

Chapter 11:

When West Meets East : the Skeleton at the Feast

(Open Inaugural Lecture, University of Kent at Canterbury, 4 June 1993)

Frazer, Malinowski and Orientalism

We are now as close to the twenty-first century as Sir James Frazer was to the nineteenth when he left Cambridge to accept elevation to Britain's (and the world's) very first chair in Social Anthropology, at the University of Liverpool. The location was not accidental. Liverpool was a very wealthy port, an important gateway to the overseas empire where the country's future seemed to lie. The appointment of this scholar, already famous for *The Golden Bough*, symbolized the forward-looking dynamism of the university. Today Britain looks more to Europe for its future and, though I do not wish to compare myself to Frazer, it would be nice to interpret my own recruitment from Cambridge as an example of this university's forward-looking dynamism!

Much has changed in British academic life in the course of this century, not least the prestige and other rewards accruing to the title 'Professor'. Frazer's decision to leave Cambridge was motivated, at least in part, by the desire to hold a 'Chair', but his was honorary and unpaid. The duties, too, were very different from those of today. Frazer was able to specify his own conditions. He was to remain free to devote himself to his research, and did not have to supervise any students in Liverpool. Nor did he have to examine, commenting on this point: 'I quite agree with our Vice-Master who once was asked to examine for the Theological Tripos and answered that nothing but extreme hunger would induce him to do so.'¹

Though a *social* anthropologist, as opposed to the sort who study skeletons, Frazer did not expend much scholarly energy on the first-hand study of any living human communities. Modern social anthropology is commonly, and in my view, correctly, dated from the very deliberate and self-conscious displacing of Frazer by a Central European called Bronisław Malinowski, who dominated British social anthropology in the inter-war decades. The revolution, as it has been justly described, consisted in considerable part of the replacement of an 'armchair anthropologist' by a fieldworker who immerses himself in the lives of the natives and thereby achieves the fullest possible understanding of their functioning social worlds.² I shall return to the subject of revolutions

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presently in relation to Malinowski's homeland, for his birthplace, the ancient university town of Cracow, was my first port of call when I embarked upon two years of fieldwork in Poland in 1978. But before turning to the current realities of Central Europe I would like to take you somewhat further afield, to another fieldwork location which I have been exploring more recently. My underlying purpose in this lecture is to invite you to reflect on the changing character of social anthropology during this century – but also to reflect on the dangers of excessive reflection!

Let me begin with a few words about anthropology at Kent. One of the most pronounced trends in the subject in recent years has been the rise of 'anthropology at home'. This phrase does not necessarily imply research within one's own country (though that has certainly increased, albeit with very uneven coverage in the case of Britain, as my colleague Dr. Bill Watson is now demonstrating in his new undergraduate course on *The Anthropology of the British Isles*). It can equally refer to work in other so-called complex societies, not necessarily industrialized to any significant degree, but literate and highly differentiated: for example, the southern Italian society studied over many years by another colleague, Dr. Nevill Colclough, or the Andalusian town studied by John and Marie Corbin.³ As anthropologists have carried out more research in such societies, a tendency which incidentally Malinowski did much to encourage, the boundaries between their discipline and sociology have become harder to defend. This tendency is nowhere more clearly evident than here at the University of Kent. From the inception of the university in 1965, anthropology has been combined in one Board of Studies with sociology. As most people present will know, the first Professor was and remains an outstanding embodiment of the essential unity of these subjects. Officially appointed as Professor of Sociology, Paul Stirling had previously trained and taught as an anthropologist. He had carried out fieldwork in a Turkey that was on the edge of massive and rapid social change, in a project supervised by Evans-Pritchard in Oxford. The important role played by Paul Stirling as social anthropology began to develop into new regions and to apply new research practices is generously acknowledged in John Davis's volume *People of the Mediterranean*. It is an appropriate reflection of the way the subject has developed that, after succeeding Paul and becoming the first official Professor of Social Anthropology here in Kent, John has since moved on to occupy Evans-Pritchard's chair at All Souls.

Unusually, then, among anthropology departments, this one has been explicitly linked to sociology from its inception. It has been less tainted than other departments by that association with colonialism which has been one of

the principal bugbears of anthropology throughout the post-colonial period. In addition to Paul Stirling in Turkey, Jeremy Kemp's research in rural Thailand provides a reminder that not *all* non-western societies were subjected to conventional models of colonialism.⁴ Of course, no department can remain immune to the changing climate of opinion in anthropology elsewhere. Scholars at Kent have helped to contextualize the strengths and the limitations of the anthropology of the colonial era: for example, Roy Ellen and, wearing his other hat as a South-East Asian specialist, Bill Watson, have contributed to studies of the Dutch record in Indonesia.⁵ But we have not seen, in Kent, the radical dismissal of past achievements. The reassessments have not been complacent, but nor have they been characterized by endless self-doubt and intellectual anguish.

We take 'reflexivity' seriously: for us it has tended to mean a constructive adventurousness in applying anthropological techniques to the study of complex, literate societies, societies that are part of the same broad cultural stream which has produced anthropology itself. In some other places, political critique has been followed by, and in some places largely substituted by, an introspective preoccupation with the status of anthropological knowledge, with epistemologies, ontologies and the ethical problems raised by many of our research practices. It sometimes seems that the invitation to ever more sophisticated reflexivity disguises an enfeebling paralysis in the discipline. Awareness of anthropology's record of unequal encounters with 'the Other' seems to lead, paradoxically, to ever greater distancing and mystification of the latter. It is my view that much of this is based on a largely false view of anthropology's role in colonized societies, but that is not the point I wish to develop here. I do not wish to deny for a moment that fundamental political realities have great bearing on all social science research. To the extent that these factors have been overlooked in the past, it is just as well we have lost this innocence. But it seems to me that an overwhelming preoccupation with 'the Other', and particularly with the manner of its literary representation, risks disabling anthropology, disqualifying it from making what I believe to be its most valuable contribution to understanding social lives, our own as well as those of others.

Perhaps I can illustrate the dangers by noting the work of the celebrated Palestinian literary scholar Edward W. Said, author of *Orientalism* (1978), and very recently of *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). My local informants tell me that this new work is in significant part a plagiarized version of the Eliot lectures which he delivered here a few years ago. Be that as it may, Said has undoubtedly been one of the most important influences on a whole generation

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of anthropologists. In at least the strong version of the 'Orientalist' critique, cultural representations of the Other, and notably of a stagnant and morally repellent Orient, are seen as both enabling and legitimating all the inequalities and injustices of modern capitalist imperialism.

Now, if Empire can be shown to play a central role in the generation of the modern novel and other literary artifacts, how much more obvious is the link between the imperialist expansion of the West and the manufacture of modern anthropology. The Ethnological Society of London, later the Royal Anthropological Institute, celebrated its 150th anniversary last month. It was established, like its other North-Atlantic counterparts, in the heyday of Victorian expansion, when evolutionist theories came to dominate the intellectual stage. There was a general faith in progress, and in the power of secular science to advance civilization. Undoubtedly, the representation of non-western peoples by pre-Malinowskian anthropologists contained much that can be illuminated by Said's perspective, and which is deserving of his moral indictment. The general image of 'the Other' was not merely oversimplified: it was distorted and exoticized, with virtually no attempt to understand how social life was actually lived. Frazer himself epitomizes the arrogance of his age. For example, his inaugural lecture finds him distinguishing between 'enlightened nations' and 'lower races'.⁶

But is the same verdict to stand on anthropology after the transition from Frazer to Malinowski? As recent work on his Polish background (co-edited by my colleague Roy Ellen) has shown, Malinowski, too, was in many ways a typical European intellectual of his age.⁷ He was a conceited man who did not suffer fools gladly, and in terms of personality and values he seems to have had much in common with Frazer. The continuity is apparent in the titles of the classic monographs he published in the 1920s. The first and most famous is called *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. It contains a rich analysis of the inter-island exchange system known as *kula* and also, in its very first chapter, the clearest manifesto for the theory and methods of the new fieldwork-based anthropology. Titles which followed later in the 1920s included *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, and *The Sexual Life of Savages*. From today's vantage point, these titles may seem an embarrassment. I am the proud owner of a first edition of the latter, given to me a few years ago by an elderly and distinguished Cambridge scientist who confessed to acquiring it many decades before at a highly dubious establishment in Soho! Should we criticize these titles as Orientalizing devices? The posthumous publication of Malinowski's Trobriand diary, which provides a mine of information about the values and

prejudices of this virtuoso ethnographer, continues to generate considerable discomfort among anthropologists today.⁸ I do not think that it should. It does not invalidate the very solid ethnographic corpus built up in the Trobriand monographs. In addition to serving as a resource for later area specialists, who have undoubtedly improved upon Malinowski's understanding of many topics, that corpus of work is still regularly invoked by those seeking to advance the general theory of the subject. Malinowski's achievement can hardly be put in the category of fiction, illuminating and important as a comparison with Joseph Conrad may be for some purposes.⁹ And in spite of his penchant for sensational titles, I suggest that erotic titillation and cultural imperialism are both rather wide of the mark in Malinowski's case. In this respect, my Cambridge friend had been disappointed with his purchase!

I want to argue that Orientalism, as propounded by Said, is an unconvincing attempt to restrict to the modern age a human propensity to label and stereotype other groups which is as old as human communities themselves; and that the main thrust of modern anthropology, from Malinowski onwards, has been not to legitimate the demonizing of 'the Other', but to probe behind all stereotypical representations by illuminating the actual social and political relations which produce them, and which are continually modifying them in practice. Those who ignore such empirical investigations are closing off their best chance of understanding the real force of the representations themselves. Let me now turn to illustrate these themes with materials from the parts of the world where I have been fortunate enough to carry out fieldwork.

Stereotypes around the Black Sea

The accounts of the classical geographers and historians who wrote about the peoples of the East Black Sea coast contain many hints of an embryonic Orientalism in Said's modern sense. Apollonius of Rhodes speaks as follows of the otherness of the Mossynoekoi: 'Whatever is right to do openly before the people or in the market place, all this they do in their homes, but whatever acts we perform at home, these they perform out of doors in the midst of the streets without blame'.¹⁰ Strabo tells his readers that these exotic natives lived in tree huts, from which they would ambush travellers.¹¹ These people lived in and around Colchis, the fabled land where Jason and the original Argonauts sought the Golden Fleece. Among the possible descendants of the Colchians are the Laz of contemporary North-East Turkey, who in recent times have themselves struck other inhabitants of Anatolia as radically different, strange, bizarre, less

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civilized.¹² But who are these Laz? The designation turns out to be very fluid – relational and situational. It is rather like trying to specify the boundaries of Eastern Europe: for the Viennese, the capital of Hungary may be eastern, but for the Hungarian, perhaps Bucharest marks the crucial symbolic boundary, and so on. So it is with the Laz. For most Anatolians the stereotype refers to the entire East Black Sea region, but within this stretch of several hundred miles of coastline, you will routinely be informed that the real Laz are found slightly further to the east. Only the inhabitants of the final section before the Georgian border identify themselves as ethnic Laz (*Lazi*). In the rest of the region the stereotype is used loosely by people to refer to populations to the east of themselves exhibiting alleged ‘Laz’ characteristics, and not in any strict ‘ethnic’ sense, implying a different *kind* of person. Due in part to the policies of successive Turkish governments towards their minorities, most Turkish citizens, even in this region, are unaware that the zone adjacent to the Georgian border is occupied by people who continue to speak a non-Turkic language, Lazuri, related to Georgian.

The putative nation-state of modern Turkey is the successor to the Ottoman Empire and the earlier polities of Asia Minor, a land which must surely have a special claim on our attention in discussions of Orientalism. European images of the world which opened up beyond Constantinople tended to fuse the wild, ‘tribal’ characteristics of the Turks, of Central Asian origin, with their role as one of the principal carriers of a great world religion of Middle Eastern origin, Islam. The literary representations of this Levantine world certainly deserve the close attention that is now being paid to them, by my wife among other scholars.¹³ Her research has shown that there is much variety in the stereotypes developed by different European peoples, and that we need to discriminate more carefully than the blanket concept of Orientalism allows.

But, though it is obviously interesting and important to study representations of the Other, I do not consider this to be the central task of the social anthropologist, in modern Turkey or elsewhere. In the spirit of Malinowski, though of course in vastly different conditions, Paul Stirling was able through his fieldwork to cut through to the social, political and economic realities of Anatolian peasant life. This required him to set aside all western stereotypes of the Turk, and, equally, to adopt a sceptical stance toward the equally unrealistic stereotypes propagated by the Atatürkian élites which governed Turkey – though these secular ideals had to be taken very seriously because of their impact on the everyday lives of the mass of the population. Some thirty years after it was written, and forty years after completion of the original

research, Stirling's pioneering monograph *Turkish Village* is still the most frequently cited social science work on modern Turkey. It is full of hard data (including data concerning beliefs and values, and what Stirling calls 'cognition', as well as more readily quantifiable materials) and this is surely what has made the work so valuable to later scholars. Paul Stirling cannot be present today because, aged seventy-three, he is back once again in the village which he first studied in 1949. In collaboration with Michael Fischer and using the most modern computing technologies, his current goal is to make all the materials relating to his fieldwork in Sakaltutan available electronically to future generations of scholars: from articles and papers to fieldnotes and videos. I am not sure that he would like me to describe him as a positivist; but to my mind this particular academic stereotype should not be an embarrassment to anthropologists. It is precisely because he gives priority to supporting arguments in a scientific style, with solid empirical evidence, that he is able to avoid a patronizing or condescending tone. He has inspired many later anthropologists, who have continued to explore the tensions and the accommodations which people have achieved between the rival imperatives of Islam, of secular, democratic principles, and of nationalism.

I have to say that not all of his successors have been able to match Paul Stirling's high standards. When positivist, empirical research is abandoned, the most unfortunate Orientalist stereotypes can still creep into contemporary anthropological work. Carol Delaney's (1991) feminist and self-focused approach, though often stimulating, leads her to a portrayal of the men in the village where she worked as workshy, and of their religion as overwhelmingly repressive. (Stirling is at once more self-effacing and more persuasive on these points.) Julie Marcus (1992) goes further still. She believes that it is an illusion to imagine that you can expand knowledge and understanding by getting close to empirical data. Logically enough, therefore, her own feminist, post-modernist treatment of 'Islam and gender hierarchy in Turkey' contains very little in the way of empirical data. The reader will learn something about the early travel literature on Turkey ('representations') and about the (ostensibly egalitarian) values of a contemporary Australian feminist, but next to nothing about the (ostensible) subjects of her book.

The Islamic faith provides the most important unifying factor for the vast majority of the inhabitants of modern Turkey. The Lazuri speaking people of the Georgian border zone were converted from Christianity to Islam some four hundred years ago. High levels of religiosity are one element in the general Laz stereotypes. However, as usual fieldwork led to recognition of a more complex

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situation. Roughly speaking, in the western section of the Laz zone, where Laz speakers have a boundary with ethnically unmarked Turks, religion is taken extremely seriously by virtually all sections of the population. However, as one approaches the state border, the picture changes. Here, larger numbers of people do not attend the mosque regularly and do not observe the Ramadan fast. People comment on these differences, and they form one of the main ingredients for the construction of locally specific stereotypes. Such local differences were cast in fresh light when, in 1988, after more than half a century of virtually total closure, the coastal border with what was still at the time the Soviet Republic of Georgia was reopened, and for the first time contacts with foreign nationals became frequent occurrences. My wife and I paid considerable attention to these contacts during our 1992 fieldwork, having previously worked in the region in 1983 when the border was still sealed.¹⁴

The unusual elements in this cultural encounter will be readily appreciated. Most of those who entered Turkey from the east were nominally Christian, though in Georgia, as in other parts of the former Soviet Union, secularization does seem to have had very far-reaching effects. These visitors did not, in reality, come as tourists, but as petty traders. For them, Islamic Turkey was a western country in the sense that it had a flourishing capitalist economy and a currency which could be exchanged for dollars, the fount of all power and security in their own disintegrating economies. The Laz zone, and indeed the entire East Black Sea coastal region, had been turned into a sprawling car-boot sale by the time we began fieldwork in 1992. The traders brought with them whatever they could, and the free market policies of the Turkish government imposed no effective controls over this commerce. Like most local people, we did not have the linguistic skills to communicate smoothly with the traders; those we did speak to were respectful of Turkey's relative economic achievements and expressed a tragic sense of loss at the disintegration of their own socialist institutions. Some female visitors complained of the treatment they received from 'uncultured' Moslem men.

Negative stereotypes were expressed much more vehemently among virtually all people in the host settlements, with perhaps some attenuation in the easterly sections of the Laz zone where we found some sympathy with the economic plight of the traders. Basically, the criticism centred on the alleged prostitution activities of the foreign women, corrupting local men and destroying the moral fibre and 'honour' of this conservative, Moslem society. Undoubtedly some foreigners (who were known generically as *Rus*, even though comparatively few of them were ethnic Russians) did exploit the enormous potential of this

market. Its rewards, as well as its risks, were far greater than those offered through conventional trading opportunities. But, at least from our vantage point in a small town at the western edge of the Laz zone, the moral indignation as whipped up in the tabloid press did seem disproportionate. There was a certain amount of hypocrisy. People who were loudest in their criticisms of the commerce continued to visit the markets obsessively, purchasing (sometimes for resale) goods whose quality they disparaged, from traders whom they cast as less than fully human. Perhaps the visitors were not seen as *naturally* thus, but they had lost some essential human qualities as a consequence of the socialist experience.

I like this example because it helps us to understand the contingent character of 'east' and 'west' in the modern world. Here it is the geographical 'east' which represents materialist, secular values, while 'west' is constituted by a somewhat fragile Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Clearly there are some deep differences in approved patterns of behaviour on the opposing sides of this boundary. Most traders would certainly condemn the prostitution engaged in by a minority of their fellow-citizens, and yet they might also argue that relations between the sexes were generally better balanced in their home communities than in this gateway to 'the west'. We have found some signs of far-reaching changes in gender relations in the Laz zone and elsewhere in rural Turkey. Close-up investigation suggests that understanding of the motives of the traders may improve as stable trading partnerships emerge and Turkish citizens pay return visits to the former Soviet republics (not exclusively Georgia). They are then able to spread a more nuanced account both of the legacy of the socialist period and of the post-socialist societies they now find there. Among the Laz, it is possible that these contacts will facilitate greater self-consciousness as an ethnic group. As time passes I expect the early stereotypes to be modified and greater mutual understanding to ensue, though this optimistic scenario could easily be derailed by media campaigns and political interference from outside the region.

The new Orientalism

It is obvious that the dissemination of this sort of stereotype in conditions such as those that prevail in North-East Turkey is a complex phenomenon, in which the coverage given in the mass media to sexual impropriety has played a major part. Many of the images now held by the residents of this region replicate more general western images of the moral bankruptcy of communism. This is hardly

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surprising, since Turkey has been a faithful NATO ally, and the power of organs such as Washington's Radio Liberty has been hegemonic. Let me now shift the focus and consider what light anthropologists can shed on the transformations which have recently swept over the heartlands of communism in Eastern Europe. I certainly do not want to imply that the close-up investigation of stereotypes will always yield reassuring messages. The people on the ground will not always see through the grosser distortions of their élites and their media. Mutual understanding and respect will not always prevail. The Balkans show clearly that another pattern is also possible. Anthropologists who carried out fieldwork in Bosnia in the 1980s have shown that the different communities were able to live in peace, cooperating and intermarrying on an ever increasing scale.¹⁵ They might also have been able to warn western policymakers of the potential for armed mobilization in the region. But those with detailed local cultural knowledge have not been heeded by our policymakers, who have preferred to accede too readily to the demands of local élites, particularly those in Zagreb. Local voices are still not being heeded, and the outcome is evident on your television screens every night.

Looking at the larger picture, there is a case for seeing the east-west divide of the Cold War era as another great unequal encounter, in which Orientalizing devices played an important role in symbolizing and legitimating boundaries. Indeed, the demise of the socialist Other has led to a renewed outbreak of this Orientalism. Like vultures, second rate western novelists now take cheap holidays in St. Petersburg and Prague and produce rehashed accounts of the Slav soul, or of women who are beautiful despite their shabby dress and cosmetics, of poets and playwrights who cultivate artistic truths unappreciated in the west, of ordinary people who have forgotten how to work because of the culture of socialism, and so on. One notes this at trivial levels: returning recently from a conference in Prague, I overheard on the plane some well bred English ladies commenting on Czech cuisine: 'so unsophisticated, at least a generation behind the times!' (In fact Prague already has its McDonalds and, unlike some other parts of Eastern Europe, appears to be catching up with the west all too rapidly for the taste of the indigenous population.) But academics, too, have contributed much to this new Orientalism, both during the socialist period and in its immediate aftermath, for example with grand theories which oppose open, democratic, western civil societies to the closed, 'totalitarian' traditions of the east. Such views have many echoes in the analyses of socialism put forward by so-called 'dissident' writers, and by émigrés in North America and Israel. My own experience tells me that these accounts are misleading and inadequate.

Social anthropologists cannot be exempted entirely from such strictures but, as before, I want to argue that an approach based on empirical immersion offers the best way to understand how socialist societies really worked and the dilemmas of the post-socialist period. It is unlikely that the Argonauts ever reached the Vistula, the river which flows through Malinowski's birthplace in Cracow. Though folklore, ethnography and sociology all flourished here, it wasn't until more than half a century after his Trobriand investigations that much serious anthropological research was attempted by western scholars in his home country. From this work we can see how unpopular many socialist institutions were – but we can see also how distorting are the simple models of totalitarianism, common though such representations were both at home and abroad.

During my own research, which was concentrated in the *Solidarity* period, before the imposition of martial law in 1981, I was able to experience not only the massive wave of emotion evoked by Pope John Paul II on his first visit back to his previous diocese in 1979, but also the popular anticlericalism which persists among many ordinary Poles. I came across deep mistrust of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which was itself perceived as an insidious totalitarian institution by ethnic Ukrainians who, fearful of Catholic nationalists, looked to the socialist state to guarantee their rights to live in their own Carpathian homelands. More recently, on shorter trips back to Poland, I have been able to experience something of the impact of democratization, and the dire consequences for people in this region of the implementation of 'shock therapy' economic policies. The slogans of Jeffrey Sachs are far too crude to be taken seriously by those who formulate economic policy for western countries, yet they epitomize the main thrust of the advice and so-called 'know-how' passed on, by this country among others, to Eastern Europe over the last few years. Much of this 'assistance' has infuriated Eastern Europeans, particularly when the actual moneys have been channeled to firms of western accountants and assorted 'consultants' entirely lacking local knowledge.

I see all this not as the end of history but as yet another example of cultural imperialism in Said's sense, a massive new variant of Orientalism, with more directly deleterious consequences for more people than any previous version. Because these events are still unfolding before our eyes in the region which has been of abiding personal concern for almost two decades, I am sometimes tempted to challenge the crude slogans of others with crudities of my own – for example, I might hazard the claim that most citizens feel that they lived more secure and contented lives in the last decades of socialism than they now expect ever to achieve under capitalism.

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However, the preferable course for an anthropologist wishing to understand this 'transition' is to stick as closely as possible to empirical facts in some local context. I don't object if some anthropologists also feel able to indulge in macro-level generalization and grand theory but, given the power of the new Orientalism, I think they must be very careful about how they set about doing this. They must try to avoid the traps which ensnare most contemporary pundits. Certainly as far as contemporary Eastern Europe is concerned, I think the virtues of straightforward documentation following fieldwork are overwhelming. For example, a former Cambridge colleague is showing in her current work how the position of both rural and urban women in Poland, very far from ideal in the socialist period, has deteriorated seriously in the last few years in the era of free market triumphalism.¹⁶ To take another Polish example, Janine Wedel consistently emphasizes the continuities of specific 'social circles' (*środowiska*), which are shaping the future of Poland today, just as they shaped the alternative social and economic forms which so effectively demolished socialist aspirations over previous decades.¹⁷ This is how the voices of anthropologists should be heard, if they can make themselves heard at all alongside the 'strong' languages of other disciplines, such as economics and political science. I suggest that the work of such anthropologists is likely to be subversive - subversive now of all those who identify revolutions and who celebrate the flowering of something called civil society in Eastern Europe, just as it was subversive in earlier years of the fantastic claims of the social engineers of the previous power system. Anthropologists take no special pleasure in puncturing post-communist euphoria; they are quite simply the only people able to provide realistic understandings of what is currently going on at the grass roots, and of what 'ordinary people' think about recent 'revolutions'.

For myself, I have spent much more time in Hungary than in Poland in recent years. The picture there is broadly similar. In going back to the village where I first lived in 1976, I have documented a transition much more gradual than the revolutionary convulsions beloved of the media.¹⁸ The demise of the Communist Party began about a decade ago and is generally welcomed locally, but other institutions, including a very flexible form of agricultural cooperative, continue to function much as they have in the past. In particular, I have found there is little support among the villagers for a policy of radical privatization of agricultural land, even though this is what post-communist governments almost everywhere in Eastern Europe have for ideological reasons been seeking to impose. People are certainly attached to the lands which belonged to their families before collectivization. But they are also fearful of a future in

which, unlike the countries which style themselves so arrogantly as the European Community, their own government is no longer able or willing to guarantee substantive supports to its farmers. These villagers live on a fairly underdeveloped part of the Great Plain, albeit within a hundred miles of Budapest. In some respects they were scarcely integrated at all into the national society in the period before socialists came to power. Through a combination of very hard work on their own part and generous supports from the state, most of these people had become fairly prosperous by the 1970s: they felt secure, with a range of entitlements that certainly did not include full democratic rights, but was very satisfactory on most other counts. These people are not hailing recent events as the victory of 'civil society' over an oppressive totalitarian state. They became very quickly disillusioned during the changes of 1989-90, and today are more likely to see themselves not as the beneficiaries of a change of system, but as victims.

Conclusions

Where does all this leave us? I apologize to anyone in the audience who, misled by my title, was expecting a physical anthropological discussion of bones and skeletal remains. Social anthropologists are concerned above all with the lived reality of ordinary people's lives, studied through their own languages in prolonged periods of fieldwork. My dictionary explains the phrase 'the skeleton at the feast' as 'a reminder of serious or saddening things in the midst of enjoyment; a source of gloom or depression'. After the excitement of 1989, anticlimax set in very quickly for a great many ordinary people in Eastern Europe. This is not properly understood, because our images of the region are still dominated by intellectual élites, and by media people who seldom venture outside the capital cities. But if our policymakers are to avoid all the errors of the recent past, sooner or later anthropological voices must be heard.

When he chose the title of his first Trobriand monograph, the harbinger of the revolution which swept away classical, Frazerian anthropology, it is entirely reasonable to see Malinowski identifying himself with Jason, a substantial cut above ordinary mortals.¹⁹ But this heroic age has passed. Much as I admire the scholarship of Frazer, Malinowski and those of my colleagues able to maintain a nineteenth century vision of the scope of social anthropology, I have not been able to offer you any Golden Fleece today. I must remain content with the modestly subversive and not always gloomy or depressing role of 'the skeleton at the feast'.

Notes

- ¹ Quoted by Ackerman, 1987: 209.
- ² The Malinowskian revolution in anthropology was comprehensively assessed in Jarvie 1964. More recent attempts to play down Malinowski's impact and originality, and to shift credit to Rivers or to Boas, are to my mind unconvincing.
- ³ See Colclough 1992, Corbin and Corbin 1987.
- ⁴ See Kemp 1992.
- ⁵ See Ellen 1976, Watson 1984.
- ⁶ It also suggests that, while non-western peoples were 'savage' and 'primitive', he felt if anything stronger contempt, and even despair for humanity when confronted by the 'less educated classes' in a city like Liverpool in his own Edwardian England. See Frazer 1913; see also the discussion in Ackerman, *op. cit.*
- ⁷ See Mucha 1988.
- ⁸ For example, Geertz 1987.
- ⁹ See Thornton 1985.
- ¹⁰ Quoted in Bryer 1966: 175.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² See Meeker 1971.
- ¹³ See Bellér-Hann 1995.
- ¹⁴ See C. and I. Hann 1992; forthcoming.
- ¹⁵ See Bringa 1990, Sorabji 1989.
- ¹⁶ See Pine 1994.
- ¹⁷ See Wedel 1992.
- ¹⁸ See Hann 1993e, 1995b, forthcoming b.
- ¹⁹ Cf. Forge 1972.