INTRODUCTION

Academic appointments can bring forth unexpected and unforeseen contests and tensions, cause humiliation and embarrassment for unsuccessful applicants, and reveal unexpected allies and enemies. It is also a time when harsh assessments can be made about colleagues' intellectual abilities, their body of work, capacity as a scholar and fieldworker, effectiveness as a departmental administrator, qualities of leadership, the extent of their collegiality and so on. Rarely do such events bring to the fore disputation and disagreement over theoretical orientation or empirical approaches. That is left to debates and disputes within the university department or faculty and other academic venues, such as conferences and scholarly journals.

Judgements by colleagues are typically expressed in more or less private contexts – in personal correspondence and conversation. But in the matter of academic appointment, and under the expectation of confidentiality, assessments are stated with greater deliberation – sometimes with greater caution and at other times with greater candour – which are every so often preserved in the relevant university files.[1] Notwithstanding, at an institutional and disciplinary level, the choice of a new professor is implicitly a judgement about the past, and opens contested visions for the future. Settling on one candidate, moreover, can alter the direction of a department, sometimes renewing or even reinvigorating it, at other times continuing (or even hardening) old cleavages and disputes within a discipline and department. Or, in the case of a new chair, such as those at Auckland and the Australian National University (ANU), they can create different challenges: appointing new staff, establishing a coherent approach, and settling on new directions in anthropological practice and theory.

In the appointment process, personal attributes such as a readiness to get along with colleagues, temperament, leadership qualities, teaching abilities or, as the Sydney selection committee pithily put it, 'intellect, character and personality', are sought – insights that only colleagues and peers close to the candidates can provide. What

we found often disconcerted us. The assessors' reports were often disturbingly personal in nature and lay bare the likes and dislikes, allegiances and enmities, as well as unexpected contests and tensions, in international (largely British-based) anthropology that were used to assist in appointments and hence determined the futures of peers and colleagues. Accessing public and private correspondence enables an insight into what people say about each other – some of it incisive, some bitchy and much of it of value for a historian trying to make sense of events and people.

Writing disciplinary history can expose anxieties in some practitioners of the discipline. Making the contents of correspondence public has brought forth comment from disciplinary practitioners, some of whom trace their intellectual lineage to figures about whom we are writing. There is a misunderstanding that the decision-making was taken by a body of academic staff broader than simply anthropologists interviewing and assessing other anthropologists. Some of our articles have received reviews that expressed deeply personal opposition, often verging on the abusive. We wonder whether a tendency to emphasize academic lineages brings forth gatekeeping or, rather, a desire to control the way the past is constructed and presented. History as we detail it disrupts personal narratives of origin, and subsequently some rejections relied on claims that the readers knew a different story that was 'true'.

We have had comments from some colleagues that we provide an institutional and organizational history of the discipline of anthropology through painstaking and detailed archival research. We have also received criticism from other quarters along the lines that this type of history of anthropology is 'history for history's sake', presenting a 'sardonic view of the squabbles and jealousies of what was until the 1970s a very small profession' (see Goody 1995: 25). We have been accused by some of concentrating excessively on personal enmities, alliances and appointment details, of making public the private opinions and evaluations of the work and competence of people now dead but well known to many living anthropologists. These opinions, we are told, were never intended to enter the public domain. One commented despairingly that 'if this is social science, God help the enterprise'. In contrast, we have been acknowledged as providing 'a welcome addition to the recent upsurge of interest in the history of universities, the tracing of academic connections and networks across the globe and the development of academic disciplines. Let us hope that further studies of Australasian intellectuals during this period

will enrich this emerging historical field' (Darian-Smith 2015: 129; see also Darian-Smith and Waghorne 2019).

Many senior anthropologists view writing on academic appointments as trespassing; we are frequently accused of inquiring too insistently in what is considered a private domain, which should be kept under very tight wraps. We have even been informed that our work attacks the reputations of individual anthropologists.[2] One referee's report, for instance, kept referring to 'the author' (Geoffrey Gray) despite it being clearly stated that the paper was co-authored:

> Some will see in this the *continuing attempt by the author to attack the reputation of Professor Berndt*, in particular, by making public the low evaluation of his work by some of the people consulted about the applicants for Elkin's position … The author does not help the situation by interpreting everything to do with Ronald Berndt in the worst light.[3]

This criticism reveals an anxiousness, a fear that such research may unearth details best left hidden, or reveal secrets hitherto held closely within the domain of personal memory. Jack Goody, for example, insists that anthropologists' acrimonious relationships did not affect their professional behaviour. The nearness of the past further complicates this anxiety.[4] It is much like family history – so many toes waiting to be trodden on. What may appear to be in the past for the historian often remains in the present for colleagues of some of the scholars under discussion. In addition, in some branches of anthropology, the lineage of training and affiliation of an anthropologist is part of a professional and personal identity. This can impact directly on their sense of themselves, their colleagues and their place (reputation) in the present. It seems to us these are calls for a steam-cleaned history of the discipline. Besides, on the matter of confidentiality, these records are in the public domain, as are government records.

Goody, after initial concerns, had few qualms about using personal papers when writing *The Expansive Moment*, which traces the development of social anthropology in Britain and Africa through 'its key practitioners'. He did wonder

> about the propriety of using personal correspondence … since it seemed like a breach of confidence. Some of this is distasteful enough to lead some readers to want to leave it out. But I have used nothing … that does not appear in a public archive … it would be a mistake to bowdlerize their contents by selecting some extracts and deliberately avoiding others … What I have done is to try and place such remarks in a wider context of understanding, the *verstehen* of the anthropologist … I have not been concerned with aspects of their personal life except in so far

as I considered that it affected 'the history of social anthropology'. By this I mean not only the intellectual history but their relations with organisations and colleagues, as these influenced the course of events. (Goody 1995: 6)

Closer to our interests is an observation by the Australian anthropologist William Edward Hanley (Bill) Stanner, who revealed the brutal and, in his perception, at times very personal side of the selection process, heightened by his disappointment at missing out on the Sydney chair in 1955 and again in 1958, and the ANU chair in 1957. He was critical of the process and wrote to Raymond Firth, his mentor. It was a time of considerable stress and overwhelming disappointment: 'Curious, isn't it: where in the anthropology we write do we deal with those high realities of academic actuality: the smear, the careful silences, the well-placed knife, the packing of panels of selectors, and the arts of prearranged judgement?'[5]

It is a damning indictment of the selection process but one that reflects some of the, at times, sheer chicanery we have seen revealed in the archival record. Stanner's comments contain the kernel of the problem we seek to examine and explicate: was the choice based on theoretical knowledge, academic status, a fit for the organizational and institutional needs of the university or even the collegial preferences of fellow professors of sister disciplines? Or a combination of these?

Based on detailed documentary evidence, we show how senior academic appointments were handled – the vagaries, the quirks and processes, questions of good faith and bad faith – and how filling a chair brought in wider academic networks, as senior figures within the anthropological fraternity became involved as referees for the various candidates, not to mention the lobbying for a preferred candidate or on behalf of oneself. Appointment decisions are also important in terms of their consequences, whether it be to continue a line of descent or theoretical orientations or as the catalyst for change, as well as in terms of relationships within a department. It is, however, more than a matter of personal alliances and enmities, although these are integral. Rather, we are mindful of the interplay of the four '"i"s – individuals, ideas, identities and institutions' (Mills 2008: 3, 11). That is, academic networks and the relationships between individuals are mediated through institutional prisms that, in turn, have a bearing on the directions and orientations of an academic discipline (Gray 2001, 2007a; Stocking 1995). The appointing of senior academics brings these interrelationships into sharp focus. One main (although

not surprising) difference between Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand in these past appointment processes also became apparent to us – namely, the unevenness of the inclusion of Indigenous peoples, as candidates, advisors or selection panel members.[6]

As well as epistemological and institutional issues, there is a methodological question. The present study, as we stated above, is firmly based on the documentary record, with a leavening of oral testimony, although we recognize that memory fades and transmutes with the passing of time. We are also aware that documentary evidence has its own problems, not least in creating an illusion of fixed evidence. Jack Goody makes a pertinent observation:

> Participants do not make the best historians, nor do practitioners make the best historians of science. But historians too are at a disadvantage. In the first place they are dependent on the written record, or … on recollections about the past … the written record is very partial in a number of ways. Not simply because much is left out, much destroyed. (Goody 1995: 191)

Importantly, he acknowledges that the written record 'of an incident covers a greater span than the understanding of any one of the participants, perhaps all of them' (Goody 1995: 191; cf. Stocking 2010: 111–13). Contrast this with Stocking (1995: xviii) on the transmission of anthropological 'oral traditions' of the recent past by 'certain elder anthropologists [who] used to take fledglings on rural outings, in which they would indoctrinate them in the authorized version of the discipline's mythistory'. In short, no single set of documents and no single memory concerning a university appointment are likely to yield other than a partial and sometimes misleading version. Even those most closely involved will necessarily have an incomplete (sometimes mistaken, other times nuanced) understanding of events, will repeat a trope generated by stories within a department that are favourable to a failed candidate, or perhaps simply be deceitful, or any combination of these.

Overall, it is a small group of people who weave in and out of the accounts – some as applicants, others are referees, most connected in some way as students, teachers or colleagues. Internationally, with the exception of the United States, which saw an increase in the number of anthropologists during and after the Second World War, anthropology was a small group, many of whom attended university together, shared teachers and so on (see, for example, Price 2008). As Goody (1995: 85) points out:

Like the members of other academic disciplines, anthropologists can be considered as a tribe … That was especially true of British social anthropology from the 1930s to the 1960s, since the dominant figures had virtually all been students at the same place and of the same man. They were coevals, age mates, who dispersed to take up academic positions throughout the country (and elsewhere).

Chicanery is a group biography (a prosopography) of senior anthropologists and the way in which they interacted with each other over senior appointments, and what they thought of each other as people and scholars. For the most part, interwar selection panels consisted of three men who made a choice between the candidates; however, by the mid-1950s, selection brought to the fore the webs of patronage and a more competitive process. Selection panels in the main consisted of disparate disciplinary representatives, which reinforced the obligation to fit the needs of the university rather than the discipline itself.

Notes

1. The retention of appointment files is even less certain today as various Acts of Parliament protect an individual's privacy and mandate the disposal of material relating to unsuccessful candidates.
2. See Pybus (1999b) for a discussion of using revelations found in personal papers.
3. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, referee's report, 'Finding a successor to A.P. Elkin, 1955: A Transnational History', 2010. [Our emphasis.] Ronald Berndt died in 1990. For a blind review, this illustrates the acrimony of the present towards the 'unknown author' (it was a joint authorship). The editor of the journal did not reject such a review; rather, she repeated the accusation; when we pointed out that at no stage did we traduce Berndt's character and reputation, she accepted the paper.
4. However, this cannot be said of A.P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney (see, for example, Gray 1994b; Gray and Munro 2011). Compare with Sutton (2009), who paints a rosy picture of friendliness and goodwill among Australian anthropologists, asking after one another's health and such like.
5. Letter, W.E.H. Stanner to Raymond Firth, 15 October 1958, FIRTH: 8/2/13.
6. Australia has a shameful record: it was only in 1966 that the first Indigenous person, Charles Perkins, graduated from university.