

INTRODUCTION: IDEAS, INDIVIDUALS, IDENTITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Over the last three decades, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have energetically reflected on their intellectual role, their relationship to the world and their disciplines' potential contribution to it. This has taken the form of some hard and productive self-questioning. Despite the best efforts of sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu, academics have paid rather less attention to the role that universities play in legitimating and sustaining disciplinary knowledges. Many academics now depend upon the intricate and unique intellectual ecosystems that higher education institutions nurture and protect. Yet we still know relatively little about the institutional role universities and funders play in shaping how academic disciplines effloresce, evolve and mature.

This book is a political history of the emergence of social anthropology as an intellectual 'school' and disciplinary identity, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom between the 1930s and the 1960s. My substantive theme is the role that the institutions and resources of the British and imperial state played in fostering the autonomy of this new social science. *Difficult Folk?* tells the story of a tightly knit community of scholars using state funds and patronage to advance a new theoretical and methodological paradigm, steadily isolating themselves from a broader disciplinary community of colonial administrators, amateur scholars and museum curators. In 1930 social anthropologists emphasised their field's practical relevance to potential funders, particularly the British colonial authorities. By 1960 the discipline was sufficiently established for its

leaders to be able to distance themselves from those who sought to 'apply' anthropological knowledge, whether in the fields of race relations, industrial relations or social development. As they staked out a new disciplinary territory, the discipline's protagonists progressively isolated their field from these different publics. Social anthropology's history is a reminder of the protean and always provisional nature of disciplinary knowledge and methods.

This is a book for students of anthropology, their teachers, and all those interested in the political history of the social sciences. This is by no means the first such history of social anthropology. *Difficult Folk?* seeks to complement existing historiographic milestones – most especially work by Stocking (1984, 1991, 1996), Kuklick (1991) and Kuper (1996a [1973]), but also the important contributions of Feuchtwang (1973), Goody (1995), Pels and Salemink (1999a), Barth (2005) and Young (2004). Many senior anthropologists have also offered shorter accounts, whether in detailed obituaries (e.g. Firth (1956) on A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Firth (1975) on Max Gluckman) or in perceptive autobiographical pieces – such as Fortes's memories of the LSE seminar (1978) or Leach's barbed observations about the 'unmentionable' role of class prejudice in the discipline (Leach 1984).

My own contribution is to draw on recently deposited personal and institutional archives that offer detailed new insights into this period. I use them to show how, during the final years of empire and the domestic higher education, this school acquired the bureaucratic foundations to defend its intellectual territory and sustain its future expansion.

For its practitioners the history of anthropology can be a kitchen-table affair, a recounting that everyone can join in. We are all involved in telling and retelling our disciplinary pasts, through anecdote, gossip and oral memory as much as through teaching and writing. We learn about disciplinary genealogies through our supervisors, we re-shape history through our bibliographies and citations and literature reviews, and we pass on a sense of disciplinary traditions in our teaching. By this definition, most scholars are involved in the production of 'insider histories' for students and colleagues.

How does this book differ from such 'insider histories'? During the thirty-year period I explore, the skein of individual ambitions and rivalries created a dense and tangled social tapestry. It would be easy to focus on charismatic personalities and their academic intrigues, for institutional histories can tend to be worthy, dull affairs. Fortunately, the archives are also full of the messy, complex details of everyday university life. These minutiae serve to bring formal bureaucracies alive. Staying close to the archive also limits any anthropological inclination towards theoretical abstraction. In so doing, I seek to

systematically chart the links between the private and public faces of this new intellectual identity, between the scholarly record and the less visible aspects of institutional politics.

Throughout this book I show how the success of this emergent disciplinary paradigm depended on the interplay of what I call the four 'i's – ideas, individuals, identities and institutions. For obvious reasons, intellectual history tends to dwell on the first of these factors – ideas. In social anthropology this now means the key methodological and theoretical advances of Bronislaw Malinowski or A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, their disputes and debates, their progenitors and disciples. There are numerous accounts of Malinowski's archetypical fieldwork practice and his influential 'functionalist' theories (e.g. Stocking 1983, Kuper 1996, Young 2004). The historians go on to show how Malinowski's ideas and scholarly influence were gradually superseded by Radcliffe-Brown's more formalist 'hyphenated functionalism' (Stocking 1996, 361), based on his re-readings of Durkheim and Mauss.

Whilst intellectual historians try to carefully historicise their accounts, those written for teaching purposes tend to be read with an eye to current concerns. Histories that focus primarily on ideas also risk reifying disciplinary identities and imaginaries. At worst, these histories become Whiggish origin myths, rhetorical pasts written to justify the discipline's subsequently development – what some call 'presentist' historiography (Stocking 1965). Perhaps none of this matters for the new undergraduate, who starts by trying to understand the dominant theoretical schools and their relationships. But it can make it harder to understand the political and social contexts in which theoretical ideas emerge and acquire legitimacy and influence.

My focus is on the inter-relationship of the remaining three 'i's – individuals, identities and institutions. I show how the reputations of individual thinkers depended on their ability to create, promote and manage a new definition of anthropology within the institutions (be they universities, funding councils, philanthropic organisations or professional associations) in which they worked. Success often came to those best able to manipulate the financial and administrative cogs of these institutions. The discipline's epistemological fortunes can also be closely linked to political developments at the end of the colonial era. Changing domestic and international attitudes to the British Empire, the post-war colonial settlement, and a huge expansion in domestic higher education funding in the 1950s and 1960s all had profound resource implications for the new social sciences.

Much of the action in this history revolves around a few highly ambitious and determined scholars, their relationships and their

students. Indeed, some have distilled the founding narrative of social anthropology down to a tempestuous intellectual psychodrama between two charismatic egotists: the mercurial and brilliant Polish polymath Bronislaw Malinowski, and the eccentric Birmingham-born Edwardian Alfred Reginald Brown. Nurturing fierce loyalties amongst their followers, they enrolled their students – Raymond Firth, Max Gluckman, Audrey Richards, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, Daryll Forde and Edmund Leach, to name a few – into this drama.

With the exception of Malinowski, who died in 1942, this group lay behind the founding of the Association of Social Anthropologists in 1946, the professional association dedicated to the new school. Between them, they sat on the key committees, held the influential posts, charmed the right people, and consolidated a secure place for social anthropology within Britain's elite universities. This makes it sound as if they worked harmoniously together. This was hardly the case – conflicts, disagreements and growing rivalries all shaped subsequent events. Their social, religious and class backgrounds shaped their attitudes and the professional opportunities open to them within the relatively rigid institutional and status hierarchies of British academic life.

The full *dramatis personae* for this institutional history extends greatly beyond this intimate group. Many of the decisions that went social anthropology's way were made by outsiders. Examples would include the political backing offered to Malinowski by LSE Director William Beveridge, or the recommendation by Lord Hailey, an influential imperial reformer of the 1930s, that anthropology should be at the centre of a programme of colonial social research. Allies like this mattered to anthropology. These figures were part of the extensive social network that linked the political 'establishment' and the British upper classes, a network that Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown both aspired to join. Lord Hailey was a close friend of Audrey Richards's family, whilst Beveridge relied greatly on his personal secretary Jessica Mair, a friend of Malinowski and the stepmother of one of his students, Lucy Mair.

Other figures can only play walk-on roles. Malinowski's disagreements with his senior colleague at the LSE, Charles Seligman, and Radcliffe-Brown's tempestuous outbursts against the physical anthropologists and ethnologists at the RAI are discussed in some detail. Much more could be said about the influential allies of social anthropology, such as the Oxford classicists John Myres and Ranulph Marett, or about its opponents – such as the diffusionist scholar Grafton Elliot Smith at UCL, and ethnologists like Henry Balfour and Beatrice Blackwood at Oxford. Fortunately, these figures are

increasingly the subject of historical attention in their own right (e.g. Riviere 2007).

The action takes place upon a metropolitan stage. The intellectual influence of individual anthropologists depended on their ability to shape policy decisions and access funding. Everyone in this new school of social anthropology had done extensive fieldwork and spent a great deal of time outside the UK. Yet the main action was played out in the meeting rooms of the Colonial Office, the senior common room at the LSE and the pubs of Oxford. Lobbying for funding or challenging policy decisions depended on being on the right committee at the right time. I also chart the changing relationships between anthropology's own institutions. The tensions that developed in the 1930s within the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) led ultimately to the foundation of the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) after the war. The growing rivalries between anthropology departments at Oxford and LSE, and later between Oxford and Manchester, were equally a symptom of intellectual divergence.

Whose stories can't I include? The most interesting tales are often the ones that might have been (Handler 2001). There are many such 'what-if' histories, glimpses of fascinating intellectual journeys not taken. What if Franz Steiner, Czech refugee and author of an influential work on taboo (Steiner 1999), had not died at the tender age of 44? How might he have influenced the intensely humanistic turn of Oxford anthropology in the 1950s? What if Gregory Bateson, philosophical anthropologist and partner of Margaret Mead, had been offered – and then accepted – the Edinburgh professorship in the 1940s? My choice of focus leads me to neglect other aspects of this past. Because of the increasingly strong demarcation line that academic social anthropologists drew between themselves and applied anthropologists, the important role of administrative and government anthropologists are also only mentioned in passing. Each department has its own folklore and foundation myths, and not all can be granted equal space. The departmental vignettes I do offer – such as on the work carried out in Manchester and Edinburgh – describe less well-known aspects of this past.

Book outline

I begin with the challenge of delimiting academic disciplines through writing their histories. Why not leave this task to the professional historians who are best equipped to call discipline-based scholars to account? Many social scientists feel that, by virtue of their knowledge and training, they are entitled to tell the story of 'their' identity. I

devote the second chapter of this book to the vexed discussion between anthropology and its historians. Whilst the subsequent chapters can be read without recourse to this debate, it explains my own commitment to a carefully historicised social science.

After this cautionary prologue, the book adopts a broadly chronological structure. The early chapters describe the discipline's struggle to gain an institutional presence within British universities in the 1930s. Its successful search for research opportunities, funding and patronage all culminated in the creation of a new professional association in 1946. Each chapter introduces new characters and social networks, and focuses on a different type of institution.

My account begins with a description of the vibrant intellectual life at the London School of Economics in the 1920s and 1930s. The intellectual energy surrounding this new institution, as well as the charisma exuded by Malinowski himself, was in marked contrast to the genteel Victorian intellectual orthodoxy of Oxbridge. I demonstrate the significance of these institutions for our protagonists – Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown – as they each sought to promote their own vision of the 'new' anthropology.

By the 1930s social anthropology had begun to don an institutional mantle, as scholarly debates migrated into the institutional niches provided by the Universities of London and Oxford. Cambridge remained relatively marginal, dominated as it was by biological anthropologists and administrative ethnographers.

The migration itself was in part the result of growing tensions between different scholarly factions within the discipline. The Royal Anthropological Institute, derived from the discipline's first professional association (Stocking 1971), represented a colourful pot-pourri of academic interests, with colonial administrators, physical anthropologists and ethnologists all members. It also catered for an enthusiastic bunch of amateur collectors and upper-class explorers. The new theoreticians of social form and function increasingly found they had little in common with this more inclusive vision of disciplinary belonging. Chapter 4 describes how A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and his students sought to take control of key committees of the Institute in 1939. When this failed, the new Oxford Chair, Edward Evans-Pritchard, led the founding of a rival association, the Association of Social Anthropologists (the ASA) in 1946.

At the root of these intellectual tensions was competition for state patronage and funding. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, social anthropologists had repeatedly, and unsuccessfully, sought government funding for their research students. Whilst many anthropologists and administrative ethnographers were employed by colonial governments, the discipline's campaign for a guaranteed

source of research funding paid off during the Second World War. This new theoretical school found that it fitted an emerging political and epistemological conjuncture created by the last days of empire. The felt need to justify Britain's imperial possessions led the British Colonial Office to design an elaborate colonial development and welfare programme – with an extensive programme of social research at its centre. I describe the involvement of anthropologists in designing and influencing this programme, and the rewards that flowed to academic institutions as a result.

The sixth chapter documents the optimistic post-war period of domestic university expansion in the UK. In many ways, it was a golden age for the discipline, yet new posts and research funding created both possibilities and dilemmas. I focus particularly on the creation of new departments of anthropology at Manchester and SOAS in 1949. This development exacerbated growing departmental and individual rivalries, but also ushered in new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and fields of enquiry. Yet by the end of the 1960s many of these trends had been overshadowed by an increasingly stormy relationship with sociology.

The following two chapters focus on particular aspects of post-war anthropological practice, that were seen, at that point, to be extraneous to the discipline's core concerns. Chapter 7 returns to the application of anthropological knowledge, and describes the tensions created by industrialists who sought anthropological answers to growing industrial relations tensions in the 1950s. Chapter 8 explores how a few social anthropologists sought to write about the new post-colonial phenomena of 'race' and racism. I describe Kenneth Little's pioneering work at Edinburgh, and explore how this field of research informed the new field of ethnic and racial studies.

The ninth chapter describes social anthropology's increasingly defensive outlook at the end of the 1960s, and the prolonged epistemological hangover caused by the end of the British Empire and accusations of the discipline's colonial complicity. Rhetorical denunciations apart, the demise of Colonial Office support created a real research funding vacuum. As a result, some urged the discipline to expand, proselytise and spread its wings within British universities. They wanted to see anthropology taught in the new universities and to become part of school A level curricula; more conservative voices urged caution and consolidation. These different visions were played out in debates over textbooks and teaching and even over the membership criteria for the Association of Social Anthropology. The decisions made during this time continue to influence the British discipline today.

Each chapter adds a new perspective on the emergence of social anthropology as an academic practice within British universities between the 1930s and 1960s. Taking up Bourdieu's challenge to make sociological sense of our own academic worlds (1988, 2000), I make use of a diversity of sources – oral, personal and institutional – to paint a picture of the changing social worlds of *Homo anthropologicus*.

In the Afterword I reflect on the contemporary status of disciplines in British universities and ask whether interdisciplinary work is reshaping the social sciences? The expansion of higher education and the funding fashion for interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary research pose questions about the continuing relevance of a discipline-based professional culture. Acknowledging the arguments made by both advocates and critics of this new orthodoxy, I suggest that there remains a place for a disciplinary identity that is able to come to terms with transience. The challenge is to account for, and set limits to, our disciplinary attachments. I offer this book as one such self-accounting.

Conclusion

More than two decades ago, Clifford Geertz argued that disciplinary boundaries were breaking down and intellectual genres were blurring (Geertz 1983). Since then anthropology's historians have begun exploring the changing meaning of disciplinary practice (e.g. Marcus 1999), the decline of national traditions (Stocking 2001a, Barth et al 2005), as well as revisiting less well known anthropological ancestors (Handler 2001). Is this the right moment to replay a discipline-centred narrative, even if one amplifies the political and organisational aspects of this past?

One way of answering this question is to use this history to think about the claims made for social science's interdisciplinary futures. Not everyone is convinced that we are entering a post-disciplinary episteme, despite the utopian claims made for 'mode 2 knowledge' production (Nowotny et al. 2001). Evidence for the continued influence and salience of a disciplinary 'order of things' can be found in institutional histories such as this. The political ecology of universities, along with their complex funding and organisational structures, serves to mitigate against rapid change. The social capital invested by individual scholars in discipline-based appointments, publications and rewards make these structures difficult to dismantle (Henkel 2000). New fields and sub-disciplines do emerge and seek recognition, but this is often alongside, rather than replacing, existing disciplines.

This is not to deny that disciplines do constantly change and evolve. They have a complex symbiotic relationship with universities, funders and other institutions that create and protect this space for enquiry. Perhaps they are best envisaged as tented transit camps, as migrating scholars stop to construct a makeshift epistemological home. These disciplinary camps train novice scholars, legitimate intellectual traditions and explore possible futures. The danger remains that their inhabitants overestimate the significance of the settlement. Whilst material and institutional traces of the camp may remain, its size and intellectual prominence is never guaranteed.

One way of guarding against such 'overestimation' is through thoughtful, critical and empirically informed histories. Beyond anthropology, there is a growing number of studies of social science disciplines (e.g. Lepenies 1988, Soffer 1994, Platt 1996, Halsey 2004, Halsey and Runciman 2005) in what amounts to a new field of 'disciplinary studies'. Within anthropology itself, this historiographic work is now a distinct sub-field of the American discipline. This is yet to be the case in British anthropology departments. In the meantime, I hope this book dispels some of the mystique cast over social anthropology's origins. If it helps the reader understand how 'difficult folk' created, reproduced and sustained a way of knowing about the world, then it serves its purpose.