

# ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND 'RACE': SOCIAL RESEARCH IN POST- COLONIAL BRITAIN

## **Introduction**

The United Kingdom of the 1940s and 1950s was shamed by a sudden and vociferous explosion of racial prejudice. The first wave of post-war Commonwealth migration provoked a widespread, if informal, 'colour bar' within many parts of society. Yet social anthropology had little intellectual interest in engaging with this post-colonial racial politics.

Kenneth Little, one of Raymond Firth's students, was an iconoclastic exception. He began his career as a physical anthropologist, and then carried out innovative ethnographic research on the black community in Cardiff. Recruited to launch a new department at the University of Edinburgh, the work he championed was at the forefront of research and public debate into 'race relations' in the 1950s. Despite the important parallels between this work and that being carried out by some of Radcliffe-Brown's students in the USA, the department established no real theoretical research 'school'. The work remained marginal to disciplinary concerns, and was largely ignored by government policymakers.

In order to understand some of the challenges Little faced, one needs to understand both the legacy of Victorian racial science and the threat posed by Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Describing his achievements in setting up the Edinburgh department, I document the

challenges presented by the politicised nature of 'race-relations' research, and explore the institutional, as well as intellectual, reasons for social anthropology's disengagement.

### **Race and its Victorian legacy**

For British anthropologists of the 1930s, 'race' was not a new topic, but one with an embarrassingly tarnished past and a highly charged present. The history of Victorian anthropology's entangled understandings of race and culture still hung over the discipline (Stocking 1968, 1987). Establishment figures like the biologist and RAI president Sir Arthur Keith and the soldier-collector Captain Pitt-Rivers used the RAI journals to expound what Pitt-Rivers called his 'ethnogenic' theory of the race-culture complex. The political appropriation of such 'scientific' debates, in the light of the history of the eugenics movement and Nazi pronouncements about the superiority of the Aryan race, made scientific clarification of the issues increasingly important.

In 1934, the first International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES) was held in London. For the organiser Professor John Linton Myres, a prominent Oxford classicist, archaeologist and influential supporter of social anthropology, the aim was 'free and friendly discussion, between men of good will from all nations, of the numerous questions as to Race and Culture which are continually arising and giving occasion for serious trouble, if they are not handled as scientific problems' (Myres 1934, 81). In the same year, the RAI itself convened a committee with the Institute of Sociology that aimed to 'consider the significance of the racial factor in cultural development' (RAI 1935, 2). It explicitly saw itself as a scholarly response to political claims 'for the intellectual pre-eminence of Germans'. The views of the committee, which consisted primarily of biological anthropologists like Sir Arthur Keith, juxtaposed with social anthropologists like Raymond Firth, diverged. A loose consensus emerged on what people actually meant by the word 'race', and a woolly definition was agreed, but substantial disagreement emerged over 'how far particular races and populations are actually linked with particular cultures or culture elements' (*ibid.*, 4). Only Firth grasped the nub of the problem, that the 'wide gap between the definition of race acceptable to a biologist or anthropologist and the current idea of "race" in political discussion should be made clear' (*ibid.*, 19). For Firth, 'the interest of the concept of race as a 'sociological phenomenon' was the force given to its institutional expression, and the fact that these 'institutions embody discriminatory treatment of individuals sharing the same geographical environment'.

The issue remained live. Later that year, Cambridge anthropologist A.C. Haddon joined two prominent public intellectuals – the biologist Julian Huxley and demographer Alex Carr-Saunders – to publish *We Europeans: A Survey of 'Racial' Problems* (Huxley and Haddon 1935). It was a direct response to growing Nazi propaganda and the threat of 'racial science'. Abhorring the misuse of the R-word, the writers suggested its replacement with 'ethnic type'. The work concluded that 'racialism is a myth, and a dangerous myth at that'. Such proposals were later supported by the campaigning physical anthropologist Ashley Montagu (Montagu 1942, Lieberman 1994).

Given the ambivalence about the very utility of a term like 'race', and the destructive ways in which it had been used, it was no wonder that there was what Stepan later called an 'anti-race' reversal within anthropology and the sciences (Stepan 1982). Social anthropologists no longer saw any analytical use for a term like 'race'. Racism became a similarly taboo subject.

Their fears were well founded. In 1936, the RAI became concerned about the activities of the Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society, and in particular the activities of its editor Robert Gayre of Gayre, self-styled laird and Scottish nationalist. The Edinburgh-based society had just announced the creation of an 'Institute of Anthropology' for teaching and research in collaboration with the Free Church College of Edinburgh. It also invited the RAI Council to send a representative to a proposed international congress at Edinburgh to further a 'scheme of co-operation in Northern European folk-lore and ethnology'. Gayre was to be the congress's British representative. After the *Edinburgh Evening News* exposed its links with Germany, the RAI council feared that the whole Congress was funded by the Nazi government. Charles Seligman, about to retire from the LSE, travelled to Sweden to meet Professor Herman Geijer, one of the organisers of the proposed conference. Geijer admitted that the German government was funding the new congress, but was sure that 'many Germans were quite independent of political influence and could be trusted to work scientifically'. Another representative denied that the society, with its roots in Swedish folk-lore research, had any interests in 'racial exclusiveness'. Unconvinced, the RAI withdrew its representative, and the Congress was never held. Robert Gayre continued to expound his racist views for many years in a journal called *Mankind Quarterly*.<sup>1</sup>

## **Edinburgh and the new politics of race, 1940s–1950s**

Having led the retreat from the racialising logic of Victorian science, anthropologists in the 1930s repeatedly insisted that ‘race’ was simply a biological, and not a social category. Thus reclassified, it could not be a topic of social anthropological research. The discipline’s purpose, they might have added, given its history, was to engage with the broader comparative questions thrown up by in-depth ethnographic study of ‘simple’ societies, and not to respond to the latest political and social ‘problems’ facing a complex metropolitan society. It was a fragile defence – the rationale contradicted exactly the promises that Malinowski had made as he gained funds for the practical application of anthropology from the Rockefeller Foundation.

A young anthropologist called Kenneth Little was determined to challenge this consensus. Little studied at the LSE under Raymond Firth, completing his PhD in 1944. For its time, his was a progressive and highly unusual doctorate. It had begun as a project of physical anthropology, as he had taken over some of the teaching work of the physical anthropologist J.S. Trevor at Cambridge on the outbreak of the war. In 1940, on the back of his results in the Cambridge Tripos, this had involved him travelling to the black community of Tiger Bay in Cardiff to study the physical characteristics of what he called the ‘Anglo-Negroid’ cross, publishing his first article in *Eugenics Review* (Little 1942). As Little developed close relationships with Cardiff residents – Banton refers admiringly to his ‘personal chemistry’ – he became aware of the impact of the ‘colour bar’ on people’s lives (Little 1943). He later admitted that his immediate experience in Cardiff ‘was a slice of the reality about which my African friends in Cambridge had told me, and so I decided to pursue my research in a sociological form’ (Little 1972, vii). Politically principled, and feeling that there was very little academic interest in race relations, which was seen simply as ‘the colour problem at the port’, he embarked upon what became a wide-ranging piece of scholarship into the issue.

Within the UK, racial prejudice was seen as a pressing concern during the war. Kenneth Little was virtually the only anthropologist willing to address these issues. He wrote an unsigned briefing paper entitled ‘Memorandum on the “Treatment” of Colour Prejudice in Britain’ for the Colonial Office. Strongly worded, and based on his research in Cardiff, he insisted that the ‘implications of inferiority, mentality, unintelligence etc which are attributed to coloured people and more particularly the Negro ... are passed on to a greater or lesser extent by every cultural medium of our society’. In it he talks of the problem of ‘social psychology’, and the need to alter ‘the nature of the

stereotype of the Coloured Man', as 'popular reactions towards a coloured person are reactions towards the "stereotype"'. Aware of the media's powerful role in shaping social prejudices, he felt the solution lay in 'correcting popular ideas', and in exercising 'a far stricter censorship over absurd and undignified representations of the Coloured man and of scenes of so-called "Native life".' Some of his advice now seems rather quaint. As well as suggesting that newspapers no longer used the term 'native', he went on to further recommend that 'Missionary societies tone down the implications of inferiority of any form whatsoever attributed to "native" peoples in their appeals to the public for financial assistance (Booklets should not be entitled "My friends the cannibals"!).' <sup>2</sup> Little also makes recommendations as to legal means to tackle racial discrimination, urging that it be treated as interference with the national war effort. It was his strongest statement on the topic of racial discrimination, and demonstrated his perceptive understanding of the risks of well-meaning condescension, and the media's role in legitimating these attitudes.

Next he wrote an educational pamphlet entitled *Behind the Colour Bar* (Little 1950) for school students. In it he describes a number of different national histories (e.g. South Africa, the USA, Brazil) in order to demonstrate the variety of racial relationships. He begins by insisting that the expression 'colour problem' is 'invidious' as it could equally well be described as a 'white' problem (ibid., 3). He goes on to challenge the fallacy of biological explanations and concludes that 'fundamental to the present problem is the enormous difference in relative prosperity between Western peoples and the rest of the world' (ibid., 17). No other anthropologist at this time was so involved in public debate and education on race and racism. He did much of this from his position as an LSE lecturer, and was appointed to a Readership in race relations in 1950, just before moving to Edinburgh.

Kenneth Little's thesis was unusual, as it deftly combined history, demography, literary analysis and sociology and a wide range of archival and documentary sources to understand the experience of the Cardiff coloured community and the larger history of the black presence and racial attitudes in Britain. Having Raymond Firth as his supervisor gave Little's work credibility, and the thesis was published as *Negroes in Britain* in 1948. The book was groundbreaking for its recognition that popular racial 'attitudes' had long outlasted an academic dismissal of Victorian racial science. Little uses the term in two very different senses, both to refer to the 'biological categories' of race and in discussing the history of social stereotyping. *Negroes in Britain* (Little 1948) opens with Little's frank admission that his interest in the topic stemmed from his 'sympathy for the victims of this prejudice'. In the preface to his book, he also saw his aim being both 'to

draw the attention of anthropologists in this country to the possibilities of applying their discipline more positively to the study of urban society', and to argue for 'scientific attention to be given to the study of racial relations in its own right' (ibid., xi).

Little felt that it was vital that a study of the 'social structure and sociology' of the Cardiff community be understood 'as part of the surrounding matrix of the larger British society'. Yet the exact shape of this relationship is not elucidated, and the book makes little real analysis of the social structure of this 'larger matrix', even within Cardiff itself. Despite his ambitions, Little ends up studying a bounded social setting. The book's academic reception was also hampered by its lack of engagement with British anthropological scholarship, despite his interest in social structure. His theoretical conceptualisation of discrimination was problematic, suggesting that such attitudes 'do not become markedly antipathetic or antagonistic unless some form of actual social or physical contact with a coloured person seems likely to take place' (ibid., 245). This ambivalent depiction was later adopted by Banton, but was heavily critiqued by American sociologists for its analytical looseness.

Racial tensions continued to mount after the war. The arrival of SS *Empire Windrush* in June 1948 took the debate about black–white relations in England into a new realm. A telling survey into public knowledge about the colonies (Evens 1948) conducted at the same time found that only half of those interviewed could actually name a colony. A confidential government report published three years later brusquely concluded that 'antipathy to coloured people in this country is probably considerable amongst at least one third of the population', and that this 'antipathy is unrelated to actual personal contact with coloured people'.<sup>3</sup> The results were never made public, to avoid attracting adverse criticism in the colonial press. The report ended by recommending an immediate programme of action to reduce such 'racial' antipathy. No action was ever taken.

In 1950 Kenneth Little was appointed as Reader in Edinburgh, a post to which he had been 'warmly invited' to apply by Ralph Piddington, its previous incumbent (Little 1987).<sup>4</sup> It was a timely moment to promote his brand of social anthropology and a programme of research into race relations. A £40,000 UGC grant to Edinburgh University funded several anthropology research posts within a newly established interdisciplinary Social Sciences Research Unit.<sup>5</sup>

Piddington's support for Little was no surprise. Social anthropology at Edinburgh began four years earlier (if one excludes the opportunism of Robert Gayre) with the former's appointment to a Readership within the Department of Mental Philosophy. An exotic figure in the

staid world of post-war Edinburgh, he was awarded an LSE Ph.D. in 1932 for work on the Australian Aboriginal community, under Radcliffe-Brown. Yet Piddington too had a history of engaged scholarship and speaking out about racial indiscriminatio, incurring the wrath of the Australian funding council by doing an interview with a Sydney newspaper discussing examples of gross racial discrimination, and claiming that this 'absolute indifference to the sufferings of the native' was typical of state affairs in Western Australia (quoted in Gray 1994, 219). As a result of this challenge to the cosy relationship between academics and administrators, Piddington was censured and never again worked in an Australian university.

Little's first years in charge went very well. Little was successful in obtaining grants from the Noel Buxton Trust and the Nuffield Foundation to do research on race relations, having argued that an anthropological technique was particularly 'well adapted to the study of the enclaves of coloured people in this country' (Nuffield Foundation 1953, 42). The grants enabled him to employ a team of young researchers to tackle the topic of race relations, particularly amongst students. These included Philip Garigue and Alex Carey to explore attitudes towards colonial students in London and elsewhere (the latter was a Ph.D. student in the department), Eyo Bassey N'dem to study voluntary associations amongst students in Manchester (N'dem 1953, 1957), Sheila Webster to look at the experience of black students at Oxford and Cambridge (Webster n.d.), and Violaine Junod to look at 'coloured' elites in London. Subsequently, a grant was awarded to Sheila Patterson to carry out research into the West Indian community in Brixton. He also obtained other grants, including one from the Buxton Trust, with which he employed Michael Banton as a research student to do a study of the 'Coloured Quarter' of Stepney. By this point Sydney Collins, an assistant since 1948 in Edinburgh, had also begun research on two different communities on Tyneside, one 'Moslem' and one 'Negro', and their differing relationships with the 'host' society, supported by a grant from the Carnegie Trust.

So who was Kenneth Little, and what kind of research environment did he create in Edinburgh? Whilst politically committed, he had little of the energetic, overbearing charisma of Gluckman or Malinowski. Edinburgh also faced disparaging comparisons with LSE and Oxford from newly arrived staff. Not everyone was negative. Mary Noble's memory of Little, for example, was of someone 'who managed to get across the subject and enthuse about it ... he didn't need to have a school around him – but people were spellbound by him, and he was great at communicating the importance of the discipline'. Little suffered mood swings, both from undiagnosed cerebral malaria and

from recurrent depression. Whilst the university gave significant autonomy to its professoriate, Little's abrasive personality discouraged some from working with him. Despite this, he established a significant research programme into urban change in West Africa (involving Michael Banton, Jimmy Littlejohn and other anthropologists) during the 1950s, a field that was more professionally recognised than that of race relations (Little 1960, 1969).

Little's most developed theoretical position was his notion of the 'colour-class consciousness' (Little 1948). As he notes, "'colour" has the same socially inferior connotation as English spoken ungrammatically, or without the "correct accent" or of wearing a muffler instead of a collar and tie' (ibid., 203). His subsequent work did not really develop these ideas. Perhaps the most prominent commission Little received, a recognition of his position in the field at that time, was to write a UNESCO-sponsored textbook, called *Race and Society* (Little 1952). He did negligible further anthropological writing on 'race' in Britain after the 1950s, partly because of his developing research interests in West Africa and his ethnographic research on the Mende (e.g. Little 1965), though he did remain 'passionately committed' to the topic, and was involved in government race relations committees until the 1970s. As Noble wrote in her obituary, 'This was the start of Kenneth Little's love affair with Africa. There he saw the pace of change and felt that this was a matter that could not be ignored by social anthropologists' (Noble 1991, 12).

Of the research into 'race relations' that Little initiated, a common theme was the attention to the cross-cutting hierarchies of colour and class. Several studies stand out as being both theoretically innovative and politically sensitive. One, entitled 'Negroes in bluebrick' – a study of racial attitudes amongst Oxford students – was carried out by Sheila Kitzinger (née Webster), now a well-known campaigner for 'natural' childbirth. Conducted as part of a postgraduate degree, it involved more than 200 interviews and case studies. If studying modern society was seen as questionable within anthropology, then studying colour prejudice at Oxford University was even more marginal, and the work was never published (Webster n.d.).

Her closest colleague whilst at Edinburgh was Sydney Collins. She found it hard to talk about the issue of racial prejudice with her other Edinburgh colleagues, who, despite their research interests, would 'pretend that if prejudice existed, it was something very distant from the lives they lived'. Collins's work is important for its careful comparative analysis of race relations between different areas and communities, for its demonstration of the heterogeneity of the coloured communities, and for insisting that 'studying the immigrant community by itself is an inadequate approach to the problem'



(Collins 1957, 15). Neither Kitzinger (1960) nor Collins adopted a simplistic model of 'assimilation' or 'integration' that was prevalent at the time. Whilst the texts are of their time, they do not engage in the 'cultural pathologising' that Alexander (1996) suggests is characteristic of such studies. Both make extensive use of empirical ethnographic research, with Kitzinger quoting lengthy conversations to explore the racial prejudices of the students she interviews.

The one member of the Nuffield research team who went on to an influential academic career was Michael Banton, recruited as a Ph.D. student by Little from LSE. He did his Ph.D. research in Stepney, in an area he described as having 'no coloured ghetto but a depressed working-class neighbourhood sheltering residents of many races and nationalities' (Banton 1954, 13), and published it with the title *The Coloured Quarter* (ibid.). Like Little, Banton provides an empirical analysis of the area in a larger political and historical context, at the expense of a detailed ethnography or contribution to extant anthropological theoretical debates. It explores recent migration and settlement patterns, and issues such as employment and intermarriage, and makes a number of policy conclusions, challenging any dispersal policy, insisting that assimilation was a two-way process. Max Gluckman reviewed *The Coloured Quarter* approvingly, and commented that 'I wish, after he had finished this study, Dr Banton had moved to investigate the receiving British community ... it is to this point surely, that students of Negro immigrants must now shift their attention ... the main problem, both for anthropology and for social workers, lies on the other side of the colour line' (Gluckman 1956, 164).

A final recruit to the Edinburgh-based Nuffield research project in the 1950s was Sheila Patterson, who did research in Brixton, and went on to edit the journal *New Community* and play an active role in the IRR (Institute of Race Relations) and the field of 'race relations' policy, but her work (e.g. Patterson 1964, 1969) was heavily criticised by anthropologists, and provided other critics with a reason for dismissing anthropology *in toto*. Alexander (1996) rightly suggests that Patterson's (1964) portrayal of a Brixton community 'racked by 'cultural doubt, dislocation and inauthenticity' set a precedent in its ascription of 'cultural and social pathologies' to black communities that became characteristic of many subsequent studies, especially those sponsored by the IRR.

Little made no real attempt to synthesise and develop the evidence and ideas around 'race relations' that his team of researchers – many of whom were still postgraduates – had developed. Banton (1983, 558) notes that 'we all met together only once, for two days in 1952', such that it 'was difficult for us to develop any common scheme of

interpretation'. By comparison Gluckman maintained the RLI camaraderie for years by keeping up a voluminous correspondence with research colleagues such as John Barnes and Clyde Mitchell. In retrospect Little tried to suggest that the department had followed a 'parallel course' to that of Max Gluckman (Little 1987, 4), but its impact on the discipline is far less obvious. Edinburgh became notorious for not advancing its students, and according to Noble 'we weren't expected to write papers etc. I never had any notion of working as part of a team – the Ph.D. was just something one did.' Another factor may have been disparaging comments about what was 'unkindly called the "Negroes-in-Britain industry"' (Banton 1973). The research 'team' lost its momentum. Banton recalls that whilst Little 'wrote and published 'about matters that were considered politically important', he never had the 'sense of his trying to create a school in the way that Gluckman created a school. There's no comparison. He wasn't even trying to do that.'<sup>6</sup>

Later in life, Little expressed the view that Edinburgh's strength had been to offer 'something additional' to avoid being 'subordinated' to the 'well-established centres in England' with their 'anthropological elite' (Little 1987). The title of his inaugural lecture, 'Social Anthropology in Modern Life', neatly summed up his ambition to turn anthropology 'to the study of contemporary developments' (Little 1965).

### **Engaging with 'race-relations' policies in the 1950s**

Ever reluctant to apply their ideas to policymaking, few anthropologists made links between the social problems affecting the colonies and those in the metropole. Into this vacuum came the 1950 proposal from member of the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC) Harry Hodson, a prominent Conservative intellectual and editor of the *Sunday Times*, for a Commonwealth Institute of Race Relations. Arguing that the Commonwealth was indeed 'at risk', and that current academic work on race relations was being done in a 'piecemeal' fashion, he proposed an independent academic body 'devoted to study and research, and precluded from propounding or propagating policies'.<sup>7</sup> In public, he phrased it rather more colourfully, linking it to the threat of communism to suggest that 'this was one of the most dangerous problems of the contemporary world', which without a solution would see 'our civilisation in sharp and increasing peril' (Hodson, 1950). He was convinced that 'the subject could be isolated from others for scientific study'.

The Council's cool response reveals the academic distaste for such public pronouncements about 'race relations', with its implicit understanding that 'races' could be distinguished and studied. Carr-Saunders, LSE Director and chair of the Council, initially suggested an alternative university-based institute. But, when the antipathy of the others became clear, Carr-Saunders hardened his position. For him 'the term "race relations" was a very indefinite concept' such that 'anthropologists and other scientists working in this field, would, in his belief, have to do a good deal more work on the origins of the different races before any really scientific study could be undertaken on the question of their relations'.<sup>8</sup> Turning down the £6,000 annual funding request made by Hodson for such an institute, Carr-Saunders commented that the proposal was 'too vague at the moment and involved too many different disciplines to be possible of fulfilment', and instead proposed supporting a single study if 'some specific aspects of races relations could be put forward'. He was not the only one with reservations. Banton recalls how Little was not 'very supportive, he saw this as his territory, and he was a bit suspicious of these other people muscling in' and 'doubted if they would do what he would regard as quality work'.<sup>9</sup> Raymond Firth shared this disdain, and, according to Mason (1984, 18), was sceptical about entrusting this work to anyone who wasn't a trained anthropologist. But Hodson was an All Souls Prize Fellow and had allies in powerful places. He managed to set up the Institute under the Royal Institution of International Affairs in London (Chatham House). Its elite establishment connections enabled him to garner together financial donations from more than a dozen Southern African mining companies, including Anglo-American, De Beers and Oppenheimer, to support its work. This was a time of increasing anti-colonial protest and activism, particularly on the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia, and it was here that 'relations between the races' (Mullard 1985, 14) were seen to be most at risk. The implicit assumption was that race relations in Britain were not a concern.

This corporate involvement confirmed the suspicions of many scholars about 'race relations' as an academic topic for research. The appointment of Philip Mason, an ex-colonial civil servant, as director of the new Institute for Race Relations (IRR) also ruffled many feathers, especially after the publication of his populist 'Essay on Racial Tension' (1954). Seen as 'not at all academic', it was criticised for its 'superficiality' and 'inadequate knowledge', which 'risked bringing Chatham House into disrepute'.<sup>10</sup> Writing to Firth in 1958 about the IRR, Little again expressed his doubts 'about whether a non-university body can claim adequately to cover the field for purposes of research'.<sup>11</sup> Mason recalls defending his vivid writing style to Firth, who responded

'if you want to write like that, you shouldn't be writing about race relations, but about something else, perhaps about love' (Mason, 1984, 40). The dispute over its pragmatic and policy-focused approach led Firth and Lord Hailey to leave the Institute's Board of Studies soon after. The IRR did little for the reputation of the academic 'field' of race relations, but the Institute went on to publish a great deal of (often corporate-sponsored) work on international race relations (Mason 1970; Hanley 1971; Hodson 1976).

Given the weakness of this field, anthropologists in the 1950s were well positioned to speak publicly about issues of race. Yet few did so. For a while, Max Gluckman became anthropology's public intellectual with his newspaper articles and talks on BBC Radio's Third Programme. He already had a public profile, having clashed with Sir Philip Mitchell, ex-governor of Kenya, on the pages of the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper. Challenging primordialist explanations of Mau Mau (Mitchell 1954), he insisted that the 'conditions with which we have colonised Africa, and not pagan Africa, have given birth to Mau Mau' (Gluckman 1954). Yet this hardly made him an outspoken critic of colonial rule, and indeed he was increasingly of the opinion that academic work and political opinion should be kept firmly separate. Several years later, Gluckman did a radio talk and an article for *Race* entitled 'How Foreign are You?' (Gluckman 1959). Asked by the BBC to discuss 'the values which people defend by treating others as aliens', he situated his own sense of 'foreignness' as a South African Jew, before talking about the ways in which everyone becomes a foreigner at times, noting how 'membership of one group makes us foreigners in another', and that whilst watching Manchester United, 'I am at one with the host of other United supporters of different ethnic origin, of different religious persuasion, and of different occupation' (ibid., 19). He was famous for his authoritarian insistence that the whole Manchester anthropology department turn out en masse to support the home team. His conclusion, that 'the enmity of some British to coloured immigrants is peripheral to the main divisions in this country', avoids addressing the way that skin colour was being naturalised as a marker of 'foreignness'. His views that 'foreigners occur whenever there is group life', that 'hostility is an essential part of group existence', and that 'dislike of the foreigner may be realistic in that he is a danger' all risked making ethnocentrism acceptable (ibid., 21).

The anthropologist Maurice Freedman (1960) challenged this view of coloured people 'merely as one kind of stranger'. For him it seemed 'to leave out of account a "racial factor" which often enters into the social perception of coloured people'. By a 'racial factor' he was referring to 'an element which ascribes the social and cultural differences of coloured people to their biological endowment'. In this

way Maurice Freedman, like Little, articulated the importance of studying the social perception of race at a time when this was being dismissed by others as too vague a topic for research. Again, he was an isolated voice.

Indicative of anthropology's public and private ambivalence about tackling a politicised topic like 'race relations' was the ASA's response to the Sharpesville massacre in South Africa in 1960. At the ASA's Annual Business Meeting the leftist anthropologist Clifford Slaughter proposed that the Association should make a public protest about the events. Whilst there was much support for this view, it was concluded that in 'view of the stated scientific objectives of the Association no public protest be made in the name of the association'. Instead the meeting resolved to put together a statement challenging the scientific validity of the racial arguments on which the policy of apartheid was justified. Once drafted, this was sent as a letter to *The Times*. The paper turned it down for publication on the grounds of space. Slaughter subsequently left the ASA and academia.

In the summer of 1958 there were a series of attacks on black communities in Notting Hill and in Nottingham, which were labelled as 'race riots.' They served to increase social consciousness of 'race' as a source of conflict, and led to a significant media interest in the topic. A small number of anthropologists began to follow Little's lead and comment on race-relations issues, including Freedman and, increasingly, Banton.

If the ASA was ambivalent about the study of race as an academic topic, then the RAI was less circumspect, and in 1959 it approached the new Institute of Race Relations with a proposal to hold a joint conference on the development of thinking about race since Darwin. An important set of papers were produced (IRR 1960, Mason 1960), a number of which pointed to the Notting Hill riots to emphasise the importance of analysing racial attitudes. The sociologist Donald McRae's comment that 'the majority of sociologists in this country have thought of this as being a subject both irrelevant and distasteful' probably also captures the view of social anthropologists. In McRae's view, 'it was distasteful because it had associations with the racial theories of the Nazis ... and irrelevant because the debate about the influence of biological differentiae on society had long gone stale, and both sociology and social anthropology had made great strides on the assumption that such differentiae are sociologically altogether unimportant.' Yet he, unlike many, recognised the paradox that 'Race, by explaining too much, too easily, by being susceptible to neither proof nor disproof, explained nothing,' whilst at the same time 'the ideology of race remained as a social fact' (McRae 1960, 76).

A follow-up conference the following year met to consider a list of significant research projects in race relations. Attended by, amongst others, Michael Banton and Audrey Richards, a list of around twenty possible research projects were discussed, of which the first was 'more systematic data on British behaviour towards other distinctive minorities' (IRR 1960). The meeting was the precedent for a number of subsequent joint IRR–RAI conferences on the topic of domestic race relations during the late 1960s. The titles of these conferences – 'The Absorption of Minorities' and 'Incipient Ghettos and the Concentration of Minorities', 'Integration' – reveal the integrationist policy perspective of the Institute. Debates at such conferences were increasingly polarised. In 1969 there was a 'palace coup', in which Institute employees, led by the librarian A. Sivanandan, successfully challenged the Council's insistence on the IRR's original mandate to not 'express an opinion on any aspect of relations between different races' (Mullard 1985, 26). This more radical group of academics fundamentally reshaped the IRR's purpose and mandate towards a very different understanding of racism and the black community in Britain (Mullard 1973). The final conference was entitled simply 'Conflict and Race'. This time the discussion was about structural change, institutional racism, and the 'need for the white specialists to learn from blacks about the needs, problems and goals of the black communities' (Kushnik 1971). The politicisation of the field was acute.

### **The Edinburgh legacy: Michael Banton and the field of ethnic and racial studies**

Kenneth Little left the task of bringing the empirical work of the Edinburgh scholars together and giving it some theoretical substance to Michael Banton. This proved to be the stimulus for Banton's *White and Coloured*, subtitled *The Behaviour of British People towards Coloured Immigrants* (Banton 1959). In this book he draws extensively on the work of Webster (Webster n.d.), Collins and N'dem (e.g. N'dem 1953, 1957), writing chapter-length synopses of their work. In doing so he uses their ethnographic studies to elaborate his influential distinction between discrimination and prejudice, in order to focus solely on discrimination, attempting to compare it with anthropological notions of custom.

But this work also drew on the rather abstract psychological concept of the 'stranger'. During his career he was the recipient of much scholarly criticism, whether for his refusal to use terms like 'racism', for his generalisations about 'White' perceptions (Kirkwood

1985) for his 'underlying bitterness towards the radical camp' (Corlett 1984), or for his attempts to apply rational choice theory to group relations (Pierce 1980; Bagley 1985; Porter 1989). His continuing, and sometimes lonely insistence that the languages of politics and of theory had to be separate weakened his position in theoretical debates.

Despite this, Michael Banton was the most prominent and influential intellectual descendant of the Edinburgh 'school', the first director of a Social Science Research Unit on Race Relations, and in many ways doyen of the field of 'race relations'. He has little time for disciplinary classification, and has never seen himself as an ethnographer, which explains his lack of influence within anthropology.

One puzzle in this story is why Little and his students did not draw on the work of either the Rhodes Livingstone Institute or those writing about 'acculturation' in the colonial context. In many ways, Max Gluckman's work in the field defined anthropology's post-war theoretical agenda. His 'Analysis of a Social Situation' (Gluckman 1958 [1940]) offered an important precedent for anthropological research into 'race relations.' His careful exegesis of the ceremonial opening of a new road bridge in a Zululand reserve offered a useful and innovative theoretical framework for anthropologists wishing to study race relations at this time. Of course it had its problems, such as its conception of conflict as somehow standing for cleavage within a shared moral order. It was also his interpretation of the social forces at play, rather than that of the social actors themselves. His student Clyde Mitchell went on to write about the reinvention of 'tribal' identities in a class-conscious urban environment (1956b, 1960, 1966). Gluckman and Mitchell's work stands out for its engagement with racial politics at a time when many shied away from it. However their methodological and theoretical approach was not taken up in the work carried out under Little's leadership. Banton recalls discovering Gluckman's famous case-study article after reading *The Kalela Dance* (Mitchell 1956b), but he doubted that Kenneth Little or others at Edinburgh knew of it or appreciated its relevance.<sup>12</sup> Up till that point, he recalls that he had read nothing of the work produced by the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. The neglect was mutual. Gluckman did not encourage his British students to explore issues of 'race' in their own work, and was even wary of students doing their PhDs on 'complex societies'. Not everyone obeyed. Scholars such as Abner Cohen carried out research on youth groups in Israel, and later wrote about Notting Hill carnival.

Anthropological ambivalence about theorising 'race relations' continued into the 1960s. Banton continued to reject any analytical use of the word 'racism', saying that it was a 'sponge' word that could take on all sorts of meanings, used by some as an 'explanandum'

rather than an 'explanans'. He was right to insist on a degree of scholarly level-headedness, but his resistance to talking about race left him ploughing a rather lonely intellectual furrow, as he worked first on his theories of social distance, and later on theories of group competition. Neither gained a significant following within anthropology. This lacuna played into the sceptics' hands. At a BSA race-relations group in 1970, the anthropologist M.G. Smith once again raised the question as to whether a 'clearly articulated analytical framework for the discussion of race relations' actually existed (quoted in Rose 1970). Smith instead drew on an alternative history of theorising coming out of Furnivall's notion of the 'plural society', describing 'a society comprising two or more social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit' (Furnivall, quoted in Morris 1957). For those still uncomfortable with a term like 'race relations', the notion of 'pluralism' offered an alternative theoretical paradigm that avoided addressing perceptions of race. Anthropologists like M.G. Smith developed this work (e.g. Smith and Kuper 1968; Smith 1998), sharing the feeling of Morris and others that the 'use of the criterion of race confuses the analysis' (Morris 1957, 124). The sociologist John Rex later developed an influential critique of these plural society theorists, pointing to examples where 'the dynamics of the society turn upon the involvement of men of differing ethnic backgrounds in the same social institutions, viz. the slave plantation' (Rex 1973, 261).

The work of the two different Birmingham 'schools' increasingly overshadowed Banton's contributions. The sociological study of race led by John Rex, and the work in cultural studies inspired by Stuart Hall's leadership, both of which directly addressed issues of conflict, interracial tension and white domination, replaced the more 'neutral' scholarly focus espoused by Banton.

### **'Race' from the present**

Despite dominating public debates, 'race relations' continued to be analytically taboo for many disciplinary academics in the 1960s. A number of anthropologists, including Banton, Firth and Little, were authors of the SSRC 'race-relations working party' report in the late 1960s, which adopted an urgent tone about tackling this taboo, and which gave rise to a new SSRC Research Unit on Race Relations in 1969. Echoing Little, the report acknowledged that 'serious racial tension' lay ahead, for, if 'first generation immigrants have been bitter about discrimination, second generation immigrants may be more bitter'. Banton, first director of the Unit, saw its task as 'stimulating



research in the various social science disciplines' (Banton n.d.). Yet the politicisation of the field meant that scholars such as Sandra Wallman, Roger Ballard and more recently Prina Werbner, worked more with sociologists than with anthropologists.

There have been a number of reappraisals of this history. Benson (1996, 48) suggests that one of the reasons for the discomfort with the idea of 'race' amongst post-war anthropologists was the unease at the 'absence from the communities of certain key features – an ordered kinship system, religious institutions, collective structures of social control'. This led, she suggests, to Afro-Caribbean ethnic minorities being portrayed as problematic objects of investigation, in comparison with Asian ethnic minorities being 'proper objects for anthropological study'. She suggests that only 'in the late 1970s can we detect the emergence of a specifically anthropological voice', naming the publication of Watson's *Between Two Cultures* (1977) as an example of this new anthropological genre. Werbner (1987, 176) does recognise these early anthropological contributions to the debate, but summarises them as the 'study of immigration'. Both oversimplify and underestimate the contribution made by the Edinburgh scholars.

Of course, there were problems and limitations to this work, methodological, conceptual and theoretical. One of these was the failure to seriously grapple with the larger system of economic relationships of which these dynamics were a part. In 1948, Little commented that the 'colonial problem of yesterday is taking on a fresh shape as the racial and national problem of today', yet his work never really sought to analyse the social, economic and political links between Britain and the ex-colonies. In a proposal to Nuffield Foundation in 1952, Little did suggest that the 'West African research could obtain data on the complex social and economic factors which give rise to emigration and direct it to Britain'.<sup>13</sup> Exactly this type of 'multi-sited' ethnography has become fashionable half a century later, but it was not a proposal that he followed through. But there are also important positives about all this work: its focus on urbanisation was novel, as was its attention to inter-group relations, and its ability to draw careful distinctions between race as a biological and as a social category.

Have things changed? Despite much debate within the American discipline on the topic (e.g. Moses 1999), difficult questions remain about the best way to study 'race' and racism. Cowlshaw (2000, 101) argues that the 'rejection of the analysis of race as an operative principle in the social world' is a 'deeply embedded characteristic of liberal scholarship that restricts attention to the ubiquitous power of race'. For her, 'while speaking of race may appear to reproduce racial

categories, not speaking about race allows racial differentiation to flourish unchallenged' (ibid.). The conundrum remains.

## Conclusion

Why did the work at Edinburgh leave relatively little mark on the discipline? Disciplinary identity politics has to be part of the explanation. With the growth of sociology, disciplinary boundaries grew progressively clearer. The question of whether this work was sufficiently 'anthropological' constantly resurfaced. In 1962 disciplinary divisions were not seen as important, but only a few years later there was a very much clearer division of intellectual labour, leading to the creation of a sociology department at Edinburgh.

Theoretical 'schools' need leaders. Whilst Kenneth Little had an eclectic set of interests, he did not champion a particular approach or seek to reproduce his agendas in his students' work. He was better at getting grants than influencing others through his writing. Indeed, the work of many of Little's colleagues was limited by their methodological catholicism and lack of theoretical development. This was not helped by their lack of engagement with classic debates in social anthropology, such as the literature around acculturation, or the work being published under the auspices of the RLI. The analytical relationship between culture and class that Webster (n.d.) and Collins (1960) began to explore was overtaken by a diverse and sophisticated corpus of sociological work on the articulation of different forms of social and economic relations (e.g. Rex 1981; Miles 1993; Hall 1996 [1980]). Little's burgeoning interest in African social change also took him away from the field of racial and ethnic studies. The lack of ethnography in Little and Banton's work also won them no favours in a discipline that prioritised the importance of detailed empiricism.

There are also institutional issues to consider. The majority of the team were research students, and either never published book-length works or moved on to other research interests. Edinburgh anthropology was also marginal to the discipline as a whole, and a long way from the densely populated seminar rooms of LSE and Oxford. It was also not the most obvious place to expect the field of race relations to flourish, given the city's overwhelmingly white populace. There was also no distinct university department of anthropology until the early 1960s, hindering its sense of unity and coherence. Social anthropology was initially in the Faculty of Arts, part of the Department of Mental Philosophy. Little felt heavily constrained by the institution and its conservative structure.<sup>14</sup>

It was not just Edinburgh's loss. In 1960, one prominent commentator, the Oxford Professor of Race Relations argued that the 'important' work of Little and his associates on 'contemporary problems of race and colour' had been largely ignored by administrators. 'It is my conviction', he wrote, 'that if greater heed had been paid by policy-makers and responsible administrators to the research papers, and the implicit and explicit warnings of men [*sic*] like these, we might have been spared some of the troubles of Nottingham and Notting Hill' (Kirkwood 1960, 96).

Kenneth Little remained passionately committed to improving race relations, and continued to serve on Home Office race-relations committees in the 1970s. Yet opportunity's window is unforgiving. The policymakers and administrators were never asked to 'take heed' by anthropologists. A tightening of disciplinary boundaries, and the growth of ethnic and racial studies within sociology led others to take up the theoretical, political and empirical challenges of studying 'race' in Britain.

## Notes

1. RAI Archives 109/5.
2. Unpublished memorandum on the 'Treatment of Colour Prejudice in Britain' dated 1942, Kenneth Little archives, University of Edinburgh, Box 1.12.b.
3. 'The public's knowledge of the Colonies and its attitudes to Coloured People'. Confidential draft report by B.M. Osborne. Kenneth Little archives, University of Edinburgh.
4. Gregory Bateson was also a candidate, after Little had suggested he be approached. At interview, Bateson's marriage to Margaret Mead was explained to the University Principal. He is alleged to have responded, 'Well, if he stole another man's wife, we can't appoint him.' In his inaugural lecture, Little pays great tribute to Piddington's enthusiasm and planning both for anthropology and the social sciences at Edinburgh (Little 1965). Much later Little attributes Piddington's success to his 'skill' at 'University politics', and to the fact that his wife was a 'leading light in the Ladies' tea club' (Little 1987).
5. Cmnd. 8875 University Development; Report on the years 1947–52 in Vol. 17, Reports.
6. Interview with Michael Banton, Dyfed, July 2001. Unless otherwise cited, subsequent references are to this interview.
7. CSSRC 53rd meeting, 1950 PRO CO901/9.
8. Chatham House IRR Archive: 3/6n g/3 IRR – General Correspondence 1949–57.
9. Interview with Michael Banton, Dyfed, July 2001.
10. Board of Studies of Race Relations, Lord Hailey's file, Chatham House Archives.
11. Sir Raymond Firth Archive, LSE.
12. Personal communication from Michael Banton, October 2001.
13. Nuffield Foundation, 7th Annual Report 1952.
14. Tony Cohen, personal communication, October 2003.