

Afterword

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Going right back to the very roots of the discipline in Britain, anthropologists have felt that their localized knowledge can and should contribute to better policy. The Ethnological Society of London (the precursor to the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI)) was an offshoot from the Aboriginal Protection Society, which was seminal in its condemnation of colonial iniquities. A century later, at the founding conference of what became the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, it was precisely as field experts that anthropologists felt that they could be of use, claiming that they could leaven the imposition of central rule and encourage local variation in the administration of colonies (see, for example, the opening remarks by Raglan (*Congrès* 1934); see also Mills 2008; Urry 1993: Chapter 5). Nevertheless, the tension that this commitment to policy gives rise to when placed alongside anthropology considered as a knowledge-acquiring discipline, illustrated, for instance, by the difficulties encountered by Northcote Thomas (Basu 2016), has never really been resolved. The ongoing debate has become accentuated, nuanced, splintered and generalized, but remain it does.

This splendid volume of chapters, and the meeting that inspired them, enables us to revisit this defining issue within anthropology, but in a slightly different and to my mind liberating way. The parameters might be familiar, but the subject at issue is urgent and, above all, nonpolitical. Let me clarify this immediately. What I mean by this is that the fact of global warming is established. Its interpretation, attributing the causes or blame, and understanding its consequences and seeking its remedies may be steeped and infused inescapably with politics, but the core of the issue at hand – that the world is heating up – is not open to serious

debate. This does not mean that there will not be climate-change deniers – there will be and there are – just as much as there are flat-earthers and those who claim that the moon landings never took place, and it is precisely one of anthropology's greatest strengths that it is so skilled at studying unusual cosmologies. However, those who deny that fact of its taking place can be treated as just that: as inhabiting counterfactual dialogues that we can puzzle through and try to empathize with, but need not regard as true.

Accepting, then, the reality and the urgency of the situation, how are we to go about our task of attempting to make a positive contribution? The introduction by Sillitoe lays out the options for practising anthropologists admirably. They are many, but amongst them we can and should revisit our current or early field researches and ask ourselves whether we have been remiss in the way that we have conducted those inquiries; we can be sensitive to the way that we may observe climate change occurring in real time, we can devote ourselves to facilitating wider knowledge of these changes and we can consider how we as a discipline can contribute towards their solution, however challenging this may be.

Each of these raises different issues. When social anthropology emerged as a distinct subject within anthropology more broadly, it did so, as has often been remarked, as a package (Jarvie 1964; for an overview, see Shankland 2012, 2019). It was never static and never as coherent as has sometimes been supposed. Nevertheless, one consequence was that it became unusual that social anthropological fieldwork would look at unfolding chronological sequences within a particular community. This was left to archaeology, whose practitioners developed increasingly sophisticated techniques, not only through the adoption of stratigraphic excavation, but also through typographic analysis, ethnobotany, dendrochronology, coring or carbon dating. Social anthropology therefore cut itself off, at a stroke, from the extraordinarily rich debates surrounding deep time that had characterized so much of the way in which anthropology had taken shape in the nineteenth century, debates that have recently been illuminatingly revisited by Clive Gamble (2021).

Equally, social anthropology came to define itself as being anti-evolutionary. It is not, of course, the case that evolution stopped being studied, but rather that just as the social anthropologists had left the unfolding of time to the archaeologists, they now left evolution to the biological anthropologists. Thus, social anthropologists cut themselves off from an immensely complex and still-burgeoning field for a second time, this time one that includes not only the unfolding relationship between climate,

ecology and social change, but also the study and development of models of human behaviour.

There was a further, this time methodological consequence. Just at the point that social anthropologists began to define themselves, they began working almost entirely alone, often with very little funding. This gave them the immense advantage of flexibility and the possibility of staying with a community over time without causing them too much inconvenience. But this also had the downside that it became much more difficult to collect data in a systematic way. Social anthropologists were pretty busy accumulating a multitude of different information, often learning a new language as well as negotiating new relationships. Often, they had no motor vehicle. Typically disinclined, by now, in any case to collect quantitative scientific data with the meticulous, daily tabulation that this requires, they instead embraced the serendipity of everyday life in the field.

Archaeologists, on the other hand, maintained a strong ethos of data collection, but worked in teams. They benefit to this day from the flexibility that has given them: when a new area of archaeometric investigation opens up, they simply make contact with the specialist in that area and invite them to join their team. They may have to alter their protocols in order to absorb the new material, find somewhere for the new arrivals to stay in the dig-house and offer them a bite to eat, but in essence the new specialization is slotted in and the existing tasks continue, being adjusted as necessary to take into account the new data that it brings.

Social anthropology then, was almost by definition theoretically, practically and methodologically uniquely ill-equipped to study long-term climate change. This, however, need not have impeded its practitioners from the contemporary study of the understanding of the weather amongst the communities where they were staying, as Sillitoe remarks in the Introduction to this volume. His postulation that this is greatly due to the dismissal of a causal relationship between weather and culture is surely correct. Indeed, the Durkheimian principle, that the social must be explained by the social was extremely strong throughout much of the twentieth century. This meant that social anthropologists, by and large, looked at the relationship between the different aspects of social life; the way in which the kinship structure is related to ritual, ritual to religion, history to hierarchy, myth to ritual and so on. Cosmology, from this point of view, becomes a reflection of the social structure of a community, and ideas about the weather are therefore relevant only insofar as these can help in understanding the cosmology and, in turn, social relations.

I myself am guilty of precisely the lack of understanding that Sillitoe outlines. I have long regretted that I did not conduct an architectural

survey of the indigenous buildings of the village where I conducted my fieldwork in the 1980s, a semi-transhumant community on the reverse slopes of the Pontus Mountains of the Black Sea coast. Only in the following decade after working with archaeologists in Konya did I realize that such a survey would have helped immensely, not least because the building materials and the trees used to construct the village houses changed quickly over time, as did the size of the timber available to them. Likewise, thereafter much sooner than I expected, subsistence agriculture ceased, the vast proportion of these houses were demolished by the villagers themselves, the timber logs were burnt or discarded, the wattle and daub with which they were covered was chucked away, and was replaced by brick and concrete. A great deal of information about the climate, and climate change went with them. Equally, I did not engage closely enough with the subsistence agricultural practices, then still pursued by most of the households in the village. From this, it would have been a straightforward step to an appreciation of the local understanding of the weather and the already changing ecoclimate in which they were farming.

Nevertheless, if we have been constrained by the intellectual paths that the discipline has taken, we do not need to feel ourselves so bounded today, in our much more intellectually pluralistic academic lives. On the contrary, a better understanding of these historical trajectories will help enormously in working out how we can change for the better. Nor is it the case that the way in which the discipline has taken shape need always impede our potential contribution to climate change discussions. A very big advantage of creating a similar social anthropology disciplinary practice, one that could operate globally, was that it became possible for social anthropologists to come together to discuss common aspects, things that they were experiencing simultaneously across their different fieldwork sites. The 1993 Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) Oxford Decennial Conference is exactly one such instance, in that it drew attention in a pioneering way to the comparative cultural complexities of globalization (see, for example, Miller 1995). Likewise, today, we are in a unique position to share and synthesize information relating to the understanding of climate across cultures, as Rosengren proposes in his fascinating chapter on the peoples of the Peruvian Amazon.

It is precisely to seek this common ground and encourage disciplinary good practice on the study of climate change that we at the RAI decided to host a discussion on this issue. What, however, is striking about this from the methodological point of view is the extent to which creating this collective endeavour forces social anthropology to draw back from its founding tenets. We see here, for example, that in order to discuss climate change, we must become historical ethnographers – as analysis

by Dewan of colonial interventions on the Bengal coast or again in the description of the Palestinian farmers of the West Bank by van Aken shows. It is surely from here only a short step to rejoin archaeology, with its emphasis on the way in which the material culture of the past helps us to understand the historical social ecology of a community.

It also forces a reconsideration of relativism, as several of the authors in this volume hint at. We cannot claim that different cosmologies are equally valid if we are dismissing those that are sceptical of climate change. Equally, we cannot understand, as Martin and Cometti note in their chapter, the way in which indigenous cosmologies are pushed to adapt by environmental change unless they have some explicit reference to a shared external world, the shared, causal constant being that it is warming.

This may not be as grave a problem as it first appears: it is often forgotten that the anthropology of morals and ethics, which at present is a growing subfield within social anthropology, was started by Westermarck in his great work *The Origin and the Development of the Moral Ideas* (1906–8). One of the reasons for this neglect appears to be that he, though a relativist, was what might be called a rational relativist. In other words, he believed that there is a plurality of ethical systems in the world that are contextualized within their respective cultural mores, and indeed derive from them, depending on the positive or negative connotations that social actions within them give rise to (Shankland 2018). For Westermarck, therefore, it was a fact that there are different ethical systems, and he regarded any search for universal ethical truth to be entirely invalid. Nevertheless, he based this relativistic assumption on the purely pragmatic, empirical grounds that it is possible to observe, and research that plurality if we seek it.

I believe that a solution along Westermarckian lines would work perfectly well for a comparative anthropology of climate change: it is fact that there are many different ways of understanding the weather and the way in which climate changes. However, this does not mean that reality itself is refracted and splintered, nor does it mean that there is an ineffable barrier to communication between different societies. The appeal for a more localized understanding, above all in appreciating the adaptations that are already being forced upon different communities, can be presented in this way, without assuming any greater epistemological complexity than is needed to communicate the tragic universality of climate-change induced-destruction.

Likewise, to work on climate change and to remain a single researcher, a lone fieldworker would appear to be exceptionally difficult. Climatic research needs statistics of some kind, whether in terms

of the environmental changes that a community is experiencing or their perception of it, as Sillitoe and Alam illustrate in their chapter. Not only will social anthropologists potentially need to work together with other researchers even at the point of the ethnographic material being generated, but in order to be able to communicate the predicament that so many indigenous peoples of the world find themselves in, we will have to prepare ourselves again to work in teams, this time with the immensely complicated local, national and international bureaucracy through which climate change discussions are conducted, as the chapters here by Bailão, Sherpa, and Carabajal and Hidalgo illustrate.

However, there is a further and crucial barrier that needs to be overcome. We are potentially very good indeed at conveying comparative, sensitive ethnography on the predicament that climate change brings, whether in Patagonia (Marin), Indonesia (Winarto) or Austria (Nöbauer), and we are beginning to learn how to ensure that local voices become heard at the international level, as Walker-Crawford's example of an Andean claim on a German energy company illustrates.

Where we have conspicuously less successful is offering solutions that will potentially work at the global level. In order to do this, I feel that social and biological anthropology will need to be able to unite, not simply because of the models of ecological change that evolutionary biologists already are developing, working alongside archaeologists of the faunal and floral record to do so, but because any solution that is adopted must work, and it must be applicable across very swathes areas of humanity. To explain, convey and communicate localized problems is an absolutely essential part of the work that we should be doing, but we must also engage with the wider models of human behaviour that are inherent within the climate change solutions already being (perhaps unavailingly) adopted. Steve Rayner, whose untimely death prevents him from helping to develop the capacity that is surely so needed in this area, catches this issue precisely in the paper that he wrote with Prins, *The Wrong Trousers: Radically Rethinking Climate Policy* (2007), in which he concludes that the macrosolutions being offered are simply not working.

To conclude then. First, we will need to work within a unified anthropological framework. Ethnographic data about the areas of the world that we work in are just that: it doesn't matter who this is produced by, provided that the data help us understand the problem better and we work out ways to share it in a transparent fashion. At some point, it is likely to overlap with the work of archaeology and biological anthropologists on models of long-term ecological change, and that it does so should be embraced.

Second, we will need to learn to engage with policy-makers. To claim exceptionalism is self-defeating. It is only by learning how to share that we can communicate, persuade and convince others that our ideas are worth listening to. We cannot help the communities with whom we have worked unless we can show why, and how, climate change is affecting them. Above all, we cannot claim simultaneously that knowledge is unique to social anthropology and that the poorer people of the world are suffering most, for the second assertion is clearly intended as a universal truth claim and contradicts the first. Knowledge, then, will have to be accepted as being universal.

Third, we will have to learn how to think macro. It is certainly within our compass to do so. However, such creative solutions will require us to include future modelling alongside our empirical observations. The task, then, is a formidable one, but it is one that we should all contribute to as much as we can. We have to hope fervently that something can be done to avert this crisis. We need to have an answer when our grandchildren or their children ask us what anthropology did to help tackle the problem of climate change. It is in the writing and the study of works such as this that we will begin to obtain one.

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