



Working in the Field

Also by Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew J. Strathern

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Working in the Field: Anthropological Experiences across the World



Pamela J. Stewart

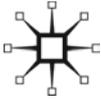
*Senior Research Associate, University of Pittsburgh,
USA*

and

Andrew J. Strathern

*Andrew Mellon Distinguished Professor of
Anthropology, Department of Anthropology,
University of Pittsburgh, USA*

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To the places we live and the people we share our lives with

Pamela J. Stewart (Strathern) and Andrew J. Strathern
May 2014, Scotland

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Preface: Working in Places, Moving through Spaces

This book is a tale of not just two but several field sites that have become a significant basis for our thinking about anthropology in general. The title of the book *Working in the Field: Anthropological Experiences across the World* directs attention to this multiplicity and also to the embeddedness of the work in particular localities. These field sites are particular places and place is a rich and complex concept that has been deployed creatively by many anthropologists in their work. It is also an expandable or collapsible concept, like a concertina. When one is in a small place one is also in larger places to which it belongs. Its own 'placeness' results from some characteristics that can mark it out as having an identifiable set of meanings that inhere to it. These meanings in turn depend on, and help to constitute wider aspects of placeness. A village or farm in Scotland has its own meanings and history, but all of them belong to the broader history of the entity named Scotland.

Scotland is one of the field areas we discuss here, always through more specific places where we have stayed. (Even the word 'stay' is inflected locally, because in Ayrshire [Scotland] where much of our work is done, 'stay' means to reside or live in, not just visit or spend some time in.) The places and countries we will take our readers to or mention in this book are all places where we have worked and include Papua New Guinea in the Pacific region. In Asia we will talk about our work in numerous locales in Taiwan, but extending to the Mainland of China, particularly

Fujian, which has close historical links with Taiwan. A comparative topic which we have pursued across many different areas has to do with farming, ecology, and relations with landscape as well as with government policies on issues such as land ownership and conservation, environmental pollution, and dealing with natural disasters. Farming has been at the heart of our work in both Scotland and Ireland, not just as a set of economic practices but as a way of life in a landscape. In our work we have pursued this topic also in the South Island of New Zealand among farmers of Scottish heritage in the Southlands down to Invercargill, and in Western Australia around Perth (whose name obviously links it back to the city of Perth in Scotland). This point leads us to note that a major global focus in our work has been on diaspora populations, products of migration re-localized in areas around the world. This was what also led us in the first place to include Ireland in our work, because County Donegal in the Republic of Ireland, like Northern Ireland itself, was a site of Scottish settlement from the 17th century onwards (earlier in the case of some Gaelic settlement); and the Ulster Scots have emerged with a revived form of identity there subsequently. Ireland has also been the site of some of our comparative work on conflict and peace-making, along with long-standing work in Papua New Guinea. Finally, here, one theme of our work that resonates across many different places and countries nowadays is the study of how people understand and cope with natural or environmental disasters. This theme links Papua New Guinea, Western Samoa, and Taiwan in particular, but with earthquakes in Christchurch and Wellington in New Zealand and with the massive devastations caused by the tsunami of 2011 in the Sendai area of Japan (witnessed by the world on TV and the internet) and the 2013 displacement of thousands of people by floods in Fujian in China as well as the devastation caused by Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban, in the Philippines, the global significance of these events and their possible connections with changes in world climate patterns has become increasingly evident and requires urgent study. Places, then, and what happens in them and to them, are indeed a focal concern for comparative anthropological work which extends to multidisciplinary collaborations.

Anthropologists, indeed, always work in places, because that is where the people they study live. This is true whether the people live in several places or only one. A good deal of ethnographic writing, as we have noted, has centered on the significance of place and places for the peoples studied. Anthropologists have also woven in descriptions of

their field areas and their experiences in them as counterpoints to their ethnographic materials. A reflexive stance to ethnography indicates that these two frames are intrinsically related. As ethnographers ourselves who have worked in many different research locales, we want to write about what it is like for us to work in different places, how we have experienced them, and how knowledge of different areas helps us to create comparisons between them and how thinking about each place helps us to see another place in a different light. We see this process as intrinsic to the development of anthropological theory as well as ethnographic practice.

This book focuses on telling its narratives in ways that students can enter into by seeing places as we ourselves have seen them.

One key aim of this book is to show the activities of ethnography and anthropological analysis as parts of the flow of life itself. We often say that everything is, in a sense, ethnography because people try to adjust to and reflect on and store memories of their worlds. Different field areas in this light are different parts of a whole life-world of experience. Our other aim is to show that fieldwork in different areas can lead to illuminating comparisons between them and contribute to seeing places as 'the same' or 'different' in relation to various ways of perceiving them.

Our geographical areas of consideration in this book are, as noted above, all ones that we have worked in and primarily include Papua New Guinea, Taiwan and China, and Scotland and Ireland.

In the Bibliography we cite relevant books, essays, and articles that have come from our research work over the years in addition to works specifically cited in this book. Many of our publications have maps showing places discussed in this book, but readers can also easily conduct a computer search for the names of places and explore the surrounding areas of the particular locales. The reader can also find a selection of photographs from our field areas at our webpage: <http://www.StewartStrathern.pitt.edu/>

Acknowledgments

We want, first, to thank all the many people that we have worked with in the various countries that we discuss in this book. As anthropologists, we depend on people for the help and insights they can provide to us, and we record our appreciation for their help here. We have also received assistance from many institutional sources over the years, for work in or relating to our numerous field areas in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Scotland, Ireland, Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, China, and Japan.

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This is only a brief selection of persons and institutions that have helped us. To them, and many others, we keep in mind, we repeat our thanks.

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