

ETHNOGRAPHY AS A CAREER:
SECOND THOUGHTS ON SECOND FIELDWORK IN INDONESIA

Whether or not I have ever learned to write with economy, I have conducted my study of a second society quickly, as Evans-Pritchard said anthropologists having a second try would: '[a] second study usually takes a shorter time because the anthropologist has learnt from his previous experience to conduct research quickly and to write with economy' (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 76). The research has been quick, however, only in terms of the number of days, weeks and months spent doing it, and speed in this case has little or nothing to do with experience. The actual period that has elapsed since I first set foot in Lamalera, Lembata, is now more than nineteen years. Over those years I have accumulated somewhat more than ten months of effective research time, a total which is now pushing up towards the aggregated year upon which *The Nuer* is based.

The fieldwork has been opportunistic at best, and the methods

Editors' Note: Dr Barnes's first fieldwork was with the Kédang at the eastern end of the island of Lembata (Lomblen) in eastern Indonesia. He and his wife lived in the village of Léuwayang from October 1969 until June 1971. This research provided the basis for a D.Phil. thesis (Barnes, R.H. 1972), subsequently published as a book (Barnes, R.H. 1974a), and several articles and notes. The 'second fieldwork' he discusses here consists in a number of short visits, on different projects, to the village of Lamalera at the western end of the same island. This research has resulted in a number of publications (see, for example, Barnes, R.H. 1974b, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1986), as well as, most recently, *The Whale Hunters of Lamalera*, a film in Granada Television's 'Disappearing World' series, first shown on British television in July 1988.

of opportunistic fieldwork have little in common with the ideal of a leisurely, if intense, two years of D.Phil. field study broken by a few months in a university department, which Evans-Pritchard (*ibid.*) said was the Oxford standard. It does have more in common with the twelve to sixteen months of frantic immersion, delayed, interrupted and harassed by host government agencies, Economic and Social Research Council irrationalities, illness and accident, which is the reality for at least some of our students at present. Still the similarity is small. The one thing that can be said for it is that it does not permit the synchronic, slice-of-life account that results from the conventional approach. People age, attitudes alter, and misfortunes come and go. The nature of misfortune also changes, plus progress arrives over and over again, bringing with it varied and unpredictable effects.

In 1970 I visited the village for a week during the prescribed break from doctoral studies in Kédang which brought me no farther from friends and subject matter than Flores. Villagers cheerfully invited me to accompany them on a whale hunt and praised the luck I brought when we actually caught one (the only time I have had either that experience or that effect). The brief article (Barnes, R.H. 1974b) deriving from the visit has been plagiarized shamelessly at least twice and has contributed in a small way to the increasing flood of tourists making their way to the village. In the academic year 1977-8, two distinguished academics employed in Australia visited Oxford after having within twelve months led shiploads of elderly foreigners to Lamalera's shore, thus giving value to the insincere assurances I had provided the director of tourism in Larantuka, Flores, in June 1987, that I would indeed seize any opportunity to send hordes his way.

I had intended to make Lamalera my real second study. After completing work on Kédang (Barnes, R.H. 1972, 1974a), I wished to produce an equally thorough account of this neighbouring but rather different group. This project should have started a series of investigations into the Lamaholot cultural area, for which I had initially prepared myself by compiling a handbook from published sources in my B. Litt. thesis (Barnes, R.H. 1968) and by drawing together from available grammars and wordlists a preliminary, unpublished dictionary. The Lamaholot programme began to mutate from the moment I decided to go one linguistic group farther east, to the almost entirely unknown Kédang, for my first field research. D.Phil. completed, my first task was to find employment and begin to repay my backlog of educational debts. In time, I ended up in Edinburgh, where sabbatical leave was available every twelve years, but unpaid leave could be obtained whenever one's department would agree to it. In 1975, I cobbled together some funds and, with the indulgence of Brian Moser, set out to gain a few weeks in the village in the hopes of putting together further research and, eventually, a film for his 'Disappearing World' series. I got no farther than Oxford, where I learned that my visa request had been

rejected because of the outbreak of war on Timor, in the same province as Lembata.

Thus things stood until December 1977 when I received a call from Norway asking me to advise about a possible World Wildlife Fund project to investigate the conservation implications of the hunting of porpoise and whale in Lamalera. They were planning to send a marine biologist and an anthropologist. I managed to get myself attached as the anthropologist, and in 1979 from July through September Durant Hembree, the marine biologist, Saddon Silalahi, a fisheries expert, and I looked into various aspects of the subsistence economy. Of course, I took every opportunity to expand my own investigations as far as I could. Three months, however, remained three months.

While we were there a new underwater volcano, Ili Hobal, erupted on July 17, while Ili Werung, on the Lerek Peninsula just a few miles east of us, fell into the sea causing a tsunami. The village of Wai Teba was completely erased by the wave, while other villages suffered damage from the landslide. Initial figures put the loss of life at over 100 souls and the number who disappeared (and were never found) at nearly 500. One man from a hamlet adjacent to Lamalera lost his wife, four daughters and four other close relatives, all of whom had gone to trade in the market at Wai Teba. Damage was concentrated on the east side of the Lerek Peninsula, so that Lamalera to the west was protected; but the tsunami did reach far enough along the western side of the peninsula to strike Labala, where it destroyed a few houses and killed six persons. All available transportation (in this case only small passenger boats used for local trade) was commandeered for relief work, so that our communications to the outer world were broken off for two weeks. During that period, basing itself on uninformed speculation coming from the World Wildlife Fund office in Bogor, Java, the Jakarta newspaper *Sinar Harapan* reported the deaths of my two colleagues, my wife and two small children and myself. Relatives made frantic efforts to contact us, though we knew nothing of what was happening until the first boat in eventually brought a *Sinar Harapan* journalist to confirm that report and a telegram from the American Embassy asking us to telephone news of our fate. Today, we would be able to use the village's new short-wave radio, but in 1979 we would have had to travel some hundreds of miles to reach a telephone.

By 1982 I had accumulated enough sabbatical entitlement at Oxford to allow me to take one term off and had also, on a second try, been awarded a Social Science Research Council grant which permitted me to take a team including Dr Gregorius Heraf, a linguist at the University of Indonesia, and my wife Ruth, as a textile expert, to Lamalera for six months. Dr Keraf was both a native of the village and the author of a modern linguistic study of the grammar of the version of Lamaholot spoken there (Keraf 1978). We arrived in July and remained through December. This time I was able to make good progress on a general ethnography, with the main focus on the economy. The subsistence side of the economy was an important interest, but the circumstances of village life required that much time be given to major transformations

which the village has been subjected to in religion, education and occupation.

For decades, Lamalera has been a stopping point for the occasional adventurer who made it to this fairly remote part of Indonesia. By the 1970s, however, it began to attract more conventional tourists, and in the 1980s tourism has become a regular feature of life. In 1982 my work was interrupted when a boatload of thirty-three scantily clad but mostly middle-aged or elderly Italian tourists arrived unannounced and declared that they were going to stay a few days. They were accompanied by a Balinese guide who spoke Indonesian and English, but no Italian. There was also an Austrian couple with whom we could communicate in German, but they also spoke no Italian. The Italians spoke no Indonesian, English or German. There proved to be no way, therefore, to make them understand that the villagers wanted the women to cover up. Fortunately, after clambering around the rocky and fairly inaccessible village for a while and sunning themselves on the boulders to one side of the beach which shelter the latrine, they decided that they had seen what there was to see and made an early departure. A few weeks later five Italian men and a young woman parked a luxury yacht in front of the beach for several days. They posed no real problems except that they had picked up open-sided Balinese sarongs, and the men insisted on exposing themselves full-frontally to the beach and the houses behind when they adjusted their clothing. Anyone who wanted to know could ascertain that they wore no underwear. My friends were rather upset at European lack of decorum, and indeed I still have to listen to their wonderment, when the topic comes up, that people, namely Europeans, who are so rich can dress like savages. My only comeback has been that like the villagers, the Italians are Catholics, and therefore the people of Lamalera are responsible for their behaviour, not me. My position admittedly is weak, and my argument has not been generally accepted.

The village has had a resident Catholic missionary continually since 1920. The men who have held this office have not only been concerned with converting people to Christianity, but also have provided health care, education, training in crafts, material support in building brick houses, and many other services. They have also consciously attempted to alter the culture to replace pagan practices and beliefs with Catholic orthodoxy. Of course, the several generations of priests and nuns who have come from the village participate in the debates on doctrine and practice which go on within the international community of Catholicism. They also to varying degrees concern themselves with issues about the extent to which local culture should be defended from enforced changes. On a daily basis, few people spend much time thinking about whether their activities are traditional or modern, but such issues do come to the fore from time to time, especially when they become concerned with the fate of their subsistence fishery. Over the years

Father Arnoldus Dupont has increasingly changed the religious topography of the village. In 1987, he conducted a ceremony to the east of the main village site in a new grotto of European design, which for once did not overlay a location of pre-Christian religious importance. It is often very difficult to recognize quickly whether what you see is the new in older guise or the old in modern dress. Pseudo-traditions abound, and the anthropologist has to work hard to see that he does not invent them himself and fill up his reports with them. The villagers are so Christian that the anthropologist can easily appear to himself and others as being interested in merely antiquarian matters when trying to find out what remains of pre-Christian culture. But there are moments when things begin to happen which have nothing at all to do with Catholic belief.

In 1982, I witnessed the most spectacularly pagan ceremony I have ever seen. It took place on a hill overlooking the outsized reinforced concrete church of West German design which the village built with West German financial assistance in the late 1970s. Government clerks, school teachers and other educated persons organized the ceremony and paid for it. The whole thing was recorded on their tape recorders, but not photographed, because it was conducted at night by impersonated evil spirits who had to be kept out of the light. Everyone who took part, including the evil spirits and the director of proceedings, was Catholic, though not all of them were necessarily currently in good standing.

Father Dupont has taken over the annual ceremony at the beach which opens the whaling season in May. Although he urges the villagers to make the ceremony as traditional as possible, the tradition is largely his own concoction and the purpose is radically changed. Leadership has passed into his hands from the lord of the land, who formerly was responsible. In 1987, he was unhappy with the quality of cooperation he received. Unknown to him, the lord of the land later went down to the beach with his assistants early one morning and redid the ceremony in order to get it right. Like the other Catholic missionaries I have known, Father Dupont has been unfailingly courteous and helpful, even though I have been one of many outsiders who have imposed on his hospitality and added to his burdens. On three of my four visits, he has gone out of his way to help arrange housing. I realized, however, that I was not fully aware of how matters stood, when once in 1979 I innocently told him of a set of attitudes and prohibitions I had inadvertently stumbled across which were full of succulently anthropological interest. To my complete surprise, in his sermon on the next Sunday, he referred to these beliefs and told the flock that they should get rid of them. Since then I have attempted to be cautious, if honest, in discussing my findings with him.

I first went to Lamalera in the aftermath of the Sukarno period, when the national economy was flat on its back, but on the verge of reinvigoration by the military government. This was a period of

unusual success for the subsistence economy, combined with very reduced opportunities outside the village. Since then, the equation has changed completely. Whaling has been in continuous and now deep decline, while young men and women have left the village for modern employment in sufficient numbers to affect seriously the demographic balance, and to disrupt the labour pool for the boats. Where once I might have written an account of a vigorous and exotic way of life, today the task has almost become one of survival anthropology. The fact that talented people leave the village, while the unsuccessful remain, is known and deplored. It is bound also to have subtle effects on the anthropologist's job. Persons who go elsewhere do not necessarily sever their ties, but the best people who continue to take an interest in village affairs provide leadership from afar. They are no longer shaping and taking charge of local events on a daily basis, and it is at least possible that the withdrawal of talent is as disruptive as any other influence. A very visible sign that this is so is the number of disused boats lying in the sheds along the beach. In 1969 there were 29 boats that went to sea every day. I regard it a near miracle that 15 went to sea in 1987 and that some boats are still being rebuilt.

The result of four brief visits over eighteen years is bound to emphasise change at the expense of stability, but not necessarily exclusively so. You also see some things staying the same, despite good reason to expect otherwise. If the diachronic aspect of the study comes out more strongly, holism does not completely disappear. Things are interconnected in history, just as much as they are in functionalism and structuralism. In 1982 we were called in to help a friend's very ill son at a point when it was too late to get any medicine into him. The death was not only extremely distressing as well as unnecessary, it was also a commonplace sign that improvements in well-being are not only desired, but also can only come about through the introduction of modern facilities. Health care requires better communications and also electricity. These factors, if they are introduced, bring with them further transforming effects. The pace of change increases, and the anthropologist has to run harder to keep up.

The death, however, also had connections with a surprisingly diverse set of past events and present conditions. Among them are why the boat *Léla Sapang* cannot now be rebuilt, why members of the clan Léfo Tukan cannot marry persons in the clan Léla Ona, and the reason why the first European missionary went insane. Also linked are the death of a school teacher some hundreds of miles away in Ende, Flores, and the reason why a descendant of the village is now a medical doctor in West Germany. All of these circumstances are explained by historical events, some of them unique and trivial, but they rest on facts of social structure and beliefs about collective responsibility and liability for guilt shared between the ancestors and the living that anthropologists regard as routine topics for description.

Among the advantages of working with a team is the range of expert skills and knowledge that become available. In this respect I was fortunate to have worked with the marine biologist Durant Hembree and to have had available Gorys Keraf's excellent investigation of the local language. The most substantial result of the trips so far has been my wife's D.Phil. thesis on weaving and on the women's contribution to the economy (Barnes, Ruth 1984). Whether or not it proves that there are topics women can study that men cannot, there is no doubting that she did it with greater skill than I could have done. Furthermore, she did it when my time was fully taken up with other demands; so if she had not done it, it would have not been done at all. Her thesis has become a book (Barnes, Ruth 1988), well ahead of much of my own writing. On the other hand, none of us has really had the time necessary to carry out our projects with the thoroughness we would have wished. Because I speak the national language, and everyone in the village is to some extent bilingual, I have been able to get the job required done in the limited time available through that medium. Nevertheless, I have never been able to concentrate on learning the local language, as I did when in Kédang, and an awful lot of everyday conversation has gone on around me without my understanding it or picking up whatever clues it may have contained. Even if it were otherwise possible, I will never, on the basis of my present knowledge, be able to produce the kind of account that I have done for Kédang.

In comparison to some other universities, Oxford has generous provision for sabbatical leave, but it has never recognized the special needs of field-based subjects such as anthropology. Evans-Pritchard's ideal of two years of nearly continuous intensive research has therefore always been beyond the reach of the academic staff of the Institute of Social Anthropology. At the most, a teaching anthropologist could string together fifteen months of uninterrupted fieldwork, but that assumes that faculty boards, grant-giving agencies and the departments of foreign governments that issue research permission and visas can be made to operate according to the same deadlines. Then there are personal considerations and family obligations that must be thought of. Because we do not get to the field as often or for as long as we would like, the Institute's reputation for empirical research depends all the more on the work done by generations of students working for research degrees. They have built up a reputation which is vital for the survival of anthropology at Oxford, and which unfortunately we continually have to defend from bureaucratic rationalizers and the enemies of academic independence.

If I had my choice of career when I completed my work in Kédang, I would have chosen to be a permanent ethnographer. Few people ever manage anything close to such a life; those who do must be of the hardiest and most determined type. For the rest of us, at least those of us who are lucky, the alternative is an academic career. In my case, academic employment was definitely a means to an end and certainly not an end in itself. It has inevitably become, however, a means which has overtaken the original end.

Only two professional ethnographers preceded me into the Lamaholot area. The first was Ernst Vatter, who went there in 1928

to 1929. Because his wife, who travelled with him, is Jewish, Vatter was forced out of his job at the ethnographic museum in Frankfurt and eventually had to flee to Chile, where he died in exile. The second was the American Raymond Kennedy. In 1950, after finishing his work on Flores, he returned to Java on his way home. Travelling to Jakarta, he was shot and killed while driving his jeep through the mountains near Bandung. In April 1987 Durant Hembree died while on vacation in Mauritius after completing a long and arduous stint on a Japanese research ship in the Antarctic. He never had the comforts of a permanent job or a permanent income. Though he hoped eventually to have such security, he had to make do with a series of short-term research postings, often doubtless more rigorous than anything I have put up with while doing ethnography. Among the sadder sides of fieldwork are the deaths of so many people, young and old, whom the anthropologist has known and cared for. Within a few weeks of our arriving in Lamalera in 1982, almost every house adjacent to our own suffered a death. People who were young and vigorous when we got to know them in 1970 have since died.

Although female tourists are now occasionally taken out in the boats, local women never go along when they are used for fishing. In November 1982, two boatloads of villagers in the *Kopo Paker* and the *Demo Sapang* sailed a short way down the coast to a place called Nubi to split planks for rebuilding the *Soge Ténã*, in which I had frequently gone to sea. Both boats were heavily loaded with food, palm wine, bamboo water-containers, women, children, and men. Felling and splitting the trees was hard and awkward work, and my own hands eventually became too blistered and bloody to continue. Nevertheless, the atmosphere was cheerful and festive. We were fed four times during the day. In the evening, after the day's work was completed, we rowed back. Everyone, old and young, male and female, took part. Since there were many more in each boat than the normal crew of fourteen, some people sat on the outriggers to row, much like eighteenth-century prints of Moluccan *kora-kora*. The supplies of palm wine had been refreshed at Nubi from local tappers, and boys climbed around the boats passing drink to the rowers. The return soon became a race between the *Kopo Paker* and the *Demo Sapang* and a splashing battle between their crews whenever the boats came close enough together. The women showed themselves better boatmen than I had expected; and though the distance was not great, everyone displayed greater stamina than I could muster after a hard day's work. Everyone, of course, enjoyed the race, and for me it bought a sense of timelessness, an event and atmosphere which had repeated itself in one form or another on countless occasions since the ancestors fled here from a sunken island to the east. To me the trip suggested the very voyage their ancestors made to the west when disaster struck their homeland at Lapan Batan.

Lamalera celebrated '100 Years of Religion' in 1986, and the village filled up with dignitaries, relatives, and anthropologists

working on nearby Flores. A year later Bapa Jo (Bertholemeus Jo Bataona) complained to me that during the celebrations the place was so packed that you could hardly move. There were so many people, most of them strangers, that it was not like his village anymore.

In June 1987 I arrived with a crew from Granada Television. Granada had decided to revive the old 'Disappearing World' project. Even though I did not have the extensive knowledge of culture and language that their anthropological advisers normally command, I was better prepared than I had been in 1975. We had extremely good luck, in the sense that so many different things happened in the brief three weeks the film crew was in the village, but of course rarely did what happen perfectly fit the producer's aims. He got put out with my reaction when he told me to ask harpooners whether they ever get bored with hunting whales and whether they ever feel sorry for the whale. I too was surprised when he said that he had in mind that the film would be a sort of Indonesian *Moby Dick*. However, Brian Moser recently recalled that he too thought that the original project would be another *Moby Dick*. At least there has been continuity of misapprehensions. I did ask the questions, and Petrus Hidang had the imagination to give us some usable answers. But then he had been dealing with me for years, and in any case he has had plenty of training in coping with foreigners.

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