



Playing the Field

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PLAYING THE FIELD

The sexual life of anthropologists

Susan Seizer

There is a little gem of a scene in the 1952 movie version of William Inge’s play *Come Back, Little Sheba*, in which Shirley Booth, in her Academy Award-winning portrayal of a dowdy middle-aged American housewife, switches on her favorite midday radio program, “Taboo.” Out croons the deep-sexy voice of the male announcer:

Taboo. It’s taboo, radio listeners. Your fifteen minutes of temptation. Won’t you join me? Won’t you leave behind your routine? The dull cares that make up your day-to-day existence, the little worries, the uncertainties, the profusions of the workaday world, and follow me where pagan spirits hold sway, where live natives dance on a moon-enchanted isle, where palm trees sway with the restless ocean tide, restless, surging! on the white shore . . . Won’t you come along? But remember—it’s taboo!

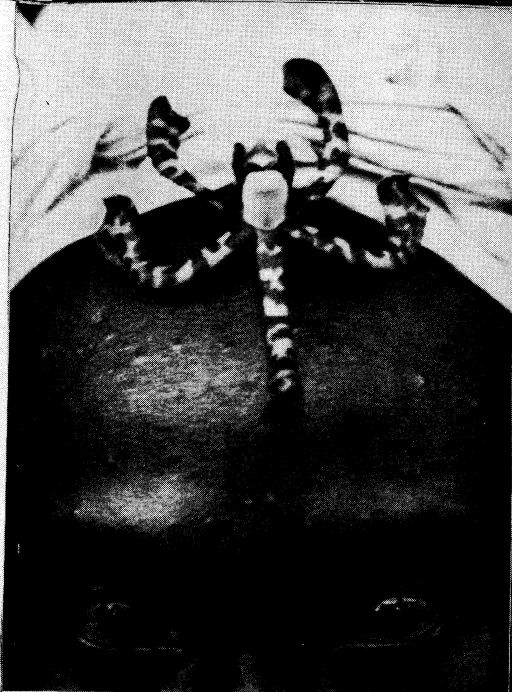
The imagined visual pleasures of this spoken text congeal in the housewife’s answering smile. Alone with her assisted fantasy, she lays herself down on the living room couch in her polka-dot house-dress and pom-pommed slippers, lowers her eyelids down to demi, reaches back to pop grapes in her mouth from the basket she has placed on the end table behind her head, and dreamily lets sway her own pagan spirit. Her shoulders catch the rhythm of the conga beat and her arms dance that fantastic variant of the hula that sprang from the collective unconscious of middle America sometime earlier this century.

The magnetic appeal of the sexually charged sphere of “taboo”—this fantasy mix of the erotic and exotic—has not exactly waned in subsequent decades, as a casual glance at almost any contemporary fashion magazine will attest. Nor has the charge of this encounter been limited to popular culture: indeed the

**Discussed
in this essay**

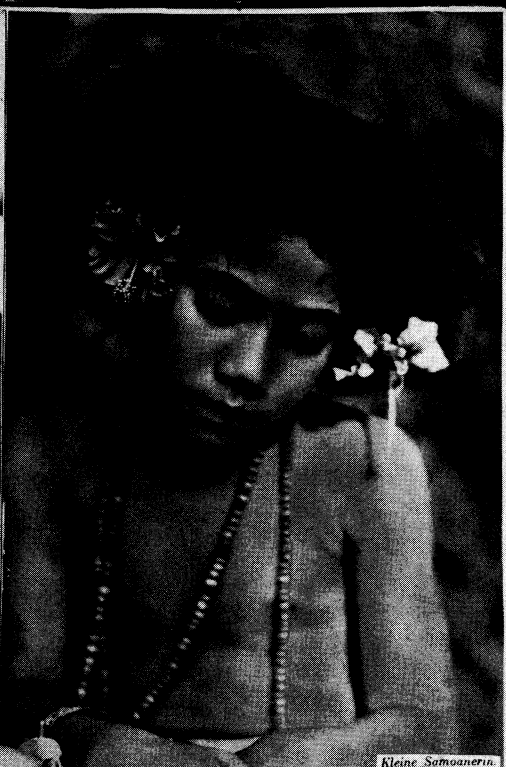
Taboo Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork, edited by Don Kulick and Margaret Wilson, New York: Routledge

Hannah Hoch (German, 1889–1978), Scrapbook, p. 97. ca. 1933. Berlinische Gallery, Berlin



Orchidee als Kopfsatz

Phot. Krause

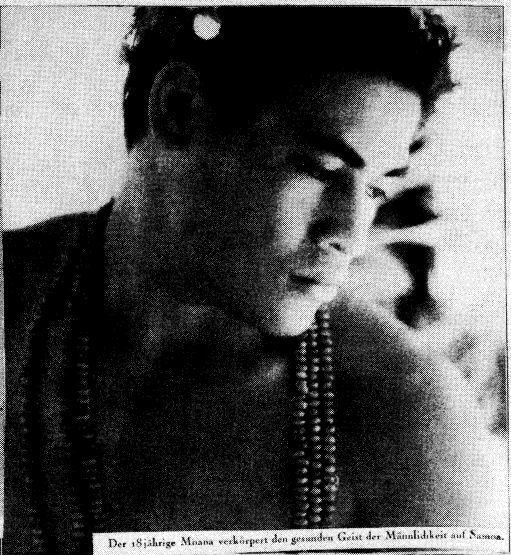


Kleine Samoanerin

Aus „Samoa“ von Robert J. Fisher



Billinger



Der 18-jährige Moana verkörpert den gesunden Geist der Männlichkeit auf Samoa.

Hannah Hoch
(*German, 1889–1978*),
Scrapbook, p. 96.
ca. 1933. *Berlinische*
Gallery, Berlin

sexuality of Others has been a mainstay of the scholarly discipline of cultural anthropology. But it is only in academic circles that the draw of the “erotic-exotic” is being “problematized” for what it reveals about Western cultural notions of sex, self, and relations of power. The ongoing rethinking of anthropology, especially, has finally begun to confront a certain smoldering disciplinary taboo: sex in the field.

Not that anthropologists have ever shied away from considering sex a proper object of inquiry. Has such study ever been disinterested? Margaret Mead’s 1928 chronicle of the sexuality of adolescent girls in Samoa was her first entrée into a brilliant academic career. Likewise, *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929), an in-depth study of “primitive” sex among the Melanesians, helped establish early on the reputation of anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. Indeed, Malinowski’s classic work was one of the earliest ethnographic monographs to result from the freshly minted mode of “participant-observation” in British social anthropology, and it was during the same Melanesian trip that produced *The Sexual Life of Savages* that Malinowski penned his now infamous *Diary*, published posthumously in 1967. The revelation of Malinowski’s sexual fantasies in the latter publication propelled much disciplinary self-questioning: What exactly is the nature of the researcher’s participation in participant-observation? How do a researcher’s preconceptions and fantasies impact on the research project—on the people he or she studies, and on its final product, that verbal portrait of Others known as “ethnography”—as well as its process, the willful experience of Otherness known

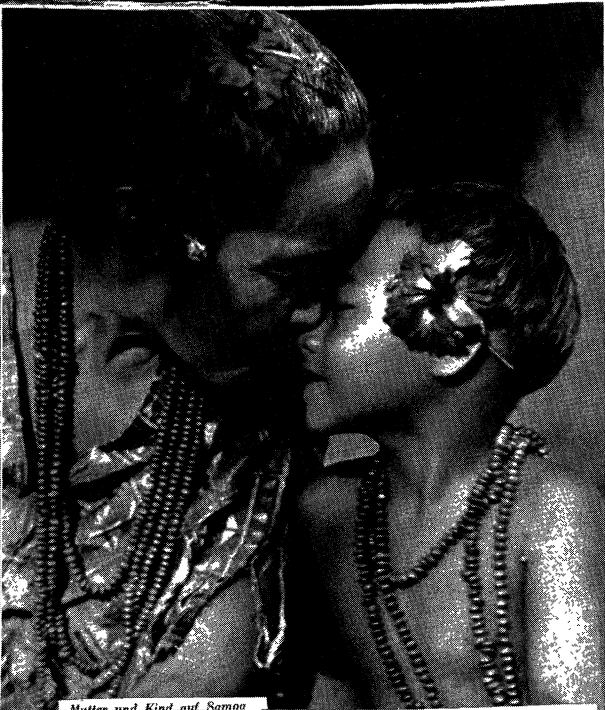
as “fieldwork”? While the figure of the fieldworker has recently become an object of intense disciplinary attention, there has been little scholarly consideration of the anthropologist as sexual subject per se. Open discussion of sex has remained, in a word, taboo.

Until now. The erotics of anthropology is the subject of a groundbreaking volume edited by Don Kulick and Margaret Wilson, aptly entitled *Taboo: Sex, Identity, and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. Very much an artifact of its time, the book comes in fashionably sexy packaging: the cover has that pleasing, slightly rubberized texture, with the word *taboo* in understated lowercase letters, printed in white against a muted-gray photograph of two naked backs, the uppermost clearly female, the lower hazy and ambiguous. Only this stretch of two naked backs, vertically repeated, from the waist to the shoulder blade—no arms, no hips, no motion, no contact—is visible. It is a design that speaks the book’s intentions: like its content, the book’s cover raises suggestive questions, while direct action remains only an off-screen potential.

In his introduction to the volume, Kulick succinctly sums up the prevailing situation: “Sex—their sex, the sex of ‘the Other’—has always constituted one of the gaudiest exhibits in the anthropological sideshow. . . . Throughout all the decades of concern with the sex lives of others, anthropologists have remained very tight-lipped about their own sexuality.” This volume seeks to loosen lips: “Since the erotic subjectivity of the fieldworker has until recently been one of the few remaining tabooed topics within anthropology, we have a lot of talking to



Leinsbühl... Heilige Pe'a, „Fliegender Fuchs“



Mutter und Kind auf Samoa



Javanische Mutter



Phot. H. R. G.

do about it. This book is a bid to get the conversation started." Eight anthropologists have duly answered that editorial summons, each contributing an autobiographical fieldwork narrative to the collective conversation.

Kulick traces previous disciplinary reluctance to enter into such discussion to three sources. First is the pervasive belief in the possibility of objective science, against which such "subjective" concerns were deemed irrelevant. Second is a disciplinary disdain for the genre of personal narrative. And third is the general cultural taboo on talking about sex. Each of these conditions is now on the wane, although they still operate to keep us from exposing the seamier sides of anthropology's disciplinary foundations. Those seamier sides are, in Kulick's words, "the deeply racist and colonialist conditions that make possible our continuing unidirectional discourse about the sexuality of the people we study."

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Though they still travel to moon-enchanted isles, cultural anthropologists are increasingly conscious of the link between the voyager and the voyeur. Current thought on the complexities inherent in the notion of "the field" (its dependence on a Self-Other dichotomy, the hierarchical relations of power assumed by the roles of foreign researcher and native informant) lays the groundwork for confronting the long-held disciplinary taboo on sex in the field. Having recognized the relevance of the ethnographer's subjectivity, this collection argues that it now seems silly to deny that issues of the researcher's sexuality and erotic subjectivity also play a

significant role both in the shape and the experience of fieldwork. Contributor Ralph Bolton points to the paradox implicit in such denial: "The taboo on sexual involvement in the field serves to maintain a basic boundary between ourselves and the Other in a situation in which our goal as ethnographers is to diminish the distance between us."

The questions unearthed by digging into the psychosocial soil of the field are innumerable. What should the anthropologist make of his or her erotic attraction to a place or a people? What of the actual sexual dynamics into which she or he plays while there? What is bound up in the refusal to interact as a sexual being? Is some other "self" activated when sexual relations do occur? And how much of this should be reflected in the academic work of anthropology?

Each essay in the *Taboo* collection sheds its own beam of light on such questions. Helen Morton's essay spans a decade of interpersonal experiences on the island of Tonga: as a girl of eighteen and nineteen, involved with several Tongan men prior to any academic involvement with the discipline of anthropology; as an anthropology undergrad and divorced mother of a Tongan son; and as a graduate student doing fieldwork, pregnant with the child of her partner-back-home. Morton reflects on the way an academic discipline based on the notion of intense study of other cultures has its own built-in codes for distancing the intensity of that study. This distance, which is, she suggests, presupposed by academic disciplines, is necessarily breached in the process of seeking understandings of "lived experience" through "lived experience"—the very kind of understand-

ing that is so central to anthropological knowledge.

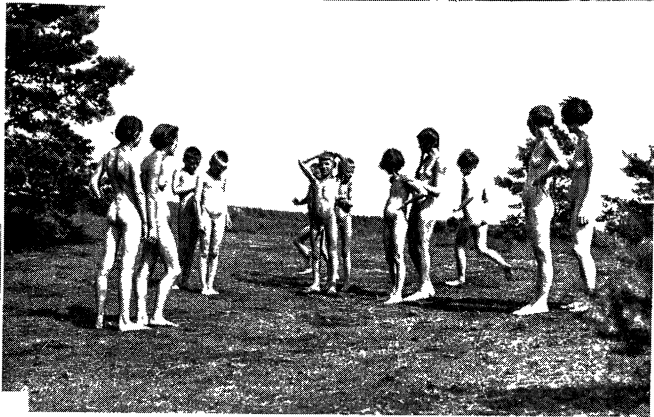
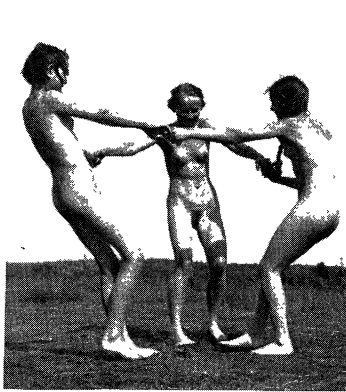
These authors describe how issues of sexuality came into play in the course of their field research, and how their own “erotic subjectivity” informed both their day-to-day practice as well as the initial founding decision to create a “fieldsite” out of what is inevitably already a site of a certain desire. The eight essays discuss anthropological fieldwork in locales from Indonesia to Belgium to the United States. In grouping these unique experiences under one umbrella, the editors chose to use the “purposely nebulous” phrase “erotic subjectivity” when inviting contributors to “discuss any aspect of their fieldwork that they consider to be relevant to the topic” of sex. This forecloses any preconceived notion about what constitutes sex: “Because we can never know in advance what will ‘count’ as sexual in another culture, and because what counts as sexual varies widely, in any case, between individuals in any culture, we as editors have not imposed any definition of ‘sex’ on the contributors to this volume.”

In the course of field research, some did engage in what they themselves think of as sex in the field. Several contributors take an overtly sex-positive stance; Jean Gearing, for example, asserts that “feeling sexually attracted to the people we live among and study is a much more positive reaction than feeling repulsed by them.” Kate Altork goes so far as to encourage “allowing ourselves to be penetrated by the field.” Ralph Bolton argues that sex can act as a bridge accessing “our common humanity,” and that “refusing to share in sexuality across cultural boundaries helps to perpetuate the false

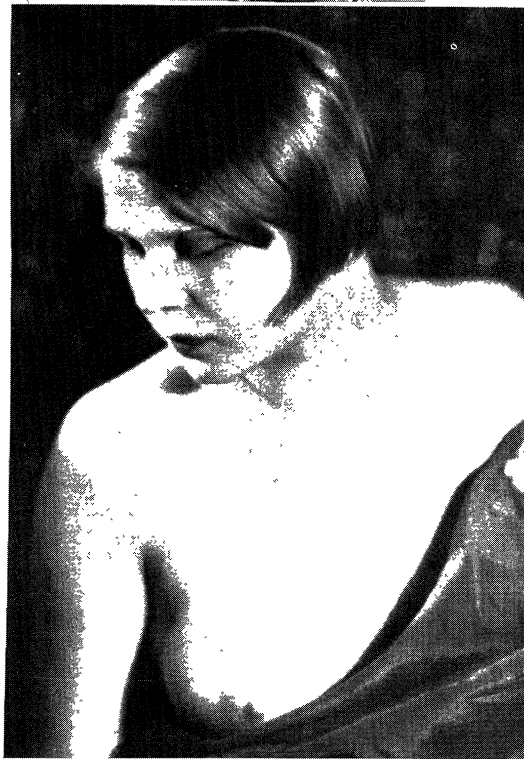
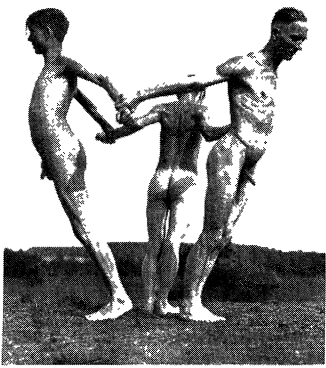
dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘the natives.’” In putting this belief into action in the gay male community in Brussels where he conducted field research, Bolton found that “information obtained post-coitally . . . when people tend to relax and open up about their lives, was always richer, more from the heart, and more revealing than the data gathering in a more detached manner.”

Such sexually enthusiastic exhortations are offset by narratives that focus on sexual fears, and on the pervasive threat of sexual aggression and sexual violence for women conducting fieldwork. Morton discusses her choice to conduct fieldwork while pregnant as a kind of prophylactic: “I needed to wear my pregnancy as a symbolic chastity belt to prevent myself from being seduced by this ‘exotic’ culture.” Gearing places her experience of “loving in the West Indies” in the context of similar fears, stemming from “the omnipresent threat of sexual violence in my fieldsite.” The reality of that threat infuses Eva Moreno’s harrowing narrative of being raped by her Ethiopian research assistant. Her reflections two decades later contain some of the most persuasive arguments in the volume:

In the field, the false division of time and space between the ‘professional’ and the ‘private’ that underpins the supposedly gender-neutral identity of the anthropologist collapses completely. In the field, it is not possible to maintain a fiction of a genderless self. . . . Women must always, everywhere, deal with the specter of sexual violence. . . . Whatever else sexual violence against anthropologists may be, it is by definition an anthropological problem. It concerns all of us, women and



Dritten abschlagen



BALIA



men, and it warrants a strong place on the mainstream anthropological agenda.

Clearly, discussing sex in the field opens a wide variety of topics of central anthropological concern. The primary taboo-breaking act that links these otherwise widely ranging experiences is discursive—talking about sex in the field, and writing about it for publication. It is the *discursive* act, not any particular sex act, that makes each of these essays brave, and not so much in the tired mode of confessional heroics as in a genuine spirit of vulnerability and questioning.

What each contributor risks in this discursive act varies greatly. The editors report that in soliciting contributions, it was from straight white men that they encountered the greatest hesitation, as well as career anxiety. They speculate that the “suspicion [and] hostility” with which most straight men responded to the volume is perhaps due to “the way many heterosexual men define both sexuality and their careers.” Andrew P. Killick, the sole heterosexual man represented in the volume, confronts such fears head-on. He discusses the ways in which anthropologists have repeatedly envisioned the field as a feminized “plot-space” to be traversed by “the penetrating male hero . . . in search of self-renewal.” Kulick suggests that heterosexual men, particularly, may find an opportunity to integrate their public and private selves through subjecting their endeavors to closer scrutiny:

Heterosexual men in the West . . . are often too busy establishing and reconfirming their masculinity to be honest about their insecurities, and this is a precedent I am here trying

to break with. To imagine that these insecurities do not exist is to be taken in by the macho rhetoric that dominates public male discourse while weakness and uncertainty emerge only in private documents like Malinowski's notorious Diary.”

Evelyn Blackwood, the volume's only lesbian contributor, notes that because she occupies a marginal social position in her own culture, she perhaps already has had more experience thinking about gender and location—and far less to lose in publicly doing so. Blackwood speculates that, “having assumed the naturalness of gender categories, many heterosexual male anthropologists tend to be less able than those of us who are marked in our own culture to bridge the gap between Self and Other, particularly when Other is female.” The point here is not, as the editors note, “to wag fingers or stereotype,” but to recognize that those who break discursive taboos on sex in the field do so from positions already sexed and gendered through multiple fields of experience.

For anthropologists as well as for the couch-lay-person, erotic interest in “the Other,” as well as discussion of such interest, is something we sense as taboo without anyone ever directly mentioning it. On close examination, the assumption that erotic engagement is somehow unethical raises, rather than answers, disturbing questions. Such questions are succinctly voiced by contributor Jill Dubisch: given the infinite number of intimate situations that anthropological fieldwork entails (eating in informants' homes, attending their rituals, becoming friends as well as part of their families, etc.), Dubisch asks, “Could a sexual rela-

Hannah Hoch
(German, 1889–1978),
Scrapbook, p. 71
ca. 1933. Berlinische
Gallery, Berlin

tionship be any more intimate, committing, or exploitative than our normal relations with the ‘natives’?” The point of the volume is decidedly *not* to suggest that breaking the taboo on sex in the field *by having sex* necessarily results in any insights, but rather that breaking the taboo on talking about sex in the field *by entering into discourse* is the condition of possibility for insight.

. . .

The strength of this collection is that it brings together individually strong arguments for its own existence. If the overall effect tends toward the insistence of a one-note samba, this is largely due to the fact that both introduction and afterword reprise, with equal articulateness, the theoretical keys struck in the essays themselves. The fieldwork experiences transpire in Greece, Indonesia, Korea, the United States, Belgium, Tonga, the West Indies, and Ethiopia. All of the authors are white, and first-world natives: Swedish, British, Australian, American. Thus while not all of the fieldwork dynamics involve white Westerners entering brown “developing” worlds—three Americans conducted fieldwork in Europe and the States—the bulk of the stories grapple with all the predictable racial tensions, always from the writer’s point of view. The lack of other viewpoints is the most serious (and again, sadly predictable) omission in these stories, and in the book as a whole. It is not only that there are no non-Western anthropologists represented. The larger concern is that there is no attempt to take on questions of representation at all.

None of the essays, for example, attempts a more dialogic written repre-

sentation; none of the authors experiments with ways to allow any voice to speak of the relations at the heart of these stories. The tenor of solitary quest is overwhelming, even ridiculous at times; take Bolton, for instance, writing about his research in the Belgian gay male community: “By experiencing them, I came to learn of blow jobs from bartenders when the door was locked at closing time.” The lone questing researcher phenomenon is clearly connected to the simple fact that each of these authors was in the field *alone*, though the origins and implications of this fact, as Killick emphasizes, are not so simple. None of the authors came with a partner, though several of them left with one. The fact of this initial aloneness colors the way each experiences the breakdown of identity emphasized in these stories. Each feels solitary in his or her disintegration; each battles the dragon of his or her emotions all alone.

In this, at least, these authors are not alone. The majority of anthropologists still leave universities in the first world to do fieldwork in towns and villages in the third world. As the editors acknowledge, the whole endeavor is saturated with capitalist exchange relations: “The Westerner is often perceived by people in a non-Western host society as a commodity for future wealth and prestige—a mirror reflection of the view taken by anthropologists, who have implicitly conceived of the field as a commodity that they trade for future academic prestige.” This first batch of stories on erotic subjectivity in fieldwork is skewed by this dynamic, and we can expect to see correctives in print in due time. These would surely begin, as Killick suggests,

by recognizing anthropologists as rather anomalous creatures in their own right, who occupy such imaginary worlds as “the field”: “There is no such place as the field. Perhaps this will become clearer when someone edits a book of accounts by informants of their relationships with anthropologists; for the latter is surely the more cohesive of the two categories.”

Another problem Wilson acknowledges is the lack of any account of “insider research”: there are no tales of the erotic subjectivity of an anthropologist working at home. Still, as Wilson notes, these essays are revealing about the way the whole business of “Otherness” becomes fuzzy when, through infatuations, marriages and divorces, pregnancies, and love affairs, “‘the field’ developed into an ongoing relationship where boundaries become increasingly blurred through kin ties and through long-term connections.” The seduction inherent in the erotic-exotic twists through these tales in which a moon-enchanted isle becomes home, and Idaho becomes a site for studying the Other. It turns out, of course, not only that “we are everywhere,” but that Others are too—and, in most instances, we are they.

I liked very much the sense of lived history in these stories, particularly those in which people return again and again, alternately hoping to move closer and to gain distance. These are chronicles of difficult circlings, widening fields. Some begin with a stretch of fieldwork, a long absence, and then a new spate of fieldwork (Dubisch), or a teen holiday and a series of differently figured returns (Morton). Others center on the frightful presence of sexual violence against women (Moreno), or on the unfolding saga of its

avoidance (Gearing). Still others work their way step by step into the field, eventually drawing in everything they pass through, until “the field” is simply life, and oneself in it: Killick writes of how he was already involved with Korean-American women long before he visited Korea, Bolton of how Europe prompted his sexual awakening long before he encountered Belgium. Altork, holding up the other end of what might be seen as a sexual-sensual continuum running through the collection, finds Idaho in the nineties a backwoods site of sensual awakening, while Blackwood searches for an intimate in Indonesia amid overwhelming odds.

The *Taboo* collection contributes significantly to the theoretical project of recognizing ourselves as partial, situated knowers, and puts erotic subjectivity on the map of more general reflexive questioning of the researcher’s subjectivity in the practice of anthropology. Each essay provides a tremendous amount to think with, in the form of lifetimes of complicated, ever-expanding scenes of cross-cultural interaction. These tales are gifts from people who have gone deeply into experiencing their own Otherness far from home. At the same time, they are tales from the couch. Attention, radio listeners: you take it all with you. It turns out that, despite fantasies about isles of escape, “the uncertainties and profusions of your day-to-day existence” are quite impossible to leave behind.

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Anthropology has long been concerned with the study of taboos, and of those interactions deemed unsettling enough to warrant prohibitions. It has been noted

Hannah Hoch
(German, 1889–1978),
Scrapbook, p. 22
ca 1933. *Berlinsche
Gallery, Berlin*

that every culture has prohibitions on conduct, and that these most frequently concern food and sex: eating certain things may be taboo (whether dog, pig, or cow), while, according to the *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, “the only universal taboo so far discovered is that prohibiting incest” (differently defined, to be sure, in different places). In seeking to explain the nature of taboos, most recent anthropological theory holds that taboos mark basic fault lines in a culture, and “have the function of keeping separate what must not be joined—of policing the boundaries” (as J. P. Parry puts it in the *Social Science Encyclopedia*). Taboos patrol the lines setting off wild from tame, raw from cooked, sacred from profane.

Though it graces the title of the collection, the implications and resonances of the term *taboo* itself are nowhere discussed in the volume. But the nature of a discursive taboo, as the notion of taboo in general, deserves careful attention. Taboo itself is a rather rare breed of a word, not least in that its academic and colloquial usages actually converge. Radio serials of the forties and fifties and the current academic questioning of the nineties share a common premise: taboos imply temptations. The English word condenses a long history of cross-cultural interaction, deriving from the word for “forbidden” in several Polynesian languages. And the term is clearly a globe-trotter; in Tamil, the Indian language in which I conducted ethnographic research, the word for the comparable concept is *tappu*, and it names a panoply of moral error.

The Tamil term does not, however (as my lover and I discovered rather inad-

vertently during our stay in south India), apply with any specificity to that identity and practice known elsewhere as “lesbianism.” Lesbians and lesbianism were, rather confusingly for us, outside Tamil taboos. Certain forms of “erotic subjectivity,” certain tendernesses between women, were quite acceptable and well established in Tamil life, while the possibility that such relations might bloom into sexual love seemed not to warrant recognition by a named prohibition. We came to understand this as a sign (in the absence of a sign) that private, loving relations between women were relatively inconsequential in a society where heterosexual marital alliances so dominated cultural consciousness. Prohibitions bother only with relations of a certain power. Lesbian relations were so literally no-thing that they did not warrant being plucked from namelessness. In a recent essay (in the fall 1995 issue of *Public Culture*) I discuss the complexities that arose because of one particular confrontation with this lack of referential distinction—a moment when a Tamil woman saw what I considered “sex” as something else altogether—and all the related, valued distinctions on which this lack of distinction touched.

I introduce such considerations here as they raise many further questions about the nature of named and unnamed prohibitions. Leaving something unsaid is surely an effective means of prohibiting its entrance into discourse, much as the taboo on talking about sex in the field has done until now. However, a thing named and undiscussed is quite different from a thing unnamed and undiscussed. What we call “Victorian sexuality” (and indeed contemporary Western

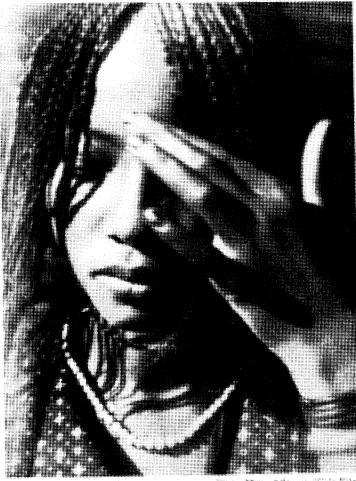


Photo Mario Adighisi (Globe-Photo)
Falle, Madhben

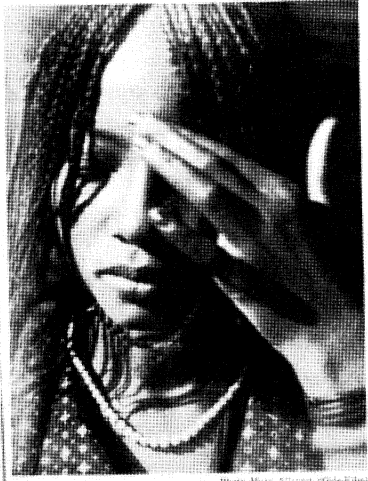
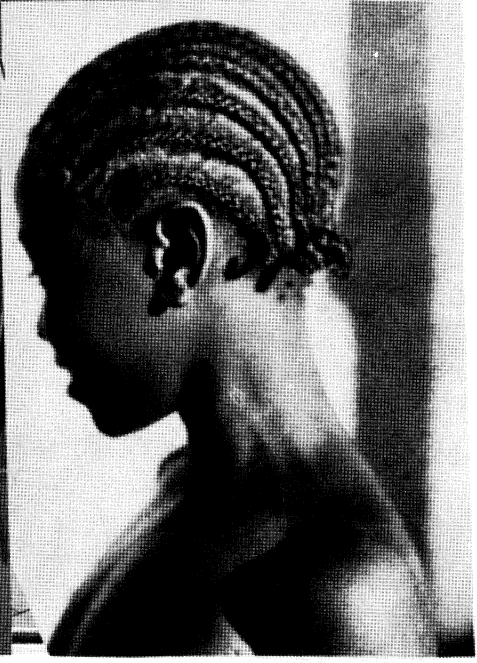


Photo Mario Adighisi (Globe-Photo)
Falle, Madhben



sexuality) grew out of the former condition, with “the closet” as its representative figure. Likewise when we invoke “taboo,” unqualified, we generally refer to distinct concepts we don’t dare discuss, but which are already shaped by concepts that name them. But that which is unnamed and undiscussed—the kind of situation I was trying to get at in my essay on the paradoxes of “visibility” in the field—is less familiar. Is something for which we have no name part of our consciousness as a kind of disavowed impossibility? This, to my mind, is one of the promises of thinking and writing about the sexual life of anthropologists: in “violating” discursive taboos, we may well stumble upon entities, both named and unnamed, that otherwise silently obstruct—or inform—what we see.

What tidy separations are threatened by the sweet temptation (perhaps also akin to horror) to follow that voice promising to lead “where pagan spirits hold sway, where live natives dance on a moon-enchanted isle”—all the while reminding us that “it’s *taboo!*”? This is a vision of the foreign as volcano: go to the brink, but just look—it’s beautiful, but too hot to touch. Will boundaries really crash if you do? What powers and dangers lie in wait to erupt beneath this taboo?

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Kulick and Wilson’s *Taboo*, like my own essay, is an attempt to unleash those powers and dangers undergirding our academic discipline. Both publications appeared the same year—the working of the zeitgeist, maybe? But lone voices have been contributing a narrative here and there on similar subjects since

the days of Mead and Malinowski, picking up considerable momentum in the last decade. The written accounts of Paul Rabinow, Manda Cesara, Dorinne Kondo, and Esther Newton are frequently cited in *Taboo*, and several recent collections have explored related questions (including Peggy Golde’s *Women in the Field* and Diane Bell, Pat Caplan and Wazir Jahan Karim’s *Gendered Fields*). Still, none of these collections focuses specifically on the taboo on writing about sexual desire in the field. To question the kind and degree of personal engagements anthropologists establish in the field is to take a critical step toward acknowledging the subtle destabilizations of the self inherent in fieldwork—always a potential, often a stated goal—as well as the paradoxical role of “contact” in mediating our conflicting desires for stability and instability in cross-cultural endeavors. Several essays in the *Taboo* collection (Morton, Killick, Moreno) discuss the attempt to maintain a stable self by rejecting desire; others (Blackwood, Gearing, Bolton) talk about acknowledging desire as a means of attaining connection with a continuous self. In writing about their varying approaches to navigating this murky terrain, the contributors here have joined in rupturing an insidious silence.

Still, the collection leaves one with the nagging feeling that there is much to be said. The goals here are academic, in the proper sense of the term: they aim to treat the practices of the academy. The spirit of the endeavor is encapsulated in Kulick’s insistence that “instead of providing exoticized *frissons*, the chapters here aim to address issues of theoretical and methodological significance.” In-

deed, the argument for “theoretical and methodological significance” is made and remade so frequently that at times I found myself wishing that this laudable concern could have managed to still itself just a bit, so as to avoid drying out, with overly academic prose, otherwise juicy topics. Such shivers may in fact be the necessary signs of erotics; I mean this constructively. Popular-culture treatments of cross-cultural relations are forever disappointingly shallow, and the willingness of academics to take on the subject in all its depth could be, quite frankly, exciting.

If, having read this collection, others join me in feeling slightly frustrated, may the sentiment be taken as testimony of the volume’s success. These essays have had to work terribly hard simply to carve out the discursive space for their own existence. It is quite understandable they have not also taken the next step, that of demonstrating how this reflexive acknowledgment of desire deepens ethnographic knowledge. I welcome all moves toward an increased recognition of the role of an ethnographer’s subjectivity in shaping ethnographic work, erotic subjectivity necessarily included. I feel, as many must by now, quite ready to move beyond the standard division of anthropological texts into two separate genres, the ethnographic monograph and the autobiographical field narrative. These essays fall squarely within the latter.

My own essay also took the autobiographical route. In it I struggled with not knowing how to represent breakdowns in dialogue. It turned out that a breakdown of communication, an absence of shared meanings, provided a breakthrough

in my own understanding of a complex situation in which my partner and I were anomalous figures. The writing experience made me all the more aware of how much I needed another voice to understand another culture.

Instances of fieldwork failures in dialogue, especially when these involve something as meaty as categorical failures, often prove profoundly productive. Narratives recounting such incidents, both of failed and successful communications, make the reader eager for a dialogic representation of the event equal to its dialogic origins. The experiences documented and problematized in the essays collected in *Taboo* led to insights both personal and cultural. Can such insights be integrated into the concerns of the initial anthropological work that inspired them? The field now, it seems, is sown. I envision essays that do more than simply proclaim the need to recognize erotic subjectivity in fieldwork; convinced of its value, I’ve enough of programmatic statements. Erotic subjectivity in the field is an important aspect of our multifaceted disciplinary endeavor; let it contribute to the larger project of refashioning ethnography. We need texts that will present anthropological work together with representations of fieldwork contexts. The conventional division of anthropological written genres into hard and soft science, monographs and stories—oh, OK, “male” and “female” styles—has grown decidedly crusty. Bring on the third term.