Klaus P. Hansen lehrt Amerikanistik an der Universität Passau. Er betreut dort den interdisziplinären Studiengang Kulturwissenschaften. Neben der besprochenen Einführung soll auch noch eine Ringvorlesung die heterogenen Studien der angehenden "Diplomkulturwirte" koordinieren. Sie liegt hier nun gleichfalls in gedruckter Form vor.


Justin Stagl


Hastrup deploys an argument which attempts to take all that she defines as positive from the postmodern and romantic ways of looking at the world, and then to harmoniously marry them to produce an exit to what she sees as the present nihilistic morass of anthropology. Thus, rather than disputing the "raison d'être" of anthropology and questions relating to multiple individual realities, and so on: she paints anthropology as a magnificent means for the solution of moral dilemmas (5); and as a battering ram to break through what she sees as postmodern Angst "epistemological qualms" (5), which was but a "temporary theoretical shortcoming of anthropology" (10); whose demise she is henceforth energetically assisting. Morality is very much in the forefront of Hastrup's mission in this oeuvre: she hopes that ethnography will somehow "contribute to a healthier vocabulary that may serve as a shared language for identifying new standards for the common good" (6). Mere problems in writing and researching are able to be dealt with by means of new theoretical developments against, which, we have come to understand, postmodern concerns find no consolation in at all. Hastrup is in the very vanguard of the Romantic Rebellion, and thus maintains the concreteness of experience; the unquestioned existence of distinctly anthropological knowledge; etc.

Hastrup aims to present a coherent and convincing treatise for the retrospective readoption of anthropological perspectives and attitudes which return the discipline and, more generally, the academy to a position of preeminence, not to say power. Unfortunately, however, the overall impression is not persuasive. Hastrup presents a rehearsal of old ideas about gazes and contact zones - whilst still maintaining a distinctive position in the disciplinary pile for anthropology/ethnography - happily reconciled with science. It is a call to arms that anthropology is both differently distinct and theoretical, i.e., can be separated from practice and, thus, presumably, the ordinary world of mundane activities and nonacademic people, yet the reasons for this reeducation are solely based in a self-satisfaction: it smacks more of a desperate plea to recognise ethnography as worthwhile and special than of a consistent and evidentially supported manifesto. Hastrup's version of anthropology as between experience and theory seems to have no real new advantage, especially as her vision of postmodernity is rather straw-person like.

Mils Hills


In developing ethnographic methods for the study of small-scale societies, cultural anthropology achieved a unique place among the social sciences. When it succeeds in "thick" ethnographic description, anthropology is unrivaled in its capacity to render intelligible the extraordinary complexity of cultural life in human the communities at the local level. Macro processes, on the other hand, have customarily consumed the attention of sociologists, political scientists, and economists. Such processes often appeared to anthropologists as limited in importance owing to their distance from the affairs of ordinary people. Yet this was surely a myopic view, as the "tribal isolate" represented more of a methodological convenience than a cultural reality.

Thus the very strength of anthropology points to a characteristic weakness of much ethnographic research - its limited capacity to assess how large-scale processes are implicated in the incorporation of small-scale communities into larger units such as regions, colonial territories, or nation states. Without an understanding of the articulation of villages or rural settlements to larger social units, cultural analysis remains incomplete. Over the past thirty years, a heightened awareness of this problem has swept through anthropology, enhancing ethnographic methods and analytical insight about the relationship of local political economies to larger forces constraining community decisions. More than ever, the postmodern world demands an anthropology capable of assessing the interpenetration of social and political developments at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

"The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya" provides an outstanding illustration of how to navigate through this exceedingly complex theoretical and methodological terrain. At the same time, it critically assesses the