



# Chapter 1

## ANTHROPOLOGY AND PUBLIC SERVICE

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An extremely valuable study would be one that compared the work of anthropologists for the colonial governments of yesteryear with that of anthropologists for governments today. My impression is that the work of the latter is considered insignificant by the governments and largely ignored or else the scholars are involved in tasks so superficial that their training is wasted.

— S.R. Barrett, *The Rebirth of Anthropological Theory*

How wrong can you be!

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In the UK these days the majority of social anthropologists who earn doctorates do not get jobs in university departments. Many go down one of a wide range of non-academic avenues: corporate anthropology (Suchman 2014), the media (Henley 2006), design anthropology (Drazin 2006), ethnographic consumer research, teaching in schools, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Survival International, Forest Peoples Programme) and a diversity of consultancies, among others.

In recent years, a small and rising percentage of those with doctorates have obtained, on the basis of their anthropological skills, positions in different sections of government. Here they can implement and help to create policy, whether at the national or municipal level. At times their potential influence on public life may be wide-ranging and profound. Yet almost nothing has been written on this recent, important development within anthropological practice. Hence the central aim of this book: to redress that imbalance, by documenting and drawing out the implications of this evolution for the discipline.

The topic is important not just because of the significance of the jobs these anthropologists come to hold. It is key because this move of practitioners into public service positions holds the very real potential to change the ways we conceive of anthropology in the round. Since the postwar period up until relatively recently, the most illustrious among British academic anthropologists acted as the national hegemon of

the discipline. They had the authority to define its limits and its central aims. Advances in theory were the gold standard; anything else was of baser metal (Turton 1988: 145–46; MacClancy 2013). To use the language of that time, which today has a very dated ring, theoretical anthropology was ‘pure’, its applied counterpart ‘impure’. This dire dichotomy had impoverishing consequences. One activity was to be looked up to as virtuous, a model for ambitious practitioners with an eye for the prestigious. The other activity, termed as tainted, was only engaged in out of necessity, by those who had not achieved enough to gain university posts. Landman, writing in the late 1970s, spoke of the persisting idea that applied work was ‘the refuge of the less intelligent’ (Landman 1978: 323). According to this discriminatory logic, tenured positions were for the front runners, extramural jobs for the also-rans. Why advertise your failure?

Perhaps the first fracture in this stereotyping vision of non-academic jobs as hidey-holes for the second-rate was the emergence of development studies as a scholastic endeavour in its own right. Indeed, anthropologists working in development played a key role in the creation and establishment of the discipline. They continue to do so. Another central factor came in the mid 1970s, with the end of university expansion and the first government cuts in tertiary education (Grillo 1985: 3; Riviere 2007: 8). The effect of these changes on the shape of anthropology as a whole did not become manifest for some time. University-based anthropologists were slowly made more and more aware of the number of fellow professionals outside academe, and then of the work they were doing. If the rise of taught postgraduate Masters courses is an indicator of their growing awareness, then the sub-fields of the discipline related to our theme which began to develop from this time on include, in rough order of emergence, medical anthropology, childhood studies, environmental conservation, refugee studies and migration studies.

Yet, for all these relatively minor developments, there has been, to my knowledge, no sustained work in the UK on anthropology in government, nor about the ways in which this new avenue might alter both how we conceive the point of our discipline and how we train students for life beyond the ivory towers. The fundamental pedagogy of undergraduate anthropology has changed surprisingly little. Thus, a supplementary aim of this book is to rattle that cage: to show the ways anthropologist-civil servants work, to investigate which skills they have exploited and which they have had to learn, and thus to suggest which abilities today’s students may need to be trained in.

In this opening chapter I first examine the history of anthropologists in Her Majesty’s Government, and then analyse the experience

of contemporary anthropologist-civil servants in a variety of contexts. The other contributors to this volume discuss a range of ways in which anthropologists engage with public service in contemporary Britain: employment as an anthropologist, charged with community development, by a British town hall; working in the Ministry of Defence and the Cabinet Office; the consequences of moving from academic anthropology to prison governance or border control; providing anthropological advice to the government in Northern Ireland; leading research teams into health and healthcare to inform NHS policy and provision.

Our collective goal is not to cover every topic in this potentially broad and rich domain of activity. I had neither the time nor the opportunity to organise that. Instead I wished to provide a chance for a sustained scrutiny of what it means to be an anthropologist in government today, to see what generalisations we can and cannot make about our discipline and public service. For this practice is growing too much to be ignored any longer.

## **A little history**

Anthropologists working with the British government is nothing new. Ever since practitioners began to turn their pursuit into a profession, there were anthropologists trying to persuade bureaucrats and politicians of its pragmatic value. Very occasionally, they succeeded.

The first attempts were long on promise, short on delivery. Victorian anthropologists, evolutionists to a man (and they were all men), argued the social utility of their practice in strictly Anglocentric terms: they wished to reinvigorate the British 'race', then perceived to be at grave risk of collective degeneration. Despite their efforts, however, they failed to impress politicians of the day. No grant was forthcoming (Stocking 1987: 266). Similarly, in the 1900s the Home Office 'certainly took note' of the work on racial degeneration by the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso, but its civil servants were ultimately unsympathetic to his widely known though controversial ideas. In 1906, for instance, an American follower of Lombroso encouraged the Home Office to imitate the US proposal to establish a laboratory for 'the study of the criminal and defective classes'. His offer of 'free advice' was declined (Pick 1989: 180–81).

A much longer-lived justification repeatedly deployed by anthropologists and their supporters was not aimed at home, but abroad: anthropology would help save the Empire from itself. They pronounced that ignorance of others' ways led to a series of dire conse-

quences: insouciant colonisers unwittingly provoked locals, wasted the benefits of costly expeditions and created political difficulties and complications that need not have arisen. Furthermore, some evolutionists and diffusionists were not so much concerned with homeland degeneration but with a much starker overseas worry: depopulation, disintegration, and even extinction of recently pacified peoples. Their message was clear. If colonial authorities did not take advantage of anthropological know-how, they could end up with no one to colonise (Kuklick 1991: 184). In the words of one diffusionist who conducted fieldwork in Melanesia:

I was asking for skulls the other week and received the ironic reply, 'In a little while the white man will be able to take all ours'. (Deacon 1934: xix)

Perhaps the first academic to exploit the imperialist argument was the great Victorian scholar Max Müller. In 1891 he petitioned the government to produce a series of records on customs in the colonies. For all his eminence, Müller's plan 'expired in the pigeon-holes of the Colonial Office' (Müller 1891: 798). There were further attempts in the late 1890s, again argued on imperialist grounds, for the government to fund a Bureau of Ethnology, modelled on its very successful US counterpart. The responses, including one from the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, were supportive, but did not extend to the dedication of public funds (Urry 1993: ch. 5; Stocking 1996: 373). In 1903 Alfred Cort Haddon, in the name of the Anthropological Institute, together with a representative of the Folklore Society urged the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, to create a commission in South Africa to produce a complete ethnographic record, for the sake of efficient administration. The politician, however, thought the moment 'inopportune'. When a weightier delegation met with him two years later, his reply remained the same. In 1911 an even more formidable group of public dignitaries and academics approached the Prime Minister, now Herbert Asquith. But the response was, once again, empty-handed sympathy. A second approach to Asquith made in 1914 was stymied by the outbreak of war (Stocking 1996: 375–80).

Some well-placed colonial administrators, now retired in Britain, also banged the imperialist anthropology drum, to pedagogical end, with some success. Sir Herbert Risley, India's first Census Commissioner and president of the Royal Anthropological Institute in the early 1910s, used his presidential address to underline the need for colonial officers to learn local customs in order to avoid fomenting unrest (Risley 1911). At much the same time, Sir Richard Carnac Temple, former Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, gave

speeches throughout the UK urging the need for fledgling colonial administrators to receive university training in anthropology (Temple 1913, 1914a, 1914b). His campaign paid off, as a course that included anthropology was set up for trainee political officers destined for the Sudan. Furthermore, in 1914 Radcliffe-Brown, who had done fieldwork in the Andamans, was hired to give a course of lectures in the discipline at the University of Birmingham. From 1924 on, men selected for posts in tropical Africa had to take a year-long course at Oxford or Cambridge that includes anthropological instruction (Kuklick 1991: 196–97, 202; Stocking 1996: 378–79).

If central government offered nothing more than goodwill, specific colonial administrations were prepared to go much further. The Indian Civil Service is the outstanding early example here. The most prestigious overseas administration in the Empire, with the stiffest entrance requirements, its civil servants regarded themselves as a mandarin elite. Some fulfilled their brief by acting as imperial ethnographers; their goal was to both understand and ameliorate local ways. An early stimulus to systematic ethnography was the periodic censuses of the entire sub-continent, the first being held in the early 1870s. Then, in 1901, a Director of Ethnography was appointed, charged with the production of a comprehensive ethnographic survey that would result in a series of tribes and castes encyclopaedias. In the following decades some administrator-scholars also produced tribal ethnographies. While the best work on the censuses generated schemes of classification grounded on theoretical visions of the origin and development of the caste system, the tribal tomes were much closer in format to a synchronic functionalism. The anthropologist of India Chris Fuller argues that although some of their colonialist ethnography was exemplary, their work as a whole had little effect on metropolitan anthropology, for two reasons. First, the nature of their material did not dovetail with contemporary theoretical debates. Second, members of this selective intelligentsia did not think they had to prove their worth to study-bound anthropologists. Most of the references in their works are to one another, not to theoreticians back home (Fuller n.d.a, n.d.b).

On other continents, only a few, very senior administrators wished to advance colonial anthropology and had the authority to do so, for example Sir Hubert Murray in Papua, Lord Lugard in Nigeria and Sir Fredrick Gordon Guggisberg on the Gold Coast. In Africa the first person appointed as a designated government anthropologist was Northcote Thomas, in Nigeria in 1906. An undiplomatic individual, he disconcerted some of his superiors, who had him transferred to Sierra Leone in 1913, only to send him home two years later (Kuklick 1991:

199–201). After the war, the colonial administrations of the Gold Coast and Nigeria did employ some official government anthropologists, and also relieved some officials of usual duties for the sake of pursuing anthropological research. The Sudan government contracted first Charles Seligman then Edward Evans-Pritchard to carry out directed research on areas its administrators wanted studied. Further afield, in Melanesia, Murray took on a pair of anthropologists, sending one to the north of Papua, the other to its south. The return of world war in 1939 ended this activity. After the war it was only repractised very fitfully. Perhaps the last official appointee was Ioan Lewis who, in 1955, was given the title 'The Anthropologist', with his own one-man department, in British Somaliland. In reality, his august-sounding post was more a bureaucratic fiction for administrative convenience than a burdensome position with colonialist purpose (Lewis 1977: 229; 2003: 307).

The most noteworthy among this small number of interwar government anthropologists were R.S. Rattray, who studied the Ashante of the Gold Coast; C.K. Meek, who did fieldwork in both northern and south-east Nigeria; and F.E. Williams, who toured southern Papua. Although all three produced highly respected ethnographies, published by the most prestigious academic presses of their time, they are today virtually unknown except by regional specialists. Rattray has been classed as 'essentially a folklorist ethnographer', Meek's work became 'fashionable to denigrate' as but an example of anthropological subservience to colonial administration, while Williams' work, though of 'lasting scientific value', was 'unjustly neglected by his peers' (von Laue 1976: 53; Young 1990; Kirk-Greene 2004). Metropolitan anthropologists were disappointed that Rattray, once back home, did not produce 'something more theoretical', while much of Meek's ethnographies was too evolutionist and diffusionist in tone for the functionalist avant-garde (Machin 1998: 186). Even Williams' theoretical account of magic, which Stocking judges to be more sophisticated than that of his contemporary Bronislaw Malinowski (Stocking 1996: 391), was marginalised by British-based anthropologists then striving to cement their version of anthropology in home universities.

Both Rattray and Meek went on to teach anthropology at Oxford, Meek holding a university lectureship in the subject in the immediate postwar years. Although Stocking groups the two plus the Oxford-educated Williams as an 'Oxford School of government anthropology' (Stocking 1996: 387), both have been excluded from the oral history of the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford. I was a member of the Institute from 1976 to 1989, first as a student, later as a postdoctoral

fellow, then as an occasional tutor. In those thirteen years, I listened to seemingly endless anecdotes about Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard and other former members, both illustrious and not, of the department. But neither Meek nor Rattray was mentioned. Not once. When I asked Shirley Ardener, who came to Oxford in the late 1950s with her husband Edwin, what her recollection was, she agreed that Rattray and Meek were never mentioned in the Institute, even in those days (S. Ardener, pers. comm., May 2015). A younger colleague, associated with the department since 2004, reported to me that he had experienced exactly the same (P. Alexander, pers. comm., 5 January 2016).

If we take a broader view of the discipline, where a metropolitan academic's version of theoretical advance does not hold exclusive sway, the anthropological achievement of these government employees becomes starkly evident. Later anthropologists of Ashante extraction recognise Rattray's 'important contribution to knowledge' (Goody 1995: 205). His analysis of the disturbances caused by removal of the Golden Stool (the symbolically central Ashante throne of power) was repeatedly upheld as an exemplar of practical anthropology, while his plan for the realisation of indirect rule was ultimately implemented (Kuklick 1991: 228; Stocking 1996: 389). Meek 'represented for countless field administrators in inter-war Nigeria the *beau idéal* government anthropologist' (Kirk-Greene 2004). Williams made 'innumerable' informed recommendations to Murray: 'His greatest coup, perhaps, was to prevent the suppression of the "bull-roarer cult" in the Gulf of Papua' (Young 1990). Young's assessment of Williams' more specifically anthropological contribution is acute:

While accepting in part the reigning doctrine of British functionalism, he had the practical experience to judge its limitations. For him, a culture was not an 'integrated system', but 'always ... to some extent a hotch-potch and a sorry tangle'. In his isolation from the academy Williams developed his own approach and addressed those issues he saw to be salient in the cultures he studied, rather than those which his academic colleagues deemed to be important. The result was a body of published work unusual in its ethnographic range, integrity and pragmatic focus. (Young 1990)

At Cambridge, anthropologist-mandarins scaled even greater heights than their counterparts in Oxford, yet today are still denigrated by historians of our subject. The first two incumbents of the Chair of Anthropology were both former members of the Indian Civil Service: T.C. Hodson, and J.H. Hutton. Both were accomplished ethnographers; as professors, they developed anthropology as a central subject in the curriculum for colonial cadets. Yet Stocking, because focused on an-

thropological theory and its contexts, sees their combined tenure at Cambridge as a time of stagnation, 'a long period of decline' (Stocking 1996: 430).

To give a specific areal example of the long-lasting effects of anthropology done by and for governments, on both colonial rule and subsequent anthropology, I here discuss a case from the South Pacific. In 1978, when I went to do doctoral fieldwork in the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides (now the independent republic of Vanuatu), I was surprised and pleased to see how many colonial officers in both the British and French administrations had read and discussed the ethnographies of the French government anthropologist Jean Guiart and of Michael Allen, whose 1950s fieldwork was partly funded and directed by the British Resident Commissioner of the archipelago. Also, while doing archival research in the 2000s, I found numerous references to their work in colonial officers' reports and correspondence (MacClancy 2007). In these colonial circumstances of genuine Western ignorance about local ways, the revelations provided by these anthropological publications were multiple, profound and of great worth to the colonisers. Furthermore, conversations with colleagues who also worked in the islands made clear to me that both Guiart and Allen had as well helped to set the anthropological agenda for their successors, which of course included me. Thus, in this sense of regionalist ethnography informed by and informing theory, the work of government anthropologists has been central for both administrators and academics.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, what this historical sketch suggests is twofold. First, the use of ethnography and the employment of anthropologists by colonial governments was patchy but productive, to the extent that any colonialist project can be so ranked. Second, within the greater scheme of things colonial, which after all had a long history and a global reach, anthropology played a relatively insignificant role; yet modern day interpretations of colonialism are so generally negative (and with good reason) that even this minor part within the imperialist project is still considered by many to be worth damning. One consequence is that, in Oxford anthropology at least, the contribution of colonial anthropologists has been airbrushed from institutional history; whatever positive impact they may have had is also swept away in the process. This raises a more general point: downplaying, depreciating or simply ignoring this variegated conjuncture only serves to skew contemporary understanding of the history of our discipline; at the same time, it threatens to blinker current conceptions of just how broadly anthropology can be conducted.



## **Anthropologists in the British Civil Service**

So much for our past. What of today?

The workshop 'Anthropology beyond Academia' and subsequent seminar series at Oxford Brookes University, on which much of this book is based, included talks by several civil servants with doctorates in anthropology. Almost all of them, however, were later unable to write up their discussion: they were too busy; there is little kudos within their career path for academic papers; because of security concerns, most are far more restricted in what they can write than in what they can say. So I interviewed them and every other anthropologist I could find who had worked for a central government department and, in one case, for a county council. In all, I spoke with eleven, and failed to interview, despite repeated attempts, another two. I re-interviewed two, and sent all correspondents a draft of this chapter for their comments, to prevent gross misrepresentation. Three replied.

A few words on words, to prevent possible misunderstandings. First, all of the people I interviewed held doctorates in social anthropology bar one, who had a Masters degree. In the following I refer to all my interviewees as 'anthropologist-civil servants'. For the sake of lexical variety, I sometimes refer to them as 'anthropologist-functionaries'. One interviewee, who read a draft of this chapter, thought 'functionary' might be viewed as belittling in some way; that is not my intention at any time. Second, I uphold a plural vision of anthropology, one of anthropologies rather than of a singular version promoted by the hegemons of the moment (MacClancy 2013). A colleague who commented on a draft argued that I was yoking the incomparable: what academic anthropologists do is so different to the practice of anthropologist-civil servants that the latter should not be seen as anthropology. Similarly, Maia Green argues that anthropology is of little use to development projects because their knowledge-making practices are constituted by different agendas. She defines anthropology as the production of ethnography, grounded on the traditions of the lone fieldworker and the status of fieldwork (Green 2012: 44, 54). That portrayal can be easily classified as overly rigid and static. I regard the statements of both my colleague and Green as prescriptive delimitations of our pursuit, positioned declarations by the academically enconced. On my reading of contemporary anthropology, it is far more productive to explore practice in both domains and see what is and might be common, rather than draw an arbitrary line between the two, for what can easily turn into self-interested ends. I fully accept that some readers may come to the same conclusion as my colleague

and Green, and that my own pleas for the recognition of plurality can be seen as self-serving.

The long-maintained tradition within the Civil Service of sharing information only with those holding 'the need to know' means that all those interviewed only agreed to speak with me on grounds of anonymity. The only exceptions were the retired. One key limitation to my research was this total reliance on interviews. Given the nature of their jobs, I could not see any civil servant in situ. We met for coffee or a drink outside their offices; I did not even walk the corridors of power. My interviewees thus tended to speak to me about process, not content. Only civil servants working in international aid or the Ministry of Justice were relatively open about what they did, why, when, to what effect. Those in the Ministry of Defence or the Home Office were particularly tight-lipped (as far as I can judge, those in the latter tend to work on counterterrorism). One year, when I saw in the newspapers that an anthropologist acquaintance who chaired coordinating committees for the Cabinet Office had been awarded a CBE, I emailed my congratulations; I added that I presumed she could not tell me what she had received it for. She has yet to reply.

Malinowski famously defined anthropology as the study of what people say they do, what they do do, and how they justify the gap between the two. Here I cannot uphold this dictum, as I could not witness a single civil servant actually at work, interacting with colleagues. Of Malinowski's threefold division, I could only study the first. I am deeply aware that this lopsided style of research, my near-total reliance on interviews, and the lack of any participant observation by me of this bureaucratic world gravely limits my understanding of what is actually going on. The only area of Civil Service activity for which we have more rounded assessment is international development, thanks to the work done by anthropologists who entered that branch of government and then returned to academia, where they later analysed their experience, as reported below.

To help preserve the anonymity of my interviewees and to avoid any charge of sexist language, I only use female forms of personal pronouns, no matter the gender of the interviewee. The only exceptions occur when I quote from named publications by an anthropologist-civil servant.

In the following sections I first examine why two key ministries began to employ anthropologists (International Development, from the 1970s; Defence, from the 2000s) and what they did there. I then look, in order, at: the polemic raised by the prospect of military anthropology; the pleasures and downsides of my interviewees' jobs; the skills they

have used, and those they have had to learn; and finally, their interactions, both positive and negative, with academic anthropologists.

## **International development**

The branch of the British government concerned with international development was the first to start employing anthropologists in post-colonial times. Among government departments, it has also been the greatest employer of anthropologists.

The status and title of this sector within government has varied repeatedly over the last decades. Harold Wilson's Labour government of the late 1960s created the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM). When the Conservatives came to power in 1970, the Ministry was renamed the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), a relatively self-contained unit within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), with its own minister. Labour, back in power four years later, revived its status as an independent ministry. In 1979, with the Conservatives back in the saddle, overseas development was returned to the FCO, again as an identifiable unit and once again renamed the ODA. The Minister for Overseas Development was a minister of state within the FCO and did not hold a seat in the Cabinet. In 1997 the new Labour government reformed the unit into the Department for International Development (DfID), headed by a minister with a seat in the Cabinet. The feisty MP Claire Short was its first minister.

In the mid 1970s the ODA created the generic post of Social Development Advisors (SDAs). At the time, international development was primarily concerned with the formulation and successful execution of projects. The patent failure of several of these made the ODA realise that its expertise in domains such as economics, engineering, forestry, health and agriculture was insufficient. It needed to examine the social dimensions of projects as well. SDAs would study the social impact of projects and consult the people to be affected by them. At first their numbers rose very slowly: one was appointed in 1975, another in the early 1980s (Sean Conlin), a third in 1986. They were seen as 'an anomaly by most people' within the organisation. When one of the three criticised aspects of a project, she was viewed as 'a typical SDA with a negative attitude' (Eyben 2003: 881, n. 3, 882). These anthropologist SDAs had to argue the case, strongly, convincingly, if they wished to participate in the design of a project.

The SDAs were keen to promote a people-first agenda. In the language of one of them, they deployed five 'guerrilla strategies' to achieve

that. First, they wanted to increase their number, so they stimulated demand. The 1986 appointee, adjudged an 'especially effective promoter and very good persuader' by one of her anthropologist colleagues (telephone interview, July 2013), proved particularly adept at working the system: 'Creating jobs required some political manoeuvring. I had to get a Head of Country programme to ask the Director of their region for new SDAs' for their programme (telephone interview, July 2013). The new recruit, once in place, would find a kaleidoscopic range of social issues in grave need of attention. They would then call for a second appointee, who in turn would be quickly overwhelmed by the volume of work and so call for a third.

Second, the SDAs appropriated agendas then emerging within the department as falling within their specific domain of expertise, e.g. gender, poverty, social exclusion. In particular, gender analysis became a key staple concern of the SDAs. Third, they promoted distinctive methods, e.g. the participatory and self-reflexive approaches originally championed by the development scholar Robert Chambers. The sum consequence of these strategies was that, when working on a project, the SDAs tended to focus on inequalities and fault lines within a developing nation. In other words, they disaggregated the components of a complex problem, as a way to find effective but nuanced solutions. In contrast, they viewed other professionals in DfID, trained in other disciplines, as lumping information together, instead of teasing it apart. These professionals were seen as aggregators of information, who all too often sought simple solutions to complex problems. According to at least one ex-SDA, economists in particular (most of whom were, moreover, macro-economists) tended to see a targeted country as comprising a homogenous population whose members would all develop equally. The same ex-SDA told me that once when she raised the topic of gender with a senior economist within the department, he replied, 'We're not concerned with inequality'.

Fourth, the SDAs worked to influence outside bodies. Gaining the approval of colleagues in the World Bank enabled the SDAs to challenge the otherwise dominant position of their economist counterparts in their UK department. To do this effectively, the anthropologists found they had also to learn some economics. Fifth, they entered into internal alliances: the SDAs, once armed with a little economics, began to work more closely with economists on the staff. This coming together benefitted both parties, as they shared the aim of taking power from the technical specialists. The trio also worked hard to persuade colleagues with overlapping interests to take on SDAs, for example

those concerned with humanitarian issues or working within the UN section of the department.

These various empire-building efforts were so successful that by 1995 there were about seventy to eighty SDAs, though now including some from other disciplines. Their number was sufficiently impressive that when in the early 1990s Raymond Firth met a senior SDA at a meeting of the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA), he thanked her for employing so many anthropologists. A further sign of the anthropologists' power-winning success came in 1995 with the appointment of one of the original trio as Chief SDA, with her own budget, a place within the senior management and independence from the Chief Economist (Eyben 2003, 2014). Twenty years' labour had finally won the anthropologists their own seat at the department's top table.

Recently retired SDAs, looking back over this period, remember fondly that most of the department's staff regarded themselves as on the left, committed to social reform. Moreover, they were pleased to be in a unit with such a reputation, one so clearly different in ethos from almost all other branches of Whitehall. And, within this already unusual department, anthropologists were regarded as particularly distinctive, at times even suspiciously so. One recalled being broached by a senior economist in the department, who bluntly asked her, 'What is it you do?' (Telephone interview July 2013) A second interviewee said that she and another female SDA were talked about within their department, as 'Those women!' 'What do they really do?' (Interview July 2013) She believed others coming from other disciplines were jealous because they were forced to recognise that the anthropologist SDAs got things done, yet where were their models? The anthropologists in the department were viewed as more politically radical than the economists, and were dubbed socialists or even 'reds under the bed' (interview, July 2013). In one revealing incident in the early 1990s, when the Thatcherite legacy was still very strong, the line manager of the Chief SDA took her aside to warn her that she had been heard talking about 'redistribution' and that she would be in trouble if she continued using that term. Generally, the anthropologists were thought 'oddballs'. These attitudes were not new: decades before, they were expressed about Northcote Thomas. In 1930 a colonial servant described him, in official correspondence, as

a recognized maniac in many ways. He wore sandals, even in this country (*Nigeria*), lived on vegetables, and was generally a rum person.

(*Residents did not want*) to have an object like that going about ... partly because he was calculated to bring a certain amount of discredit upon the white man's prestige. (Quoted in Lackner 1973: 135, emphasis in original)<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s, one of the Permanent Secretaries in the department went so far as to dub its anthropologist employees 'the beard and sandals brigade', despite the fact that the majority were women. The spectre of the bearded lady?

SDAs, to be successful, had to transcend these dismissive stereotypes. They needed to be both 'technically very competent' and 'politically astute': to change the world, they had also to change the bureaucracy (Eyben 2003: 887). Conlin, writing in the mid 1980s, emphasised that anthropologists working within or for the ODA often failed to recognise both 'the great deal of institutional commitment' to projects and 'the great deal of emotional investment' in them by other SDAs (Conlin 1985: 82). He was blunt in stating that many anthropologists found it 'difficult to work in a team with other disciplines', while their claims to moral superiority bordered on the egregious:

Anthropologists often seem to think they are the 'keepers of morality' and assume that no one else working in the field possesses the same fine moral sense. Apart from being very irritating to others, this attitude is often adopted even in the face of moral dilemmas which development poses. (Conlin 1985: 84)

As one of the original trio said to me, many SDAs were very good anthropologists while on field trips but not so perceptive once back in the London office. The ones who succeeded in climbing the hierarchy never forgot that.

Across the Civil Service, the ambience within the section for international development was seen as distinctive. Compared to other ministries, it was thought to do pretty much what it liked, and to be staffed by 'a bunch of lefties', who suffered fewer constraints than their homologues elsewhere in Whitehall. In the first decades of British government involvement in this sector, most of the staff, and not just the anthropologists, had already spent many years living and working in developing countries before being recruited. Even when there was a deliberate shift to employing younger staff instead of 'old colonials', the newcomers were still sent abroad for their first posting, 'to get mud on their boots'. These strong traditions of relative autonomy, fieldworking and research production meant the department felt like an unusual mix of development agency and Whitehall ministry.

In the early 2000s, the Permanent Secretary of the department thought it 'too much like a university', so set about change. About the same time the Chief SDA took a posting abroad: 'I was sick of management. It was boring. I wasn't doing anything more than just managing people' (telephone interview, July 2013). Her departure from London

roughly coincided with the rise in the department of governance professionals, many trained in public administration.

This was part of the shift in DfID from investing in specific projects to creating partnerships with national governments. The rationale was that rather than attempt to implement particular initiatives to alleviate poverty, it was more productive to engage in restructuring governance: reducing the scope of state services, liberalising markets and increasing recognition for human rights. The priority of this approach, usually dubbed 'the new institutionalism' or 'neoliberal institutionalism', was 'to get the system right'. In this context, the models deployed by governance professionals of how the world works were considered more comprehensive and applicable than those used by anthropologists, sociologists or political scientists. As their leverage grew, the number of SDAs with doctorates in anthropology began to decline.

Today, old hands lament that the Department for International Development has become much more like a conventional branch of government and its anthropologists have to act like mainstream civil servants. These days most aid money is channelled directly to national governments, and the much-reduced number of site-specific local projects initiated by DfID are managed by local technical officers. No more need for muddy boots.

## **Defence**

By the early 2000s sectors within the Ministry of Defence (MoD) had realised that the nature of armed conflict had changed. Modern wars were less and less likely to involve the mass deployment of tanks arrayed across an open battlefield. Instead they required a very different style of military involvement and were increasingly based in countries whose populations held radically distinct values and attitudes to common Western ones. It was a shift from 'Have we more firepower than them?' towards 'How do we influence?' Armed units stationed in contested zones had to learn, at one and the same time, how to withstand the enemy and how to win the support of locals not engaged in the conflict, no matter how difficult the troops might find it to distinguish, within the resident population, between adversary and non-adversary groups.

To assist its troops in developing the requisite skills in these novel theatres of war, the MoD, among other initiatives, began to recruit anthropologists. The first openings for them were in the Centre for Human Sciences within the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency, and

slightly later in the Influence and Analysis Team within the Ministry's multidisciplinary research wing, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), based in Farnborough, Hampshire. Only a small section of DSTL, in reality a large umbrella organisation, is dedicated to research in the social sciences, and within that small section anthropologists were greatly outnumbered by psychologists. Yet the anthropologists were received very positively and given great leeway. In their own words, in the MoD anthropology was 'the new black'; they were viewed as 'oddballs, the new kids on the block'. Their new workmates and superiors, who liked the idea of anthropology though they did not really know what it was, were very willing to listen to the anthropologists' ideas, to test them out and give them space. And this, as one interviewee pointed out, in an organisation which until then only did things like inventing jet engines.

Their job was not only surprisingly open-ended, but excitingly varied as well. If the overall shift, which they had been hired to assist in, was from assembling overwhelming firepower to winning hearts and minds, the central query the anthropologists had to pose repeatedly to their paymasters was, 'What do you want?' In other words, they needed their superiors to specify their overall objectives. Once specified, the anthropologists could begin to elucidate what were the 'bits' that could be used and what were the 'levers' that could be pulled in order to achieve those objectives.

These anthropologists, deeply trained in one discipline, had to learn quickly how to cooperate in interdisciplinary teams, using multi-methods approaches to solve pressing practical problems. They also had to research and produce reports on what they perceived as future problems the MoD would have to face. For instance, one had to carry out a literature review of the definitions of states vis-à-vis 'terrorist groups' and then sum up the results of her copious reading in a five-page report. At the end of every year, each would be asked, 'What are the problems you see on the horizon?', and would be expected to come up with an informative response no longer than one paragraph.

One new recruit found she had to play two roles. The first was very generic: helping the military to understand how people work. In her later article on this 'very successful' project, entitled 'More Tea and Fewer Messages', she states that she showed MoD officials and members of the armed forces how the application of sophisticated social scientific theories could help them in their everyday tasks, whether in Whitehall or Afghanistan. If abroad, the key idea was for them to engage with the local population. The underlying logic was along the lines of, 'If I build you a well, the chances of you giving me information



rise'. She emphasised the importance of talking to people, as a way of building and consolidating trust (Tomlinson 2009). She also developed cultural assessment tools, a checklist of questions to help the military understand who they are living among. The questions focused on economics, politics, religion and even kinship, though the word itself was not used.

The new recruit's second role was more ethnographically specific: she had to learn a lot about particular countries, using her social scientific understanding of, for example, Afghanistan or Libya. Another anthropologist, recruited the year before, had developed a series of very brief, introductory notebooks on local cultural ways, such as non-verbal behaviour and gestures, in a further effort to prevent soldiers misunderstanding locals, or being misunderstood by them. I do not know how successfully these booklets were regarded or used by the troops.

One anthropologist-functionary made it clear to me that while some of what they presented to the officers might have seemed obvious, they were presenting it in such a way that their listeners could then talk about it later, to themselves and others. For instance, portraying a person's multiple identities as a diagram of overlapping petals gave the audience an image they could remember and transmit easily. It also helped the officers to realise and visualise their own tendencies to stereotype. In fact, the talk produced by this anthropologist about identity was so well received that she was asked to give it more than twenty-five times, to different groups.

The interdisciplinary group of social scientists within DSTL assembled a college of university academics in related fields curious to learn more of their Ministry-based colleagues' work. At periodic day meetings, members of the DSTL team showcased their aims and multi-methods, and then set their guests exercises to practise and assess the value of their approaches. The next outreach initiative to academia was staged by two anthropologists who had moved from DSTL to the MoD in Whitehall. There they held a pair of workshops for a clutch of invited academic colleagues, and one serving major, to discuss and comment upon their project to develop a statistically grounded cultural modelling programme. Although some of the invitees entertained doubts about the viability of the programme, they did reach consensus about the cultural categories to be employed. The workshops themselves were judged 'a great success' by one of the organisers, as the pair took their results to senior MoD staff, which led to the creation of one hundred new posts and 'people trained up in new ways' (interview, 15 June 2013).

The MoD anthropologists stressed to me their pleasure in coming to realise how bright and how open to discussion even the most senior officers could be. Indeed, the higher the rank, the better-read in anthropology they tended to be, because generals have drivers and can spend car journeys reading ethnographies. And they do.

## **Military anthropology**

British anthropologist-functionaries are well aware of the work done by their colleagues in other governments. In particular, these UK anthropologists' engagement with the military was, in at least one key area, much influenced by the unfortunately good example of their US counterparts, whose approach provoked a sustained polemic, both in American anthropology and national media.

In the early 2000s the US Department of Defense began to create Human Terrain Teams (HTTs). The aim was to train mixed groups of anthropologists, other social scientists and area specialists in ways of gathering culturally sensitive information. They would then be embedded within military units on active service in zones of conflict, above all Iraq and Afghanistan. Although the HTT programme was closed down in 2015, its central ideas were morphed, rebranded and privatised that year. The use of anthropological practice and knowledge by the American military continues (González and Price 2015).<sup>3</sup>

Many US anthropologists and other academics soon spoke out against this new government initiative (e.g. González 2009, 2010; Lucas 2009; Network of Concerned Anthropologists [NCA] 2009; Price 2011), forcing the American Anthropological Association (AAA) into a lengthy debate about the ethics of the teams. Several HTT anthropologists were aware that some of their critics' arguments were well grounded. Although an HTT member might call herself a 'high-risk ethnographer' or be dubbed 'a uniformed anthropologist toting a gun', several admitted that the vaunted separation of assembling cultural information from gathering intelligence was extremely difficult to maintain: they could not know all the ends to which their information would be put (Gezari 2013: 45, 46, 94, 189). Moreover, in the eyes of its critics, this exploitation of anthropology for military ends besmirched the reputation of the discipline and threatened the physical security of fieldworkers. In 2007, after much deliberation, the Executive Board of the AAA publicly stated its disapproval of the programme (AAA 2007). At the same time, a select commission of the AAA recognised that the HTTs were but one part of the multiple modes of anthropologists' engagement

with the military (see Foshier 2013; Fujimura 2013; Holmes-Eber 2013; Rubenstein 2013; Turnley 2013; Varhola 2013), and that even the most vocal of HTT critics were not categorically opposed to working with the military (Commission on the Engagement of Anthropology with the US Security and Intelligence Communities [CEAUSSIC] 2009). In the words of Sally Engle Merry, critical anthropologist of human rights:

I'm not a fan of war, and I don't think war as a way to produce peace makes much sense. But I also think the military is in a very difficult box, and people are trying to do the right thing. I just wish we could find a way to use the knowledge anthropology can produce to bring these wars to an end. (Quoted in Gezari 2013: 126)

Anthropologists in the MoD were well aware of this debate, at the very least because they periodically conferred with their US counterparts, such as Montgomery McFate, who oversaw management of the HTTs. These civil servants recognised that some HTTs had done very good work, producing very detailed reports. In fact, they considered some of the work too detailed. However, to avoid reigniting the heated controversy generated in the AAA and mainstream American media, the anthropologist-functionaries decided to imitate a different US military mode of deploying the discipline. Instead of preparing anthropologists to work alongside troops on active duty, they suggested training officers in anthropology. In 2009, partly at the anthropologists' prompting, the MoD decided to set up a Defence Cultural Specialist Unit (DCSU), where selected officers could learn how to collect material in an anthropologically informed manner. The plan was that all its recruits would undergo a ten-week course in social sciences and 'influencing skills', as well as training in an Afghan language, before being deployed in Helmand, the southerly province of Afghanistan where the British Army operated. A NATO press release on the course specifies their role there:

The specialists will help build a picture of Helmandi society for commanders in Task Force Helmand and battlegroups across the province to help them identify and understand issues relating to the local cultural, political, economic, social and historical environment to help commanders make better and more informed decisions. ...

The specialists will build on their existing language skills and cultural understanding by gathering local knowledge and fostering contacts at bazaars, *shuras* [consultative assemblies] and other places where local people gather.<sup>4</sup>

The intention was that the DCSU would have forty-two members, from any of the services, eight of them stationed in Afghanistan at any one

time. Besides sending specialists into conflict zones, the Unit would also support cultural training in the wider military and other government departments. Its inaugural, truncated training course was attended not just by UK officers, but also by civil servants from the MoD, FCO, DfID and the Civil Service Stabilisation Unit.

Almost inevitably, one captain in the DCSU, who chose to live for a year with a unit of the Afghan Local Police, was compared with the legendary World War One ethnographer-spy, Lawrence of Arabia. As he himself put it:

My job was to go into areas where we didn't have a lot of knowledge, to speak to the villagers and to train the local police officers.

In these areas allegiances could change in a moment, everyone knew someone in the Taliban. I would lead these Afghan elements in engagements against the insurgents.

Sharing a bed with Afghans wasn't the done thing, nobody else was doing that. I suppose I went a bit bush, especially with the really horrible beard.<sup>5</sup>

It is thought that several of those who complete this course and put it into military practice will themselves become academics on leaving the armed services. Despite repeated attempts, I have been unable to obtain any further information about the course they undergo.<sup>6</sup>

As the broader work of the DCSU suggests, it can be very difficult these days to isolate the work of the military from that of other divisions of government. For critics today, exclusive focus on the armed forces is hard to achieve. The expansion of 'joined-up thinking' and the establishment of a broad-based 'security agenda' has led to delegated members of the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office and DfID working together on the same committees, in Whitehall or the field, for the same ultimate ends. The only complaint from those in DfID about these meetings is that they tend to be regarded as the poor relation at the table. As one wag put it, 'Crumbs for bums?' (Interview July 2013)

For some, however, all is not rosy in this new, more 'humanised' vision within the British armed forces. A pair of feminist critics, for instance, have argued that although the avowed intention is to understand others and so enable transitions towards stability and security, they contend that their scrutiny of an MoD release reveals that it continues to uphold an instrumentalist approach to culture, which it regards as immutable and thus akin to 'race' (Duncanson and Cornish 2012: 163–65). At the very least, their work suggests that the DCSU has much work to do if it is to spread a modern anthropological approach through the MoD.

## **The skills they brought to the job, the ones they learnt on the job**

Anthropology students are taught a range of skills. Those who go on to do fieldwork and write a thesis learn an even broader set. Of course, which skills turn out to be important for anthropologist-civil servants depends on the jobs they have to do. The range of those jobs can be remarkably diverse.

The skills my interviewees already had which proved of use in the Civil Service were: the ability to use a very wide, very varied evidence base ('very, very useful, that', said one); their interviewing skills; and their capacity to read and understand new material at reasonable speed (one admitted she could do that much faster than expected, so kept quiet about her ability). Studying anthropology had taught them to understand other cultures in 'an informed subtle way', while doctoral fieldwork had trained them to observe and record things very closely, and how to collate the amassed data into meaningful patterns. They had also learnt the importance of taking into account 'agents' visions of us and how that influenced their own actions'. Several emphasised anthropology's holistic approach, as opposed to the seemingly more narrow-visioned styles of those who came from other disciplines, where they had been trained to look solely at one aspect of a problem. One identified a tendency within the MoD and the Home Office to focus on individuals, such as important political figures; anthropologists, she said, could counter this, 'especially if it is exaggerated' (interview July 2013).

For some interviewees, cooperating on common tasks with graduates of other disciplines made them far more aware of just how distinctive their own skill-set was. One former member of the MoD said she had not realised what anthropology had given her until she had to work with other professionals, such as economists and political scientists. Work-based chats with them made her appreciate that she thought of groups in ways different to them.

The skills they had to learn make up a long list. I noticed the more successful tended to provide a more fulsome inventory. Most of the items they gave tend to fit under the twin rubrics of how to manage people and how to influence them. One said she learnt to be always cheerful and positive: 'Don't say "No"'. Unlike their American counterparts (Nolan 2013), most of those I interviewed said they did not 'network'. To them, that sounded too instrumental. Instead they emphasised the importance of getting to know the people they worked with, of respecting them, and in turn being respected. To gain and

then hold colleagues' attention and respect, these fledgling civil servants had to learn, and learn quickly, how to be highly professional: in these contexts that meant being clear, down to earth, responsive, rigorous and able to deliver on time what was needed. They needed to learn to recognise what mattered, and what did not. In the words of one former functionary, one had 'to engage with the customer' (interview July 2013), clarifying what they needed before trying to deliver it.

As veterans of fieldwork, my interviewees knew the importance of learning the local language, building up good relations with 'stakeholders' on a common project, assessing where they fitted into the hierarchy, identifying when to interject and when to hold back: 'You pick your battlegrounds' (interview July 2013). Experienced ethnographers, they were well aware that they had to learn the model and the reality of the organisation now employing them. If they wanted to get anything done, interviewees had to know whom they could talk to, at what level. To get a decision made and then see it implemented, they had to 'sell' the idea, to the right people, by making them see its benefit. In the words of one, who had worked in the MoD, 'I was cutting things down to their essence for the colonel, at the same time taking into account "What kind of person is the colonel?"' (Interview July 2013) Another, in DfID, revealed that she influenced decisions by making friends with others at the same level as her in neighbouring sections of the Ministry, and then persuading them to push for the same change at much the same time. It usually worked, she said.

In the MoD, the anthropologist-functionaries also had to become confident in themselves, to be ready to challenge people. They were helped in this by the self-image of the Ministry as a 'learning organisation'. One interviewee in the MoD said they could tell even generals and other very high-ranking officers to their face that they were wrong, and if the anthropologists learnt how to do that without insulting them in the process, these senior military men would accept their correction. The top brass knew it was important for them to meet with academics, to develop and rethink their strategies. And sometimes they were prepared to pay the price of those encounters.

The anthropologists also had to learn how to work productively with others in teams. They emphasised how multidisciplinary these groups can be: economists, operational researchers (who model large systems), statisticians, social researchers, political scientists. As they have begun to ascend the Whitehall hierarchy, my interviewees have also had to learn how to delegate: they were no longer researchers but managers of research projects. One point all interviewees stated was

that they had had to develop quantitative skills: 'Doing a PhD in social anthropology did not teach me about reliability, validity, or the need to number questionnaires'.<sup>7</sup>

The skills they learnt to cast aside included reading from the text when making a presentation and giving hour-long seminar papers: twenty-five minutes was the absolute maximum. They also had to avoid at all costs 'waffle' and esoteric prose. As one said, 'I now write in a pithy style, so that ministers can absorb information rapidly and make decisions: a two-page document; nothing more' (interview July 2013). It is notorious how far hidebound academics can stray in the opposite direction. Audrey Richards was famously told by a colonial official, 'Just half a sheet – just the salient facts' (Richards 1977: 178). To her, his remark exemplified the impatience of administrators. Today anthropologist-functionaries would regard it as yet another indicator of many academics' inability to be exact but still terse.

To learn how these skills might be employed in a concrete fashion, I asked one interviewee how policy is crafted. She replied that it was a very difficult question to answer as the process could be so complex, but she gave as a simplifying example the goal of the present government to reduce the number of immigrants. First, relevant ministries would be asked to review the existing legal parameters and how they might be changed. In this case, the ministries involved would be the Home Office, which oversees the police force, the FCO, which grants visas, and those concerned with the management of social services. Each would have to investigate the consequences for their department of any development of policy, by commissioning some of their civil servants to begin the process of finding out and evaluating the options. As this initiative moved closer to the formulation of a bill, a bill team would be formed, its membership drawn from the ministries most involved. Its task would be to shepherd the proposal through Parliament. The team leader would be charged to tour the ministries concerned, to discuss and solicit input for the legislation. The team would then assess the collated inputs, and produce a draft bill, to be discussed with and approved by their political superior. When the selected minister has to present the finished bill to the House of Commons, a senior member of the team stands in a nearby passageway. She makes notes on questions put by MPs and then has her commentary passed to the minister, so that he or she can respond in an apparently informed manner.

In an age of IT, this latter procedure sounds almost Victorian, on a par with the maintained tradition of printing Acts of Parliament on goatskin vellum.

## Fun, fun, fun?

### *Upsides*

So far the only other ministries to take on anthropologists are the Foreign Office, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Cabinet Office. In all four and in the MoD, outside of DSTL, my interviewees first worked primarily as researchers, carrying out research projects. If they proved good at that task, within a few years they could then progress to managing research projects. At this more senior level, they have to think up viable projects, bid for their funding within an internal competition and, if successful, usually oversee and coordinate the project through to its final report. For example, one anthropologist at the Ministry of Justice said she at first researched drug markets, assessing the effectiveness of police strategies to control the trade. She then started to design research projects and to commission others to carry out the projects, some of which could be quite large, for instance qualitative work on the criminal behaviour of drug traffickers, evaluating middle markets, and assessing police evaluation.<sup>8</sup>

Interviewees said they did not usually devote all their time to research or managing research projects. There were also rote tasks to perform, still intellectually challenging but with less range for their imagination and shorter-term targets. One said a very high proportion of their work was 'keeping the wheels of government turning': helping to formulate parliamentary questions, which have to be adjudged truthful and accurate, as well as commissioning research, assessing the reliability of relevant, already existing information, and providing ad hoc, urgent information to ministers. A second interviewee said that working out the most appropriate discourse for their superiors to use was another common task: 'I help politicians to find the right language in which to express issues to the people' (interview July 2013).

For the sake of their careers, it is important for these anthropologist-civil servants to gain broad experience. However, switching between ministries is much easier, I was told, than being promoted from research to project management. One interviewee stressed to me that it was important to control the alluring charms of research. If one wanted to move up, one had to move on. DfID is the exception: perhaps because of the commitment they show and satisfactions they gain while working in international development, no anthropologist, to my knowledge, who has entered that department has then left it for another ministry. Candidates for promotion are assessed via an evidence-based process: 'It's not enough to be shiny. One has to deliver high-quality products,



to time, in accordance with the Civil Service Values' (interview July 2013). Ascent can be relatively rapid. One interviewee, who served in the MoD for four years, had, by the time she left, achieved an administrative grade that equated to the military rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Every civil servant I spoke to stressed the pleasures and satisfactions of their work. Some were energetically emphatic on this point. Only one looked back on her doctoral days with patent nostalgia: 'My PhD was fun. I miss that fun!' (Interview July 2013) Several interviewees underscored their keenness, on completing their doctorates, to apply their anthropological knowledge to public end; they did not wish to remain in academia all their working lives. Most had decided relatively early to get out of university and put their training to extramural use. One confessed how disappointed she had been, when a research student, that she had had to debate with her Oxford tutor why anthropology needed a point. To my interviewee the question was real; to the academic it was merely academic. As another interviewee put it, 'I am not here to indulge myself to write papers. I am here to help the people' (interview July 2013).

Some interviewees saw working for the Civil Service as a real opportunity to effect change, not just campaign for it. One, who worked for the MoD, said she 'saw the value of stimulating change from the inside' (interview July 2013). For instance, the first unit she worked in, DSTL, drew on social scientific understanding in order to develop influence and to advance the use of 'non-kinetic techniques', i.e. talking to people, not killing them.

Without exception, all of those who had worked in international development were particularly eloquent. 'I loved feeling I was making a difference, influencing processes and policy.' One former SDA said she was 'just curious about people. I liked a challenge, getting people to do what they hadn't considered or were not sure they wanted to do'. 'There are a lot of committed people in DfID. It has a very strong ethos. There is a great buzz.' (Interviews July 2013) A recent retiree from DfID stated:

I am now writing a report on how to spend £80,000,000 on urban poverty in X [one of the poorest countries on earth]. Because of my experience, I have inordinate, unjustified leverage on projects. I know how to get money out of departments. I am continually surprised how easy it is to prise money out of people. (Interview, 27 June 2014)

Some spoke of the excitement at being so close to power, the seductiveness of being party, in however marginal a manner, to the making of grand decisions that might affect millions. One SDA mentioned the

'frisson' of being asked by a minister to speak with him or her about something. When Claire Short was Secretary of State for International Development, she held regular roundtable meetings where 'people would get angry or pleased with what you'd done. You felt very included, part of the decision-making process. It created quite a buzz' (interview July 2013).

Several said they liked the interdisciplinary dimension to their work; they found it exciting, having to work with psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and others. One called it 'fascinating'; she 'learnt loads'. She had worked for NGOs previously and had been somewhat frustrated with the range of her research work. To her surprise, the MoD, where she worked, stressed the need for continual learning: a refreshingly 'huge percentage of time was spent on training' (interview July 2013).

There can be important differences in ministry workstyles. I have already mentioned the distinctiveness of DfID. The FCO, as one of its members pointed out to me, is still regarded as the senior branch of the Civil Service. The Foreign Secretary is able to bring greater political pressure to bear than other ministers. He or she is granted greater freedom of comment, and that relative degree of liberty percolates down to his mandarins. Also, civil servants in the Home Office have to monitor the dissemination of extremist views solely within the UK, whether those views are imported or internally generated. In contrast, my interviewee added with a smile, those in the FCO working on similar themes get to make trips abroad.

### *Downsides*

My interviewees, some of whom I have known for years, listed surprisingly few downsides to their jobs. One former SDA said the politics of the government of the day was a major constraint, which could prove frustrating. Come a post-electoral change of governing party, civil servants had to learn the development programme and set of priorities of their new ministers, what new tasks they would have to perform, and what initiatives they would have to drop, no matter how much work they might have done on them. Another interviewee frankly admitted that the work could at times be dull; she found the levels, spread and weight of bureaucracy dispiriting and frustrating. A third complained of how tightly her time was organised. While in DSTL, she had to account for every fifteen-minute slot of her workday.

A social scientist friend, who in the 1980s had done a series of consultancies for the Home Office, told me that, in her experience, if the re-

leased results of her commissioned work clashed with the stance of the government, her findings would be publicly dismissed, on television or the radio, by the relevant minister. In contrast, all my interviewees said that no work they had ever done was suppressed. One did confess that sometimes '[a] point of view didn't chime ... It can be disappointing if you see the rational and right path to take, and it's not taken' (interview July 2013). Another, who has since left the Civil Service, said her suggestions had never been ignored while she worked for a ministry. The only time any of her ideas had been disregarded was when she worked for an NGO.

Perhaps the apparent lack of suppression is because the more adept civil servants learn to censor themselves, before others get them to do it. One ex-member of DfID confessed that there was a continual tension in the Department for people like herself, between an anthropological point of view with its concerns about nuance and complexity, and the formulation of public policy, which requires quick and simple answers: 'But that's what politicians want. So we spent a lot of time suppressing our concerns. There's no space for doubt in public policy' (interview July 2013). This self-suppression can be particularly difficult for practitioners of a discipline like anthropology, which prides itself on reflexivity and ethnographic subtlety.

Only one of those I interviewed said that she had ever been asked to do something she considered unethical, and that was only once or twice, in the MoD. On both occasions, she said, she rethought the request in a way that made it ethical, to her satisfaction. The officers were pleased with her re-presentation of their task. As she put it, she had given the customer what they needed rather than what they wanted. Another interviewee, an ex-member of DSTL, stated that during her time with the unit she never felt the information she produced was used in ways she was not informed about. Indeed, one former anthropologist-functionary said the only time she had received demands to twist a report, they did not come from within the Civil Service but from representatives of a professional body being assessed by a regional government. When their initial pleas for a change in her assessment of them failed, they shouted directly to her face. She told me she refused to budge. I learnt of only one anthropologist-civil servant who resigned for ethical reasons. She left DfID on a matter of principle: she would not be party to a departmental decision to supply the Nepalese police with helicopters. She thought, very probably with good reason, that they would not just be used for emergency evacuations of the injured and endangered, but for hunting down the then-active Maoist insurgents as well.

Some of my interviewees considered there was no significant difference in the main ethical problems they faced, compared to those encountered by academic anthropologists and fieldworkers. The key questions were the same: who are you representing? What is the end result of one's information? One interviewee stressed that, contrary to the image held by critical outsiders, anthropologist-civil servants were in fact better protected ethically than academic anthropologists in their own sphere. On joining Whitehall, a recruit has to enter a contractual agreement to abide by the statutory Civil Service Code. As she said, 'This has legal bite. And I've seen stronger use of it in government than of the ASA guidelines in anthropology'.<sup>9</sup> (Interview July 2014) The Code is explicit about the duty of civil servants to raise any concerns they may have. It is equally clear about the consequences: 'If the matter cannot be resolved using the procedures set out above, and you feel you cannot carry out the instructions you have been given, you will have to resign from the Civil Service'. This may be seen as a strength or integral weakness of the Code. Compare the epilogue to the ASA guidelines: 'This statement of ideals does not impose a rigid set of rules backed by institutional sanctions, given the variations in both individuals' moral precepts and the conditions under which they work'.<sup>10</sup>

Recently, some anthropologist-civil servants from across government have gone further, and formed an informal group to discuss ethical issues and provide a structure to support colleagues who may feel they are being put under unduly difficult conditions. When I asked what clout this body, independent of ministerial structures, might have, one interviewee replied that if any collectively agreed statement by its members were disregarded, that 'would be at a cost' (interview July 2014). The group, in other words, acts as an informal lobby within governmental structures. I have been unable to learn more about the functioning of this group.

Depending on one's point of view, distance from academe might be included here as a further downside of becoming a civil servant. One former SDA said that when she gave seminars in departments of anthropology, audiences were on the whole excited by her work. But generally she learnt to steer clear of academics, as she found it too complicated to explain the various constraints she had to work around. She therefore came to find that most academic critiques of topics relevant to the department seemed very distant. She said there was an inside circle of academics, former colleagues in the Ministry, who understood their work and who collaborated productively with them. Those on the outside circle did not understand the way the Ministry functioned, and had different agendas and criteria. They were not given work.

The government's desire for secrecy, perhaps overdeveloped in the British case, was given as another change one had to get used to. This was especially felt by former academics used to living their subject all day. To one ex-MoD interviewee, one downside of her job was not being able to talk about it to outsiders, no matter how close they were. She added that she was a pacifist, who did not believe that killing people was the best way to resolve conflicts. But that was an opinion she had kept to herself, not shared with either friends or work colleagues. Another said it took several years to get used to the idea that one's labours ended at the end of the workday. Because her tasks were classified, she could take no documents whatsoever out of the Ministry building. While an academic, she had been used to working as late as she wanted, wherever she wanted. By the time of our interview, she no longer regarded this imposed limitation as restricting, but rather liberating.

Of course, committed civil servants can reinterpret apparent downsides in a positive manner, because they stress dedication to the ultimate aims of their work. Some interviewees, brought up in the questionable traditions of the 'solitary fieldworker' and of academics as 'lone stars', found the transition to teamwork particularly hard. One said she had to learn 'to let go' (interview July 2013): ideas and the resulting products did not belong to oneself, but to the team one was on. 'There's no copy-right on your work', said another (interview July 2013). Some found this change in style liberating:

Three months in, I realised my ego didn't matter. Such a different world to academia: there's no back-stabbing.

When I was a postdoc at [a major London department], I was shocked, really shocked at how anthropologists behave towards one another.

Here we give ideas freely. Careers are not dependent on those ideas. You are part of a team. We are very corporate here. (Interview July 2013)

One interviewee said that teamwork on a proposal was a collective endeavour in 'what'll wash', i.e. an exercise in language. The general attitude was that if their proposal was not accepted the first time, they would rephrase it in a different language the next time. As good anthropologists, they also learnt to comprehend the underlying logic of the armed forces. One recounted that in DSTL and the MoD, she and fellow anthropologists were constantly striving to unpick military assumptions. They learnt that some could be unpicked, but some not, or else they had to be approached in a different way 'because of political realities' (interview July 2013). None of my interviewees saw either strategy

– washing or unpicking – as a downside to their job. On the contrary, they saw them as enjoyable challenges. Ultimately, several confessed that what maintained their interest and their belief in their position was the ability to ask, at any point, ‘What are we doing with the information we’ve gathered?’ and being able to come up with an answer that satisfied them. They were using their skills ‘to try to improve the situation’ (interview July 2013).

A few interviewees complained about the sustained level of pressure in their workplace, and its potentially damaging consequences. One, a rising civil servant in the mid levels of the FCO, exemplified the point by detailing what she called ‘a typical day’ (interview July 2014):

8AM: hour-long meeting with a deputy director of an overall mission, who reported to the Director-General of the FCO (equivalent in rank to a Private Under-Secretary). They discuss how best to staff the mission. They need to get the right mix of skills at different levels and stay within budget.

9AM: a Training Department meeting with the lead person for one of the Ministry’s diplomatic training courses. They discuss whether everything is properly organised and set up: e.g. actors would be used for role-playing exercises; were enough, and enough of the right kinds, booked? They also have to scrutinise whether the most appropriate exercises are being allotted to the different trainees. The two have to check that the course will test and develop the required skills: will it be a productive use of everyone’s time?

9.40AM: she gives a ninety-minute class teaching ‘Cultural Difference’ to a dozen members of the FCO. She sketches the way the study of culture has been broached by anthropologists, sociologists and business analysts, who have researched multinationals as well as different organisations around the world. She shows how one can shift from theory to quotidian manifestation, e.g. in face-to-face meetings and unexpected events. The class overruns by ten minutes.

11.20AM: fifteen-minute tea break.

11.35AM: a forty-five-minute meeting with a new recruit whom she is mentoring and coaching. Concerns include: how is he finding his new job? What challenges is he finding? A military officer in his mid 30s, he is used to working within very clear parameters. My interviewee tries to get him used to taking independent initiatives; she suggests techniques he can use.

12.10PM: Lunch, with a small team she is working with on the second iteration of a new training course. They hammer out its future, discuss how it could be improved, and take note of feedback: ‘Not too much theory please!’

c. 1PM: back at her desk for an hour, she goes over the results of a cross-department plan. Over the previous eight months she had put to-

gether what a certain discipline could contribute to our understanding of a recognised danger to British society. Her sub-task for this plan is to facilitate a network of forty academics who were consulted on the question. (My interviewee stresses that an important side-dimension of her work is to facilitate the contribution of academics.)

2PM: she takes the report about the plan to a meeting with several Director-Generals and Directors who have already read it. They opine that the report is very interesting but too long: two pages would have been better. They ask how its implementation might impact on the FCO. What does it mean for posts and people? In the process, an initial discussion about the direction and future tasks for the FCO is turned into a question about the allocation of resources. The meeting has to end at 3PM, but at least another hour of work on it is needed. She will have to 'squeeze it out' of her schedule.

3PM: tea, with a junior colleague who wishes to talk about the use of social media by Daesh. She identifies the relevant experts and suggests he speak with them.

3.30PM: forty-minute discussion with a senior colleague about the development of policy towards an unstable African country.

4.10PM: discussion with some colleagues about three projects in which she is involved. All three have online data dimensions, and are concerned with ways for the FCO to make better use of its online presence. For example, one new programme has gone through its preliminary stages of development; they now need to probe its level of trustworthiness. The questions they ask include: are we holding it up to the right level of scrutiny? Can we make it more available? Will it be seen as UK government propaganda? They wish to reassure themselves that at the upper level there is due diligence, and at the lower level sufficient resources to run the programme successfully.

Later this week she will join a further meeting, with all those involved in this particular project: its manager; representatives of the various departments that contributed to its funding; academic liaison; two or three pilot users. The key question here will be whether the project is worth spending more money on, or whether the time has come to stanch the cash flow. As she put it, 'Is it time to cut, and cry "No more"?'

5.10PM: back to her desk for sixty to eighty minutes, to go through her emails. Only fifteen today; this is less than usual. But her online calendar, to which others have access, is full for the next three weeks. So colleagues tend to leave her alone, for the time being.

One email is a conversational thread, started by a colleague who describes a recent event and worries whether they reacted appropriately. My interviewee tries to reassure him: 'Don't worry. You did the right thing'.

Another email is a request for information: the department is gathering evidence about what they have done in countries X, Y and Z over the last eighteen months. They wish to know where departmental efforts have had the greatest impact or success. My interviewee parks this item;

maybe she will attend to it later. She quietly ponders why colleagues are asking others to do their work for them.

6.30PM: her average leaving time. Other days she might leave at 5PM, 7PM or at the worst 7.30PM.

Phew! As she said to me, 'Days are frantic at the moment'. She added that her daily schedule was more complex now compared to her time in DSTL. However, she noted that this was a common consequence of promotion, especially in the contemporary context of a government with fewer resources 'and more arses on it'. She said she had never seen colleagues taking long lunches; rather, they always felt under pressure. Expectations were rising, and levels of stress with them. Recently, for the first time in the fifteen or so years she had been in the Civil Service, she had started to notice that colleagues were having to take time off on medical grounds. Today's Whitehall is not for slouches.

### **Professional identity**

All those I interviewed had been civil servants for several years at least, some for decades. A number were surprised at my question about whether they still thought of themselves as anthropologists. It was not something they usually considered. Perhaps my question was wrong-footed; I should not have used so concrete a term as 'identity'. Maybe they did not wish to appear rude to an anthropologist who had chosen to remain in a university.

As one interviewee pointed out, new entrants to the Civil Service come as either generalists or specialists. But if even an anthropologist with a doctorate enters as a specialist, she can still end up with a series of different identities, which matter in different ways. One retiree, who had spent much of her life in DfID, said she had blown hot and cold about being seen as an anthropologist, as being a development professional was a different, equally professional identity. An interviewee who had been a civil servant for over a decade classed herself as both an anthropologist and as a government researcher, but the latter was clearly more important in her day-to-day work. Another, who worked in international aid for twenty years, said whether one was an anthropologist or not, one still became a DfID bureaucrat with a particular Department-framed view of how the world, above all the aid world, worked. One interviewee looked uncomfortable at first, then replied that it had been important early on to be an anthropologist but her skill base had widened greatly since then: 'It can become a hindrance to be a specialist' (interview July 2013). If she were to come back to academia



for a sabbatical, it would not be as an anthropologist, but an anthropologist-civil servant. Only one was emphatic about shedding that period of her past. She, who had worked first in international NGOs, then in the MoD, and now held a senior position in a charity with global scope, said that her professional identity as an anthropologist was by this stage completely irrelevant.

Others were much more positive about their anthropological background. One recent retiree from DfID said her identity as an SDA was central for her, and that was linked to her social anthropological training. Being an anthropologist was, she stated, 'important': 'Something about anthropology which gets into your blood. It sort of informs how ever you see things' (interview July 2013).

It was notable that this interviewee, who had a Masters but not a doctorate in anthropology, was very vague about what exactly she meant. Here, anthropology appeared to be more a personal banner than a specifiable intellectual practice. Another interviewee, who had started as a specialist but now regarded herself as a generalist, was emphatic: 'I'll always be an anthropologist' (interview July 2013). Although she had been in the Civil Service for more than a decade and a half, she stressed how important it was to her that she was still publishing and editing anthropology. Indeed, she was now more heavily involved in a particular international anthropological organisation than she had been when a postdoc.

## **Reactions from/to academic anthropologists**

The very idea of working for the Civil Service can excite strong reactions, in favour or against, across a broad swathe of British academic anthropology. A lively section within the discipline is firmly opposed to any anthropological involvement whatsoever with the government, and especially with the military or associated bodies. They phrase their rejection primarily in ethical terms. These attitudes were starkly expressed in a mid 2000s debate.

In 2006 the FCO and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) launched, in an exclusivist manner, an ill-considered joint research programme on 'Combating Terrorism by Countering Radicalisation'. The ESRC, it was said, was very keen for this initiative to prosper: it hoped it would be the first of many, linking its organisation and various ministries, and thus the sharing of budget provision. After much criticism, especially from anthropologists, a revised brief for the programme was issued. However, the ASA resolved that the initiative, whose results

would inform UK counterterrorism policy overseas, was ‘prejudicial to the position of all researchers working abroad, including those who have nothing to do with this Programme’ (Minutes, ASA AGM, 12 April 2007). There was a real fear that the scheme could endanger anthropologists in the field. The Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), after a particularly charged debate on the issue, finally decided to support and endorse the ASA resolution (Minutes, Council, RAI, 25 April 2007). In a comment on this debate (which I attended), the editor of *Anthropology Today* adjudged:

Alarm bells ring for many academics when they are asked to work not so much broadly for the public good as on behalf of the ruling powers – whether in service of ... particular public agencies, or for the government of the day and its international allies. Such engagement often entails pressure to modify our findings in the light of values that ought to be themselves the subject of in-depth research; the ‘Combating terrorism’ project is a case in point. (Houtman 2007: 2)

One civil servant considered that the poor handling of this initiative had been ‘very damaging, as anthropologists kept away from the FCO’ (interview July 2013). In contrast, another thought it did lead to some beneficial rethinking: what were better ways to commission independent academic work? How could the government clarify that it was asking for independent views? In her opinion, if the grant-holders felt muzzled, any exploratory programme would be a waste of money.

In an insightful review of this controversy, in which he played a minor but significant role, Jonathan Spencer demonstrated, with detailed examples, how difficult it is for a university-based academic to make informed ethical decisions when involved in the murky world of powerful government bodies (Spencer 2010). One question is whether that is sufficient reason for anthropologists to keep away from government. Professional opinion remains deeply divided. Skinner, who sees ethics as skilled practice rather than a universal code, agrees with the call for anthropologists to commit to ‘the possibility of ethical uncertainty’ (Harper and Corsín-Jiménez 2005: 11). For Spencer, ‘The best we can hope for is not so much being “right” but simply being “less wrong” than the last time’ (Spencer 2010: S298). Or, to précis Beckett: Fail. Try again. Fail better.

One dimension to this debate is the desire of politically active academics to retain their privileged position, however embattled or reduced it might be, as critical intellectuals. They wish to uphold the anti-war Quaker maxim, ‘Speak truth to power’, even if (for some, especially if) power is not listening. In sharp contrast, almost all of my civil servant interviewees displayed no moral qualms about the commitment

they had made. For them, it was Hobson's choice whether to be an outsider critic or an insider attempting to steer policy. An ex-member of the MoD justified her position on the grounds that she was happy to provide more nuance and understanding about a relevant topic, especially if it led to less violence as an outcome. One may also question how politically aloof the tenured can be. In the chiding words of one who has worked for DfID, 'As anthropologists we must ... acknowledge that there is no anthropology outside politicised institutional settings, and that what we do as ethnographers and as anthropologists is always part of some sort of political agenda, even if this uncomfortable fact is often unacknowledged within anthropology' (Green 2006: 125). Her words were echoed by one interviewee who, after reading a draft of this chapter, gently reminded me, 'Any anthropological practice is embedded in the society you're in. For instance, Jeremy, your publishing this book is an exercise of power' (interview July 2014). She added that it was not just academics who could speak truth to power: civil servants could do it as well, and maybe to more effect, though that would never be made public.

This commitment to working within government led to occasional face-to-face conflict with their tenured counterparts. One interviewee pointed out to me that, compared to other academic specialists, such as political scientists, British anthropologists are much more cautious and suspicious about the government (see also Green 2006: 125). Another interviewee recounted that when she had given a seminar at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), she had had a 'tough ride', though overall she had 'enjoyed the interrogation': 'It helped me top up my academic integrity, kept me on my toes about things I'd become complacent about' (interview July 2013). Another was similarly understanding. She stressed to me the view that civil servants were supposed to be by necessity apolitical. In contrast, she considered that academics could 'confuse' their intellectual opinions with their political views. Such was life, she thought, up in the ivory towers. She felt better away from those turreted enclaves. Of course, her statement relies on a restricted notion of the political; critics could easily respond that joining the Civil Service is itself a political decision, while the ability of functionaries to steer, indeed at times to manipulate the decisions by their political masters is notorious. One reason for the great popularity of the BBC comedy series 'Yes, Minister', whose axis is this tension, was viewers' well-placed suspicion that what they saw was so close to the truth (Crissell 2002: 201). The writers of the series openly admitted being inspired by Richard Crossman's account of the battles he had, when a Cabinet Minister, with his Permanent Secretary, Dame Evelyn Sharp,

whom he called a manipulator (Crossman 1975). In return, she branded him a bully (Bendixson and Platt 1992: 2; see also Watkins 1965).

Other interviewees had stronger, less positive comments about their erstwhile colleagues which, if true, do not reflect well on academic anthropologists. One functionary told me that a university-based acquaintance had insinuated strongly that it had been both brave and foolish of her to join the Civil Service. Another, blunter anthropologist told her, 'Your career is over'. My interviewee added that she had been gently but firmly pushed out of the anthropological organisation she had helped represent because its members did not want to be associated in any way with an anthropologist in the MoD. Another said to me she had never been so insulted by anyone as the times when she was abused by anthropologists because of her work in the MoD. She found their level of rudeness and personal abuse 'despicable', and it had led her to cancel her subscriptions to both the ASA and the RAI. She regarded the invective of her former fellow professionals as very non-analytical: 'They refused to understand what I was saying. They were not prepared to put aside prejudices. It was very disappointing' (interview July 2013). In his contribution to this book, Benjamin Smith pushes the argument further: he contends that if anthropologists are committed ethically to the pursuit of insights regarding others, they are in turn obliged to unpack their own biases. 'On that basis, I regard the disdain of many academic anthropologists towards those working for the government as not merely disappointing, but also as profoundly un-anthropological' (Chapter 2).

American anthropologists working in different branches of the US military have made similar comments about their academic colleagues. One argues that for university-based anthropologists to regard any interaction with the military 'as a priori polluting severely limits the value of what we can learn and what we can do to affect changes in policy and actions' (Rubenstein 2013: 131). Another laments that in the process of condemning the Human Terrain System, 'Many anthropologists just lump everyone who works for the military into one basket' (Holmes-Eber 2013: 51).<sup>11</sup> In an unexpected twist, a third sees training troops in our subject as a class-crossing way to spread the anthropological message:

As a discipline we do not make anthropology particularly available to those who cannot afford a college education or who have to focus that education on something more likely to get them a job with only an undergraduate degree. Any time an anthropologist teaches military personnel, there is a good chance the instructor will be bridging a socioeconomic gap the discipline has done very little to close. (Fosher 2013: 99)

Several years ago, a few anthropologists within the MoD participated, with some Australian colleagues, in a panel on 'Anthropology and Government' at an international conference. One commenter from the floor accused them of exploiting their training for what was essentially simplification, stereotyping; she said she had turned down an invitation to contribute an entry on a particular unstable country to an encyclopaedia of nationalism because she was asked to write it in a certain way. One MoD anthropologist on the panel replied that she respected her decision but, in her place, would have made the opposite choice, 'Because if you're not contributing, you're abdicating responsibility'. When a British professor then argued that the MoD anthropologists were 'giving their skills over to an empowered government', he was asked what his research had done for people on the ground. He did not reply. The MoD panellists were surprised and pleased to receive (very unexpected) support from Australian anthropologists working on Aboriginal rights and in the country's health services. Also, another interviewee said members of the Society for Applied Anthropology, a US organisation, whom she had met at one of its gatherings, were 'a lot more welcoming' than academic members of the ASA (interview, 15 June 2013).

A third interviewee, in a different ministry, criticised her former colleagues' chosen disassociation and refusal to participate. She argued that although anthropologists were very good at thinking about, reflecting on or dealing with complex issues, they were also 'very snobby'. It was

disgraceful [that] anthropology doesn't contribute more. For example the riots of a few years ago: who's working to understand them?

There's a tension here. You need to maintain a critical distance to write ethnography. But without engaging directly with the society within which we live, anthropology will fail to renew its identity, including its global identity. If we're not prepared to live in the real world, we as a discipline become more irrelevant. (Interview July 2013)

My interviewees judged that this traditional posture of academic self-distancing is beginning to decline, at least in other social sciences, because of the increasing pressure from the UK research councils for university-based work to have 'impact', i.e. an observable effect on public life or policy.

My 'anti-snobby' interviewee considered academic anthropology 'interesting, like philosophy, but not very practical'. In the words of another, 'There are big problems in the world. We should be using our skills to try to improve the situation' (interview July 2013). Let me give a personal example: in the late 1990s the Director of the RAI asked me

to edit a book demonstrating how anthropology could contribute to public understanding of contemporary social issues. The publishers chose to entitle the resulting book, *Exotic No More. Anthropology on the Front Lines* (MacClancy 2002). To my very great surprise, one UK reviewer assessed the book's aim as 'Thatcherite', because the vision of anthropology I put forward there was too pragmatically framed for his tastes. Instead he underlined how many anthropologists see their subject 'as a sister discipline to philosophy' (Stewart 2004: 384). Another, equally critical British reviewer regarded anthropology as 'a humanistic anti-discipline ... as much a voyage of subjective discovery as it is grounded in some shared practices' (Hart 2004: 5). Clearly, while an increasing number who publish in academic journals are deeply concerned with extramural exigencies,<sup>12</sup> some anthropologists, at least in the UK, remain reluctant to dislodge the priority for the discipline of developing academically oriented theory. It appears that, to them, the generation of novel concepts and modes of explanation, unfettered by concerns in today's world, is what universities should do.

At base here, in the sharp difference of attitudes separating my interviewees from these critics, is a strong tension between conceptions of our pursuit. Some, such as my interviewees, wish to turn their anthropology to pragmatic benefit, whether near-immediate or more long term; they accept that prospect may come at the cost of self-limiting the range or depth of their criticism. Academic opponents of this position uphold the equally uplifting dream of the 'anti-discipline', where anthropology is meant to act more as a provocation to thought than as a prescription for it (Herzfeld 2001: xi). Within the broad church that we dub 'anthropology', this tension is as creative as it is constant (MacClancy 2013: 189). It is also as productive as it is resolvable, for pragmatic benefit and theoretical advance do not have to be mutually exclusive. They are not incompatible. Some reflexive applied anthropologists hope to merge the two by constructing a 'theory of practice'. To some that sounds overly ambitious and formal: better to interlace the two in a well-grounded process of praxis (Partridge 1985; Baba 2000; Hill 2000).<sup>13</sup> Within this scenario, concerns about putting anthropology to work need not be seen as threats to a theoretician's paradise. Eden is not endangered. To put this another way, some UK anthropologists choose to proclaim their discipline as the art of the unthinkable while their counterparts in the Civil Service view their job as the pursuit of the possible. They might both be right, and still well able to work together.

It is also necessary to mention here that reliable sources informed me that several British anthropologists (including some very senior figures) provide, when asked, anthropological advice, usually based on

their regional expertise, to sections of the armed forces. Both for reasons of security and, I presume, of professional self-image, these periodic contacts between academic anthropology and the military are not openly discussed. In other words, just because there does not appear to be a single tenured anthropologist in the UK openly promoting the benefits of anthropologists consorting with the armed services, this does not mean that linking up does not occur, and on a regular basis.

## **Varieties of public service**

So far I have concentrated on anthropologists working in Whitehall. Most of my interviewees are still there and thus, for several reasons, feel unable to write their own accounts. Although I have tried to generate generalisations about their practice, there is no model career path, perhaps because the modern incorporation of anthropologists into central government is still relatively new in the UK. Some join a ministry and stay there for decades; others hop from department to department at regular intervals; yet others enter, then leave within a few years.

What is already clear is that the experience of anthropologists engaged in public service is much broader and more diverse than just those who work for the central ministries of the British government, as the various contributors to this book demonstrate. Their personal accounts also serve to portray the life-course of some of today's anthropologists, as they have shifted back and forth between academia, NGOs and government work. Since the increasing privatisation of public service, driven by a neoliberal agenda, is steadily eroding the jobs-for-life tradition of the Civil Service, these repeated shifts in workplace are likely to become more and more the norm, not the exception. Perhaps the best contemporary image for the career trajectory of an up and coming anthropologist is not that of an elevator but a switchback or, worse, a roller coaster.

For university teachers and undergraduate readers, the chapter by Robert Gregory is perhaps the most inspiring. Directly on graduation, with nothing but an anthropology BA to his name, Gregory got a job with an NGO working with a borough council, was then taken on by the council, and he has moved up its town hall hierarchy ever since. He was first charged to work with Portuguese migrant workers in the town, then with young people, older people, an angry residents' association and so on. In each case, instead of hiring outside consultants, he has engaged directly with the population, finding out their points of view, what they want, and has then persuaded the council to fund

locally desired initiatives, usually run by the locals themselves. By applying the methods of development studies in this Norfolk town, Gregory exemplifies, and his team wins prizes for, 'backyard anthropology'. His initiatives are rolled out as models for other troubled areas in the country, and even come in under budget. At the same time, he has to anthropologise with the state, interpreting Whitehall calls, such as 'boost participatory democracy', into local terms and later back-translating the results into Civil Service-speak. Also, he thinks it important and worthwhile to build the ethnographic skills of other council officers. Gregory's action-oriented anthropology takes a different form to academic undertakings. But this continually adaptive style of our discipline may well be one of its best futures.

A complementary example is the work of Ian Litton, Commissioning Implementation Lead for Warwickshire County Council. There he manages teams charged with implementing IT strategy in various branches of local administration. He has also done prize-winning work on how to coordinate approaches by local and central government to identity assurance.<sup>14</sup> For example, he researched ways for individuals to prove their identity online, facilitated by a customer-controlled network of trust between organisations. In our interview (19 February 2016), he said this work made him realise the 'slippery' nature of identity within British public life and how IT systems could manage that. In overseeing teamwork, he employs 'agile methods', which put value on communication, verbalising the unspoken, co-production and user priorities. In response to my questions, he considered that the most directly relevant lessons of his anthropology training at the University of St Andrews were to make him more aware, in particular, that there were multiple ways of interpreting the world, that people living in one locale may yet understand the same events in different ways, and that in order to create efficient systems one had to learn 'where people are coming from', i.e. the power of ethnography as a research method (e.g. Litton and Potter 1985; Potter and Litton 1985). Unlike my other interviewees, he could pinpoint the guiding line provided by one of his teachers: Ladislav Holy's transactionalist emphasis on the constitutive role of the individual in the ongoing creation of social life (e.g. Holy and Stuchlik 1983). It was also noteworthy how similarly the language and style of our discipline dovetailed with those of agile methods; indeed, the latter is sometimes called 'software anthropology', and may today adopt explicitly ethnographic dimensions.<sup>15</sup>

Dominic Bryan and Neil Jarman, both based in Northern Ireland, made a series of key interventions in the late 1990s to resolve repeated problems of public disorder, as they discuss in their chapter. Initially



they engaged with politicians, then assisted in the development of law and the application of policy, and finally worked with those practically involved with the issues on the ground. Exploiting their ethnographic nous, they repeatedly pitched ideas, accepted that some did not work and then thought up more, in a constantly evolving context where anthropology met government practice in a lively dynamic, which at its best ascended spirally. Their experience also demonstrates the intellectual potential of international exchange, as they took their ideas to post-apartheid South Africa, brought others back and persuaded the government to test them. As they confess, these were heady times; their chapter shows how a pair of hardworking imaginative ethnographers can take advantage of rapidly expanding horizons to put their anthropology to public use. In the process they have persuaded initially sceptical civil servants of the value of fieldwork methods for the gathering of relevant data, which can in turn inform the formulation of policy.

Mils Hills's career history is easily the most vertiginous of all the contributors. He went from near-idyllic doctoral fieldwork in Mauritius via the MoD all the way up to the Cabinet Office, where he was directly answerable to the Prime Minister, before leaving to start his own consultancy, and then back to academia, this time in a Department of Business Studies. It is a remarkable example of an anthropologist who really was able 'to speak truth to power', especially since his words were 'much appreciated by some individuals' (Chapter 2). On the basis of his own experience, he is also very ready to take a stance that, he openly admits, some will find 'unacceptably provocative'. Hills defends in a feisty manner the full integration of anthropologists into government, and he criticises those against it who, in his terms, are self-marginalising our discipline. This debate, central to the themes of this book, is not one that is going to go away. We must learn to extract what we can from it.

Peter Bennett traces a seemingly different work-course from other contributors. His chapter is all the more illuminating for that. His trajectory goes from doctoral fieldwork among a particular Hindu sect in India to working in prisons, then governing them, only to return decades later to academia, directing a Centre for Prison Studies. His last ten years working for the British Government he spent governing Grendon, Britain's first prison run as a therapeutic community. It is both broadly praised and much researched. He assesses that his anthropological training had a threefold effect. First, it made him value and support ethnographic work on his own terrain. Second, it allowed him to transcend a misleading opposition of us vs. them, the staff vs. the inmates; instead he came to regard the prison as a social context where

he had to comprehend the views, feelings and behaviours of all those with whom he worked. In other words, an informed empathy was key. Third, Bennett argues that he went from being a participant observer in his Indian days to a self-observing participant in a much studied environment; in Grendon, he was an actor meshed within the thick description of his own ethnography, which was in turn an ongoing exercise in generative reflexivity. Also, he makes it clear that his doctoral training stuck with him, and to productive end: 'I have often listened to the highly charged life-changing testimonies of Grendon prisoners and been reminded of the devotional outpourings of sectarian saints' (Chapter 6).

Benjamin Smith's career has embodied yet another sequence of shifts: from fieldwork to applied fieldwork while still studying for his doctorate; working as an NGO intermediary between the indigenes and the state (in this case, Australia); finally, working for the state, in the UK Border Agency. Instead of viewing a bureaucracy as an isolable organisation with its own culture, he takes a neo-Foucauldian turn, viewing government as processual, '(re)produced between particular practices that may not necessarily be formally understood as governmental ... diffuse in character', which categorise and steer those with whom its agents and procedures come into contact (Chapter 3). Thus, NGOs performing 'the work of government' both encompass indigenes within the state and train them in state-oriented subjectivities. As a civil servant he finds his training is particularly advantageous in helping to understand colleagues' interests and aims, building relationships with them and using that to develop and deliver successful policies. At the same time, he holds dear the anthropological generation of unexpected insights, however inconvenient they may be to the bureaucracy. He worries that his two aims of remaining an anthropologist 'at heart' and fulfilling the needs of his bureaucratic role are not always well aligned.

Rachael Goberman-Hill, compared to the other contributors, takes a different but highly relevant tack, in a world where an increasing number of government services are being outsourced. These days the Department of Health of the British government explicitly encourages partnerships between universities and the National Health Service, to such an extent that many research-active staff hold contracts in both academia and the NHS. Goberman-Hill details the development of two research projects; she headed one, and played an important role in the other. In her discussion of these projects, she shows how she both adapts her research style to meet the expectations of funders and appropriates the modes of other disciplines. Since in-depth fieldwork is too

lengthy for NHS funders, she pares her anthropological methods to the bare essentials. Yet she continues to affirm flexibility as key to research, especially given the increasing codification of qualitative analysis. For her, one cost of this stripping down is having to keep quiet about the need for reflexivity and creativity. She concludes with a worry that continues to gnaw: what will be the eventual effects of ranking short-term observation as a valid substitute for longer-term fieldwork? Perhaps what some see as a threat to our disciplinary distinctiveness others will regard as an opportunity.

### Anthropologies elsewhere

The British experience is distinctive. We should not expect otherwise. Just how anthropology has been conceived and deployed over time differs from one country to another, each with its own administrative elites, educational traditions and historical trajectory. A cross-national skim demonstrates the point.

Let us start with the USA. Some of its great urban universities have long-established reputations for applied versions of the discipline, and in World War Two many practitioners willingly adapted their skills to defeating the enemy. Also, the US is still the world's largest economy, with the life of its residents regulated and monitored by a broad extensive bureaucracy. Today the continued high production of anthropologists with doctorates combined with the shrinking market in tenured positions, plus the established custom of practitioners working with government, means that an increasing number work in a diversity of public offices at a variety of levels from the federal to the local. Nolan's recent *Handbook of Practicing Anthropology* gives an idea of this range and its outsourced equivalents. Among others, it includes contributions from a disaster anthropologist and several professional consultants, as well as chapters from those working in the World Bank, the Marine Corps and an assortment of federal agencies: medical, environmental, USAID and so on (Nolan 2013). The American Anthropological Association strives to further this shift by routinely holding workshops on how to gain a job in government (Fiske 2008: 124).

The demographic composition of a country may play a key role in this arena. For instance, in Mexico, whose 'national minorities' comprise over 20% of the population, anthropology has played a constitutive role in government since the revolution, over a hundred years ago. For decades, anthropologists working within or advising the national administration have helped to formulate and implement policy;

at first they advocated acculturation of indigenous groups, later their integration within an explicitly multicultural nation. Unlike its British or US counterparts, Mexican anthropology is not burdened by colonialist hangover or neocolonialist excesses. It continues to be a force for change, with its graduates broadly placed across diverse sections of government (Krotz 2006). Little wonder, then, that when the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held its quinquennial congress in Mexico City in 1993, the president of the country delivered its opening address.

Population size may also be a relevant factor. Norway has a population of only five million; its educated elite is correspondingly small. Within that privileged sector, the social sciences are very popular choices for university entrants; this was especially the case for anthropology during the decades when multiculturalism was in vogue. Postgraduates with extended field experience hold posts, some very senior, in a variety of government ministries (e.g. Justice, Health and Care Services, Fisheries, Defence, Environment, and the Foreign Office, whose portfolio includes international aid). Furthermore, many tenured anthropologists are ready and willing to participate in public debates about issues of the moment: the treatment of the Saami, the status of immigrants, the worth of aid and so on (Eriksen 2006, 2013; Howell 2010). Their words may have weight because it is quite possible for a minister and a public anthropologist to be old university friends; failing that, it is quite likely that his/her First Secretary is a social scientist. On top of that, some anthropology research students, on graduating, do not go into Civil Service, but politics. The leading example here is Hilde Frafjord Johnson: in 1991 she went straight from gaining her research degree to becoming a political advisor to the Prime Minister. Within six years, she was Minister for International Development, a post she held for most of the following decade.

In many countries outside the West, anthropologists do not disdain the application of their craft. Indeed, they may find it hard to justify any other form of their discipline. For instance, in Cameroon today applied anthropology is not marginalised but lauded, and its graduates choose to enter the policy-making apparatus of the state (Nkwi 2006). Elsewhere, politicians' felt need for control may stifle the local development of our discipline beyond the university walls. For example, in Turkey the intellectual repression of certain governments has led to an anthropology yet to gain a public voice or to participate in the making of national policy (Tandogan 2006). Today, China is perhaps the most discouraging case. There the making of money, preferably in vast

amounts, is so highly valued that anthropology is deeply unattractive for most university entrants (Smart 2006); I have found no evidence of anthropologists working for its government.<sup>16</sup>

The point is clear. We cannot generalise easily from the British experience. Other countries have other styles. These all too brief examples at least give us an idea of the factors that might enable a public service anthropology, and help grant our graduates access to posts in officialdom. What we do not know, and would be good to find out, is whether government anthropologies differ distinctively across countries, and how, within each state, national anthropology and bureaucracy intermesh, productively or otherwise.

### **Government anthropology: the colonial and the contemporary**

It would be good to comment on the epigraph given at the start of this chapter. But there are obstacles to a productive comparison.

First, anticolonial attitudes are now so pervasive that the rewriting of history can make it difficult to assess the contemporaneous attitudes of colonial anthropologists. It is crucial to remember here that colonialism was thought a civilising mission by many until the postwar decades. Lucy Mair, who held a Chair in Applied Anthropology at the London School of Economics, remembered, 'None of us ... held that colonial rule should come to an immediate end. Who did in those days? We thought it should give Africans a better deal' (Mair 1975: 192). In the 1970s Sir Raymond Firth chatted about this shift with a fledgling doctoral student, James Clifford:

Firth thought the relations between anthropology and empire were more complex than some of the critics were suggesting. He shook his head in a mixture of pretended and real confusion. What happened? Not so long ago we were radicals. We thought of ourselves as critical intellectuals, advocates for the value of indigenous cultures, defenders of our people. Now, all of a sudden, we're handmaidens of empire! (Clifford 2013: 2)<sup>17</sup>

If, for a moment, we were able to push these concerns to one side, and attempt to assess identifiable benefits of colonial anthropology, our list would still not be long: a few interventions, already noted, where authors informed colonial policy and forestalled counterproductive actions by the authorities; a heightened appreciation, by ethnographer-administrators, of the complexity and sophistication of local ways; commissioned ethnographies that informed the approach of district officers and their superiors.

Second, I iterate the limitations of my own research, based on interviews, not grounded on fieldwork. The only hint I had of the disparity between what my interviewees say and what they do was the occasional lack of fit between the comments made by the anthropologist-civil servants I quizzed. For example, my interviewees tended to gently dismiss suggestions of ethical dilemmas in the workplace. If that were the case, however, it is strange they have felt the need to find space in their already over-full schedules to assemble an informal lobby for the upholding of Civil Service values.

My caveats expressed, what informative comparisons can be made between colonialist practice and that of today? Several differences are evident. First, the mission of the early government anthropologists was usually to produce ethnography or to conduct surveys. They were generators of data, to help dissipate Western ignorance of native customs. Their reports were meant, in usually vague ways, to inform colonial policy. Rarely was their work problem-focused; an exception was F.E. Williams' study, in the Papuan Gulf, of the 1920s modernisation movement, then termed the 'Vailala Madness', whose rebellious dimensions so disturbed the administration (Williams 1923). In contrast, today's breed of anthropologist-civil servants are not hired for ethnographic survey work, but much more specific ends. They are given posts because of particular research skills, as detailed above. Second, they cannot play the role of 'the lone ethnographer', a solitary intellectual gone heroically native, but have to be team players, in suits. Third, anthropologists in Whitehall work to exacting and usually short deadlines, if they wish policymakers to pluck the fruits of their research; colonial ethnographers were usually given a freer rein. Fourth, unlike their contracted predecessors, their positions are long term and they can contemplate the prospect of scaling a career hierarchy. The price of scrambling up that slope, however, is periodic monitoring, further training and sustained pressure on delivering the goods. If they choose to advance their careers, they have to produce, and keep on producing.

Fifth, if an anthropologist working within or with government wants to do research that leads to a direct development in policy, it is near essential that they be involved in the creation, commissioning and management of projects. Otherwise, it is all too easy to disregard their results. In a similar manner, outsiders who wish to inform policy have to ensure their work fits into clearly defined, actively pursued project aims. For it to make a difference, it is preferable that the outside research be commissioned. For instance, Charles Kirke, a military anthropologist and ex-serviceman, told me that in the early 2010s the MoD sought informed proposals for internal reform (interview July 2014). He per-

sueded his academic institution to fund his research into cross-cultural differences between the four services (Civil, Army, Royal Navy, RAF). Staff at the Ministry welcomed his report 'enthusiastically'. However, as far as he is aware, the policy recommendations of his self-generated research (Kirke 2012) were never acted upon.

## **What chance an anthropology of government?**

If an anthropology of contemporary government does emerge, its research remit would have to include the making of policy and the workings of bureaucracy. However, there are problems with the study of both.

An identifiable anthropology of policy has arisen since the millennial turn; in the late 2000s, the association dedicated to it was the most rapidly growing section within the AAA. Its methods and findings, one of its protagonists claims, are 'potentially transformative for the discipline' (Shore 2012: 101). However, like my interviews for this opening chapter, a good number of these studies are hampered by lack of open access to their field site. Instead they tend to focus on the evolving logic of documentary process rather than the internal disputes constituting its production. Similarly, most anthropological studies of bureaucracy so far are either ethnographies of the interface between the public and the administrative, or critical exercises into the rationality of form-filling (e.g. Herzfeld 1991; Bernstein and Mertz 2011; Hoag 2011; Graeber 2015).

An anthropology of Aidland, the study of professionals in international development, promises to overcome some of the above shortcomings. Many of these studies are written by anthropologists who have worked in development, for or within government. David Mosse, in a survey of this material, examines how their ethnographies dissect the productive interactions of the ideological and the actual. Tales of integral compromise, they portray these organisations as informally structured by concealed politics, hidden incentives and careerist strategies, with insiders maintaining an ostensible commitment to collective representations of bureaucratic rationality and institutional mythology. In order to keep their posts and reproduce their organisational structures, they discipline both themselves and one another (Mosse 2011). Of course, much of this is the case for the ethnography of institutions in general: in each sub-world, practitioners box and cox to achieve particular ends; they speak a common language and together uphold a professional ideology. They know their jobs depend on it.

Intimations of all the above are scattered throughout this chapter, as some interviewees revealed to me a few of their cunning wiles and effective stratagems, honed by their doctoral experience: elucidating how best to fit in, by scrutinising what was model and what unspoken reality; their self-disciplining (no talk of 'redistribution'); whom to talk to about what, when, how ('What kind of person is the colonel?'); whom to ally with when, to get an initiative accepted; the 'guerrilla tactics' of SDAs in DfID ('You pick your battlefields') and so on. Veteran fieldworkers, they understood before they stepped into the corridors of power that Whitehall was constituted by social relations and appeals to a protective Civil Service Code. My interviewees and contributors to this book are also well aware that the team-based production of policy and other documents leads to a loss of nuance; Smith strives to accommodate unexpected ideas; Goberman-Hill worries about keeping silent over the need for reflexivity and creativity. Their realist vision of their workplace is backed by the rare, critical report from academics about the day-to-day functioning of government. For example, a study led by the behavioural economist Michael Hallsworth, who at present works for the Behavioural Insights Team, which reports to the Cabinet, classified policy making in the British government as a messy process deeply resistant to reform (Hallsworth, Parker and Rutter 2011).

For several interviewees and contributors, government process is as constraining as it is enabling. This does not necessitate that it is at all times rigid, as some academics seem to suggest. For instance, Green portrays development interventions as inflexibly formulaic. Some interviewees told me a different story, of being given space to conduct new styles of qualitative research, of thinking up new ways to investigate issues. Despite the constraints, there remains space for winning creativity, innovative initiatives. Gregory's 'backyard anthropology' and Litton's 'software anthropology' were both awarded prizes and imitated by other councils. Bryan and Jarman's chapter is a list of ethnographically informed policy recommendations, mostly implemented, some successfully, some not. Hills was one of a small group of energetic, bright young men and women, deliberately brought into the Cabinet Office and other strategic parts of the civil, defence and security services, in order 'to shake things up', to foment culture change. He is explicit that his team had the power to speak truth to power, and for that to be much appreciated by some. A sceptic might claim that what Hills and some interviewees are recounting are just the consequences of a brief experimental moment in the long history of the Civil Service. Maybe; maybe not.



My brief list of examples of interviewees as informal workplace ethnographers is but a necklace of anecdotes. A well-grounded anthropology of government needs systematic studies of particular ministries or their sub-departments. Outside of DfID, however, the chances are that they won't be appearing soon, for two key reasons. First, the ends of government and the perceived need for secrecy effectively block most investigations by outsiders. This applies both to the present day and the recent past: in the UK, official documents are not publicly available for thirty years, and by that time the protagonists of past initiatives are usually either dead or assisted by a failing memory. In fact, death is no protection: the Cabinet tried to prevent posthumous publication of Crossman's diaries. The second reason for pessimism is equally patent. Doctoral fieldworkers are more observers than participants; normally, by the time they have learnt how to act, they are preparing to go home. In contrast, anthropologist-civil servants who choose to stay become more participants than observers, as Bennett noted of his time in the Prison Service. Open, critical analysis of their own workstyles then becomes too threatening to their own positions. When David Mosse wanted to publish a rounded ethnography of a long-term DfID project in which he had been involved, his government co-workers were energetic in trying to block its release: they feared for their jobs (Mosse 2005, 2006).

The goal of government ethnography is not impossible. There are other solutions. Some anthropologist-civil servants, on retiring or shifting sector, may consider returning to the discipline and providing us with subtle, reflexive analysis of the world they inhabited, and helped perpetuate. A glimmer of this comes in Bennett's chapter, where he gently chides the pair of researchers (one of them my wife) who analysed Grendon in stark Foucauldian terms. The reality of prison life, he argues, was much more nuanced. Also, Mosse gives two examples of revelatory texts by former participants: one a tale of heroic effort, the other a confessional tract of the damage done (Mosse 2011: 18). Eyben's reflexive account of her decades in development is a further example (Eyben 2014).

A further question has to be, who would these ethnographies of government be for? Why do they need to be written? My listed examples four paragraphs above demonstrate that my interviewees are very well aware of organisational realities. Similarly, Mosse notes that 'there is little external criticism of development practice that is not prefigured within expert communities' (Mosse 2011: 18). These facts suggest that ethnographies of government would have very little new to tell civil servants themselves. At this rate, the main audiences for these accounts

would be fellow anthropologists (which some would see as a self-referential circle), interested outsiders, curious to see their suspicions confirmed, or students, especially those who wish to work in organisations. On this reading, the *raison d'être* for ethnographies of government appears manifold: to advance academic anthropological debate, to further the education of the already informed and to forewarn job-keen undergraduates of institutional realities. These books could thus be sited in a broad middle ground between exercises in cultural translation and formalisation of the pre-known. Once again, this book does not escape that classification.

## **Futures for anthropology**

The employment of anthropologists by colonial governments was patchy but productive. Those were balmy times, when ethnographers could go off-station, alone, for months. In comparison, the work of today's anthropologist-civil servants is much more collaborative, their timelines are more limited and their results more pragmatically assessed. A few of my interviewees held to a self-flattering image of themselves as the awkward Johnny at a gathering of professionals. The accumulated evidence of this book suggests that, with increasing examples of successful bureaucratic practice, that view may be slowly changing. In the future, it is likely that 'Anthropology is the new black' will be seen as but a catchphrase of this transitional phase.

Anthropology may be currently fashionable in certain Whitehall corridors. That does not assure its continued future in the Civil Service. One of my interlocutors, who maintains links with the armed forces, told me of a recent meeting with a pair working in 'behavioural science' for elite military units. They had been exposed to some poor-quality anthropology, and so dismissed anthropological insight in summary fashion: 'Just stuff you can get from Wikipedia'. It is tempting to interpret their remarks as the petty rivalry of fellow professionals competing for the ear of government. Perhaps, but the challenge is still clear: anthropologists need to demonstrate, time and again, that they can add considerably more value than just data to be gleaned from online sources. Evidence in this book suggests they can do that, so far.

One concern repeatedly raised by some contributors and interviewees was the very nature of, and prospect for the discipline. Whither anthropology? Amidst much uncertainty about our subject, one thing that does seem clear is that, thanks partly to forces beyond our control, anthropology is shifting towards a more practice-oriented mode.

Despite the informed protests of some, the begrudging reluctance of more and the studied avoidance of far too many, anthropologists are increasingly obliged to justify the continued existence of the discipline in broadly pragmatic terms. However, in a recent counter-charge defending 'useless knowledge', Marilyn Strathern observes that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) recognises the key contribution the sciences, including the social sciences, make to the national economy; the DTI even acknowledges the importance within those domains of 'curiosity-driven research' (Strathern 2007: 100–101). But the ESRC, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which replaced the DTI, has made the potential 'impact' of proposed research an increasingly important criterion for judging the worthiness of grant applications. The seven-yearly government evaluation of university research employs a similar measure. Whatever one department might have proclaimed about the value of the apparently 'useless', the general research policy of the government points in a different direction. What to call this style of impact-oriented work? For some, 'applied anthropology' today sounds passé (Johnston 2012), tainted by colonialist or neocolonialist association (e.g. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 7–8), while its practitioners' desire for a 'theory of practice' can appear but a will o' the wisp. To an extent, the term is being pushed aside by 'engaged anthropology', which usually means taking an ethnographic focus to appalling ills of the contemporary world and then trying to make possible contributions towards their remedy (Low and Merry 2010). To the jaded, this change of nomenclature can be too reminiscent of the semantic game-playing notorious in academia. Instead of turf wars over terminology, it seems best to examine the range of their results and gauge their cumulative effects.

It also appears that we are moving towards a much more plural anthropology, one practised globally, where the hegemonic role of university departments is no longer unquestioned. It would be comforting to envision a scenario where tenured academics and extramural practitioners participated horizontally, not vertically, in networks of earth-wide proportions. Furthermore, our interests are not served by overly rigid characterisations of our discipline, where anthropology is said to be constituted by certain practices and not by others. These premature prescriptions are out of place in evolving contexts. Instead of propounding exclusionary definitions of anthropology, as though it were a bounded culture, it is more productive to perceive our discipline in social, relational terms (Strathern 2007: 96).

In these open-ended circumstances, where the theory vs. practice binary is damned as an outdated dichotomy, any attempt to predict,

or worse to proclaim our future would be as vacuous as it would be pretentious. Watch this space?

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## Notes

1. The products of fieldworkers put in place by colonial governments may be similarly enduring. Evans-Pritchard's terminology of Nuer leaders and political segments came to be used by administrators in the Sudan when discussing modes of authority among the ethnic group. Indeed, at least until the 1980s, his nomenclature was 'still the basis of most administrative descriptions of Nuer politics' (Johnson 1982: 240).
2. For a more nuanced assessment of Thomas, see Basu (2016).
3. See also González (2015a, 2015b).
4. 'Military Specialists Aim to Improve Cultural Understanding', ISAF News, 1 April 2010. Retrieved 13 May 2014 from <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/military-specialists-aim-to-improve-cultural-understanding.html>.
5. 'The NEW Lawrence of Arabia: Captain Who Lived among the Afghans and Led His Warriors to Victory over the Taliban Wins Medal Second Only to the VC', Mail Online, 6 October 2013. Retrieved 13 May 2014 from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2446262/>

The-NEW-Lawrence-Arabia-Captain-lived-Afghans-led-warriors-victory-Taliban-wins-medal-second-VC.html.

6. An ex-member of the MoD said the content and level of training in the course would be equivalent to that offered by a postgraduate certificate in general social sciences methods.
7. <https://twitter.com/fishaflaying>, 13 December 2011. Retrieved 23 June 2013.
8. According to The Guardian, anthropologists work within the Research, Information, and Communications Unit (RICU) of the Home Office. RICU combats the online communications of ISIS by discreetly disseminating its own, counter-radicalisation messages ‘at an industrial scale and pace’ via newspapers, leafleting and social media (The Guardian, 2 May 2016. Retrieved 24 June 2016 from <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/02/inside-ricu-the-shadowy-propaganda-unit-inspired-by-the-cold-war>). According to The Sunday Times, anthropologists also work within the Behavioural Insights Team, based in Thames House, headquarters of MI5, the counter-intelligence agency of the British Government. The team’s ‘main task ... is to establish whether people flagged as potential threats are “talkers” or “walkers” – those who simply boast or those who are preparing to act’, (‘MI5’s mind readers help foil seven terrorist attacks’, The Sunday Times 7 August 2016, p.16).
9. For the Civil Service code, see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code/the-civil-service-code>. Retrieved 17 February 2016.
10. <http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml>. Retrieved 17 February 2016.
11. For examples of other ways in which the US armed forces make use of anthropology, see Wunderle (2006); and the special issues of the Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin devoted to ‘Cultural Awareness’, January–March 2010; ‘Cross-cultural Competence’, January–March 2011; ‘Language and Cultural Competency’, January–March 2012; ‘Culture, Regional Expertise and Language’, July–September 2014. All available at <http://fas.org/irp/agency/army/mipb/>.
12. The list here could be long. For example, in indigenous rights, they include the proponents of cultural critique and activist advocacy (e.g. Hale 2006; Shannon 2006). Medical anthropology is another obvious field in which most practitioners are focused on effecting change.
13. On the idea of internships where students are asked to produce theory from practice, see Beck and Maida (2013: 3). Also, Mosse has commented on how ‘engagement with international development has encouraged reflection on the practice of anthropology itself’ (Mosse 2013: 240).
14. The prizes were at the Real IT Awards 2014, winner in both the ‘Security as Enabler’ and ‘Partnership’ categories.
15. For example, J.T. Pedersen, 2010, ‘Is it Agile or Software Anthropology’, retrieved 22 February 2016 from <http://www.jtpedersen.net/2010/03/09/is-it-agile-or-software-anthropology/>; C. Yury, 2015, ‘Breaking it Down: Integrating Agile Methods and Ethnographic

- Praxis', retrieved 22 February 2016 from <https://www.epicpeople.org/breaking-it-down-integrating-agile-methods-and-ethnographic-praxis/>.
16. In Canada, I was informed that there are a few anthropologists employed at federal, provincial and other bureaucratic levels but there was no connection between the posts they hold and their training in the discipline (J. Stacul, pers. comm., 28 February 2016). In Germany, a few appear to have gone into international development, but very few, if any, into other domains of the public sector. Despite my enquiries, I was unable to obtain any information about anthropologists working in either the French or Spanish Civil Services.
  17. For a similar attempt to reassess attitudes to the work done by the first Australian-trained anthropologists, who coordinated with the bureaucratic gatekeepers to Aboriginal societies, see Finlayson (2008).

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