



They Lie, We Lie: Getting on with Anthropology

Peter Metcalf

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They Lie, We Lie is an attempt by an experienced fieldworker to engage recent critiques in ethnography, that is the writing of culture, made both from within anthropology and from such disciplines as cultural studies and post-colonial theory. This is necessary because there has been a polarization within anthropology between those who react dismissively to what Marshall Sahlins calls 'afterology' and those who find the critiques so crippling as to make it hard to get on with anthropology at all. Metcalf bridges this divide by analyzing the contradictions of fieldwork in connection with a particular 'informant', a formidable old lady who tried for twenty years to control what he would and would not learn. At each stage, the author draws out the general implications of his predicament by making comparisons to the most famous of all fieldwork relationships, that between Victor Turner and Muchona.

The result is an account that is accessible to those unfamiliar with the current critiques of ethnography, and helpful to those who are only too familiar to them. His discussion shows, not how to evade the critiques, but how in fact anthropologists have coped with the existential dilemmas of fieldwork.

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