding ancestors of fieldwork-led, modern British anthropology (Firth 1957; Kuper 1973; Stocking 1996). For example, the interest in Malinowski's career by the author of the first biography reviewed here, Michael Young, itself dates to the 1970s.

Nevertheless, we are presently witnessing a new burgeoning biographical interest in the lives and experiences of our anthropological forbearers, in Britain and elsewhere. If the hefty 2000 pages in these books about five different "British" anthropologists is anything to go by, then they are perhaps indicative that the discipline in the United Kingdom remains eclectic in how it portrays itself biographically. At one extreme is the focus on the individualist "warts and all" type of popular narrative about interesting or charismatic subjects. At the other are the more historiographic accounts that uncover epistemic disciplinary structures as reflected through the lives and works of certain key thinkers who have achieved prominence.

This article argues that as a newly emerging, self-conscious genre, the biography to a small degree but more importantly the contextualized, intellectual biography in particular will be crucial to the development of anthropological reflexivity. In other words, I suggest that intellectual biographies are becoming increasingly fundamental to the way in which the discipline continues to write its own history (Bourdieu 1990).

Reflexivity: Bending Back Disciplinary Bones

Social anthropologists largely began to be self-aware of questioning the authority of their own ethnographic representations of other cultures in the 1960s. Particular reflexivity camps emerged in the social sciences in this period as an inherent critique of positivism. For example, Schutz (1962) advocated phenomenological approaches; Garfinkel (1967) advanced ethnomethodology; Turner (1974) explored social dramas and creativity; Bloor (1976) promoted the sociology of scientific knowledge; and Ashmore (1989) among others was interested in postmodernism. By the mid-1970s, during the heyday of structural functionalism, social anthropologists (as opposed

to sociologists) were already showing less interest in examining their own oeuvre and its theoretical assumptions as objects of research. Nevertheless, some British anthropologists like Bateson (1980), inspired by wider debates in cognitive science and epistemology, upheld the concern for what the discipline could know about itself. He pointed out that in being both subject and object of research, we place ourselves in a situation where we can become aware of how knowledge is accumulated, gathered and turned into “Knowledge” (i.e., information accepted and transmitted by a larger community of scholars).

As structural functionalism’s power started to lose sway in late 1970s social anthropology, the speed of such shifts and challenges increased. This was both the cause and consequence of a public demand for more accessible entry into higher education. Such an increase in the power of the grass roots did not result, as some had anticipated it would, in the end of the university as a community of scientists. Conversely, it was a sign of the rapid development of hermeneutic (Gadamer 1975), biographical, and autobiographical theories and concepts—positions that scholars were increasingly willing to embrace (Okely and Callaway 1992; Reed-Danahay 1997).

Reflexivity has certainly had its advocates internationally across the social sciences for over two decades now. This takes us to the contemporary investigations of education and research. The critique of writing in the ethnographic process has taught us that our depictions communicate as much about ourselves as about our representations of the world (Marcus and Fisher 1986). As Burawoy (1991:7) states: “Participant observation is not only a paradigmatic technique for studying others; it also points to a distinctive way of understanding ourselves. The dialogue between participant and observer extends itself naturally to a dialogue among social scientists.” This theoretical innovation has allowed insightful and far-reaching observations into the nature of the academic profession and the processes involved in the production of knowledge. Notably, recent approaches in the study of scientific knowledge have generated a number of case studies in the vein of understanding how experimental analyses are vulnerable to the observer’s interests and values (Latour 1987). In spite of this, few ethnographers have been concerned to empirically examine research in their own fields. This is perhaps due to the fear of appearing self-obsessive and narcissistic given that reflexive conceptual frames are already incorporated into the formulation of participant-observation (Boissevain 1974).

One endeavor in this direction is Kurzman’s (1991) interrogation into the affinities between values and interests in the production of

knowledge. He provides a continuum of social distance between observer and observed, researcher and subject. Kurzman claims that the sentiments of social distance extend to the main interests of all ethnographers using participant-observation. In this sense, the ethnographer's role in the field allows fieldworkers to pursue political goals as well as make observations and gather data whereas the niche for social theory in the academic world guards against individualist critiques at one extreme and dehumanizing interpretations at the other.

The upshot of this reasoning is that ethnographers swing dichotomously between their subjects and their relations to other social scientists. Unfortunately, this process sometimes violates the ties between research interests and community needs since the contextualization of participant-observation work can be disempowering for one's subjects. This illustrates that contemporary studies on the process of doing research occasionally frame knowledge production as a vehicle for domination. Realizations of this kind place the notions of biography and autobiography into a paramount position in the study of higher education. Such perspectives allow continuity and change, decent and revision, preservation and innovation, to complement each other in the production of knowledge. Ergo, reflexive histories become individualistic, disciplinary, and cross-disciplinary tools at the same time.

Biographies of anthropologists teach us something significant in this respect. By revealing the importance of diaries and informal personal documents as well as polished articles and monographs, they can help trace the anthropologist's meanderings between ontology and epistemology—between experience, method, and theory. Such sources are valuable in uncovering and debunking imperial, colonial or other potentially questionable processes that might or might not have implicitly occurred through the practice of fieldwork (Loizos 1977). With these conceptual points about epistemic reflexivity in mind, let us now move on to examine the texts individually, in reverse order of their publication date since this is more or less inverse to the chronology of influence for the characters involved.

BOOKMARKS, HALLMARKS, AND RE-MARKS

Young on Malinowski

Michael Young's biography of Bronislaw Malinowski (2004) does not look at the last twenty-two years of his life from the 1920s

onwards. This will be the topic of a much-anticipated follow-up biography by Young, when Malinowski truly becomes an international figure. The book strikes a nice balance between illustrating personal information about Malinowski's formative period of ethnographic training whilst examining in considerable detail the implications of this budding career for the methodological and theoretical developments of British social anthropology. Despite its 610 pages of challenging material, this first volume is remarkably easy to read. For some time to come, it will be by far the most comprehensive survey of the vast archive of files, communications, and academic writings surrounding this pioneer fieldworker. Furthermore, it is not only essential reading to those interested in Malinowski studies but will also be highly informative to anyone interested in the history of anthropological thought.

The text is divided into three parts. The first provides considerable detail about Malinowski's parents and his first twenty-five years of life. The second chronicles the shortest period of four years during which the Pole meandered between London and his homeland. The final section richly covers those busy six years when Malinowski was exiled in the South Pacific by World War I. In this book Young eloquently reveals how Malinowski's fascination with the construction of his own persona led him to conceptualize the theoretical foundations for myth as social charter and eventually functionalism. We are also shown some of the ways in which his near obsession with his own social standing lay behind his unprecedented methodological innovations in the field. The book equally begins to scrutinize the mysterious aura and elusive pedagogic style that this charismatic actor was adopting. This of course would eventually attract what were to become some of the most influential people in the professional founding of the discipline.

If there were any serious criticism of this volume it would simply be that on a few occasions Young seems to unchallengingly accept some of Malinowski's main theses. For example, the ignorance on the part of Trobrianders of the father's influence in sexual reproduction (what has come to be known as the "virgin birth debate") has been much more contested than is given credit. In Young's defense, he does acknowledge that the concern over the physiology of reproduction has been "one of the hoariest debates in social anthropology" (Young 2004:180). He even admits in his introduction that certain theoretical exchanges in which the *pater* of functionalism was involved are better exposed by others. "Expositions and critiques of Malinowski's theories and of his work are legion. . . . It would have hindered my narrative immeasurably, and added inordinately to its

length, to engage with this vast literature at every turn” (p. xxii). He further claims that his aim is to give voice to Malinowski and his colleagues while wishing to avoid confrontation with his own contemporaries, so that he sees his book as a literary biography based on historical sources rather than an intellectual one based on more recent assessments of Malinowski’s legacy to the wider writings of social anthropologists. I feel Young is selling himself short here and would argue that his extensive tome is more than just both but a fine example of each. Indeed, in addition to the 46 pages of chapter-divided endnotes, he provides a healthy 12 page bibliography of scholarly research, plus an additional reference page to Malinowski’s manuscripts.

Nevertheless, even if it were “simply” an historical piece of literary biography, in the case of the particular debate about Trobriand paternity, what Young has done is to ignore not only his own colleagues but also those of his Polish-cum-British protagonist. For instance, he writes that the epidemiologist Raynor Bellamy “had discovered what Malinowski was later able to confirm: that Trobrianders denied any link between male insemination and female conception” (p. 387); later he adds that Sir James George Frazer had been “pleased to infer that his own pet theory concerning the ignorance of physiological paternity had been confirmed in the field by an ethnographer of Malinowski’s calibre” (p. 436). Such statements give the impression that this conclusion was correctly taken for granted and not adequately challenged in this period of Malinowski’s life. Undoubtedly Young will deal with this issue in a more complex way in the following book, during the period when more people got involved in this discussion like the colonial official, Leo Austen. In the meantime, however, Tambiah’s (2002) discussion of Edmund Leach’s later contribution to this debate in the 1960s and 1970s is much more exhaustive.

As we will see, however, the difference in styles is such that Tambiah’s and Fardon’s (1999) books are purely intellectual biographies at the expense of what Young provides regarding an array of biographical detail which rarely falters. If on occasion the text overall does slightly waver, then this would be when it comes to some of the generalizations that the author makes about the nature of the discipline. One example is when he says without substantiation or further explanation that the participant-observation of a good ethnographer “requires the alertness of every sense” (p. 536). Undoubtedly, yet I am curious as to why these more general comments are not elaborated upon to the same extent as the sophisticated descriptions he provides for the ways in which his protagonist’s personal history

details were intertwined with the intellectual building blocks of such an innovative thinker.

Somewhat pedantically, I admit, I also feel that Young could have elaborated upon some of the passing statements he makes regarding the impact of Malinowski's "fatalism" on his musings and theorizing. For example, he writes without much elaboration, that

..he also had a vague, equally irrational conviction that they had 'already paid the ransom to fate.' Introspective insight such as this informed his anthropological theory of religion, which held that beliefs in Providence and Immortality were fundamental. If he found it impossible to believe in the latter, he obscurely believed in the first. [p. 506]

As a counter example, the fullness in which Young considers his protagonist's contribution to the discipline should be noted. In this sense, it is important that he has identified some of the perceptions which local people, both native and expatriate, had of the troubled European ethnographer. It is interesting to see Young follow this level of postcolonial analysis in the wider context of his character's social networks, allowing him to suggest that "Malinowski, it seems, was part of Hunt and Haddon's larger plan for government-sponsored anthropology in both Papua and New Guinea" (p. 377). Furthermore, he even addresses the complexities of disciplinary reflexivity by demonstrating that Malinowski was aware of but not troubled with the issue:

"to what extent introspective analysis modifies psychic state" could well be reformulated for the eyewitnessing fieldworker: to what extent did his presence modify the behaviour of those islanders under his observation? There is scant evidence, however, that this question bothered him. [p. 542]

Malinowski's life has of course been extensively described already, so on the whole this account is there to fill the gaps. Social anthropologists will nevertheless cherish this volume for the thick description that it provides regarding his theoretical opposition to evolutionism and diffusionism; his confessions that the omission of post-contact change had been the greatest shortcoming of his monographs; and his stance of insider-ness and immersive participant-observation which allowed him to devise methods of deconstructing

the difference between what informants said versus what they did. The book also describes in more varied detail than has ever previously been noted the many bureaucratic influences and limitations on Malinowski's movements during his time in the South Pacific (Malinowski 1967). This, Young aptly concludes, has done the discipline an enormous favor by embedding precedents for individual autonomy and longevity into the practice of fieldwork.

Van Tilburgh on Routledge

Centering around a two year core on Easter Island (Rapa Nui), this book is divided into two further sections which cover the before and after periods of Katherine Routledge's life. Jo Anne Van Tilburgh's (2003) biography of Routledge, and to a lesser extent of her husband, William Scoresby-Routledge, should not be judged in light of its significance to social anthropology since it is not particularly an academic book. Rather, it reads exceptionally well for what it is—a popular biographical travel and expedition log. Unfortunately, however, this is not a genre that I feel suitably qualified to review. Nor would it be very useful to consider it as such for a scholarly journal, so my critique might seem unnecessary harsh.

If this were to be an intellectual biography, then part of the problem that Van Tilburgh would have been faced with is that the Routledges actually left little by way of any renowned theoretical legacy. That is, they had little academic power, no followers in the form of students or researchers of their own, and added little to the theoretical developments of the field. In part, this is surely due to their lack of credentials and institutional affiliation. Van Tilburgh does point this out but mostly in terms of the "academic freedom" that it gave them. What is overlooked, however, is the level to which their contribution to the British or world scene of emerging archaeological and ethnological theory was largely negligible, despite their substantial contribution, as peripatetic members of the intellectual aristocracy, to the imperial process itself.

Unfortunately, in terms of reflexive disciplinary insight, Van Tilburgh does not seriously unpack this issue of Routledge's overall insignificance, preferring to glorify the contribution that her protagonists made to expedition anthropology as well as to archaeological excavation techniques and survey field methods. Consequently, she has opted to portray a sensationalistic life history account instead of contextualizing the Rapa Nui material into larger intellectual discourses, other than the academic debate about the origins of the Islanders. This is singled out as one of Routledge's life ambitions and

therefore as the catalyst behind her subsequent projects in the South Pacific (Van Tilburgh 2003:205–214). But at the time, this was surely an issue that was academic in the more derogatory sense of the word since there does not appear to be any realizations whereby, for these colonial explorers at least, the posing of such riddles and their empirical answers were inherently contestable. That is, bound up with disagreements between certain theoretical camps like diffusionism and evolutionism, let alone the more complex reflections to arise decades later in terms of the politics of representation and post-colonial theory.

It is interesting that these wider issues are not addressed explicitly given the excellent job that Van Tilburgh does in indicating that the Routledge project, through Katherine's initiative and compassion, ultimately became part of an ethical ideal to champion indigenous causes and highlight cases of injustice, oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, the author does establish that one of the Routledges' expedition research questions regarding the connection between Easter Island's past and present inhabitants was convincingly answered by them, thus demonstrating the mnemonic and socio-political significance of cultural continuity (especially pp. 168–169). In these terms, Van Tilburgh is able to underline an interesting and significant contradiction on the part of her main characters: "The irony, of course, was that the Routledges, who condemned the Rapa Nui for thievery, were doing their own—arguably more detrimental—kind of stealing, though they would have been shocked to hear it called that" (p. 146). This is a highly relevant point that I am guessing many other scholars might have followed up with a discussion about colonialism or cultural ownership and repatriation.

A further example of where the book could be seen as inadequate is in the little discussion of the Routledges' published material which itself was far from vast. For instance, their first co-authored book about the *Akikuyu* receives specific attention in only the last three paragraphs of the sixth chapter about British East Africa (Scoresby-Routledge and Routledge 1910). Much of this simply lists the places and people who reviewed the work. With the exception of a few lines, it hardly engages with anything that it says. Moreover, Van Tilburgh's biography does not (unlike Fardon[1999], for example, in relation to E. E. Evans-Pritchard's influence on Mary Douglas) go on to elaborate about the theories and ideas of those who were influential upon the protagonist. This seems like a wasted opportunity given Routledge's significant relationship with Robert Marett at Oxford. A final point of critique is that the scholarly references of the bibliography, totaling over twenty pages, are never cited in the text.

Rather unusually (although Grinker [2000] has done the same) the book does not even provide adequate citation in the text to the archival sources used which are listed as an extensive sixty-plus pages of endnotes.

As I have suggested, however, these reservations are only problematic in terms of the academic rigor expected of an intellectual biography. So in a sense I admit to barking up the wrong tree. Consequently, the book's best and most significant elements come out initially through the thick historical description, which reveals the power of the ocean in connecting Polynesian cultures (p. 111). Later in her conclusion, Van Tilburgh rather unexpectedly makes the Routledge story relevant to current times. Here she raises pressing eco-heritage concerns by identifying certain conservation, environmental, and archaeological protection issues that surround the island, the Rapa Nui statues, and the protection of both local culture and indigenous land claim rights. In this case, Van Tilburgh should be applauded for her sensitivity to significant ecological and political dilemmas. This raising the bar of awareness for such pressing social and ecological matters is, for me, the most important component of this book.

Grinker on Turnbull

Admittedly, it is problematic to talk about Colin Turnbull as a British anthropologist given that his contributions only really took place once he began to establish himself in America through his first post as the African curator for the American Museum of Natural History in New York. So even though he trained in Britain and his work has of course had some impact in Europe, Roy Richard Grinker (2001) convincingly shows how Turnbull has been much more influential to American cultural anthropology. The contradiction is more glaring once we acknowledge, as most do, that ultimately Malinowski is a British social anthropologist (cf. Ellen et al. 1989).

This cross-Atlantic connection in Turnbull's work is interesting in itself, however. It reflects of course the internationalization as well as professionalization of the discipline from its "imperial/colonial" heartland. The idea of all these five anthropologists being more or less British by birth or migration is the starting point, not their destination. A further reconciliation comes through from Turnbull's Oxford training and doctoral field site in Africa, both of which were archetypical of post-Second-World-War U.K. anthropology (Goody 1995). Like Douglas, however, Turnbull's research was in a Belgian

territory and thus outside the direct influence of the British Colonial Office. Additionally, Turnbull's Scots-Irish identity does come in to play at times in Grinker's text, even though we are shown how his real personal development after his initial immersive fieldwork is completely tangled up with his New York cosmopolitan lifestyle, his Virginian retirement home life, and a renewed field persona involving his partner.

Grinker reminds us many times that Turnbull's life and ideas were more often than not ahead of their time. Significant, for those interested in current material culture studies, is the way Grinker makes it obvious that Turnbull can be seen as a highly significant predecessor of this area. His museum curating in New York; his involvement in the production of the theatrical production of *Les Iks*; and the relationship that he helps establish between art/drama and anthropology are all good examples. Grinker incisively points out the possible connection to Turnbull's Oxford training under Evans-Pritchard here, whereby anthropology began to be formulated as a humanities subject which had much more affinity with the arts than the sciences (p. 235).

Like Van Tilburgh, Grinker also adopts a popular non-academic style with a number of literary devices to keep the attention of the average undergraduate. The text is easy to read, with a bounty of gossip, suspense, and generalizations about the discipline. At times the story is remarkably captivating in relation to the many debates that Turnbull was shrouded in. But overall the book comes up short in terms of the presentation of wider conceptual and theoretical substance. Grinker nevertheless makes many observations that are considerably astute, if overtly dilute and lacking in elaborative discursive context. Early on he suggests that part of Turnbull's fame resulted from writing about experiences and feelings that were more universal than was the case for most of his more traditional, "scientifically" minded colleagues. Yet it is not until the end of the book that he is even vaguely critical of the fact that Turnbull left little by way of significant contribution to the theoretical development of social anthropology or museology. Similar to Van Tilburgh then, this seems to leave him open to talk about the work of other anthropologists and anthropological theory in only the vaguest terms: "Many anthropologists use a concept of universal rights in their advocacy for immigrants, refugees, and others; many others still cast a suspicious glance on globalizing concepts like human rights or 'development'" (p. 186). Names, however, are not given, the discussion is not pushed further, and we are quickly moved on to gloss over another topic that is altogether different.

Further stylistic similarities to Van Tilburgh exist. Here too the prose is often sensationalistic and superficial, with all sorts of unsubstantiated pseudo-psychological assumptions about what was going on in the heads of his protagonists. The following passage from earlier on the same page is indicative of some of the more banal interpretations, in this case about the distinct contrast of Turnbull's emotive and romantic depiction of the Pygmies which was diametrically opposed to his alienated and ultimately dystopic portrayal of the Ik:

Unlike the Pygmies, the Ik failed to empower Colin. Because he could do little for them the Ik threatened his role as protector or savior. Because they did not seem to respect him or care for him, the Ik never gave him the sense of self-worth he derived from Joe and other underdogs. And because the Ik never gave him someone like Kenge [his Pygmy key informant] who he could love and idolize, he grew angry and lonely. The Ik were unlikable to Colin to the end, sadly unyielding to any Pygmalion-like efforts. [Grinker 2001:186]

Furthermore, the adoption of a populist presentation style means that Grinker does not provide a comprehensive bibliography or adequate citations of the archive material he uses. Indeed, source materials are whimsically and inconsistently found in chapter notes which are not numbered throughout the text and thus require some guesswork to follow. For example, chapter 10 starts with an examination of some controversy surrounding one of Turnbull's books:

Graham Green praised Michael Korda [Turnbull's editor] and Colin for their courage; Margaret Mead called it "beautiful"; and reviews in *Life* and the *New York Times* saw the work as a powerful commentary on the human capacity for evil. Others called it "unethical" or "dangerous," and in the *New York Times Book Review* a reviewer called Colin "deranged." [p. 155]

Grinker presents no less than six or seven different potential sources here without citing any of them properly. Where for instance did Greene praise these people, in church? One does not need to be a trained historian—let alone a famous architect or novelist¹—to

¹As Greene (1951) himself does in his most personal, semi-autobiographical novel, *The End of the Affair* (see also Neil Jordon's screenplay adaptation, 1999, Columbia Pictures).

acknowledge that God is indeed in the detail, if not for the sake of offering supportive evidence then at least as a courtesy to those readers who might be interested in chasing up any such material. Surely it is the job of a good biographer, popular or otherwise, to facilitate such a task.

Additionally, there are certain similarities between Turnbull and the popular British anthropologist Nigel Barley (1986). Both were museum curators for some time and for most of their careers free from some of the responsibilities of many academic positions. Both have also been incredibly successful authors of accessible best-seller “travel literature” type books. Along with this fame, they consequently shared the experience of occasionally being ignored or subjected to ridicule by more “conservative” professional anthropologists. Indeed, Turnbull had spoken out on politically sensitive issues and advocated views that many find unorthodox. Like Albert Camus (1960), he protested vehemently against capital punishment during a time when he was conducting research on death row inmates (chapter 15). Turnbull’s life in terms of the arts, theater, and his Scottish origins also had its parallels with Victor Turner, who made an illustrious introduction to the University of Chicago’s anthropology department in the late 1960s. Grinker, however, makes few such comparisons or attempts to contextualize Turnbull’s life as a popular academic, the exceptions being in relation to an analogy he makes to an eccentric neuroscientist as well as to a few passing comments about one of Turnbull’s colleagues, Margaret Mead, who did not seem to have much time for him.

Finally, there is a whole materiality (Hockey 1990) and landscaping (Laviolette 2003) of death at the end of chapter 16 that is conceptually bypassed. Here the relationship between the funeral of Turnbull’s partner Joe Towles and the ideas of symbolic tangibility as well as the manifestation of various identities (i.e., African/Celtic/academic/homosexual/married) could have been described in more length. Grinker recounts this event scrupulously in the ethnographic vein of thick description. Again, however, he does not seem to think it worth his while to contextualize the scene into a wider anthropological discourse about burial and mortuary ceremonies which he admits was itself of interest to the mourning protagonist.

Tambiah on Leach

In contrast to the past two texts, Stanley Tambiah’s (2002) account of his friend and colleague Edmund Leach’s life is considerably erudite

and occasionally Hermetic. Some critics might suggest that this is too much the case and that the book offers little personal information about Leach. Other than for theoretically minded anthropologists and social historians, it will probably have limited appeal and is likely to go over the heads of many. Nevertheless, Tambiah provides an intellectual biography in the truest sense. The book is an outstandingly exhaustive reading and contextualization of Leach's oeuvre within the discipline and British society more generally.

Tambiah begins by postulating the remarkable thesis that Leach's life was wholeheartedly anthropological in every respect, despite his initial training and interests in engineering, mathematics, and all things pragmatic. From his upbringing in a large, kinship-focused family to his informal and anecdotal analyses of ritual hierarchy in university ceremonial processions, Tambiah suggests that Leach's inquisitive mind was shaped by, and ultimately helped extensively shape, a quintessentially anthropological worldview. We are then shown, once Leach starts his professional career after finishing his Ph.D., that polemical rhetoric and the setting up of straw-men were part of his strategy for successful debate. Through such devices he could overcome the tension between being both structuralist and functionalist. Owing to a mastery of empirical detail, he would choose a constant struggle for a middle range approach concerned with meaning over behavior as well as the need to provide cross-cultural comparisons and "transcriptions" to use his term (Hugh-Jones and Laidlaw 2000).

Although interested in kinship and social structure, and profoundly influenced by his teachers Malinowski, Firth, and Fortes, Tambiah charts the trajectory that Leach took away from functional determinisms towards the structural appeal of linguistic-like models. He effectively turned his back on the path being paved at the time by his rival "Anarchy-Brown" which we are shown was riddled with personal and professional antagonisms. Tambiah therefore demonstrates that one of Leach's most significant contributions to social anthropology was to predominantly help lay the groundwork that would allow British structural-functionalism to thrive while paradoxically withdrawing himself somewhat from the intellectual debates in British social anthropology. He instead preferred to engage with a wider international dialogue—French structuralism and American functionalism.

It is at this later point in his career that Leach produced a series of pieces about biblical materials. In a detailed progression through the publications and personal communications between Leach and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tambiah digests his protagonist's attempts to

elaborate upon the theoretical foundations of structuralism. This interest in the sociological meanings of religious scriptures is one of the ways in which some of Leach's writings closely parallel those of Mary Douglas. Reading chapter 11, where Tambiah goes through this material about biblical texts, is a bit like reading *The Da Vinci Code*. An elaboration on the symbolic and iconographic nature of Leach's interpretations is beyond the scope of this essay, save to note that he was attempting to overcome the a-historicism of Lévi-Strauss's structural analyses of myth by emphasizing the "total ethnographic context." In this case this refers to the ways in which cultural meaning grows out of tradition (p. 295).

In his twelfth chapter Tambiah repeats Leach's motivations for writing about art and architecture. These were to expose how Christian doctrine was embedded in the social, and to explore the cultural backgrounds of belief systems more generally. The author elaborates upon Leach's application of contextual structuralist methods in three case studies from published essays. Tambiah here uncovers the rather minimal interdisciplinary impact made by Leach outside anthropology. He concludes the book with three fascinating chapters that are especially pertinent in terms of directly addressing the development of social anthropological thought. The 17th and 18th offer glimpses into Leach's own reassessment of his life's work and an examination of his administrative contribution to the Cambridge College system as the Provost of King's. Chapter 16, however, is most highly relevant to us since it chronicles the complex debate regarding the relationship between British anthropology and the processes of colonialism. Here Tambiah reviews the influence upon Leach of subaltern thinkers and postcolonial theorists from a vast range of sources and perspectives such as Marx, Dumont, Foucault, and Gramsci. He mounts a densely nuanced if somewhat apologetic scenario for how Leach fits into the discussions about re-problematizing the history and current practices of British social anthropology.

Among the few faults that the book has is its excessive length, which could have been cut down because of significant repetition. Tambiah continually lists information such as full titles in the main body of the text (sometimes several times on the same page) as well as in the footnotes and again in the bibliography (e.g., p. 319). It is difficult to see what this adds unless it is a heuristic way of making the reader remember certain details. Unfortunately, however, it probably has the reverse effect. One is prone to skim over these passages quickly, sometimes missing out on some information that might be relevant but is concealed in the repetition. Also rather

surprisingly, the prose is often far from elegant. Certain sentences are incredibly long and convoluted. Given the significance and sophistication of the topics covered, much of this can be forgiven. But once one breaches the 300 page mark it does become more than a bit tiresome and frustrating to work through. The reader will hopefully indulge one example:

I am introducing this information about Malinowski's advocacy of studies of the dynamics of unequal colonial contact in Africa, not only to problematize the blanket charge of anthropology's conscious or unconscious complicity in the Western imperial project, but also to mute that part of Leach's own undifferentiated indictment of those anthropologists of the period of the 1930s to 1950s who are alleged to have sought to construct a pre-colonial "traditional" tribal society as a bounded whole, impervious to change before colonial contact, and/or, when studying the societies during the colonial period, to ignore or bracket the impact of colonial administrators, missionaries, and commercial entrepreneurs on their subject peoples. [p. 447]

I have chosen this particular example for several reasons. Principally, it reveals Tambiah's ability to go beyond the simple praise of Leach's ideas. Instead, he is often willing to critically engage with the thoughts and writings of the Cambridge don. By questioning the logic and theoretical developments of his protagonist, Tambiah ultimately ends up exploring their repercussions in a wider body of social anthropological knowledge which both men, sometimes in collaboration, have substantially shaped. The example is equally useful since it shows that Tambiah's text is all the more fascinating because Leach himself was concerned with impacts of politics of class, status and ethnic origins upon the history of the discipline.

What Leach was therefore perfectly aware of, but given his own class might have had difficulty reconciling as an internal contradiction, is the idea that power relations within the anthropological community are asymmetric. Indeed in his popular public address, *A Runaway World* (1968), to which Tambiah dedicates his entire 15th chapter, the only social anthropologist to date to ever deliver the BBC's much acclaimed *Reith Lectures* reflexively addressed how those in power intentionally use their status to protect their positions against rival ones. Such rival positions, he suggests, do not therefore spring up at random. They can only gain credibility from specific groups within the community, namely sheltered young newcomers. In seeking professional recognition these somewhat peripheral

individuals can potentially advance challenging theoretical developments since they are not yet fully socialized into the rules of the dominant paradigm. For this reason Tambiah makes some effort to show Leach's benevolence to the next generation of anthropologists through his involvement with foundations such as the Esperanza Trust. He even mentions in the first chapter that Leach's privileged family had a legacy enmeshed with the foundations of the cooperative movement.

Fardon on Douglas

Richard Fardon's 1999 biography is also a sophisticated intellectual *tour de force*, on the writings of Dame Mary Douglas. As a West Africanist and one of her former students, he is well qualified to produce what is again an enormously rigorous piece of scholarly work which, as a straightforward biography, would definitely be lacking in personal detail. Nonetheless like Tambiah, his profound contextual engagement with Douglas's research is indicative of the erudite level that the reflexive history of anthropology can reach. Interestingly in this sense, like Grinker, Tambiah, and Young have done, Fardon also situates himself biographically in the preface of the book, offering important insight into the ways in which "academic kinship" networks can also exist as coherent disciplinary systems. Indeed, he even goes a step further by inferring that on occasion social anthropology can be rather incestuous intellectually—Douglas (1980) writes a biography of Evans-Pritchard; so does Burton (1992); Fardon reviews Burton's book (1993) and writes his own about Douglas.

As a justification for providing an intellectual biography, Fardon acknowledges the idea of undermining the age-old maxim about describing the person as a means of understanding his or her work. Instead he follows the Viennese musician Hans Keller who reversed this truism to suggest that an in-depth knowledge of the work explains the person. This holds much truth. We come out from reading this powerful analysis of Douglas's research feeling as if we knew her personally. And since we learn about the extent to which she had the habitus of a perpetual critic and perfectionist, it is easy to assume that she herself could never have been one hundred percent happy with this text, although her abilities to find grounds to fault it were far superior to mine.

Fardon's book is divided into four parts. Part 1 outlines Douglas's Catholic boarding school upbringing, her education at Oxford, and her initial African fieldwork. Part 2 analyzes and deconstructs her two most internationally renowned publications. Part 3 looks at her

post-1970s years in America, away from mainstream British anthropology, when she ventured into new terrain that dealt with theories of consumption, risk, and religion. Part 4 analyzes her conceptual ponderings on social institutions, modernism and Durkheimian classificatory systems. In examining her early years the author demonstrates that Douglas's Catholic exposure at The Sacred Heart Convent added a dimension of non-spatial universality to her thinking. It would equally leave lasting impressions on her interests in symbolism, ritual, institutional hierarchy and security as well as what he suggests is one of her biggest achievements—helping anthropologists take seriously the study of Western societies. Analogously perhaps, his analysis of her regimented educational upbringing has narrative resonances with the anthropological documentary filmmaker David MacDougall's ethnographic series about the Indian public school system through the five films of *The Doon School Chronicles* (1997/2000). Both are accounts of class and normativization, hence reinforcing the social facets so prominent in the imperial dimensions of British anthropology.

In examining the training of anthropologists at Oxford, Fardon makes a similar point about Douglas to Grinker's about Turnbull by putting forth the argument that Evans-Pritchard and Franz Steiner's influence on Douglas was such that she acquired most of the characteristics that were archetypical of post-World-War-II British social anthropology. That is, an African field site and a curiosity about social structures particularly in terms of the formation of groups associated with kinship lineages (pp. 40–41). Given this institutional structuring mechanism of social anthropology at Oxford, the question thus arises as to why both Grinker and Fardon each omit citing or mentioning the protagonist of the other's biography in their own.

In a rather short twenty-odd pages, which are disproportionately represented by a plate of five fieldwork photographs, Fardon then looks at Douglas's research among the Lele. Or rather, he mostly looks at her study of the Lele, the published outcomes of that work, elaborating very little on experiential encounters or methodological strategies for how she went about doing fieldwork. Owing to what is possibly a lack of letters and similar written archive materials for this period of her life, it is nonetheless a shame in terms of a reflexive history towards the process of fieldwork that this episode of initiatory ethnographic practice is so briefly examined. This must be for me the only real shortcoming.

The biggest single emphasis of the volume, however, is on the ten years that allowed Douglas to synthesize the ideas that would become her consistent theoretical stances and would turn her into an

international figure. In deconstructing her two most well known books, Fardon here uses the clever reflexive technique of offering a “structuralist” analysis of Douglas’s own structuralist work and prose style (p. 84). That is, he gives us a pattern for the way she formulates her arguments in writing that is recurring and forms rhetorical foundation. He demonstrates that this is present from the linking of paragraph passages, all the way through to the way the overall chapter outline of the book works as a sequence of thesis, antithesis and dismissal reinforcing initial thesis.

Fardon then goes on to explore Douglas’s attempts to establish theoretical pillars for supporting the understanding of universal forms of human behavior as gleaned from comparative methods in social anthropology. “The juxtaposition of contemporary and exotic materials, often but not always African, has become a hallmark of her work on Western society . . . Douglas’s juxtapositions derive from her desire to create a genuinely catholic, in the sense of universal, comparative social anthropology” (p. 110). This ethos would fuel an incredibly diverse and prolific career based on her oft reworked but generally consistent conceptual grid-group model. Fardon unpacks its evolution as Douglas applied it to economics and consumption, risk analysis, religion and ritual, and institutional thought. By looking at these periods of research in her life, he effectively demonstrates the multi-dimensionality of grid-group theory whilst nonetheless providing an overview of the ways in which it has been contested and opposed.

Such an analysis of the power dynamics at the core and near the peripheries of academia allows Fardon to address a most germane issue in terms of a disciplinary reflexive history—situating Douglas within the wider rubric of British social anthropology’s modernist movement. He concludes that as an inspirational systems builder she was destined to travel a liminal path toward recognition. Indeed, the book shows that in many instances the rationale for her writings has been to bring various theories and methods of social anthropology to their logical extremes, revealing ultimate strengths and weaknesses. This has been Douglas’s vision beyond the applicability of specific models or frameworks and would undoubtedly be for many the mark of a true social theorist.

BIO-REFLEXIVITY AND HISTORICAL DISCIPLINARY SELF-AWARENESS

As is the case with all five volumes, but particularly this last one by Fardon since it is slightly older, others have of course provided more

isolated and detailed reviews (e.g., Rousseau 2000). For my purposes of providing a contextual overview, however, I have not found it necessary to rehash the same type of analytical discussion about the specific concepts and theories scrutinized by these biographers. But it is still important to note the extensive range of variation in intellectual depth and style between these biographies. This has critical bearing on the ability to summarize what each adds to the scope of disciplinary reflexivity. It also has relevance in terms of textual distinction, with certain advantages as well as disadvantages for their accessibility and for drawing particular audiences. So as we've seen, Van Tilburgh and Grinker offer very accessible texts whereas Fardon and Tambiah are at the other extreme, with pieces that are highly challenging. Young's book is somewhere in between. A further comparison is that the biographies by these last three authors venture readily into cross-cultural terrain, the former two largely shun such areas.

All the texts touch on the importance of psychology to biographical anthropology. Van Tilburgh does this for the obvious reason of having to deal with the mental illness of her protagonist Katherine Routledge. For his part, Grinker deals with Turnbull's fascination with homosexual physical intimacy in the field and his life in America generally. Young does so by relating Malinowski's personal and professional engagement with Freudian thought. Fardon and Tambiah deal less with psychological concerns in terms of the personal analysis of their main characters. Yet they do not fail to examine the more social and conceptual relationships between psychology and anthropology by considering how the theoretical aspects of psychoanalysis influenced the formulations that Douglas and Leach were making.

Contrarily, only Fardon has any explicit comments about gender issues even though the gender balance in the texts reflects the early gender possibilities in the discipline (Wayne-Malinowska 1985). Camilla Wedgwood's early if rather stunted career at Cambridge under Haddon is an example (Lutkehaus 1986). Marett, Radcliffe-Brown, and Evans-Pritchard at Oxford taught a number of female students including Routledge, Marie Czaplicka, Beatrice Blackwood, and Barbara Aitken at the turn of the 20th century, and later Douglas after the Second World War. Kuper (1999) has also recently chronicled the significant achievements of Audrey Richards and in his earlier work reminded us that "the high proportion of women among Malinowski's students is noteworthy" (1996:67). Differing from Kuper here, Urry (1992:16) suggests that the presence of women, Jews and colonials was actually indicative of the marginality of the discipline in the intellectual world of inter-war Britain.

Douglas, Leach, Routledge and Turnbull in particular have often inadvertently made considerable advances in the realm of material culture. Despite this, none of the biographers explicitly reference or engage with what has recently been labeled as the new wave of material culture studies (Buchli 2004). Van Tilburgh does mention Routledge's archaeological affiliations and her position of enormous socio-economic privilege which allowed her to have her own 90-foot yacht built (the *Mana*) and to fund her own research expedition to Easter Island. Grinker highlights Turnbull's museum curating and connections with the performing arts while Tambiah dedicates a chapter to Leach's writings on the anthropology of art and architecture as well as referring to his proud commitments as a Trustee of the British Museum. For his part, Fardon comments on Douglas's writings about rites of consumption.

But the real overt examination of the relationship between material culture and a reflexive disciplinary self-awareness concerning the ability to carry out research comes through when Grinker, Tambiah, and Young repeatedly address the financial elements of research and publication grants, field budgets and salaries. Such implicit Marxist analyses about the economic dynamics inherent in the production of knowledge reveal the importance that biographies have in the shaping of the discipline's responsibilities and self-awareness.

As we have seen in terms of reflexivity, many authors have shown that certain correlations exist between an historically specific nexus of political elites and the propagation of theories that are convenient for maintaining social segregation. Boissevain (1974) for instance, suggests that processes operating outside and within the scientific community eventually forced the turnover of dominant paradigms. Anthropological theory is therefore no different than any other social process. He identifies three procedures working toward change within the scientific community: biological processes, epistemological considerations, and sociological factors. Increasingly, he sees that researchers are beginning to examine the birth of social forms. Their focus is not on the forms per se but on the social processes that create them. Consequently, they are not asking what social orders consist of but how they are maintained.

In this respect we must return to Tambiah who has done a superb job in examining the debates surrounding how and why certain forms of disciplinary colonialisms have come to exist as they do. Placing Leach centrally into the debate regarding the levels of potential complicity for anthropology's association with colonial and imperial processes, he goes through certain responses by social anthropologists to the critical arguments raised by postcolonial or subaltern

theorists inspired by Said's *Orientalism* (1978) such as Fabian in his classic *Time and the Other* (1983). Through the reflexive biographical lens we thus see an example of how paradigm shifts and inter alia disciplinary challenges can be historically chronicled to reveal that they are not haphazard mutations.

Due to the shortage of surveys on scholars and their research, this article has thus pursued the idea that biographies provide historical reflexive insight on the discipline in the same way that anthropologists analyze others—in terms of personal values, disciplinary structures, regional interests, and so forth. Hence, the interpretation of the texts presented here is itself susceptible to similar examinations and critiques. I cannot claim an exemption from the values and interests attributed to colleagues. Burawoy (1991:224) indicates that “perhaps this vulnerability explains the paucity of research on research.” In truth, however, this is surely a false impediment as the contemporary interest in academic biographies reveals. Scrutinizing research far from belittles the legitimacy for doing that work even if it might question its quality. On the contrary, it often heightens its credibility. By revealing the complexities and constraints upon academic study, one can indeed emphasize the significance of such work as well as stress the importance of a world that still remains ill understood by the public at large.

CONCLUSIONS

It is no surprise also that biography and reflexivity should become prominently linked in current social anthropology given that the very nature of the discipline's history has consistently been fascinated with the ancestors and the kinship systems of other cultures (Langam, 1981). Once the argument for the importance of examining our own societies and disciplinary identities was made, it was only a matter of time before people started to examine how some of our more significant founding figures are linked through various networks of influence. So if we really are witnessing a new trend in the discipline for biographies of the great and the good, the question remains: will the autobiography be the next possible stage of development in our reflexive examination of the life histories of anthropological ancestors?

Toward the end of his life Leach (1984:22) certainly advocated that this was necessary for the future prosperity of social anthropology: “Unless we pay much closer attention than has been customary to the personal background of the authors of anthropological works, we

shall miss out on most of what these texts are capable of telling us about the history of anthropology.” We should also infer from the keeping of extensive diaries, published posthumously of course, that Malinowski (1967) was endorsing this form. From the writing of a book structured around a personalized life experience (*The Human Cycle* [Turnbull 1983]) and an experimental auto-biography (*Lover and Beloved* [Turnbull n.d.]) a similar assumption can be made about Turnbull, especially through the latter text, which he deeply regretted not being able to publish (Grinker 2001:258).

It is also noteworthy that the biographical genre is still very much a single author process. Perhaps this mirrors the individuality inherent in the nature of ethnographic fieldwork. Yet if we are to truly reach a reflexive turn in the discipline, social anthropology will need to consider collaborative efforts and co-edited compilations in scrutinizing the lives of the ancestors. Obviously a significant problem here is to convince publishers about this, since multi-authored compilations seem to have gone out of fashion recently. We are told that they do not sell. Perhaps this is a reason for the flourishing publication of biographies, for I fear this new “trend” is as much driven by an increased concern for reflexive histories as it is by market forces.

Hero worship sells, even I’m reluctant to suggest, in anthropology since what is obvious with these five books is that both the protagonists and the authors are well-established figures. So perhaps the next trend will be for the biography of biographers (Byatt 2000)? Regardless of such asinine speculations, it is clear that Fardon, Tambiah and Young in particular have painted vivid intellectual portraits of a triumvirate of key contributors. Hence, these texts are more than mere biographies. They are themselves significant epistemological conceptualizations of how theory and method intermingle with life history and politics. Indeed, they are vital and vibrant reflexive symbols for a hundred years of British social anthropology.

In thinking of biographies as an historical form of disciplinary autobiography, I was reminded of what Nietzsche wrote in his foreword to *The Antichrist*—some people, he says “are born posthumously” (1895:572). Such a statement rings even more true through the increased possibility for ancestor worship accorded by the mythological constructions of anthropological biographies. But as a point of clarification, most of the scholars depicted in these biographical accounts were born early enough to be aware of the significance of their own impact on the intellectual landscape of anthropology in the United Kingdom.

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