

Writing Culture from Within

Reflections on Endogenous Ethnography*

Rob van Ginkel
University of Amsterdam

The days when anthropology was automatically associated with accounts of 'primitive peoples' in faraway lands are gone. Though the confrontation and dialogue with others deemed 'exotic' constituted anthropology's initial *raison d'être*, today it is not in the least exceptional that anthropologists study an aspect or segment of the society of which they themselves are members. Thus, instead of studying ourselves through the detour of studying others – occasionally with the justification that perceiving others as 'exotic' will ultimately lead to the recognition of our own peculiarities (cf. Leach 1982:127) – many ethnographers nowadays tend to take a short cut.

This fact notwithstanding, participant observation has remained the much-heralded trademark of ethnographic research. In this respect, anthropology differs from all other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. It is probably the distinct method of participant observation which is the reason why anthropologists doing fieldwork at home reflect upon the implications of their position as natives for their research and its results. At least, historians or sociologists conducting research in their own society do not seem to be as reflexive.

When anthropologists predominantly went to foreign countries far afield, they considered themselves 'strangers and friends', 'marginal natives' or 'professional strangers'.¹ These terms are an indication of their role as outsiders. Now that anthropologists carry out fieldwork at home, have they become insiders? What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of endogenous ethnography, or endo-ethnography for short?² Does the native anthropologist's view differ from that of his foreign counterpart? What are the particular problems of endo-ethnographers? Does speaking of anthropology at home (Here) and abroad (There) create a meaningful distinction or a false dichotomy? Edmund Leach states that 'fieldwork in a cultural context of which you already have first-hand experience seems to be more difficult than fieldwork which is approached from the naïve viewpoint of a total stranger' (1982:24). To what extent does his observation hold true? Does intimate knowledge of and identification with one's research group yield a deeper understanding and a more thorough ethnography? Or does an inside view inhibit the perception of familiar socio-cultural patterns,

cultural translation and a reflexive stance? These are some of the questions underlying this article, which is based on a review of the relevant literature. But first I will discuss why anthropology came home at all.

The repatriation of ethnography

The fact that social and cultural anthropologists are increasingly turning to the study of their own society and culture is a relatively recent phenomenon. To be sure, early arm-chair anthropologists used piecemeal evidence from non-Western as well as European societies – including their native countries – to test their evolutionary hypotheses. And it is true that, as Orvar Löfgren (1987: 74) points out, in the nineteenth century in countries without colonies (such as Sweden and Russia) the interest was directed towards the ‘primitive within’. But most of those investigating domestic issues in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were involved in ‘rescue’ ethnography. That is, they recorded aspects of native culture which were under threat of extinction. In that sense, their work was more akin to that of folklorists than to that of anthropologists working in the tropics.

Although there are several early examples, it was largely after World War II that anthropologists started to undertake fieldwork at home. In Europe and North America, they began to understand that anthropology is the study of all peoples and cultures and following this realization they discovered many previously neglected research subjects. Almost simultaneously, Western-trained African and Asian anthropologists went back home to do research. An early instance of this reshuffling of fieldwork locations is found in the writings of the Portuguese ethnologist Jorge Dias (1948), who turned from his work in Africa to conduct a community study in Portugal. Other examples are the Chinese anthropologist Lin Yueh-hwa’s book *The Golden Wing* (1948) and Busia’s account of the chief’s position among the Ashanti in Ghana (1951). It would not be difficult to mention even earlier anthropological studies at home. However, it was only in the 1960s that endo-ethnography really took off. After a hesitating start it has now achieved a well-established position.

The ‘repatriation of anthropology’, as Marcus and Fischer (1986:113) dub the partial home-coming of the discipline, was stimulated by a number of political, economic, and academic developments.³ Firstly, the decolonization process has had a major impact. The authorities of many newly independent states objected to research by foreign anthropologists who had earned themselves a bad reputation during the era of colonialism and were no longer welcome. The governments of the developing nations were suspicious of neo-colonial intellectual imperialism and authorized very few research permits. To some extent, the vacancies were filled by (usually Western-trained) native anthropologists. Several governments encouraged or urged them to conduct domestic development-oriented research.

Secondly, with access to traditional fieldwork locations being all but barred, many Western anthropologists had to stake out new concerns and new areas close to home. Some preferred the relative freedom of research there to the bureaucratic restrictions of fieldwork in the newly independent states (if they could obtain a permit to do research there at all). In the wake of these developments, it dawned upon them that the study of their own society and culture was both compelling and legitimate. They could also find cultural variation there, and it was literally brought home to them that they were ignorant about many aspects of their own society. Some have deliberately sought the exotic and unfamiliar in their own country.

Thirdly, in Europe and North America less funding became available for ethnography in the tropics, especially for expensive large-scale expeditions. At the same time, governments and non-governmental organizations increasingly financed cheaper applied and policy research at home, for example regarding ethnic minorities, marginal groupings, crime, and so forth. The redistribution of research funds has partly been a consequence of the growing number of anthropologists applying for grants. This in turn was caused by the democratization of academic education and the concomitant rise of student numbers. To train these students, many anthropology departments have organized fieldwork at home or in neighboring countries. Once they discovered that this research could be interesting and rewarding, several graduates pursuing an academic career decided to become endogenous ethnographers. However, the shortage of academic jobs forced many to get involved in applied research for state or private institutions. This kind of endo-ethnography has produced results that are relevant and useful in a practical way.

Fourthly, the 'crisis' in anthropology and the subsequent questioning and rethinking of its theories and methodologies forged the recognition that anthropology is the study of *all* humankind and not some special segments of it. In the Euro-American domain, ethnographers confronted a particularly challenging task, since they could no longer mystify communities as static and isolated social units, a mystification typical of much of their previous ethnographic work in foreign countries. Anthropology's traditional conceptual and analytical apparatus insufficiently equipped these ethnographers for their new task. However, several pioneers successfully tried to bridge this void by rethinking methods and concepts which could be applied in so-called complex societies.⁴ Some encouraged young anthropologists to do fieldwork in their backyards. At the same time, there was an increasing self-awareness on the part of many Third World anthropologists and anthropologists of ethnic origin in Western countries. They felt they had a special obligation in doing research which could be of practical use to 'their' people. Some of them also preferred the view from within to the view from without, because the latter might harbor bias or even ethnocentrism (see, for example, Gwaltney 1981; Maruyama 1974).

Being at home in the field

Among many other things, the ethnicity, gender, class, religion, residence, age, marital status, education, speech, appearance, ability, and personality of the interlocutors affect the ethnographer's fieldwork, including his or her relations with informants, the information solicited and gained, and, as a corollary, the final ethnographic product.⁵ This may seem a truism, but the majority of anthropologists hardly account for the impact of autobiography on ethnography (see, however, Altorki and El-Solh 1988; Okely and Callaway 1992; Narayan 1993). If we accept that autobiography and the presentation of self have an effect on the nature and results of fieldwork, then it follows that being a native anthropologist has consequences for the ethnographic encounter and the ethnographer's writing. In other words, all ethnographers are 'positioned subjects' (Okely 1992: 14). According to Ohnuki-Tierney, '[t]he effect of the presence of an anthropologist differs greatly between native and nonnative anthropologists' (1984:585). She explains that informants 'perform' for outsider anthropologists, who at best document a 'negotiated reality'. Insiders, on the other hand, have an *a priori* intimate knowledge of their own culture but face the problem of 'distancing'.

This may be true in some cases, but the aforementioned aspects of the interlocutors' personas influencing their dialogue are of course to a large extent also of consequence in research at home. Ohnuki-Tierney clearly generalizes and exaggerates the discrepancy between anthropologists from within and from without.⁶ Compare, for example, her statements with Indonesian anthropologist Koentjaraningrat's frank observations on his fieldwork in two Javanese peasant communities:

I can consider myself to have a sufficient comprehension of Javanese culture; however, except for the language, which is of course my native tongue, that knowledge was almost totally irrelevant for an understanding of the community life of rural peasants, particularly in the initial stage of the field work. My knowledge of Javanese culture was limited to that of Javanese urban culture, and although I was released from the efforts of studying the language in which I was to communicate with my informants, I experienced my study of those two Javanese peasant communities almost as if studying an unfamiliar environment in which I could not even take the basic cultural elements and value orientation for granted. By members of both communities I was placed as an outsider because, although I am a Javanese, I was considered to be one of a different and higher social class from the city and a member of the civil servant class with whom, according to the strongly class-conscious Javanese peasants' view, people have to interact cautiously, carefully, politely, and at a distance. I was part of my own subject matter but remained a stranger, and I was caught in the situation during the greater part of my field work. For me it was not the problem of stepping into a culture which I must try to penetrate as deeply as possible, and from which I was later to step out again; I was trapped in that culture, a subculture of my own, but which I could not possibly penetrate (1982:178).

Koentjaraningrat explains that older people especially, were reluctant to vent their opinions. They not only *considered* him an outsider, but also *kept* him an outsider. Thus, Okely's remark that in other cultures anthropologists are 'initially treated as outsider[s], rebuked for rule breaking and by varying degrees incorporated and rejected' (1992:14) may also hold true when they do research in their own societies. The Dutch anthropologist Lodewijk Brunt makes a point of stressing that it is fundamentally wrong to assume that ethnographers doing fieldwork in their own societies only have to deal with people who adhere to closely corresponding values: 'Not only may there be a difference between the anthropologist and his informants, but it is very likely that there are differences between various groups of informants as well' (1975:36). With regard to his research in the village of 'Stroomkerken' (a pseudonym) in The Netherlands, Brunt observes that he was not at all familiar with all kinds of conventional rules, nor could or would he call himself an insider vis-à-vis certain local groupings (1979:88-89).

These examples and remarks serve as a warning not to overemphasize the differences between anthropology at home and abroad. We should not take the relative advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of research in an absolute way. Obviously, as a matter of degree there are pros and cons, but judging by the literature the experiences of anthropologists differ widely in this respect. Consider, for example, the aspect of linguistic competence. Sharing a language with informants is an asset because it facilitates communication, saves time, and enables avoiding distortion by interpreters. Many anthropologists writing on anthropology at home mention these as important advantages for those conducting domestic research (see, for example, Jones 1970:252; Hayano 1979:101). However, using one's mother tongue does not necessarily mean that communication is unequivocal (Brunt 1979:88) or that anthropologists can take the words of their informants at face value (Hastrup 1993a:151; Gefou-Madianou 1993:167-68). In addition, dialect or occupational lingo may distort communication considerably. Okely succinctly states that to do research among Traveller-Gypsies in her native country, she had 'to learn another language in the words of [her] mother tongue' (1984:5). Even if a shared language facilitates communication, this does not mean that an ethnographer will automatically elicit information by asking questions, since these questions are unsolicited. Icelandic fishermen found their compatriot and anthropologist Gísli Pálsson's questions silly, pertaining to obvious matters, and too personal (1991:104). The ethnographer felt he made little progress and it was only after he was invited on a fishing trip, thus undergoing an important rite of passage, that he was accepted and more successful in eliciting information. Thus, being 'familiar' with the culture studied can be deceptive (Greenhouse 1985:261).

Informants will not be very permissive when native anthropologists break their cultural rules. They are supposed to know, and the margins for blundering are quite small. If they challenge certain norms, they risk estrangement or ostracism.

Outsiders may be granted much more room in this respect. They are excused for their misunderstandings, improprieties, insensitivities – in short, their ignorance – precisely because they are outsiders (Messerschmidt 1981a:199–200). In this respect, anthropologists from abroad are ‘privileged strangers’ (Graham 1981:119). And in redressing the foreign anthropologist’s behavior, informants unconsciously ‘betray’ their cultural codes to him or her. Moreover, it may be more convenient to deal with an outsider because, in private at least, it offers an opportunity to relax conformity to cultural conventions or behavioral standards precisely because he or she is a non-interested party (Aguilar 1981:17). In contrast, being a true insider (that is, being a member of a subculture under study) is never ‘a neutral, uninvolved position’ (Nakleh 1979:344). He or she is known, and there is no escape from control by the researched group, while at the same time its members cannot risk non-conformism: ‘indigenous anthropologists find themselves in a great variety of positions vis-à-vis the local groups that affect their self-perceived roles and the expectations of the local community’ (Fahim and Helmer *et al.* 1980:647). The danger of being so enmeshed and understanding so much as an ethnographer is that it may become impossible to retain the role of detached observer in certain situations ‘because one is caught up in the demands of the various other roles he or she occupies’ (Stephenson and Greer 1981:128; also see Kondo 1986:79).⁷

To return to an issue raised at the beginning of this section, it is often pointed out that endo-ethnographers are in a privileged position because of their *a priori* intimate knowledge and comprehensive view of their own culture and society. Being familiar with many of each other’s idiosyncracies facilitates the interlocutors’ dialogues. In this connection, a host of more or less related advantages is mentioned in the literature. Endo-ethnographers are supposed to have: a good understanding of the macro-society and its symbol and value systems, no culture-shock, feelings of empathy, and easy access to the intellectual, emotive, and sensory dimensions of behavior.⁸ In a recent article, Michael Moffat summarizes these claims: ‘Studying subjects relatively “like themselves,” local ethnographers may be more attuned to cultural nuance than far-from-home anthropologists, better able to draw on experiential understanding. They can often “blend in” more completely – verbally, behaviorally, physically – possibly making for better rapport, possibly affecting who and what they are studying less by their presence’ (1992:206). Others, however, are far less optimistic and mainly emphasize the difficulties involved in doing fieldwork in the culture in which one is raised, precisely because of the matter of intimate knowledge and familiarity. Given the fact that there is much controversy regarding this aspect of ethnography at home, it merits further discussion.

The familiar as the exotic

It was Malinowski's dictum that to understand other peoples' cultures required grasping the natives' point of view. But some anthropologists claim that studying their own culture involves a mental *tour de force*. Some deem it not unlike trying to push a car while being inside it, observing a parade whilst marching along, or being a fish attempting to see the water. Though we could probably come up with a dozen more metaphors, the problem boils down to the question of how to study one's culture when one lives it. How is it possible to prevent overlooking important matters and patterns that one sees, hears, and smells every day? It involves a process of making the familiar and the taken-for-granted seem strange to oneself so that one can record what in the first instance seemed insignificant (Hayano 1979:102; Feldman 1981:237; Stephenson and Greer 1981: 124–25; Weston 1991:14).

Of course, the problem is particularly acute for those anthropologists who conduct fieldwork in settings of which they have intimate knowledge. Kath Weston, for example, did research among lesbians in the San Francisco Bay Area where she (herself a lesbian American) spent years in university. Being so much a part of the subculture, '[p]resumptions of a common frame of reference and shared identity can ... complicate the anthropologist's task by leaving cultural notions implicit, making her work to get people to state, explain, and situate the obvious' (1991:14).⁹ Though it is generally assumed that it is advantageous to have a fund of inside knowledge, this clearly creates problems of its own. Some anthropologists have for some time failed to go beyond the self-evident. Edmund Leach (1982:124–26) attributes this hazard to the ethnographer's initial preconceptions and prejudices, which derive from private rather than public experience. They are liable to distort the vision of ethnographers studying their own society in a way that does not affect the naïve ethnographers from without.¹⁰ What informants say may seem like common sense to the ethnographer-cum-insider. Emily Martin, who conducted research in her native United States on women's perceptions of human reproduction, faced this problem. It was only after she realized that the 'obvious facts' her interviewees told her were also in need of explanation that she could re-approach her material from a new perspective. The length of time which passed before this *Gestalt switch* occurred, Martin writes, 'stands as vivid testimony to how solidly entrenched our own cultural presuppositions are and how difficult it is to dig them up for introspection' (1987:10–11). There are also examples of anthropologists who discovered, to their dismay, that they erroneously thought their inside knowledge would give them a headstart. Ethnographer William Pilcher, for instance, himself an experienced former Portland longshoreman and many of whose kinsmen were still practicing the same profession, found his previous knowledge a hinderance during research among longshoremen in his hometown. He thought he knew the answers to his questions in advance, but

he was surprised to find that his own data proved him wrong (Pilcher 1972: 5).¹¹

Thus, whereas for anthropologists doing fieldwork abroad the problem is how to get *into* a culture, those conducting research at home may face the problem of how to get *out* in order to enable them to have an ethnographic gaze at familiar surroundings (Aguilar 1981:24; Löfgren 1987:76). The process of distancing oneself from the research subject may prove difficult, since the situations studied can be almost identical to those confronting the ethnographers in daily life.²³ How is it possible to reach a deeper understanding of phenomena that may seem self-evident? How does one perceive cultural assumptions shared with the subjects of research? How can we get at tacit culture without experiencing the contrast and difference inherent in cross-cultural research which can attune the investigator to this tacit culture? Many anthropologists propose taking a comparative perspective, whether implicit or explicit (cf., for example, Madan 1982:9; Sörbö 1982: 156; Moffat 1992:206–07). For sure, knowledge of other cultures, of the cultural variety in human societies, will help to see the taken-for-granted as well as the not-so-obvious. 'Cross-cultural perspectives still have an important role to play in carrying out projects of repatriated ethnography, in defining novel approaches to taken-for-granted domestic phenomena, in framing questions, and in suggesting alternatives or possibilities among domestic subjects that are only revealed by comparative contrast with other cultural material,' Marcus and Fischer (1987: 135–36) contend. In order to defamiliarize oneself, they suggest disrupting common sense, for example, by doing the unexpected or placing familiar objects in unfamiliar contexts (ibid.:137–38). But this may not be good advice. It could mean transgressing cultural rules, with all the risks this implies.

So far we have seen that some authors point to time economy as an advantage of endo-ethnography. However, in contrast others emphasize that anthropologists at home should not economize with time, but should conduct their research slowly so that the relations between the interlocutors can develop (Segalen and Zonabend 1987:117). Some endogenous researchers even go so far as to spend time abroad in order to defamiliarize or distance themselves before entering the field in their own culture (Perin 1988). There are anthropologists who maintain that before doing research at home, anthropologists should have done cross-cultural research to enable 'objective' observation (Nakane 1982:58).

However, though detachment may avoid home-blindness, 'distance' should not be confused with 'objectivity'. Many anthropologists who have rejected anthropology at home in the past have done so because they deemed it inherently subjective as opposed to the 'objective' approach of traditional anthropology.¹³ This assertion is much too simplistic. Today, it is widely accepted that objectivity in ethnographic research is an illusion. At best, it is inter-subjective. To quote the French ethnologists Martine Segalen and Françoise Zonabend at some length:

Whether one is familiar with or a stranger to the culture one is working on, there are no absolute grounds for considering the degree of cultural difference between object and observer as either an obstacle or an advantage with regard to its objective description. Certainly it can happen that, to the observer who is close to the culture which he or she is studying, the object can seem at first to be profoundly familiar, forming part of his immediate universe. In that case facts, attitudes, behaviour patterns seem hopelessly self-evident and so indescribable, because [the are] colourless, insipid, without precise contours, as if bathed in the implicit. In these extreme situations, the first imperative, which is only the obverse of that which applies to the ethnologist of the exotic, is to defamiliarize himself with the object, to re-create artificially that distance and perspective without which any perception is impossible. This distancing, this externality to the object, can be achieved when observer and observed come to know and take into account their respective positions. . . Exoticism certainly offers data which are immediately and easily descriptive because they are new, whereas familiarity blurs the object to be described. *Both can prove to be deceptive*. If one rejects the complicity of the strange and the illusion of the known, then ethnographic 'fields', distant or near, are revealed as on an equal footing (1987: 111, emphasis added).

Again, a caution is in order. The problem of being an insider, who in order to gain a good vantage point has to pull himself out of the swamp by his own hair like a Baron von Münchhausen, is often exaggerated. We should not conceive of societies and cultures as homogeneous monoliths.¹⁴ Nor do anthropologists possess a complete fund of knowledge pertaining to their own society. As Seteney Shami states: 'The indigenous anthropologist does not come into the field with all the knowledge and experiences generated by the various and complex structures of societies' (1988:135). The degree to which investigators are genuine 'insiders' can differ widely, even when they are in their own country and do research among people with the same ethnic background (Stephenson and Greer 1981:124; Narayan 1993). Ethnographers may not suffer a 'culture shock' in confronting informants at home, but there is certainly a chance that they will encounter a 'subculture shock'. Zdzisław Mach (this issue) points out that he 'experienced a curious mixture of both familiarity and estrangement' when doing fieldwork in a community in his native Poland. Even in a small country like The Netherlands, an anthropologist can discover that something familiar like a morning coffee drinking ritual is performed and is lent significance in a different way within a rural community than in a city (Brunt 1979). Urban settings are usually made up of so many subcultures that anthropologists will surely not be familiar with all of them. But even in general, 'there is little likelihood of true insider research ever becoming common: the ethnographer will always be somewhere on the continuum between empathy and repulsion, home and strangeness, and seeing and not seeing' (Sarsby 1984:132).¹⁵

Besides, it is not only significant where and among whom investigators conduct fieldwork; the research subject and goal are equally important. If anthropologists working in their own society try to elicit information which is supposed

to be known, they surely face the difficulty of interpreting 'obvious facts' – if they get answers to their questions at all. However, if they seek to get an inside view of, say, the ethos of a specific occupational community without being a member of it, they are bound to be overwhelmed with information which is not at all familiar. Though native anthropologists will share some cultural codes with members of such a subculture, other conventions, rituals, and taboos of the latter will strike them as idiosyncratic.¹⁶ Furthermore, the special problems of ethnography at home seem closely linked to the method of participant observation. For instance, those anthropologists using historical data, although facing numerous other difficulties, in many cases do not have to deal with the problem of familiarity in their inquiries. The longer the span of time which has elapsed between the lives of their research subjects and the investigation, the greater the distance between them and their 'informants'.¹⁷

The presentation of results

Once data is collected, categorized, and interpreted, the next problem of ethnographic writing is what or what not to publish. 'People who are subjected to anthropological research have a right to see its finding,' Hussein Fahim (1977: 83) maintains. I agree, though publishing one's ethnographic results is fraught with problems. This is particularly true when doing anthropology at home. If one carries out research abroad, there is often a barrier between the language used to communicate in the field and the language used to publish the results of fieldwork. In this case, ethnographers are also separated from the field and have a great deal of leeway in what they write, without having to worry that sponsors or informants may be reading over their shoulders. To circumvent this situation, endogenous ethnographers may opt to avoid using their native language and publish in English, the international academic lingua franca. On the other hand, at home, geographical proximity makes it easier to maintain relationships with informants: to keep up-to-date, to check data, and to ask for their opinion about reports in preparation or draft papers. It is also possible to get feedback from native anthropologists. I am not claiming that the latter always and necessarily know best. But the inside view may correct culturally biased projections of foreign ethnographers in a similar way that the latter's perspective can lead to adjusting insider bias. The dialogue between domestic and foreign anthropologists undertaking fieldwork in each other's vicinity would mean an enrichment of perspective.¹⁸

Still, there are several problems in publishing the results of endogenous ethnography (cf. Segalen and Zonabend 1987:117–18). In numerous countries, national bureaucracies will not only dictate what may be researched and which methods can be used, but also what may be published and what not (El-Solh 1988:113; Okely 1987). This is not just the case in societies ruled by authoritarian regimes.

With respect to contract research in particular, government representatives and state officials in Europe or North America often want to maintain control over what is stated in the final ethnographic product. Sometimes they will even try to prevent publication of unwelcome results or decree in advance what those results should be (Köbben 1991:34–35). Needless to say, this puts ethnographers in an awkward position as to their intellectual freedom.

But it is not just bureaucracies or other institutions commissioning research which may be trying to influence its outcome. In several cases, in particular when ‘studying up’ (Nader 1969), informants may demand more than a say in what is said about them. The Dutch anthropologist Heidi Dahles (1990) presents an instance of this kind of interference. The hunters she studied – who were also her sponsors – tried to meddle in the concepts she used, the theoretical perspective, the interpretation of the data collected, and the results published. Sometimes, members of the research population demand ratification of the final text, as I myself experienced when doing fieldwork in a Dutch fishing community.

As Judith Okely observes, ‘When publication is in the same country as fieldwork, the anthropologist cannot escape being read or misread by a wide range of interested parties beyond the usual academic constituency. The text will therefore bear the marks of such future scrutiny’ (1984:5). Many ethnographers refrain from writing things which are potentially harmful to their informants’ interests. This is true in general, but it is much easier to conceal their identity when working abroad. If a third party, for example a news reporter, reveals the informants’ identities, this would disrupt the relations between the interlocutors and would perhaps lead to strife in the community where research was conducted (Nakleh 1979:349; Brunt 1975). In the case of endo-ethnography, auto-censorship may also serve to protect one’s self-interests. Of course, it is easy to be called to account by sponsors, respondents or fellow scholars in one’s own society. Therefore, it is probably far from exceptional that ethnographers will be extremely careful – perhaps even overly careful – in deciding what to make public and what not. The anticipated continued relationship between investigators and their informants may affect what the former write. They face more direct dilemmas in decisions concerning whether or not to withhold certain information than their counterparts working abroad (Jones 1970:255). Ethnographers must also decide on what to report and what they can consider as common knowledge by their potential readership (Stephenson and Greer 1981:125).

Conclusion

It should be clear by now that the debate pertaining to the advantages and disadvantages of endo-ethnography remains unresolved and is to be continued. Yet, some preliminary conclusions are in order. Given the heterogeneous character of all cultures, it is not easy to find the locus where any anthropologist

would genuinely be 'at home'. Even if such a setting exists, there will be many unfamiliar situations and moments in which researchers will either assume or will be ascribed the role of outsiders (Altorki and El-Solh 1988:16). Moreover, like all people they may 'have many strands of identification available' (Narayan 1993:673). In the final analysis, attributing a special epistemological position to endo-ethnography may prove yet another anthropological mystification. It would rigorously dichotomize anthropology Here and There, and thus Self and Other, and would ultimately bring about the fragmentation of anthropology into a plethora of ethnographies more or less written from within. Both the native and the foreign anthropologist operate as interpreters who are involved in cultural translation. It is only at the practical level of fieldwork and publishing, and not at the analytical level, that differences between anthropology at home and abroad exist; or should exist, for in a theoretical respect there should be no differences in the common endeavor of understanding humanity in all its heterogeneous facets (Hastrup 1987:105). Studying the kaleidoscope of cultures does not imply that we need another anthropological specialism for each and every social and (sub)cultural reality (Sörbö 1982:155). The crucial point is not where anthropologists hail from, but how they perceive and interpret the reality they confront (Fahim 1977:86, note 1). Wherever they conduct research, to do their jobs properly anthropologists must remain 'professional strangers' with a keen sense of involvement and distance: 'The tension between the need for both empathy and detachment is a problem facing *all* anthropologists' (Sarsby 1984:129), not just those working either at home or abroad. This very same tension enables the writing of ethnography and lends the anthropological perspective its special flavor. Perhaps this is what Kirin Narayan (1993:682) means when she says: 'Writing texts that mix lively narrative and rigorous analysis involves enacting hybridity, regardless of our origins.'

Notes

- * I thank Margreeth van Dijk and the editors of *Etnofoor* for their comments and suggestions. Thanks also to Jonathan Fletcher for his editorial assistance.
- 1. See respectively, Powdermaker (1966), Freilich (1970), and Agar (1980).
- 2. By endogenous ethnography, I simply mean research in the anthropologist's own national setting and ethnic group. I will use the term interchangeably with anthropology/ethnography at home. There is no consensus on what to call anthropology one does in one's own society. Besides 'anthropology at home' and 'endogenous ethnography', there is a plethora of names used to indicate this kind of research. Among the terms used are: 'native', 'domestic', 'indigenous', 'auto-', 'local', and 'insider' anthropology or ethnography (Messerschmidt 1981b:13, 1981c:197, note 1). Though these concepts are often used interchangeably, some anthropologists distinguish between insider anthropology or anthropology at home (preferred by North American and European anthropologists working at home), native anthropology (ethnic and minority anthropologists doing research in their own ethnic group),

and indigenous anthropology (used by Third World anthropologists working in their own countries, often taken to be synonymous with 'Third World perspective') (Fahim 1977; Fahim and Helmer *et al.* 1980; Messerschmidt 1981b:13). Colson argues that the last concept is a misnomer when understood as 'Third World perspective', since we are all indigenous somewhere (in Fahim and Helmer *et al.* 1980: 650; see also Cernea 1982:122–24). For various reasons, some anthropologists object to the term native anthropology (Jones 1970:257–58; Cernea 1982:122–24) or native anthropologists (Hastrup 1993a, 1993b; Narayan 1993).

3. Confer Boissevain (1975:10–12), Bovenkerk and Brunt (1976:2ff.), Fahim (1977: 81), Hayano (1979:99), Fahim and Helmer *et al.* (1980:644), Aguilar (1981:15), Messerschmidt (1981b:9–13, 1981c:198), Madan (1982:13–14), Marcus and Fischer (1986:113), Jackson (1987a:8–9), Altorki and El-Solh (1988a:3–4), Moffat (1992: 205). See also Mach (this issue).
4. Messerschmidt (1981b:5) even enthusiastically proclaims that anthropology may be witnessing a revitalization due to its partial home-coming. I do not share his optimism.
5. On the implications of gender, class, education, and other variables for research at home in some Arab societies, see the contributions in Altorki and El-Solh (1988b). The Dutch anthropologist Peter Kloos observes that 'any fieldworker has to suppress a lot of his own identity, because it interferes with his smooth integration. He tends to become a rather blank personality, a weathercock' (1969:511). However, in many respects it would be difficult to conceal one's identity. What Kloos apparently means is that ethnographers should not bandy their opinions about. The subjects' knowledge of a researcher's identity (which can be more easily obtained in the case of an endogenous than a foreign ethnographer) may make it difficult to deal with opponent groupings in a local community. In that particular respect, he or she may have to act like a weathercock. On such manipulations and opportunistic behavior in fieldwork at home, see Brunt (1972, 1975). On the matter of cross-cutting identifications, see Narayan (1993).
6. To be sure, Ohnuki-Tierney is certainly not the only anthropologist who perceives a stark contrast between anthropology at home and abroad (see, for example, Aguilar's 1981 review article and Moffat 1992).
7. Thus, Gefou-Madianou writes that she had to 'become a native with multiple identities' sometimes marginalizing herself in her own country (1993:169).
8. See, for example, Hayano (1979:101), Fahim and Helmer *et al.* (1980:646), Aguilar (1981:17ff.), Cernea (1982:129–31), Koentjaraningrat (1982:176), Ohnuki-Tierney (1984:585), Strathern (1987:17), Altorki and El-Solh (1988:7–8), Gefou-Madianou 1993:162), Hastrup (1993a:155–56), and the contributions in this issue.
9. Even so, the lesbian subculture has its own subcultures, which may mean that a lesbian researcher would most likely be an outsider vis-à-vis several of these sub-subcultures. And, as Weston cautions, 'every situation carries its exoticisms, insofar as the exotic is always defined in relation to a set of assumptions held by the observer' (1991:224, note 12). Endo-ethnographers may express surprise or shock 'which can only be explained with reference to perceptions or experiences that contradict a researcher's preconceived expectations' (*ibid.*).
10. Several anthropologists claim that subjectivity and cultural bias are inherent in endogenous ethnography (cf., for example, Cernea 1982:131–35; Koentjaraningrat

1982:176). However, both insider and outsider perspectives 'are subject to misconceptions based on different *a priori* assumptions' (Nakleh 1979:345; see also Jones 1970:252).

11. Unfortunately, Pilcher does not elaborate upon this problem. He merely states that by joining the longshoremen's Union he was able to solicit more information and that his membership validated his role as a member of the occupational community. Many Dutch anthropologists studying some aspect or segment of their own society do not deem it necessary to read ethnographies or other (scholarly) literature pertaining to their country. Apparently, they seem to consider themselves to be experts on Dutch culture. Thus, they assume that The Netherlands is culturally homogeneous and that their personal experience will help them to understand cultural intricacies of whatever segment of The Netherlands they research. But people 'are not just miniature reproductions of their societies and cultures' (Turner 1976: 989; also, see Greenhouse 1985:264).
12. Ohnuki-Tierney writes: 'If studying cultures other than our own represents a journey out from and back to our collective self, as embodied in our own culture, and if "distancing" is critical for this endeavor, then it follows that native anthropologists face an even more difficult task in creating enough distance between themselves and their own culture' (1984:584).
13. On various forms of bias mentioned by critics of anthropology at home see John Aguilar (1981:22ff.).
14. Cohen's advise that we 'can use our experience of the complexity of our selves to contain the anthropologist's temptation to generalize and simplify others' (1992: 226) should be heeded. See also Aguilar (1981:25) and Graham (1981:119).
15. I will not pursue this matter any further, since it has already been given ample attention in the section on role aspects.
16. Altorki argues that the assumption that ethnographers are doing indigenous anthropology 'is more questionable the greater the cultural distance, especially that distance created by language differences, between the researcher and the people studied' (1982:168). This assertion seems too obvious to merit attention. However, see *Anthropology at Home* (Jackson 1987b), which contains several examples of anthropologists who claim to be doing anthropology at home when the research setting is slightly familiar. Thus, a Dane is doing anthropology at home in Iceland, a Brit in Poland or Russia, and so on. Though the book certainly contains some interesting articles, its broad conception of endo-ethnography leads to confusion.
17. This is probably also the reason why historians hardly ever reflect on the problem of doing 'historiography at home'. By the way, a large number of Dutch anthropologists who do fieldwork in their own society are involved in ethnohistory. Perhaps this is so for the very same reason: they probe into the unfamiliar and exotic at home and look for it in the past.
18. Though their views are potentially mutually beneficial, so far most anthropologists from within and from without who share a fieldwork setting seem more often than not to disagree. Debates on the basis of published material often boil down to claims over ethnographic authority (cf., for example, Hastrup [1990] versus Einarsson [1990]). In such cases, exchange of information and dialogue are rare. In Hastrup's case, it is the foreign anthropologist disqualifying the critique of a native anthropologist. As insiders, native anthropologists sometimes do not recognize the image of 'their' people in the foreign anthropologist's mirror, or criticize him or her on matters of presentation and interpretation (see, for example, Nukunya, this

issue). Often, a gap exists between the ethnographic description by outsiders and the self-perception of readers, whether they are anthropologists or not. If they are anthropologists, their critique on exogenous anthropologists should be guided by public rather than personal experience.

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