



Channeling Malinowski

How being like an early 20th century ethnographer on a tropical island, with or without the pith helmet, can make a more effective linguist

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Background

This presentation is taken from a forthcoming Joint Special Operations University Monograph I co-authored with Darby Arakelian entitled:

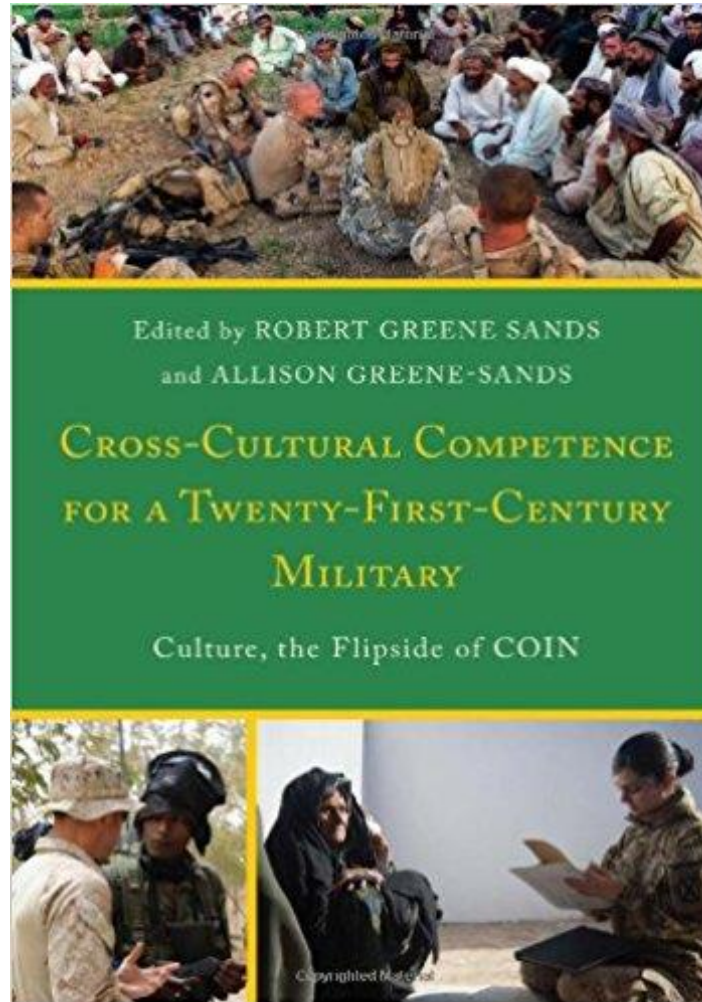
Channeling Malinowski: Advancing SOF Cultural Engagement through Qualitative Approaches

And from other research and publications...

AND decades of ethnographic work...



A Story about Reality – His and Hers



At end of the talk, I promise to answer the question:

WIFMtL?

What's in it for me, the linguist? (WIFMtL)

- Intimacy with patterns of behavior and core beliefs to **understand, influence, and forecast future behaviors** of others
- Reinforcement of the linguist as **opportunistic ethnographer**
- Language as part of **“cross-cultural capability”** that is critical to DoD and other USG organizations



Three Key Elements to Mission Success

Understand Behavior

Influence Behavior

Forecast Behavior

Liberia



A military aircraft, possibly a C-17 Globemaster III, is shown in flight from a low angle, flying over a vast, hazy landscape. The foreground is filled with dense evergreen trees. The background shows rolling hills and a distant town or city with some lights visible. The word "Afghanistan" is overlaid in white text on the left side of the image.

Afghanistan

Iraq



Nepal





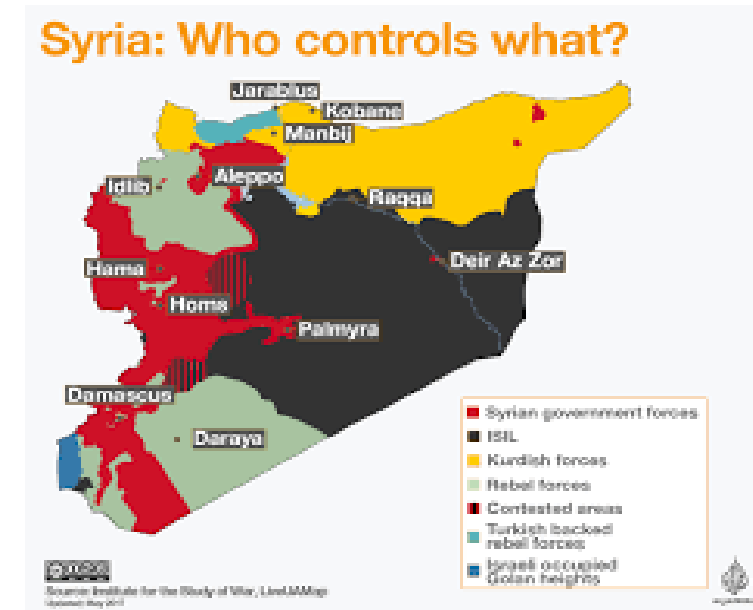
Assad Loyalists
Rebel groups – continuum
ISIS – membership is global
Al Qaeda
Jabhat al-Nusra
Other terrorist groups
Iraqis
Sh'ia/Sunni
Kurds
Turks
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Iran
US w/ France, UK military
European Union
Egypt
Israel
Refugees
UN Aid organizations
US Interagency

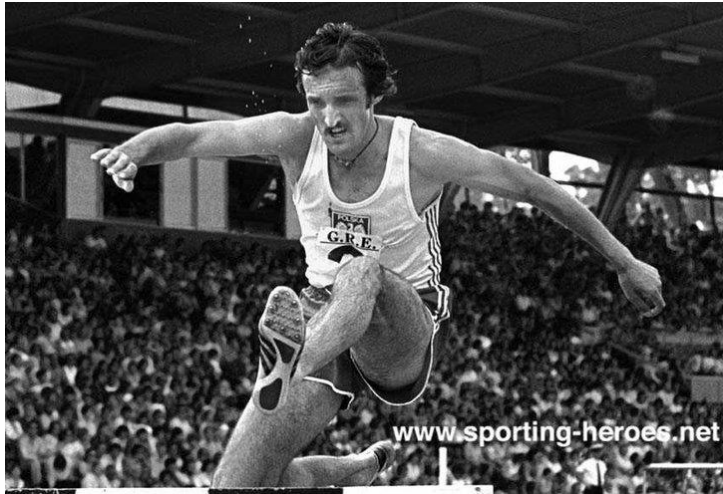
If earlier operations in Afghanistan were undergraduate approaches to cross-cultural complexity, Syria is the doctoral dissertation.

Syria

Some of Many Unanswered Questions on Syria

- What is success?
- What drives behavior of the actors?
- What borders do we apply?
- If we clean up Syria, that solves the problem, right?
- What is pertinent in the history of area and peoples?
- What are the natural resources?
- What religion are they?
- How are alliances formed and maintained?
- How global is local security?





Malinowski's Story



Trobriand Islands

Historical Caveats – Anthropology in the Colonial Era

- Eurocentric perspective
- Utility to support administration of colonies
- Economic end states
- The “culture” of the exotic – still with us today

Pith helmet became a symbol of colonial rule



Brief Primer: “Culture” Resides in the “Head”

Social and cultural knowledge is critical to accessing the “**metalanguage**” that reveals how humans organize their lives

This knowledge is exposed/accessed in social interactions

- how people form and sustain relationships through observing and participating in behaviors

Understanding, influencing and forecasting rests on how well you can “think and act” like “other”

– more or less



Malinowski's Ethnography: Systematic Approach to Understanding Others



Embedded Participant-Observation

- Document a particular aspect of the lifeworld: the systems of meaning
- What are the meanings created and communicated by members of a society?
- What is the structure of social and cultural knowledge and how organized?
- What categories are recognized and how are those categories related?
- What are the relationships between and/or among language, culture, and thought?

A black and white photograph of a village scene. In the foreground, a large group of people, mostly men and children, are sitting on the ground. They are dressed in simple, traditional clothing. In the background, there are several huts with thatched roofs, supported by wooden poles. The scene is set in a rural, tropical environment with trees and vegetation visible in the distance.

Malinowski interested in behavioral similarities

Repetition, or similarities, identified things important to everyday life

Differences keyed to those that were unique

Interactions among villagers revealed a behavioral code of cultural importance

Culture reflected in activities, actions, interactions, and, inferable from these, their thinking – really just “getting inside their heads”

Patterns of Behavior

Universal behaviors and their patterns underlie and motivate all human activity including how people:

- govern
- worship
- learn
- communicate
- Assign gender and age roles
- defend the group from external forces and each other
- connect to the past
- mobilize to face natural and human-made crises
- adapt to face adversity

Patterns store social and cultural knowledge



Flexibility of Patterns

- Not rigid - malleable to external human and natural conditions and influences
- Reflect adaptation/adjustment to outside conditions and influences
- If people adjust or stop reinforcing patterns, they will eventually cease to exist
- Existing patterns always accumulate little changes over time that can result in significant changes in behavior



Core Beliefs are at the root of these behaviors

I believe if you turn right on 2nd, you will connect with I-95 in three stop lights

I believe that if you floss you will have healthier gums

I believe that sentencing reform will lead to a decrease in crime

I believe women have a right to choose

I believe women are responsible for sexual assault

I believe in evolution

I believe the earth was created in 7 days and is 6000 years old

I believe Israel has the right to exist

I believe Palestinians have a right to exist

I believe Islam is a religion that breeds terrorism

I believe Christians are infidels

Patterns of behaviors embedded in social and cultural reality

- **Social reality** - shared collective experience of those members in a group or larger society that includes the makeup and meaning of relations and behavior found in social interaction
- **Cultural reality** - formed by the core beliefs that drive and coalesce behavior around distinct but universal “cultural” components, such as kinship, exchange, gender, governance, religion and others

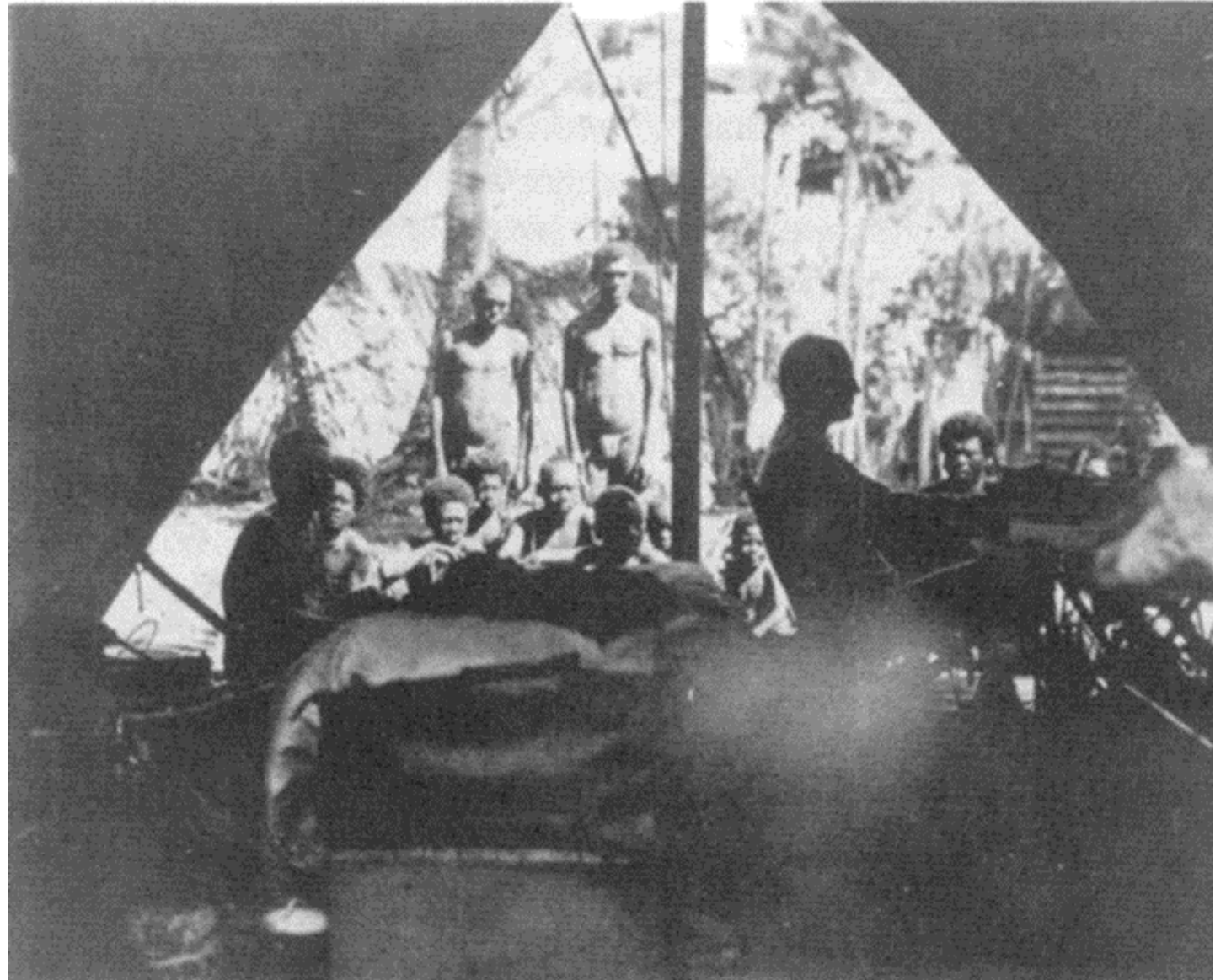
They may seem distinct, but how we form and sustain personal and professional relationships is based on how well we know this reality

Malinowski Model – The Opportunistic Ethnographer

Three fieldstones:

- 1) Operate under good scientific aims
- 2) “Live” with the “natives”
- 3) Use good data gathering techniques
 - Fieldnotes, interviews, kinship diagrams, photos, analysis, synthesis

AND... learn the language!





Method

The anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the veranda of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter's bungalow, where, armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda, he has been accustomed to collect statements from informants.... He must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; he must sail with them to distant sandbanks and to foreign tribes.

Access to Patterns and Beliefs - One way - “Just So Stories”

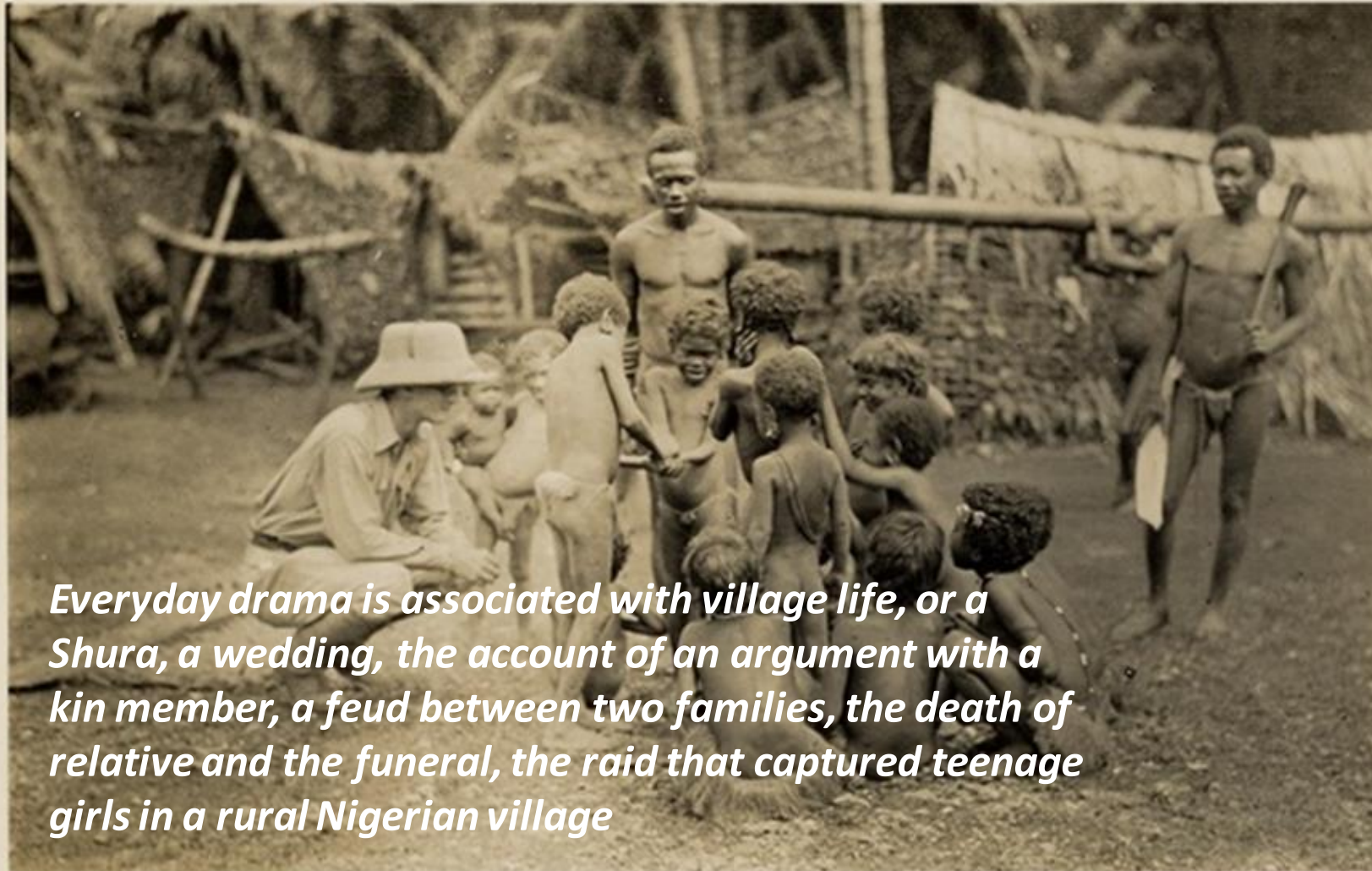
Stories are meaningful
and intimate to the
people who tell or
listen to them



“Whatever else these stories are, they are cultural artifacts, just as much as a 1965 Chevy, a hand axe, or an episode of Days of Our Lives is a cultural artifact. If we want to learn about a culture, we study its artifacts, especially the ones that say something about social relations and the culture itself.”

--Paul Durrenberger

Why *Just So Stories* Important to Understand/Translate



Everyday drama is associated with village life, or a Shura, a wedding, the account of an argument with a kin member, a feud between two families, the death of relative and the funeral, the raid that captured teenage girls in a rural Nigerian village

Stories/story-telling entertain, educate, relay myths, and pass down social and cultural knowledge

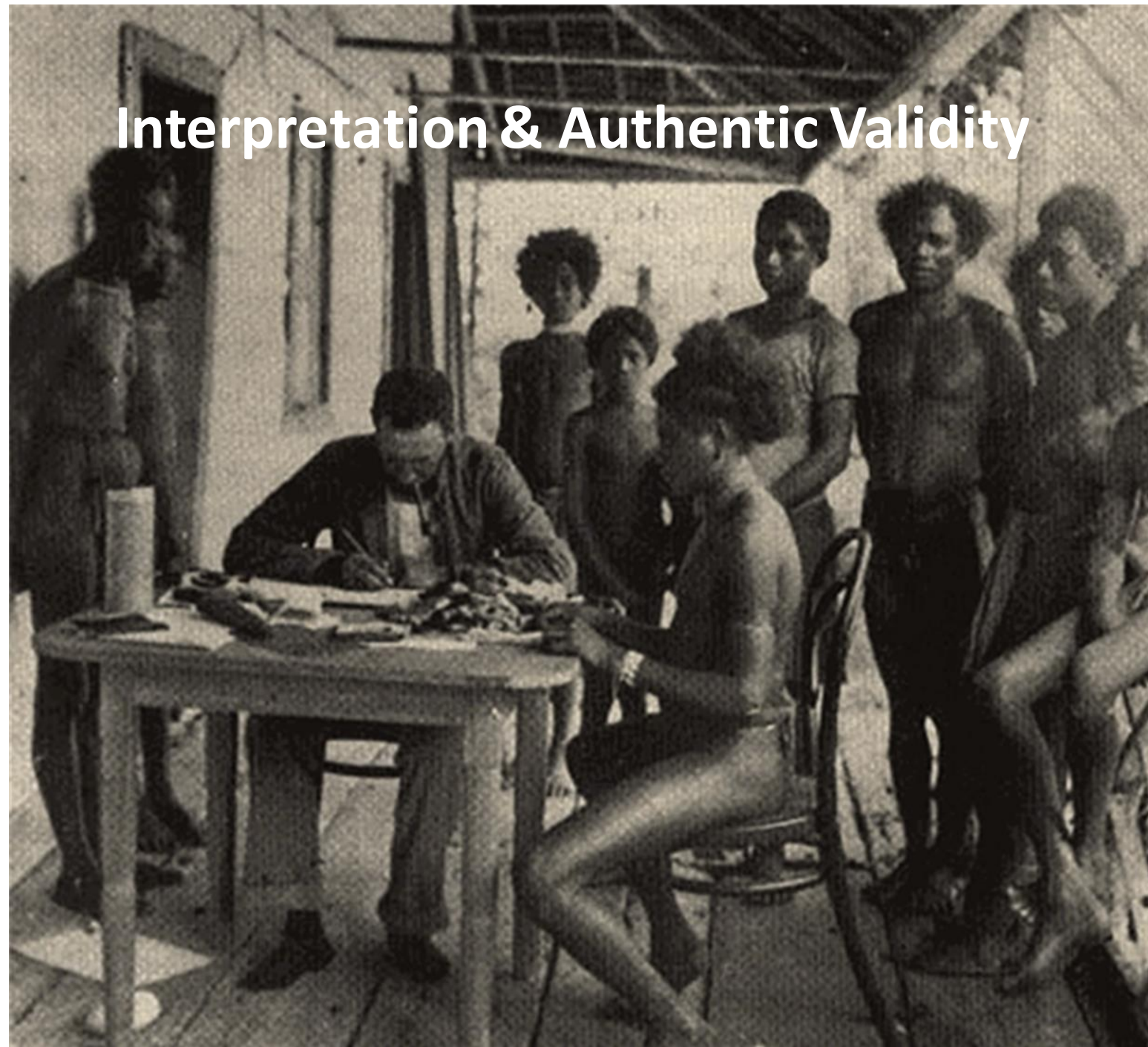
Extracting “messages” of “patterns or themes” reveals how one’s world is designed, constructed, and maintained

Repository of information advances local theories for how individuals and groups will act given future conditions and actions

Expose the “native’s” reality through validation - observation and active engagement of cultural other

If Malinowski could participate as a Trobriander in Trobriand daily and ceremonial life, building and sustaining relationships and predicting future behavior, then his view of their cultural reality would map accurately to the islanders.

Validity and cultural authenticity of what the ethnographic “stenographer” and cultural interpreter can provide to organizations such as SOF in discerning cultural reality are paramount to successful engagements





Kula Ring

Kula

Malinowski asked "why would men risk life and limb to travel across huge expanses of dangerous ocean to give away what appear to be worthless trinkets?"

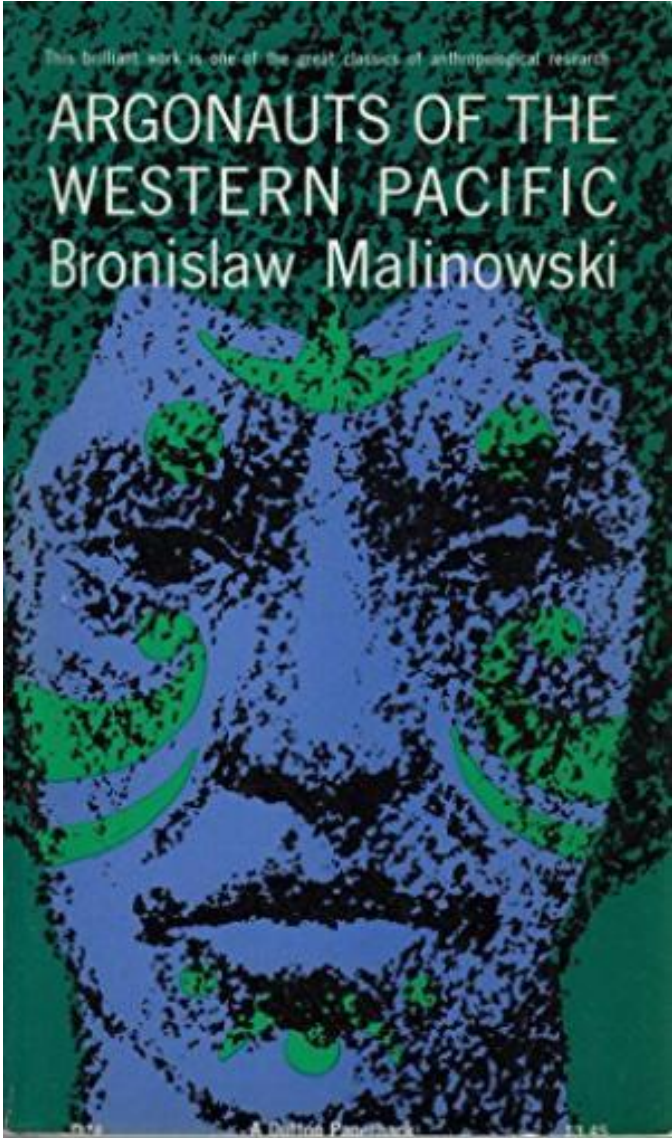
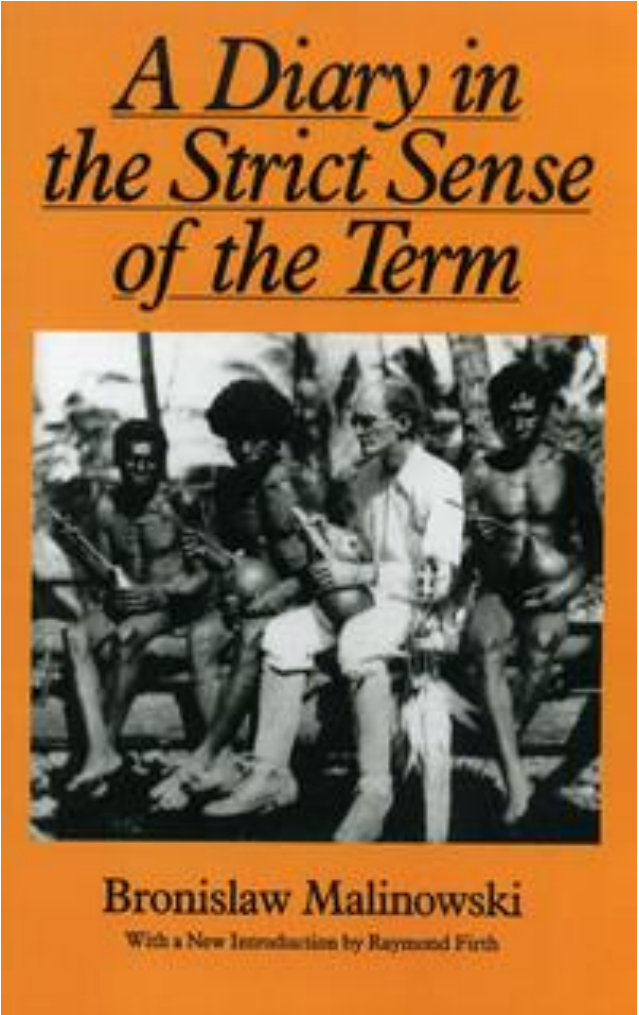
Malinowski traced the network of exchanges of bracelets and necklaces across the archipelago and established that they were part of a system of exchange (the Kula ring), and that this exchange system was clearly linked to political authority.

The behaviors that were critical were often found encased in ritual and 'just so stories.'

Malinowski observed, participated, listened, and reflected throughout.



Complicating Accessing and Understanding Reality - The Id and Ego



Break – Breathe – Stretch

Or...try to leave inconspicuously



Special Forces in Nigeria

What is needed to understand, influence, and forecast behavior?



Opportunistic Ethnographer

SOF, or other organizations, are not after “PhDs who can win Bar Fights”

Build an “organic” capability that enhances success of understanding, influencing, and forecasting

Provide universal knowledge on belief systems and behaviors across culture groups; skills that facilitate accessing of and thinking about realities of others and self; and tools that capture and assist in analysis

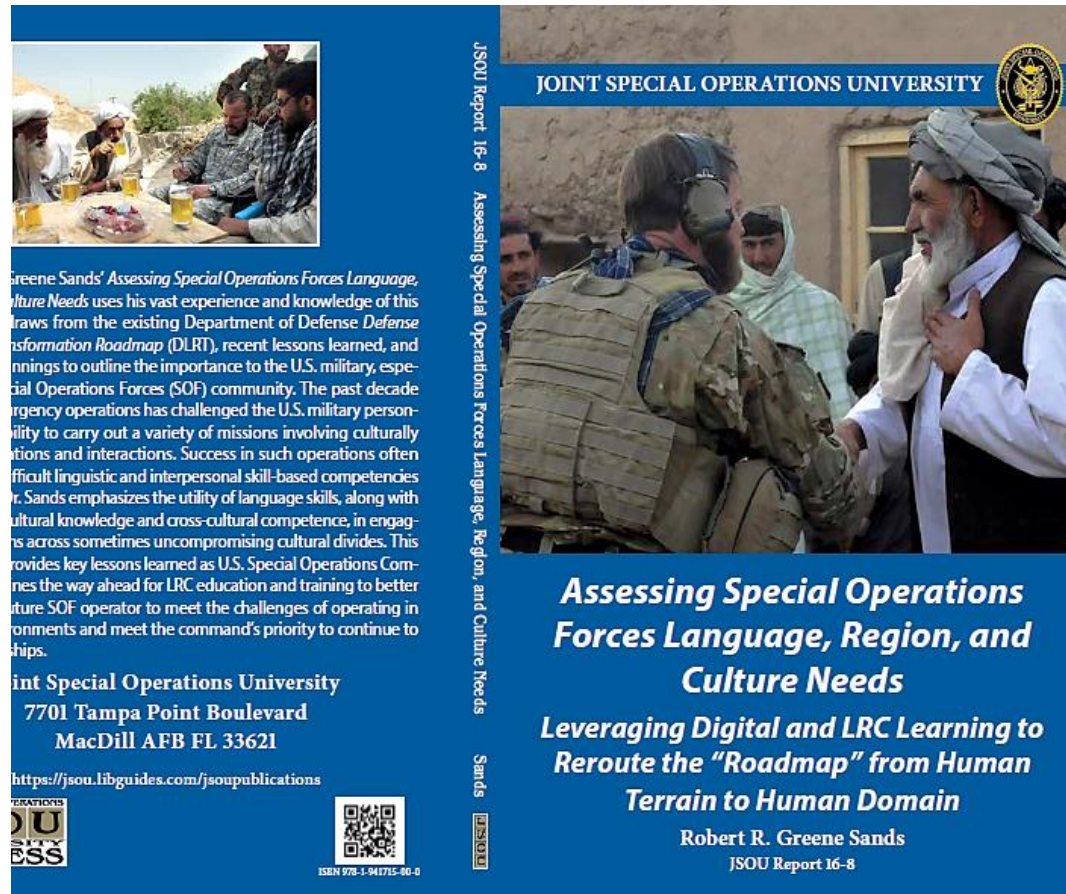
And... make it all transferable for an expeditionary force

Tall order?



Cross-cultural Capability

A synergized, coordinated and sequenced learning program of language and culture knowledge and skills



JSOU Report 16-8 Assessing Special Operations Forces Language, Region, and Culture Needs

Robert R. Greene Sands
JSOU Report 16-8

Assessing Special Operations Forces Language, Region, and Culture Needs
Leveraging Digital and LRC Learning to Reroute the "Roadmap" from Human Terrain to Human Domain

Robert R. Greene Sands
JSOU Report 16-8

Joint Special Operations University
7701 Tampa Point Boulevard
MacDill AFB FL 33621

<https://jsou.libguides.com/jsoupublications>

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- Culture/region general AND specific knowledge
- Skill-based competencies that engage thinking differently, mitigate cognitive and cultural biases, and facilitate navigation across - and interaction with - cross-cultural complexity
- Blended learning with integrated language, region, and culture curriculum promoted through an LMS – MOOC-like
- Language is one of several areas of emphasis
- Multidisciplinary faculty across one learning event
- Three year program of classes seeding this capability at JBLM LCC

A Sister Effort: Global Competence

“Framework for Developing Global and Cultural Competencies to Advance Equity, Excellence and Economic Competitiveness”

- *Proficient in at least two languages;*
- *Aware of differences that exist between cultures, open to diverse perspectives, and appreciative of insight gained through open cultural exchange;*
- *Critical and creative thinkers*, who can apply understanding of diverse cultures, beliefs, economies, technology and forms of government in order to work effectively in cross-cultural settings to address societal, environmental or entrepreneurial challenges;
- *Able to operate at a professional level in intercultural and international contexts* and to continue to develop new skills and harness technology to support continued growth.



Comparisons

Foundation provided in a integrated, blended learning event versus seeded across a student learning trajectory

Multi-disciplinary faculty versus multidisciplinary courses and programs

Military Learning versus higher education



Questions?

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Thanks!