*Chapter 4*

# THE POLITICS OF DISCIPLINARY PROFESSIONALISATION

## Introduction

Social anthropology's rise to post-war intellectual favour was a triumph of methodological and analytical innovation. Yet it was a triumph that depended on finding organisations prepared and willing to fund this new approach to anthropological research. Up till the 1930s, the search had been relatively fruitless, even though anthropologists had been employed by the Colonial Office and by individual colonial governments. Malinowski's breakthrough came from his skill at cloaking his vision in the rhetoric of 'practical anthropology'. His success in getting the US-based Rockefeller Foundation to support the work at the LSE transformed the discipline's fortunes.

This chapter explores these early attempts at applying anthropology and the way in which struggles over the place of this work within the discipline were played out in the professional association. Radcliffe-Brown's stormy tenure as President of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) in the late 1930s provoked a major rift within the Institute. The affair led E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who was Radcliffe-Brown's replacement in the Oxford Professorship, to found a new professional body after the war. The Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) was launched in July 1946.

The ASA was memorably described by Raymond Firth as a 'band of brothers' (Firth 1986, 5). An aura of intimacy and clubbishness

infused the shared scholarly project and theoretical outlook of its members. Membership was carefully controlled. The restrictive criteria for membership determined the new field's professional image, its public profile and its subsequent development. Nurturing new academic identities requires determined cultural work, and limiting access to this identity can be part of this process. It is in the mundane minutiae of committees that an epistemological identity gets created and maintained. The ASA's endless debates over who should become a member helped define 'British' social anthropology.

## Anthropology and the Colonial Office

The first years of the twentieth century saw repeated attempts by anthropologists, and their representative association, the RAI, to convince the imperial government that anthropology deserved funding. This is a story told at greater length by both Kuklick (1991) and Stocking (1996). The first attempt was in 1896, when the British Association for the Advancement of Science passed a resolution urging the funding of a 'Bureau of Ethnology for Greater Britain' on the grounds that 'collecting information with regard to native races within and on the border of the Empire would be of immense use to science and to Government itself' (quoted in Myres 1929, 38). Despite the offer of a room in the British Museum, no government funding was forthcoming. A further deputation to Prime Minister Asquith in 1912 was equally unsuccessful.

A committee was set up at the British Association meeting in 1914 to 'devise practical measures for the organisation of anthropological teaching at the universities'. Henry Balfour, then curator of the Pitt-Rivers Museum, was enthusiastic about the idea, viewing it as of the utmost importance 'that the Empire should encourage and subsidise Schools of Anthropology which aim at promoting Imperial interests and equip future administrators'.[1] A prominent early endorsement of the importance of teaching anthropology to administrators was also made by Sir Richard Temple, a senior figure in the Indian service, who felt that Colonial Officers should 'imbibe the anthropological habit' before being entrusted with the responsibilities of 'administrative, commercial and social control' (Temple 1913). The appeals of 'practical men' such as Temple and other colonial administrators were felt to be more effective than lobbying by anthropologists themselves. Courses for colonial cadets were already in existence in Oxford and Cambridge, and in 1912, twenty-one of the thirty-four students on the Oxford diploma were in training as colonial officers. The experience often made deep impressions on these new recruits, a number of whom went on to develop careers as anthropologists (Pels 1997).

If some early colonial administrators found themselves drawn towards anthropological enquiry, the majority were disdainful. In particular, the tale of Northcote Thomas served as a 'cautionary tale in official circles for decades' (Kuklick 1991, 201) after his removal from service in both Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Northcote Thomas was initially appointed in 1909 as the first government anthropologist in Nigeria. He was tasked with making sense of survey data collected by political officers in southern Nigeria, but on the Colonial Office's condition that 'purely scientific research ... must not interfere with his main work' (ibid., 199). However on both tours he pursued his own linguistic research, seen both as impractical and as irrelevant to the practical tasks set out in his conditions of employment. Somewhat of an eccentric, he had famously proposed to file his false teeth to win favour with the communities in which he worked. He was subsequently viewed within the Colonial Office as a salutary example of the risks of employing scholars to do practical work, even though a Royal Anthropological Institute committee appointed to examine his work declared itself most 'impressed with the thoroughness of his enquiries', and concluded that the materials would give 'utmost service to officers serving in that part of Africa'.[2]

If there was ever a honeymoon relationship between anthropologists and British Colonial authorities, it was short-lived – perhaps lasting the few years after the First World War. During this period the governments of the Gold Coast and Nigeria seconded district officers such as Charles Meek and Robert Rattray to do research on anthropological topics. Both had studied with Marett in Oxford. Rattray even founded a new Anthropological Department of Ashanti. Later, government anthropologists would be intermittently appointed in various parts of Africa, but their role was never institutionalised. As Stocking notes, 'they were for the most part consumers rather than producers of anthropological theory' (1996, 390), and their peripheral status, in both geographical and disciplinary terms, was held against them.

When funding for the RAI's proposed 'central institute' was still not forthcoming by the 1920s, it became involved in a 'Joint Committee of Anthropological Teaching and Research', comprised of representatives of universities, to discuss 'matters of common concern' and to be the 'accredited mouthpiece of all British Anthropologists' (Myres 1929, 49). Malinowski was enthusiastic about such a committee, feeling that it would 'obviate certain misunderstandings' between universities and colonial authorities, and enable British universities 'officially to co-operate with dominions ... in carrying out research which is regarded in the major portion of the Empire as of definitive value to the Empire as a whole'.[3]

None of this translated into direct funding opportunities until the mid-1920s. At that point, the newly launched Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund began to support projects in human biology, providing a grant for the LSE in 1923. A series of much larger grants followed, partly because of an unlikely alliance between Joseph Oldham and Bronislaw Malinowksi. Oldham was a leading figure in the Protestant missionary movement, one of the founders of the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures (IIALC), and active in colonial reform. Initially unconvinced by the virtues of academic research, he and Malinowski found common ground as they courted the Rockefeller Foundation magnates.

Malinowski's talent for reading the funding runes is visible in his memorandum to the Rockefeller Foundation in 1926, headed 'Practical Applications of Anthropology'. He begins by admitting that the 'affectedly academic attitude of entirely non-practical interests is often a cloak for incompetence'. But most of his frustration is aimed at 'men of affairs'. He chides the British colonial administration for 'the unscientific manner of treatment in racial problems in India, Egypt and Africa', seeing it as likely to cause trouble in the same way that the 'unscientific way of treating Irish nationalism led to deplorable results'. He bemoans the Colonial Office view of anthropology as a 'purely antiquarian science', and quotes one official as saying 'we do not want future officers in our colonies to study anthropology', fearing that 'they would measure skulls instead of administering law; they might dig up old graves instead of looking after sanitation, or study savage superstition instead of keeping down crime and rioting'. This may, he admit, have characterized 'old fashioned anthropology' but grossly misrepresented 'the new spirit in anthropology'. Referring to the Netherlands as 'the most successful Colonial power [*sic*]', he pointed out that it 'recognises, uses and supports anthropology'.[4]

Amidst the bluff rhetoric, Malinowski's focus on the 'practical applications of anthropology' marks a subtle change in his disciplinary self-conceptualisation. Anthropology for him is no longer a 'habit of mind' to which administrators could aspire, but a rigorous and professional 'science' to be learnt and applied to the study of land tenure issues and even 'black bolshevism' (Malinowski 1929, 22). In his paper entitled 'Practical Anthropology' Malinowski suggests that, without a research base, the 'practical man' often merely 'gropes in the dark' (ibid.). His words were carefully chosen, all too aware that the Rockefeller philanthropy now favoured academic research that promised practical outcomes. His charm offensive succeeded, leading to a $250,000 five-year Rockefeller-funded programme of research under the aegis of the IIALC, a new missionary-influenced bureau that promoted language research. This was awarded in the face of stiff

lobbying from A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, involved in a rival bid with the School of Oriental and African Studies.

Despite this new rhetoric, many administrators still felt that anthropologists were simply not doing enough to make themselves useful. P.E. Mitchell, Chief Secretary of Tanganyika, was a prominent critic of Bronislaw Malinowski and vented his frustration at the irrelevance of academic anthropology to administrative concerns. He was of the view that the anthropologist tended 'to look out at the busy world from his laboratory window, and when he offers help, it is in terms of laboratory methods. He must learn to come down into the street and join in the life which he desires to influence.' Mitchell went on to call for some 'general practitioners of the trade' who could apply the scientific results of scientific investigation (Mitchell 1930, 220).

True to his word, Mitchell supported an 'experiment in applied anthropology' in the Iringa province of Tanganyika, involving a collaboration between an anthropologist (Gordon Brown) and an administrator (Bruce Hutt). Hutt was the District Officer of Iringa district, whilst Brown had been a member of Malinowski's LSE seminar, coming to anthropology with a doctorate in psychology. Their 1935 book *Anthropology in Action* described an attempt to closely link 'specialist research to the day-to-day business of administration'. There was one condition; that it was up to the 'administrator to ask questions, and for the anthropologist to answer them' (Brown and Hutt 1935, xvii). For Mitchell, the key question was 'Are the people well governed and content?' (ibid., xv). This circumscription of the scholarly project to the immediate demands of administrative rule exemplifies an instrumentalism often assumed by critics of anthropology's colonial complicity. Yet the collaborative relationship that Brown and Hutt developed and documented – despite its complications – was virtually unique. Both were enthusiastic about the project, and together advocated 'not only a series of partnerships between administrators and anthropologists, but the institution of some central clearing house for disposing of the knowledge so obtained' (ibid., 1935, 237). Paradoxically, for a project so tightly defined by utility and the sixty-nine questions asked of the anthropologist by the administrator, the resulting book resembled a 'classic' functionalist and holistic ethnography.

By the late 1930s Raymond Firth and Audrey Richards, both steeped in the LSE and Fabian tradition of research for social reform, had become forceful advocates for the use of anthropological skills by colonial governments implementing development initiatives. Their subsequent influence within the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC) is the culmination of numerous attempts to 'sell' anthropology to the colonial authorities. In 1938, Raymond Firth,

anthropology's consummate civil servant, prepared a seventeen-page 'Memorandum on the utilisation of anthropological services by colonial governments' for the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (ACEC). Serving on a committee concerned to establish programmes of 'social and economic development' executed 'with the aid of community education', Firth circulated a questionnaire to a variety of administrative officers and anthropological colleagues asking about the discipline's 'utility'. Some of the responses were predictably off-centre, such as one from a district officer in Nigeria who had suggested that the anthropologists could work as 'shock troops', able to 'accompany any patrol, whether of Police or Soldiers' whenever necessary to 'clear up misapprehensions'. Most were less melodramatic, and nearly all supported Firth's views as to the utility of anthropologists, who by dint of their 'systematic training' were in a position to 'cover the whole field of systematic information required for an adequate programme of rural development'.[5]

In his final report Firth cited the uniqueness of the Brown and Hutt collaboration to make the point that, in many other territories 'with problems just as pressing', there were no government anthropologists, and that a far more 'systematic utilisation' of the discipline's services was possible. Referring to the work carried out for the government of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan by E.E. Evans-Pritchard, and that by Dr Margaret Read for the government of Nyasaland, Firth argued unashamedly for 'the appointment in each territory of a specific Government anthropologist ... trained in modern methods of field research'.[6]

Firth was open-minded about whether such appointments should be 'administrative officers of proven capacity' or someone from outside the service, who might have a 'more dispassionate approach to the problems'. His only concern was that people had prior training. Firth was emphatic that the role was not to teach 'the District Officer to do his job' but rather one of 'technical advisor ... guided by the declared policy of the Government, though the results of his investigations might sometimes influence that policy'. His memo ended with a remonstration that large-scale plans for social and economic development without the help of anthropology would seem a 'neglect of useful aid'. It was a vision that Firth went on to pursue very effectively within the Colonial Office. In the meantime, the very promise of government funds for applied research was causing a major rift within the anthropological community.

## Anthropology's professional associations

The Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland was founded in 1871 from the conjoining of two rival scholarly associations with different perspectives on human evolution and the importance of social reform (Stocking 1971). Its ambitions mirrored that of comparable Victorian scientific societies. Holding monthly London meetings, it became known for its intellectual tolerance and holistic remit. After being granted a royal charter in 1907, the Royal Anthropological Institute's (RAI) membership grew, attracting explorers, private scholars, missionaries and administrators. Whilst active in lobbying governments both home and abroad, the RAI did not see its primary role as supporting the growth of academic anthropology – not least because so few academic posts existed in the early years of the twentieth century.

Across the Atlantic, the American Anthropological Association, founded in 1902, had already demonstrated the role a professional association could play in promoting the interests of a university-based discipline. Its birth was not straightforward. The months leading up to its incorporation were marked by tension between those members of the existing Anthropology Society of Washington, who wanted to restrict its membership to forty elite 'professionals', and those led by one W.J. McGee, who wished to make it more open, valuing the contributions that 'amateurs' could give (Stocking 1960). Franz Boas, aware of the duplication of effort by local scientific societies, proposed a rationalisation of such societies within the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Boas was outmaneuvered in his own plans, partly because of growing antagonism towards the Washington clique. The majority of those invited to join the new association were against an 'exclusivist' membership policy (ibid., 8). Yet Boas's fears about amateurishness and scientific populism were unfounded, the new association expanded rapidly, and soon became dominated by practicing academics. Whilst the 'four-field' terminology to describe the American academic discipline was not articulated till much later, the association welcomed a wide variety of scholarly interests. By 1917 it had 300 members, and continued to grow rapidly.

Back in the UK, social anthropology in the 1930s faced the challenge of gaining a foothold within British universities. Despite Malinowski's influence, LSE still had only three permanent staff. Variants of 'social' anthropology were being taught in only three universities, and were also competing for influence with the 'diffusionists', led by Elliot Smith at UCL.

The RAI, until 1946 the British discipline's only professional body, held one of the keys to the promotion of social anthropology – its

scholarly journals and intellectual leadership. Its mandate was to represent all branches of the discipline, a large and diverse constituency of administrators, academics and independent scholars. Those seeking to promote the academic fortunes of social anthropologists were a minority, albeit an influential one. They had to compete with those who held that anthropology should by definition include the biological and physical study of humans, as well as the study of all aspects of material culture. Some of the biological anthropology published under the RAI's imprimatur (Rich 1984) exemplified the least palatable aspects of Victorian racial science. Yet the unwieldy nature of the RAI's decision-making process, unpredictable council members and its inclusive membership policy made factional initiatives unpopular. This tension came to a head during Radcliffe-Brown's presidency of the RAI in 1938 and 1939.

## Infighting at the RAI

The RAI had been at the fulcrum of sporadic attempts to involve anthropology in policy debates during the 1930s. In 1937 this led to the creation of the 'Applied Anthropology' committee. At a time of growing political foreboding, there was concern over the message that would be conveyed if the British government decided to implement a 'return of territories' to their former colonial power, Germany. Gertrude Thompson, RAI Vice-President and prominent archaeologist, led the campaign for the RAI to take a public position on the politics of appeasement. Writing to Raymond Firth, she acknowledged that 'the objection of "politics" might be raised'. She went on to note that 'the contribution anthropologists can make to the question is anthropological: the relations of the British Empire to Germany need not be discussed, but the relation of white rule to native life should be'.[7] Firth was reluctant to get involved, and Lucy Mair and Audrey Richards initially poured cold water on the idea. But others in the RAI decided to take action, and a declaration from the grandly named RAI subcommittee on the 'Anthropological Implications of the transfer of territories from one power to another' made a report to RAI Council in 1937, recommending 'systematic and public investigations of the implications of such transfer generally' that was 'strictly from the anthropological point of view'. It also concluded that the RAI was competent under its Articles of Association to 'promote representations in this sense to His Majesty's Government' on the matter. Nearly every senior social anthropologist decided to add their signatures to the report, including Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Mair, Myres, Richards, Seligman and Edwin Smith.[8]

This new committee, with Lucy Mair as chair, suddenly became very politically active. It requested Council to make a deputation to the Royal Commission on the union of the Rhodesias, nominating Radcliffe-Brown and Edwin Smith to represent the RAI, and produced a further memorandum on the 'Condition of the Australian Aborigines' for submission to a federal government conference, again under the representation of Radcliffe-Brown. It also mandated a deputation of members in February 1938 to meet the Secretary of State for the Dominions on the question of the transfer of the territories of Swaziland, Bechuanaland and Basutoland to South Africa, insisting that 'native opinion' needed to be consulted, and that anthropologists were best able to advise on the 'most effective methods of explaining the position and consulting native opinion' and the need to devise 'terms of transfer which would safeguard essential interests of the natives involved'.[9] Such statements were always surrounded by qualifiers, such as 'Policy is the business of Government', as the committee sought to deflect any accusation of playing politics. Yet this wasn't enough for the RAI President Lord Raglan, and he subtly rebuked the committee the following month. Writing to Firth in 1938, he acknowledged that 'the question of the transfer of the South African protectorates is one upon which individual members of the Institute may well hold strong opinions, but it is a purely political one, and the Institute, as a scientific body, should do its utmost to avoid any suspicion of interfering in politics'.[10]

Driven largely by Lucy Mair's enthusiasms, the committee also proposed a programme of research, including a study of changes in bride price, whereby members contribute pieces exploring European influences on the African custom of 'bride-price', seen as an 'aspect of native culture which presents particularly acute problems of adaptation to modern conditions'. As part of its promotional efforts, it enlisted the support of the colonial office representative on the committee to carry out a postal survey of Colonial Governments to assess their perceived need for trained anthropologists. A variety of responses were received, such as the highly revealing response of the Kenyan Governor, who welcomed the 'opportunity of working out detailed proposals for co-operation over a period of some years on the problem of native land tenure in Kenya'. Such initiatives are indicative of the growing political confidence possessed by anthropologists during this period.

With power comes dissent, and the story of the Applied Anthropology Committee exemplifies the internal rivalries and intrigue within the Royal Anthropological Institute. The proliferation of committees was not simply a testament to the Kafkaesque aspects of the RAI's bureaucracy, but also a jockeying for position and authority

by rival academic factions, particularly during the period from 1939 to 1940 when Radcliffe-Brown was President of the RAI. His allies, especially Meyer Fortes, but also Lucy Mair, found they increasingly antagonised those who, by dint of their academic training or professional lives, valued a more inclusive vision of anthropology. This rival group included Herman Braunholtz, Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum, the RAI Secretary William Fagg, who was Deputy Keeper of the Department of Ethnography at the British Museum, and the managing editor of *Man*, Ethel J. Lindgren, who had been trained at Cambridge. Other supporters included Charles Seligman, ex-Professor of Ethnology, and the William Wyse Chair at Cambridge, J.H. Hutton, previously employed by the Indian Civil Service. Sharing a view of anthropology that reached beyond academic concerns, they resented Radcliffe-Brown's attempts as RAI President to 'run down' or remould the Institute as 'mouthpiece for his particular brand of social anthropology'. Writing in 1940 to Herman Braunholtz, William Fagg's fears over 'R-B's defeatism' and the future 'ruin' of the Institute were prescient:

> Radcliffe-Brown seems to be hag-ridden with the idea that there is a New Order impending in this country in which there will be no room for the Institute; he seems bent on shutting down the Institute for the duration, maintaining perhaps its skeleton at Oxford (or even in Raglan's vaults) ... Either anthropology will be left without an effective central organisation, or a rival body (of which I have often heard dark threats) will be set up at Cambridge. I believe, in opposition to R-B and his school, that the Institute can and should use the war to consolidate its position with the Fellows it can retain, so that when better times come it will be 'in training' and ready for a thorough-going crusade.[11]

For this reason, William Fagg vowed to stay on as RAI secretary, despite Radcliffe-Brown's attempts to replace him with Raymond Firth; the latter refused point-blank to take the job, given his wartime responsibilities in Naval Intelligence. The earlier activities of the Applied Anthropology committee had been controversial, and Fagg particularly resented what he called Radcliffe-Brown's 'injudicious' decision to revive its 'ghost', which had gone into abeyance whilst Mair had been doing fieldwork in Africa. The conflict came into the open over appointments to yet another new committee – the 'International Affairs' (later known as the Colonial Affairs) subcommittee of the Applied Anthropology Committee.

The crisis had begun in February 1940, when Meyer Fortes wrote to Fagg from Oxford, proposing a 'sub-committee' to draft a memo to the British Colonial Secretary about research funding. Meyer Fortes, acting as secretary of the RAI's Applied Anthropology committee,

sought the support of the RAI council for a memorandum to the Colonial Office on the need for anthropological contributions to research in the colonies. The British Government was planning a major research effort in its colonial possessions as part of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (CDaW). Fortes mentioned that he had been asked the previous year by the Colonial Office about 'anthropological research needed in the colonies ... if and when money should be allocated for this purpose'. Recent statements by Lord Hailey had made clear just how much money was available for colonial research, and Fortes felt that an authoritative RAI statement on the need for anthropological research would carry weight in the Colonial Office. In their submission Fortes and others wished to stress the potential contribution of social anthropology, and tempers rose over whether the memo should mention the study of material culture and technology and whether funds should be directed to research centres based in the colonies.

William Fagg was far from enthusiastic about the creation of yet another subcommittee, and was also suspicious of Fortes's position in the Radcliffe-Brown camp, feeling that he was not acting with the RAI's interests at heart. Quickly searching for someone seen as more supportive of the Institute, Fagg nominated Dr Margaret Read – soon to be made Professor of Education at the Institute of Education in London – as chair of this new memo-drafting committee. Writing to Fagg, Ethel Lindgren warned that 'we must, of course, be prepared to have our plan defeated by the President, who is accessible to influences from Fortes at Oxford – with the result that Mair or Fortes will be placed in the seat warmed for Dr Read. Needless to say, I shall support Dr Read.' Fagg agreed, strategising that Read's 'nomination should be sprung on the President and his faction only at the meeting'. There was an extra complication. Whilst Lucy Mair was a Radcliffe-Brown sympathiser, she was thought to be 'very wet blanketish' about Audrey Richard's ambitious ideas for a set of regional research institutes. Radcliffe-Brown however was in support, and had 'insisted they should be dealt with by the Applied Anthropology committee'.[12]

Once the committee was finalised, the memo-writing commenced. Unsurprisingly, the first draft called again for a central bureau, such as the RAI, to coordinate research. However, Radcliffe-Brown was far from happy with it, and prepared an alternative draft, cleverly titled as a 'Memorandum on the Hailey Report'. He insisted that 'research into the anthropological side of colonial problems will yield best results ... if carried out from research institutions in this country'. Radcliffe-Brown argued 'that in the first place the task for research as well as that of training should be entrusted to British Universities' with 'departments of Social Anthropology headed by a Professor of the

subject'. This amounted to a call for an expansion of appointments at Oxford, Cambridge and London; the creation of an Institute for Colonial Anthropology was added as an afterthought. Predictably the RAI officers were furious, as it made no attempt to build upon what Lindgren felt had already been achieved, 'anthropological training for all colonial probationers, anthropological research by government officials, the appointment of government anthropologists'. For her, it simply emphasised a 'purely academic viewpoint'.[13]

At this point things became more Machiavellian. Fagg nurtured John Hutton's opposition to this 'new' anthropology and John Myres's growing unease with Radcliffe-Brown's style at Oxford to mount a counter-offensive. Capitalising on what Fagg later described as a 'considerable error of judgement on R-B's part' in not consulting Seligman whilst drafting his document, Fagg ensured that the final meeting to approve the draft was packed with people aggrieved at the manner in which Radcliffe-Brown had handled the matter. Later, writing to Lindgren, Fagg commented with satisfaction that 'the enemy came prepared to negotiate', and that, going through the whole thing 'sentence by sentence', we 'exacted fairly severe terms'. But the dispute seemed primarily to have focused on how to mention the study of technology and material culture, and whether to take a position on the importance of 'team-work', both aspects that Fortes and Radcliffe-Brown disapproved of. The final draft, endorsed by the RAI Council, ended with the muddled compromise that, whilst 'the setting up of research institutes in British universities and in the colonies themselves is recommended as the primary necessity, plans should be made for establishing an Institute of Colonial Anthropology'.[14]

As Fagg later acknowledged, comparing the event to his fears over the current war, 'the victory of which I spoke was of course purely relative ... we have neutralised the worst features of the original draft, and ensured that our own sociology Hitler will not achieve "world domination"'. Fagg feared that the neutering of the memorandum would 'hammer anthropology in general by showing us up as a muddle-headed lot who have the greatest difficulty in restricting our chauvinistic elements', adding that the Colonial Office 'may think we must put our house in order before we expect much consideration'. Dark rumours began to spread within the RAI about a potential new rival association for social anthropology, portents that came true the year after the war.

## The 22nd of July 1946 and the foundation of the ASA

The infighting and rivalry no doubt concentrated the minds of Meyer Fortes and his colleagues at Oxford, most particularly that of Evans-Pritchard. It was Evans-Pritchard who masterminded the creation, launched as the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) on the afternoon of Tuesday, 22 July 1946. Historians are in agreement about its significance. Kuklick (1991) suggests that this event marked 'the era of professional domination of British Anthropology', whilst Kuper describes its first committee as 'reflecting the power-structure in the profession ... this was the power map and it remained the same for twenty years' (Kuper 1973).[15]

Intellectually, the association's roots lie in regular pub discussions (and the occasional meeting at Radcliffe-Brown's rooms in All Souls) in Oxford before the war. Stocking describes how, at the initiative of Evans-Pritchard, 'the little group that had met with Radcliffe-Brown on Fridays before the war was joined at Oxford by another half-dozen younger anthropologists' (Stocking 1996, 423). The earliest meetings between Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard dated back to the early 1930s, when the former had been visiting Europe on the way to his new post in Chicago. Audrey Richards wrote to tell her supervisor Malinowski about these meetings, saying 'EP is making up to him'. Evans-Pritchard subsequently brought Fortes into these discussions on the nature of the lineage, and the following year invited Gluckman to join them.

During 1938–39 the pub debates focused on Evans-Pritchard's and Gluckman's field data, as well as on kinship and the whole the notion of the social 'system'. This led to the publication of *African Political Systems* (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). Evans-Pritchard's correspondence with Fortes reveals the former's key role in these events, along with his military style campaign to consolidate this new school of social anthropology. He and Fortes planned how they would succeed to the Oxford and Cambridge chairs respectively. 'In the end, we will win our fight and it looks as if the fortunes of war have changed in our favour' (quoted in Goody 1995, 179).

Evans-Pritchard clearly felt that his own role in the founding of the ASA was not as acknowledged as it might have been, for in 1971 he wrote to the ASA Secretary 'to record matters for the record'. In his letter to Banton he described the sequence of events: 'If I remember rightly, I wrote to Radcliffe-Brown from Cambridge when I was a Reader there in 1945–46, suggesting that social anthropology might be considered an autonomous discipline and that we should combine in an association to further its interests.'[16] As the letter implies, the association was always intended as a pressure group as much as an

intellectual talking shop. From the first meeting, the new association sought to cultivate its own institutional culture and disciplinary identity, and this was best achieved by keeping close control over who would be allowed to join. Whilst the symbolism of this new association was much welcomed by its members, the bureaucratic momentum it initiated was less anticipated.

Evans-Pritchard's initiative began at the end of the Second World War, a period that had seen anthropologists dispersed, and many involved in active service. Evans-Pritchard himself had served in Sudan. With the impending retirement of Radcliffe-Brown from the Oxford chair in 1947, Evans-Pritchard seized the opportunity to bolster the nascent discipline and his own place within it. Having discussed his idea of a professional association with Meyer Fortes and Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard then went on to invite Siegfried Nadel, Max Gluckman, Audrey Richards, Brenda Seligman, Raymond Firth, Daryll Forde and Edmund Leach to attend the first meeting in 1946. The archaeologists Anthony Arkell and Louis Leakey were also in attendance, but were not invited to become members. They were a cosmopolitan – if male-dominated – group. Two were South Africans (Gluckman and Fortes), one a New Zealander (Firth), one a Welshman (Forde), and two had relatively aristocratic English origins (Richards and Evans-Pritchard).

Ten days beforehand, Evans-Pritchard circulated a short one-page memo on his proposed agenda. 'It is suggested', he began, 'that Social Anthropology is now sufficiently distinct a study to have its own Association and Journal and that a co-operative undertaking of the kind is desirable in the interests of the science.' Diplomatically, he went on to insist that the association should not be 'in rivalry with existing institutions', suggesting that it might even be an autonomous section of the RAI. He carefully articulated what he saw as being the objects of the association, which included ' a) to propagate the interests of Social Anthropology, particularly by strengthening the existing university teaching departments and encouraging the formation of others b) to co-ordinate research c) to constitute a body, representing the interests of the science as a whole, to which governments and other corporations desiring advice on questions of research can apply'.[17] These aims were adopted word for word at the first meeting of the association, a measure of both his dominant position and force of character.

This blueprint for the association was explicit about the ASA's political role. This can be contrasted with the formation of the British Sociological Association (BSA) a few years later, distinguishing itself from the older Sociological Society, founded in 1904. The BSA was launched through a letter to *The Times* newspaper declaring its intent

to foster discussion and 'coordination' of research, with the aim of promoting a 'systematic science of society' (quoted in Platt 2003). The BSA was not linked with a specific theoretical 'school', indeed an initial recruitment letter suggested that it was 'not desirable to define the terms "Sociology" and "Sociologist" in a very strict way' (ibid.). Nor was it so concerned with gatekeeping its membership. Of the twenty-four original sponsors of the BSA, two would have seen themselves primarily as anthropologists (Raymond Firth and Meyer Fortes).

Two related aspects of Evans-Pritchard's original vision were the source of much subsequent conflict within the ASA. He had proposed that one of the nascent group's roles would be to produce a 'register of anthropologists in the British Empire'. He felt that 'social anthropology might in the first place be limited to teachers and research workers in Social Anthropology in Great Britain, the Dominions and the Colonies, but could later be expanded to include teachers and research workers in America and elsewhere'. Why not just Great Britain? Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, the theoretical and methodological progenitors of social anthropology, had taught in numerous places, and it was their students that the association was intended to bring together. This vision of a Commonwealth association was not initially reflected in the association's title, for which Evans-Pritchard had provisionally suggested 'The Association of Social Anthropologists', but did closely guide the committee's decisions on whom to invite to join.

The second was Evans-Pritchard's proposal that the association would publish a journal 'devoted solely to Social Anthropology ... such a journal would publish only contributions to theory and methodology, and not ethnographic fieldwork reports'. Aware of the importance of having a sufficient membership to support the publication of a journal, he suggested that the project should be discussed 'with a view to starting publication in two years' time'. Once this happened, he envisioned that 'the association could be thrown open to all who care to join it'. This may well have been a throwaway gesture of inclusivity, as it flatly contradicted his other views of the association's purpose. The proposal to open up membership was not revisited.

Along with this memorandum, Evans-Pritchard strategically circulated two very different responses that he had received to his proposals, from Siegfried Nadel, who had studied under Seligman, and Max Gluckman. Nadel urged that the association should address the issues of applied anthropology, and provide some 'scope for discussing colonial problems so far as they come within the purview of social anthropology'. Gluckman, on the other hand, was adamant that 'in the present situation there is a grave danger that the demands of colonial governments for research worker may lead to an excessive concentration on practical problems to the detriment of basic research

and the lowering of professional standards'. Gluckman was, at this point, at one with Evans-Pritchard on the importance of prioritising the theoretical development of the discipline, and Evans-Pritchard's circulation of these memos served to highlight the issues at stake.

Everyone that Evans-Pritchard had invited was present at this first meeting in Oxford in July 1946. The minutes recorded the resolution 'that a professional association of teachers and research workers in Social Anthropology be here and now formed as an independent body'. At this first meeting, chaired by Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard was appointed 'Chairman and Secretary-General', whilst Firth, Forde and Fortes made up the committee. The minutes note that 'until next conference the committee have power to invite anyone to become a member. One black ball to exclude.' The last business of the meeting was to draft a letter to inform the RAI of the new association, 'hoping for collaboration with the Institute'. There was no formal response. Many involved in the new association were already active officers and council members within the RAI, and it was not felt that the two were mutually exclusive. The ASA did, however, take on the task of lobbying the Colonial Office over the allocation of research funding of anthropologists

The first committee meeting was held in Raymond Firth's office in the LSE a few months later, and two lists of potential members were drawn up, nine from Great Britain and double that from the 'Dominions', most of whom subsequently agreed to join. As Firth (1986) notes, the emphasis was on choosing 'people who had been trained by either Malinowski or Radcliffe-Brown'. Gradually, tensions surfaced. Firth comments, a little disingenuously, that they never actually used a set of black balls. He describes how the qualities of each of the proposed candidates were discussed in the committee meetings, and remembers how decisions were often 'idiosyncratic', with 'Fortes in particular vehemently protesting against some of the names raised' (Firth 1986). As a result, after this initial expansion, only four further members were elected over the next three years, one of whom was Elizabeth Colson, then Assistant Director of the RLI, and the first American member. By 1950 a sense of staleness was developing, and it was agreed to change the process to one of majority voting. Gluckman wrote to Clyde Mitchell, telling him that 'you'll be pleased to hear that the ASA is going into younger people more rapidly – as soon as they show they are likely to stick it as professionals. We all feel we need younger blood.'[18] A significant number of new members were appointed in the early 1950s, including another American, David Schneider, who lectured at LSE from 1949 to 1951.

For the next few years Evans-Pritchard was the energy behind the association, acting as Chairman and Honorary Secretary, and taking

on all the administrative duties of calling meetings, organising agendas, and sending short communications to *Man*. The committee was reconstituted in 1952, separating the offices for Chairman and Secretary, and appointing three other members. Gluckman's appointment as Secretary began in that year, and he took over the extant administrative files from Evans-Pritchard. Much later again, in April 1960, with the subscriptions of more than 120 members to attend to, Gluckman proposed that the offices of Secretary and Treasurer should be further separated.

Raymond Firth has referred to the pioneers of the Association of Social Anthropology of the Commonwealth (ASA) as a congenial 'band of brothers'.[19] Even if not all brothers – Brenda Seligman and Audrey Richards were founder members and highly influential anthropologists – this phrase captures of the association's fraternal ethos. Firth notes how its gatherings, initially in Oxford, London or Cambridge, were 'eagerly anticipated'. One of the appeals of the ASA in its early years was that its meetings were, appropriately enough, intensely social occasions.

As Jack Goody recalled, 'the closeness of the fraternity was one way in which the highly amorphous subject of anthropology was given some manageable bounds, and some continuing focus was provided for current investigations' (1995, 83). Gluckman describes one such meeting in the mid-1950s as a 'riotous time ... we drank and joked and talked'. Each character gets a mention: 'Radcliffe-Brown was on good form, Evans-Pritchard at his best.' He described how a 'shocking psychotic' paper by Reo Fortune had 'told us all about Papuans waging war because the un-avenged ghosts of their kinsmen set wild boars to break the garden fences, so we ended by calling social anthropology the study of piacular pigs jumping through holes in the social structure'. Yet his letter to his student Mitchell also reveals the cliquey and masculine intellectual rivalry that equally pervaded the meeting, with rude comments directed at the female members of the LSE faculty in particular. 'Kaberry was horrified when E-P and I said a lineage was a political group more than a kinship group. She, Audrey, etc will never understand.'[20]

Until 1958, the association met twice yearly. Declining attendance at meetings in the late 1950s led to calls for just one annual meeting to be held each year. As well as group discussions on theoretical themes (the first in January 1947 was on social structure, opened by Radcliffe-Brown and Firth) the meetings also addressed more prosaic institutional, pedagogic and disciplinary concerns. During early meetings Firth gave a paper on research funding, Audrey Richards on the relationship of anthropology to related disciplines, and Fortes on the teaching of anthropology. Yet one issue repeatedly dominated the business meetings – membership.

## One black ball to exclude? Disciplinary and national exclusivity

What should one make of the energy the association devoted to debating its membership? The association stands accused, by Edmund Leach amongst others, of being more a professional trades union than a learned society, and the colonial administrators who made up many of the students on anthropology courses were excluded from joining the ASA.[21] Even during the 1950s, there were regular committee discussions about membership criteria. One could see these as merely internal matters, a concern only for the keeper of the records. Yet the minutes reveal a great deal about the self-perception of the association's members.

Philosophical viewpoints or scientific schools are often associated with particular nations. For the ASA the implied link between disciplinary and national identity ('British social anthropology') had powerful historical symbolism. The British government was at that point wrestling reluctantly with the implications of decolonisation, reinventing the Empire as a Commonwealth, a new, more equal partnership of states. Yet anthropology had been centrally funded by the Colonial Social Science Research Council. The ASA had brought together a community of scholars in institutions across the world, but held all its meetings in Oxford, LSE or Cambridge. This presented problems. Could the ASA reinvent itself as a Commonwealth association, rather than a colonial one? The reality was more complex still – the ASA was a metropolitan scholarly community, brought together through the colonial intellectual exchanges of its key teachers. The 'British' aspect of 'British social anthropology', a title first ascribed by the American anthropologist George Murdock was a seemingly neutral unifying concept, a label for a school of anthropology fostered first at the LSE. Its colonial resonances were left unexplored.

This vision of a Commonwealth organisation immediately created conflicts over who counted as 'one of us', and was therefore eligible for membership. The initial qualifications for joining seemed simple. 'Membership of the association is limited to persons holding, or having held, a teaching or research appointment in Social Anthropology.' Yet such simplicity was deceptive. One early committee minute noted wearily that there had been 'the usual discussion of rules of election'. The tensions and recriminations surrounding the open discussion of candidates' strengths and weaknesses led to Audrey Richard's proposal in 1948 that 'election should be by secret ballot, with a two-thirds majority necessary'. In a 1953 committee meeting a 'research post' was interpreted as possession of a Ph.D., being an indicator that the person was 'on the way to becoming a professional anthropologist'.

The significance of these election procedures is revealed in the 1956 debate over whether to expand the committee to include younger members of the association. The proposal was rejected, because it 'might be embarrassing to have young anthropologists sitting in assessment of people almost their coevals'.

The demographic history that resulted is important. From the eleven founder members, recruitment occurred primarily along personal networks of colleagues and promising students. Over the first twenty years, the ASA's membership doubled every five years, but its modest size was no measure of social anthropology's prominent intellectual profile at the time. In 1963 all fifty-five academic anthropologists with posts in the UK were members of the ASA, and most sought to attend the twice-yearly meetings. By 1961 ASA membership totalled 140, going up to 220 by 1966. In contrast, seventy attended the British Sociological Association's (BSA) founding meeting in 1950, and a letter to *The Times* led to 250 further members by the following year (Platt 2003). In 1966, the BSA had 800 members.

Students equally caused the association repeated headaches. After Fortes gave a paper to the ASA meeting in 1949 on the teaching of anthropology, the next business meeting proposed that graduate students should be encouraged to arrange parallel meetings, as they were not invited to attend ASA meetings themselves. The committee agreed to look into 'ways and means' of supporting such an initiative, but it was a controversial idea, and was quietly dropped.[22]

What is the difference between a learned association and a professional association? The former, according to Barnes (1981), is concerned solely with the pursuit of truth, whilst the latter focuses instead on the promotion and defence of its members. The distinction is a neat one. Yet it rarely holds for long. There can be few learned societies that are so altruistic or devoted to the disciplinary vocation that they totally neglect their members' more mundane interests. Stocking's pithy appraisal of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Great Britain and the Commonwealth as 'part trade-union, part debating society' aptly captures this tension (1996, 429). The founding members would not have described themselves as 'professionals': their academic standing implicitly legitimated their authority. Yet they used this dual identity to create a disciplinary 'closed shop' and an association that was highly effective at promoting its members' interests and scholarly identities.

## Notes

1. RAI A58/2/2/1.
2. RAI A22/3/5.
3. RHO 58/2/15/26b from Malinowksi, 27.5.31.
4. Oldham MSS Afr. 1829, RHO, pages 1–2.
5. Firth Archives 2/1/1–5, BLPES.
6. Ibid.
7. RAI 43/1.
8. RAI 43/5/1.
9. RAI A43/7/5.
10. RAI A43/9/5.
11. RAI 6/28.
12. RAI A43/13/4, 95/7/10, 95/7/12.
13. RAI 43/13/13, 43/13/10.
14. RAI 13/25 p21.
15. Kuklick (1991, 10) suggests that this event marked 'the era of professional domination of British Anthropology', Kuper (1973, 119) describes its first committee as 'reflecting the power-structure in the profession ... this was the power map and it remained the same for twenty years', and Stocking (1996, 429) notes how the 'association became a very effective professional group, part trade-union, part debating society'.
16. ASA archives, LSE A1.7.
17. ASA Archives 1.1. Unless noted otherwise, subsequent references are to ASA committee minutes.
18. Mitchell MSS, 5/123 Rhodes House, letter from Gluckman 2.9.1950.
19. Interview with Sir Raymond Firth, December 1999, Highgate.
20. Gluckman to Mitchell, 2.9.1950, Mitchell archives 5/1 ff123, Rhodes House.
21. With hindsight, Leach was explicit about this, claiming that 'the original role of the ASA was to prevent the Universities from employing unqualified refugees from the disappearing Colonial service to teach "applied anthropology"' (Leach 1984, 18).
22. It was not till the 1990s that students were offered associate membership of the ASA.