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PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND OBJECTIVITY  
IN ANTHROPOLOGY

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine the early history of discussions of participant observation and objectivity in anthropology. The discussions revolve around the question of whether participant observation is a reliable method for obtaining data that may serve as the basis for true accounts of native ways of life. I show how Malinowski in 1922 introduced participant observation as a straightforwardly reliable method and then discuss how – and why – most of the discussants in the 1940s and 1950s maintained that the method is reliable only if the researcher takes a whole number of precautionary measures.

1. INTRODUCTION

As a distinct research technique, participant observation came into existence around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Within anthropology, its introduction as method is first and foremost associated with Bronislaw Malinowski. Between 1914 and 1918, he carried out participant observation on the Trobriand Islands, an archipelago east of New Guinea. Based on his findings, he published, in 1922, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* which provides an account of native life at the islands.<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to the book, Malinowski famously described – and commended – the use of participant observation. In large part, due to his example and promotion of it, the method began to gain ground among anthropologists. It became the defining method of anthropology.

In his presentation of participant observation, Malinowski asserted that the application of the method allows the anthropologist to arrive at an objective account of native life. In the 1940s and early 1950s, anthropologists and other social scientists discussed this and other claims about objectivity. Common to these discussions of objectivity is that they revolve around the question of whether participant observation is a reliable method for obtaining data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native ways of life. The participants in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s arrived at a slightly different result from Malinowski. Whereas

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1 Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1922.

Malinowski regarded participant observation as a rather *straightforwardly* reliable method, most of the participants in the later discussion concluded that the method is reliable only if the researcher takes *a whole number of precautionary measures*.

The aim of the present paper is to examine the early history of discussions of participant observation and objectivity in anthropology. I begin by providing an outline of the method of participant observation and different notions of objectivity. On this basis, I first present Malinowski's reflections on participant observation as a rather straightforwardly reliable method. Then I turn to the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s and consider the various reasons advanced as to why the anthropologist must take a whole number of precautionary measures to ensure that the method reliably generates data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native life.

## 2. THE METHOD OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Malinowski and most of the participants in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s shared the same conception of the method of participant observation: over an extended period of time, the researcher should participate in the ways of life under study while trying to intervene as little as possible. At the same time, the researcher should observe what goes on around him. Various aspects of this characterization of the method deserve further comment.

To start with the participatory component of the method, the requirement to participate "over an extended period of time" may be rephrased as the demand to carry out participation for approximately two years. This standard was set by Malinowski. Over a period of four years, he spent nearly two and a half years on the Trobriand Islands.

During the long stay in the field, the anthropologist should participate, in the sense of taking part, in the ways of life under study. In the introduction to "Argonauts", Malinowski stressed that he participated in the sense of living among the natives. Also, he pointed out that he sometimes participated in the stronger sense of taking part in the activities of the natives.<sup>2</sup> In general, it is possible to distinguish between various ways and extents to which the anthropologist may participate in the ways of life he studies.

While participating in one way of another, the anthropologist should try to interfere as little as possible in the natives' life. Of course, the anthropologist will inevitably have an impact on the course of daily life when he, say, engages a native in conversation or tries to learn some craft. Also, he may accidentally cause a change of business as usual. Still, and this is the point, he should not actively try to change and interrupt the way the natives normally go about their life. The anthro-

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

pologist's aim is not to alter the native ways of life that he studies, but to find out about them.

Turning to the observational component of the method, the anthropologist should observe, in the broad sense of taking notice of, what goes on. Above all, this means that the anthropologist should make use of his five senses to register how the natives go about their life. Moreover, "noticing what goes on" is many times taken to include the anthropologist paying attention to, and registering, his own experiences as he is taught, say, how it is appropriate to behave or how to weave a basket.

The whole point of applying the method was famously stated by Malinowski: it allows the anthropologist "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world".<sup>3</sup>

### 3. OBJECTIVITY

When Malinowski and the participants in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s reflected on the method of participant observation, the notion of objectivity was often invoked. More specifically, they used the notion in at least three different – though perfectly compatible – senses.

First, objectivity was predicated of the results or accounts based on data gathered by use of participant observation. Here, an objective account of native life was equated with a true account of their life. Accordingly, in the introduction to *Argonauts*, Malinowski talked interchangeably about how participant observation allowed the anthropologist to arrive at the "objective, scientific view of things" and at "the true picture of tribal life".<sup>4</sup> Likewise, this understanding of objectivity informed a passage in *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* from 1951, where it is noticed that by living "outside village territory he [viz. the anthropologist] may be able to take an objective view of the community as a whole".<sup>5</sup>

Second, objectivity was predicated of the method of participant observation. To state that the method is objective was another way of saying that the method reliably produces data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native ways of life. An example of the notion of objectivity used in this sense was provided by Oscar Lewis. He pointed to the concern among some anthropologists with refining participant observation and other methods such that these "might lead to greater precision and objectivity in the gathering, reporting, and interpreting of field data".<sup>6</sup>

3 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

5 British Association for the Advancement of Science, *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, 6th ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. 1951, p. 41.

6 Oscar Lewis, "Controls and Experiments in Field Work", in: Alfred L. Kroeber (Ed.), *Anthropology Today*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1953, p. 453.

Third, objectivity was predicated of the researcher who carried out participant observation. Thus used, the idea was that the anthropologist who is objective, or who takes an objective stance, is better able correctly to represent what goes on around him when making his observations. For instance, Florence R. Kluckhohn had this sense of objectivity in mind when she related that she had “temporary lapses of cold objectivity” during her fieldwork.<sup>7</sup> And the same goes for Siegfried F. Nadel when he commented that “the observer’s personality might easily override the best intentions of objectivity”.<sup>8</sup>

When these three notions of objectivity figured in discussions of participant observation, they had one important feature in common: they were invoked as part of examinations of whether participant observation was a reliable method for obtaining data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native life. This formulation was not used in the discussions of participant observation themselves. Still, it captures what is at stake there. In reflections on whether the application of participant observation allows the anthropologist to arrive at an objective picture of native ways of life, what is at issue is whether the method reliably generates data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native life. Similarly, as noticed above, the preoccupation with whether the method is objective amounts to a concern with whether it reliably produces data that may serve as basis for a true picture of native life. Finally, when the objectivity of the anthropologist is in focus, the anthropologist being objective, or mostly so, is regarded as a precondition for the method reliably generating data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native ways of life. Accordingly, the concern with objectivity on the part of Malinowski and the participants in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s may reasonably be summarized as being at bottom a concern with the question of whether participant observation is a reliable method for obtaining data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native life. This being clarified, it may now be examined what exactly Malinowski and the participants in the debate in the 1940 and early 1950s had to say about this question.

#### 4. MALINOWSKI ON PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND OBJECTIVITY

Malinowski’s famous presentation of the method of participant observation in *Argonauts* is from 1922. Before, and around, that time, the large majority of anthropologists used other means to gather information about native ways of life. They did not go into the field themselves but had others to collect their data for them. Or, they went into the field yet without living with the natives over extended

7 Florence R. Kluckhohn, “The Participant-Observer Technique in Small Communities”, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 46, 3, 1940, p. 343.

8 Siegfried F. Nadel, *The Foundations of Social Anthropology*. London: Cohen and West Ltd. 1951, p. 48.

periods of time.<sup>9</sup> Only a few researchers had carried out participant observation prior to Malinowski and these few researchers had not published anything on their use of the method.<sup>10</sup> Malinowski's introduction to *Argonauts* was the first written piece on participant observations as a scientific method.<sup>11</sup> Against this background, Malinowski "was able to make himself the spokesman of a methodological revolution".<sup>12</sup> Within anthropology at least, the constitution of participant observation as a method came, above all, to be associated with Malinowski.

In the introduction to *Argonauts* Malinowski made it clear that participant observation, as the method was to be called, was conducive to a true picture of native life.<sup>13</sup> In support of this point, he drew attention to several advantages of using participant observation.<sup>14</sup>

Malinowski explained how he participated in the ways of life of the natives in the sense of living among them. As a result, he stressed, he had access to, and was in a position to notice, everything about native life as it unfolded in their village. He made this point in terms of a description of how he would typically pass his day among the natives. Among other things, he commented that "[l]ater on in the day, whatever happened was within easy reach, and there was no possibility of its escaping my notice".<sup>15</sup> Participant observation allowed him to make observations covering all relevant aspects of public life in the native village. Further, Malinowski tells, he insisted on getting access to the more private aspects of native life too. As he stayed with the natives for so long, they ended up accepting this: "as they knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco".<sup>16</sup> In short, Malinowski maintained that he was able to make observations covering *all* aspects of native life.

9 Rosalie H. Wax, *Doing Fieldwork. Warnings and Advice*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1971, p. 28ff.

10 Notice that "researchers" should not be taken to include travelers, traders, missionaries, and the like. Here, I shall not address the question of the extent to which some of these may be said to have practiced participant observation before Malinowski did so.

11 Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation. A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2002, p. 5.

12 George W. Stocking, Jr., "The Ethnographer's Magic", in: George W. Stocking, Jr. (Ed.), *Observers Observed. Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 1983, p. 5.

13 K. M. DeWalt and B. R. DeWalt report that, in the sense used here, the term participant observation began to show up in the 1930s. Around 1940, it had gained wide currency – K. M. DeWalt and B. R. DeWalt, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

14 Malinowski may also be said to use other means, tied to his manner of presentation, to convince his readers that participant observation is conducive to true accounts of native life. For an analysis of these, see Stocking, *op. cit.*, p. 104ff.

15 Malinowski, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Also, Malinowski pointed to another consequence of his long term participation: after some time, the natives got used to his presence and his participation in their ways of life did not have any effect upon their behavior:

It must be remembered that as the natives saw me constantly every day, they ceased to be interested or alarmed, or made self-conscious by my presence, and I ceased to be a disturbing element in the tribal life which I was to study, altering it by my very approach, as always happens with a new-comer to every savage community.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Malinowski implied, he was able to observe native life as it really was, that is, as it took place when he was not there.

Lastly, Malinowski related that he participated not only in the sense of living with the natives, but also in the stronger sense of taking part in their activities. Sometimes, he accompanied the natives on their walks, joined them in their games, took part in their discussions, and the like. In this connection, he noticed that “[out] of such plunges into the life of the natives [...] I have carried away a distinct feeling that their behavior, their manner of being, in all sorts of tribal transactions, became more transparent and easily understandable than it had been before”.<sup>18</sup> In other words, his participation in this stronger sense enabled him to get a better grasp of their ways of life.

Malinowski supplemented these points with a few pieces of general advice: the anthropologist should be thorough and systematic when gathering his data. Further, the anthropologist should remember not to let his personal convictions, views, and the like prevent the data from speaking for themselves: “the main endeavour must be to let facts speak for themselves”.<sup>19</sup>

In this fashion, Malinowski presented the method of participant observation as being a rather straightforwardly reliable method for obtaining data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native life. He mentioned only the benefits from using the method. He gives the impression that if the anthropologist keeps his advice in mind, the application of participant observation is plain sailing: its use readily results in data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native life.

## 5. THE DEBATE IN THE 1940S AND EARLY 1950S ON PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND OBJECTIVITY

Following Malinowski’s promotion of participant observation, it took some time before the method gained wide currency. Likewise, some time passed before papers and chapters, specifically dedicated to reflections on the method, began to be

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

published.<sup>20</sup> Papers and chapters of this sort mainly started to appear in the 1940s and early 1950s. In these, anthropologists and other social scientists discuss various threats to participant observation as a reliable method for generating data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native ways of life.<sup>21</sup> In particular, they were concerned with six threats. Three of these are versions of the more general problem of missing observations, as I shall call it. The other three threats are versions of, what I shall refer to as, the problem of misleading observations. In the following, I examine the different versions of these two problems in turn. Moreover, as most of the participants in the debate held that the threats may be averted, I look at the proposed solutions to the problems. My primary focus is the methodological reflections advanced by anthropologists. Yet, occasionally, I also refer to papers and chapters by sociologists who participated in the debate and addressed the issues under discussion.

### *5.1 The problem of missing observations*

The general problem of missing observations occurs when the anthropologist's observations fail to cover all the relevant perspectives within, or aspects of, the ways of life under study. If observations representative of relevant perspectives, or aspects, are lacking, this may result in the anthropologist forming a false picture of the native ways of life he studies. The discussion on participant observation in the 1940s and early 1950s particularly focused on three versions of this problem.

### *5.2 Inaccessible observations*

When Malinowski described how he carried out participant observation among the Trobriand Islanders, he conveyed that the natives allowed him to make whatever observations he needed for his study. In the 1940s and early 1950s, anthropologists emphasized that not every researcher is in this fortunate situation. An anthropologist may be denied the possibility of making observations on numerous grounds. These include his sex, his age, his involvement in a conflict among the natives he studies, the way he has explained the purpose of his study, and the natives' sense of privacy. As a consequence, the anthropologist may not be in a position to make various relevant observations.

In the discussion of participant observation in the 1940s and early 1950s, the suggestion about how to respond to this predicament was the following: as far as possible, the anthropologist should monitor his participation so as to be allowed

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20 All along, when anthropologists made use of the method of participant observation, they included methodological comments in the introduction to their books on the native ways of life. In the following, these sorts of methodological remarks will not be examined.

21 It is worth noticing that very often these discussions are tied to concrete examples of threats to the reliability of the method. Less commonly, some threat is considered in general or in the abstract.

to make as many relevant observations as possible. In “Notes and Queries on Anthropology”, this strategy is exemplified by the advice that “the investigator who hopes to gain a wide view of the culture of a given area must avoid mixing too exclusively with one group”.<sup>22</sup> Otherwise, the other groups may not want to talk to the anthropologist. A little later in the same passage, the anthropologist is further encouraged to “pay attention first to that group which is considered ‘the best people’, and find his informants among them; it will always be easy to work lower in the social scale afterwards; while the reverse may prove impossible”.<sup>23</sup>

Needless to say, this strategy, viz. to monitor one’s participation with a view to getting access to as many relevant observations as possible, is not always applicable. For instance, there may be nothing the anthropologist can do about his being prevented from making certain observations due to his sex. In these cases, the anthropologist should take his lack of certain types of observations into account when analyzing his data. In that manner, he may try to avoid arriving at a false picture of native ways of life on the basis of his observations.

### 5.3 *Observations not sought out*

Another version of the problem of missing observations occurs when the anthropologist fails to seek out accessible situations that put him in a position to make various relevant observations. For instance, Herskovits mentioned how earlier anthropologists wrongly paid attention to the elders only. This meant that they did not seek out situations in which they could have made relevant observations of alternative perspectives within, and aspects of, the ways of life they studied. As Melville Herskovits put it, “for many years it was an axiom of field-work that only the elders could give a ‘true’ picture of a culture. Today we know better”.<sup>24</sup> Other reasons why an anthropologist may commit this sort of mistake are his emotional engagement in the study, his prior field work experience, his personality, and so on.

In the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s, the solution proposed was that the anthropologist should always make sure to seek out all the accessible situations in which there are relevant observations to be made. In this spirit, Herskovits contended that “[t]he best procedure is thus to talk to both men and women, young and old; to observe a wide range of persons in as many situations as possible”.<sup>25</sup> This way of dealing with the problem is also exemplified by F. R. Kluckhohn. She wrote: “I wished to evade the bias of viewing the culture entirely from the

22 British Association for the Advancement of Science, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Melville J. Herskovits, *Man and his Works. The Science of Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Alfred A. Knopp 1949, p. 88.

25 *Ibid.*



married-women's perspective. To do this, I had to seek out other acceptable general roles".<sup>26</sup>

#### 5.4 *Observations not made*

There is also a third version of the problem of missing observation that was mentioned in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s. It can happen that even though an anthropologist seeks out relevant accessible situations he fails, in these situations, to make various relevant observations. That is, he fails to pick up on, or take notice of, various relevant goings-on within the situations. Again, there may be various reasons for this. One was mentioned by Seymour Miller. He pointed to a situation in which "the observer has become so attuned to the sentiments of the leaders that he is ill-attuned to the less clearly articulated feelings of the rank and file".<sup>27</sup> As a result, the observer does not notice how the rank and file feel.

The proposal about how this problem may be avoided is simple: the anthropologist should make sure to cover all relevant perspectives within, or aspects of, the situation in which he makes his observations. To prepare himself for this, the anthropologist may do various things. For instance, Lewis maintained that the anthropologist should get a firm grip of anthropological theory and method. By acquiring this knowledge, he stated, "we automatically reduce the probability of error".<sup>28</sup> Further, Lewis continued, "to achieve a high degree of objectivity the student must know himself well, be aware of his biases, his value systems, his weaknesses, and his strengths".<sup>29</sup> The underlying idea here is that this puts the anthropologist in a position to prevent his biases, values, etc., from making him overlook relevant perspectives within, or aspects of, a situation. Still, there is always the possibility that the anthropologist does not completely succeed on this account. For this reason, Lewis seemed to suggest, the anthropologist should always include a statement of his interests, assumptions, and the like, in his account of native life. In this way, the reader may know the framework of convictions, assumptions, and the like within which the anthropologist made his observations.

In this fashion, then, the participants in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s pointed to three versions of the problem of lacking observations. At the same time, they advanced propositions as to how the careful anthropologist may avert these threats to the reliability of the method of participant observation.

#### 5.5 *The problem of misleading observations*

The other general problem discussed in the 1940s and early 1950s was the problem of misleading observations. It is the following: the anthropologist may make

26 Kluckhohn, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

27 Seymour M. Miller, "The Participant Observer and 'Over-Rapport'", in: *American Sociological Review* 17, 1, 1952, p. 98.

28 Lewis, "Controls and Experiments in Field Work", p. 457.

29 *Ibid.*

observations that should not be taken at face value since they are not directly indicative, or reflective, of the ways of life under study. Insofar as the anthropologist wrongly takes observations at face value, he may arrive at a wrong picture of the ways of life he studies. Within the debate on participant observation, especially three versions of this problem were considered.

### 5.6 *The observer's impact on native ways of life*

According to Malinowski, his long stay among the natives had the result that his presence ended up having no impact on the natives' behavior whether in public or private. Thus, he claimed, he was able to observe native life as it really was independently of his study. However, in the 1940s and early 1950s, anthropologists maintained that the problem of the observer's impact on the native ways of life is not necessarily solved by the natives' getting more used to the anthropologist. For instance, Benjamin Paul plainly stated that "[t]he presence of the observer influences the event under observation, less so in the case of public and formal performances, more so in the case of informal and private behavior".<sup>30</sup> Consequently, even after some time has passed, the anthropologist cannot assume that his observations are directly indicative of native life as it takes place when he is not there.

The suggested response to this problem was that the anthropologist should try to determine to what extent, and in what ways, his presence has an effect on the natives' behavior. Paul continued by exemplifying this line of approach when he wrote that "[c]ases of domestic quarrels that are witnessed, for instance, should be compared with reports of quarrels that are not witnessed by the investigator".<sup>31</sup> Once the anthropologist has an idea of the extent and nature of his impact on the natives' behavior, he may then take this into consideration when using his observations as basis for an account of the natives' ways of life. In that manner, he may avoid taking the misleading observations at face value.

### 5.7 *Natives' incorrect accounts*

When an anthropologist participates in the native ways of life, he will typically have conversations with the natives and he will overhear them talking to each other. In the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s, it is stressed that the anthropologist should not always take the natives' accounts at face value: the natives may, intentionally or nonintentionally, provide incorrect representations of their ways of life. An instance of this problem was reported by Nadel: "[o]ften I have been told by Nupe noblemen that some religious cult of the peasants was merely a ridiculous

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30 Benjamin D. Paul, "Interview Techniques and Field Relationships", in: Alfred L. Kroeber (Ed.), *Anthropology Today*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1953, p. 443.

31 *Ibid.*

and nonsensical practice, not worth recording. Where my exalted informants *did* recall it, their description was full of misunderstandings and distortions.”<sup>32</sup>

The proposal advanced as to how the anthropologist may avoid wrongly taking the natives’ accounts at face value is that he should try to determine whether, or to what extent, the natives’ accounts correctly portray their ways of life. There are various manners of doing so. For example, Nadel pointed out that

[i]nasmuch as these forms of bias are also sources of error, they can be checked and controlled by various means – by the judicious choice of informants from various walks of life; by a judiciously concrete technique of questioning; by the collection of several complementary statements and of numerous case studies; above all by ascertaining the ‘bias’ which must follow from the general organization by society.<sup>33</sup>

By checking the natives’ accounts in this manner, the anthropologist may take their correctness into consideration when using them as basis for a portrayal of the ways of life he studies.

### 5.8 *The observer’s distortion of the situation*

A third version of the problem of misleading observations, discussed in the 1940s and early 1950s, occurs when the anthropologist distorts what is going on in the situation he observes. There may be various reasons why this happens. For example, Morris S. Schwartz and Charlotte G. Schwartz noticed that if the researcher “is studying the authority and power relations in a social structure, his own difficulties in accepting authority or wielding power may prevent him from seeing the situation realistically”.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, insofar as the anthropologist’s observations are distorted, they should not be taken at face value.

The suggested response to this problem was that the anthropologist should take steps to ensure that his observations will not be distorted. Among other things, the anthropologist should acquire a broad knowledge of anthropology, avoid developing too close emotional ties with the natives, and examine his values and convictions. On this basis, he may try to reduce the distorting impact of factors like these. In this connection, Schwartz and Schwartz commented that “discovering one’s biases becomes a continuous process of active seeking out and grappling with one’s limitations and blocks [...] the more perspectives from which we see the bias, the greater the possibility of minimizing its effects”.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the participants in the debate in the 1940s and early 1950s considered three versions of the problem of misleading observations. And, like in the case of the problem of lacking observations, they made suggestions as to how the careful

32 Nadel, *The Foundations of Social Anthropology*, p. 38, italics in original.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

34 Morris S. Schwartz and Charlotte G. Schwartz, “Problems in Participant Observation”, in: *American Journal of Sociology* 60, 4, 1955, p. 351.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 353.

anthropologist may prevent the different versions of this problem from undermining the reliability of the method.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the present paper, I have examined the early history of discussions of participant observation and objectivity in anthropology. These discussions revolve around the question of whether participant observation is a reliable method for obtaining data that may serve as basis for true accounts of native ways of life. First, it was shown how Malinowski regarded participant observation as a rather *straightforwardly* reliable method. Next, the debate on the method in the 1940s and early 1950s was considered. It was demonstrated how – and why – most of its participants maintained that only if the anthropologist takes *a whole number of precautionary measures* is participant observation a reliable method for generating data that may serve as basis for a true picture of native life. Of course, the debate on participant observation and objectivity did not end there: it carried on and it is still ongoing. It is notable that in the early discussions reviewed here the ideal of scientific objectivity and its applicability to anthropology was taken at face value, whereas this has been questioned with increasing frequency in more recent times. A survey of the further development of the discussion and an investigation of how this may be related to developments in the philosophy of social science generally, however, is the topic for another paper.

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