

INTRODUCTION

AFTER SOCIETY

João Pina-Cabral and Glenn Bowman

Introductory Remarks

This book brings together a group of scholars who were shaped by Oxford anthropology in the late 1970s and early 1980s, each reflecting on their academic trajectories. This was a period of major political and academic change in Great Britain and, more generally, around the globe. A decade earlier, the student revolts had had a profound effect on the way the social sciences saw their role in society. Yet, it is only with the impact of the neoliberal reaction, at the time of Mrs Thatcher's first government, that the full implications of the earlier crisis made themselves felt in anthropology. These implications were both internal, in theoretical terms, leading to a deep questioning of the central tenets that had shaped the social sciences throughout the twentieth century; and external, in academic terms, when scholarly discourse was suddenly treated by those in power as being largely irrelevant to the economy and to society – a kind of perverse luxury.

Those of us who started our anthropological careers at the time faced the need to respond to a further set of aspects of intellectual decentring: (a) a second wave of psychoanalytic feminism was making important theoretical inroads; (b) poststructuralist critique was overturning the dominant individualist consensus that had dominated since the Second World War; (c) postmodernist dispositions were challenging traditional modes of ethnographic writing; and (d) a new Marxist-inspired postcolonial historiography was affecting the assumed perspectival roles of anthropological research, proposing radically new approaches to the very meaning of power. Our period as postgraduate students, then, was a moment when something new was about to emerge but had not quite yet arisen.

These contributions look back on that moment, and on our responses to it. As a whole, they challenge the discontinuist approach to the history of anthropology that became dominant in our discipline after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. A number of authors came to prominence in the United States who were more likely to claim influence from some distant (French) philosophical mentor than from their own training as anthropologists. This approach blanked out past debates, treating all that went before 1984 as, basically, theoretically irrelevant. A whole generation of young anthropologists the world over were never even taught the conceptual underpinnings that marked the work of their predecessors, simply being told that 'structural-functionalism' (whatever that meant) was a bad thing, so they did not need to know about it. The contributors to this volume believe that such a discontinuist view has had profound and damaging effects in our discipline, cutting it off from its central fountains of disciplinary inspiration.

Furthermore, the discontinuist approach fails to see that the ethical concerns that characterize anthropology today have always been a preoccupation of all schools of anthropology – even those marginal groupings of the past that, to our contemporary judgement, appear abhorrent. As an approach, discontinuism is deeply imperialist and chronocentric, shutting us off from the history of anthropological thinking – all anthropological thinking, not only 'Western anthropology'. Worst of all, it hides the fact that anthropological debates and anthropological evidence gathering do not sit outside or beside the world's globalization and the emergence of the Anthropocene, but sit squarely within it, as central aspects of its historical occurrence. It is enough to look in a minimally informed way at the role that scholars like Monica Wilson, Jomo Kenyatta, Z.K. Mathews, Eduardo Mondlane and Max Gluckman played in the modern history of Africa to see how our world has been shaped by anthropology. Today, the postimperialist anthropology that the contributors to this volume aim to build sees itself as an heir not only to the twentieth-century anthropologies of empire, but to all the traditions of anthropological thinking that came before – as many as we can manage to encompass. In our globalized world, we can (indeed, we must) embrace all traditions of the past (Pina-Cabral 2017a).

In the chapters of this book, the contributors engage their own professional histories in order to examine how the impact of the post-structuralist critique that characterized our passage through Oxford in the late 1970s and early 1980s can make a decisive contribution to the theoretical changes that are, once again, reshaping our discipline

(see Chapter 9 by Timothy Jenkins for a historically informed discussion of ‘breaks’).

Society

Anthropological dissatisfaction with the very notion of ‘society’ is an old and recurrent strain within a discipline that defines itself as ‘social’. The critique of the theoretical implications of neo-Kantian sociocentrism was not a new invention of the 1990s (Ingold 1996); it has always smouldered quietly within the discipline. After all, Arthur M. Hocart was ostracized and his work systemically marginalized (Needham 1967 and 1970), largely for his denial of the sociocentric consensus.

Hocart’s younger companion in Cairo, Evans-Pritchard, was also a lifelong disbeliever. In 1962, after the death of Radcliffe-Brown, he was now finally free to wonder out loud whether there was

an entity [that] can be labelled ‘society’ and [whether] such an entity has something called a ‘structure’, which can be further described as a set of functionally interdependent institutions or sets of social relations. These are analogies from biological science and, if they had their uses, they have also proved to be highly dangerous. (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 55)

This was revolutionary stuff in those days, on a par with Edmund Leach’s first Malinowski Lecture (delivered in 1959) in which he proposed rethinking anthropology’s epistemology (Leach 1961: 1–27). Evans-Pritchard’s preferences had always inclined more towards the *phénoméniste*¹ vision of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Marcel Mauss than towards the positivist inspiration of Durkheim’s earlier writings. As Durkheim openly admits, his last work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ([1912] 1915: 235 fn. 733) opens up new perspectives, responding directly both to the impact of Lévy-Bruhl’s *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* ([1910] 1951), whose title he debated with the author, and to his nephew Marcel Mauss’s never-completed doctoral thesis on prayer – a thesis whose second half the author never wrote, as it largely merged into his uncle’s final work (Weber and Sembel 2019; see also Keck 2008). In the years that followed Durkheim’s death in 1917, both Lévy-Bruhl and Mauss would further develop this *phénoméniste* strain of thinking (which they called *ethnologie*), distancing themselves progressively from Durkheim’s earlier more scientific visions of ‘sociology’ (see Lévy-Bruhl 1949).² In contrast, Radcliffe-Brown’s primary source

of inspiration was Durkheim's earlier and more positivist *The Rules of the Sociological Method* ([1895] 1982), as is patently clear in his now canonical *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (a book actually edited posthumously by Fred Eggan and Evans-Pritchard in 1952).

In the 1950s and 1960s, Evans-Pritchard worked consciously and explicitly at deconstructing this positivist heritage. He did this in three principal ways: firstly, he encouraged his disciples to translate into English most of the works of Mauss and Lévy-Bruhl (see Lévy-Bruhl 1952[1934]), and those of their close collaborators;³ secondly, he encouraged the digging out of important anthropological thinkers that had not followed the sociocentric observance;⁴ and thirdly, he undertook a revisitation of the philosophy of history of his former Oxford teacher, Robin Collingwood (see Pina-Cabral 2017b: 37–42). In turn, this was encouraged by intense dialogue with Michael Polanyi, the philosopher of science, to which the latter explicitly refers (e.g. Polanyi 1959: 100–101; and 1952).⁵

In fact, doubts concerning positivist reifications of society were no new thing with Evans-Pritchard. In the theoretical essays he published in Cairo in the early 1930s (1933, 1934, 1936), we can already identify the first signs of the critique of knowledge that would eventually set him against the disciplinary project represented by Radcliffe-Brown (see 1950 Marett Lecture: Evans-Pritchard 1950). Mary Douglas's book on Evans-Pritchard (Douglas 1980), in which she presents him as a strict follower of Durkheim's sociocentric inspiration, would most likely have been rejected by the Oxford master himself.

In the late 1960s, for a brief while, Lévi-Straussian structuralism seemed to Oxford anthropologists to promise a natural succession to the Maussian strain of the *Année Sociologique* that they had always favoured. However, Lévi-Strauss's response to Needham's translation of *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* put an end to that brief romance (Lévi-Strauss 1965, 1969), leaving no doubt among the Oxford poststructuralists that their own critique of positivist social science was epistemologically far more challenging than anything Lévi-Strauss would ever condone.

This critique found its canonical expression when Rodney Needham (1972) published *Belief, Language, and Experience*, a book revolutionizing the epistemological assumptions of the sociocentric consensus that had dominated the Classical Period (1920s to 1950s). At the same time, in essay after essay, his colleague in Oxford, Edwin Ardener, was unpacking the securities of that classical moment

(2006), as Tim Jenkins and Maryon McDonald so lucidly expound in their chapters in this volume.

By the late 1970s, and particularly among those of us with an interest in history, the impact of the neo-Marxist approach of E.P. Thompson (1978) was as profound as that of the writings of Bourdieu (1977), themselves inspired by the late Marcel Mauss (see Glenn Bowman in this volume). Oxford was, after all, the place where historicist anthropology would continue to be practised right up to the mid-1980s. John K. Campbell, for instance, spent his life working at the intersections of anthropology, history, and political studies, and guided many of us in that direction (see Mazower 2008).

According to Peter Rivière (2007), the immediate postcolonial period – stretching from 1962, when the old diploma for colonial administrators was interrupted, to the mid-1970s, when Evans-Pritchard died – was a boom period in Oxford anthropology. By the end of the 1970s, however, Evans-Pritchard's death, a series of setbacks in the appointment of professors, and a schismatic crisis in the administration of the Institute of Social Anthropology gave rise to the atmosphere of unease identified by many of the contributors to this collection (see Jeremy MacClancy in this volume). Oxford poststructuralism's profound challenge to established epistemological certainties was not accompanied by clear guidelines from either Ardener or Needham, the two leading thinkers, as to how the discipline should be reconstituted. Indeed, when the young James Fox asked Needham what the future of anthropology should look like now that the old paradigms had collapsed, he famously replied 'the future will look after itself'.⁶

Those of us who came to social anthropology as graduate students in that period, each with his or her own personal intellectual motivations, experienced this sense of theoretical and disciplinary unsettlement in very different ways. We were all, as the various chapters in this book detail, quite conscious of the need to find new ways out. Yet, we could hardly have known that the critique of the positivist notion of society that we were undertaking academically was in fact a more central aspect of our era – with implications that all of us profoundly rejected. By September 1987, when Margaret Thatcher replied to the journalist Douglas Keay, 'you know, there is no such thing as society' (*Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987), the conceptual undermining of classical social anthropology had found deep resonance in politics, to an extent that none of us had even minimally foreseen. Whilst we critiqued positivist sociocentrism in order to better understand social life, neoliberal politicians abhorred the very notion of

collective responsibility; whilst we saw individualist ideology as part of the sociocentric approach, they mostly wanted to get rid of human co-responsibility.

Neoliberalism imposed itself politically in the early 1980s in direct opposition to the ideological consensus that had been established at the end of the First World War. The latter had focused centrally on collectivist values. Fascism and communism, as political ideologies, both grew out of this sociocentric ideology. Social democracy, the democratic version that won the day in Western Europe after the Second World War, was based on these same tenets. The prescient declaration of this victorious sociocentrism, embracing both political and social theory, is the fascinating closing passage of Marcel Mauss's classic, *The Gift*, first published as a series of articles in 1925:

In certain cases, one can study the whole of human behaviour, and social life in its entirety. One can also see how this concrete study can lead not only to a science of customs, to a partial social science but even to moral conclusions, or rather, to adopt once more the old word, 'civility', or 'civics', as it is called nowadays. Studies of this kind indeed allow us to perceive, measure, and weigh up the various aesthetic, moral, religious, and economic motivations, the diverse material and demographic factors, the sum total of which are the basis of society and constitute *our common life*, the conscious direction of which is the supreme art, Politics, in the Socratic sense of the word. (Mauss [1954] 1990: 107, our emphasis)

By the 1980s, however, this ambitious programme was being questioned both by the poststructuralist thinkers and by the radical individualism that is best represented by Margaret Thatcher's assertion in 1987 that, rather than something called 'society', 'there are individual men and women, and there are families' (*Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987). Thatcher's statement, in shaping British society and, in time, much of Western and Central Europe through the politics of 'austerity', created the conditions for its own validation – the systematic neoliberal undermining of the central institutions of the state that we are still experiencing today in Britain at the hands of successive Tory governments.

The sort of philistinism that came to dominate British politics under the guidance of Mrs Thatcher and her successors had an immediate impact on university administration, and presented a central challenge to those of us who, having begun our careers as anthropologists in the mid-1980s, found that grants had been reduced, whole departments had been extinguished, and new posts as professional anthropologists were no longer available. Indeed, the ecumenical engagement with alterity that characterizes the anthropological

tradition was abhorrent to those in power at the time, as was to become evident in the 1990s.

The implications of the critique of the collectivist ideals that we had inherited from the belle époque remained an unresolved intellectual puzzle for a very long time. As Emmanuel Lévinas has noted, in 'Reagonomics' (the bastard offshoot of the Thatcherite 'revolution') the traditional values of *égalité* and *fraternité* were derided, the first as being communistic, the second as being contrary to the prosperity of all (see Caygill 2002). Instead, there was an overzealous focus on *liberté*, interpreted as the individual's liberty to procure economic gain. The socially deleterious effects of this form of moral blindness are plain to see today when inequality in the distribution of resources has reached levels previously unheard of in human history (Piketty 2014). Indeed, with the excitement caused by the end of the dictatorial communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the expansion and growth of the European Union, it was not until the mid-1990s that, both in anthropological theory and in the theory of democracy, the full implications of what had been happening started to become apparent.

In social anthropology, it was only then that the theoretical and ideological implications of postmodernism and its association with neoliberal ideologies became explicit to most European anthropologists, prompting a rethinking of the notion of sociality (Strathern 1988; Ingold 1991). This opened the path to a new social anthropological project based on a dialogue with the sciences, on the one hand, and with radically distinct modes of conceiving the ethnographic gesture, on the other (see Pina-Cabral 2011). Indeed, as Jonathan Benthall (2007) declares in his inspired history of that period in Oxford anthropology, the central project of articulating a new conception of anthropology proposed at the time, that bypasses Cartesian epistemological assumptions, is only now starting to gain ground within world anthropology. We are today 'after society', therefore, in two senses. On the one hand, we no longer take the unitariness of 'society' as a given; but, on the other hand, we have not stopped searching for what, throughout the twentieth century, we meant to describe by means of it.

Trajectories

In the early to mid 1980s, after the collapse of 'society', the hegemony within anthropology was turning to North America. At the same time, in politics, the relevance of studying society underwent profound delegitimation. Those of us coming out of postgraduate

studies in Oxford had to ask ourselves seriously whether social anthropology was really our vocation. There were no jobs to be had and there were too many voices telling us that our fascination with what social anthropology stood for was wrongheaded. The profound epistemological and theoretical advances that had emerged in the post-structuralist work of our teachers in the late 1970s and early 1980s had found little echo elsewhere. International forums were dominated by the North American ‘semiotic turn’, which largely ignored Wittgensteinian-inspired poststructuralist critique. At the same time, the increased size of the audiences was fuelling a stardom system at loggerheads with previous styles of scholarly engagement. This was particularly the case at AAA meetings, whose size grew exponentially due to the net growth in the number of university students worldwide and the greater ease of international travel. Mid-century European values of intellectual debate and empirical innovativeness were no longer the distinguishing factors that made academics stand out among their peers. The mid-1980s were days of change, theoretical doubt, political delegitimation, and professional unsettlement. They left a mark on the professional trajectories of those of us who entered our professional careers at that time.

Thirty years later, what has come of that generation? What happened to those of us for whom anthropology never lost its fascination and who persisted in making careers as researchers and teachers in our chosen discipline? How did our personal professional trajectories reflect the momentous changes that social anthropology in particular, and the social sciences more generally, underwent in the 1980s and 1990s? These were some of the questions we put to a group of colleagues who carried out postgraduate training in Oxford at the same time as we did, in the late 1970s. We invited them to come to Canterbury to tell us about their anthropological trajectories. The resulting seminar was fascinating in that it brought out the complexity of people’s professional careers and, at the same time, their personal engagements in the forms of scientific life that make up our discipline. We met again later in Oxford under the auspices of David Gellner and the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in the company of local colleagues like David Zeitlyn, Joy Hendry and Renée Hirschon, who enriched our discussions.

Of course, the papers we gather as chapters in this book do not necessarily constitute a representative sample of our discipline or even of the anthropological work of the Oxford graduates of our generation; we are certain that others could have made invaluable contributions to the study. Considering, however, the inevitable limitations of such

an exercise, we believe that we have brought together a set of documents concerning the history of social anthropology that is quite unique. As the reader will find, each contributor has brought their own personal take to the issue, tracing distinct trajectories and varied perspectives on events. Each one has chosen a different angle from which to approach the questions – some more personal, some more political, some more theoretical, some more methodological. In fact, they provide a fair sample of the pluralist modes of debate that have come to characterize contemporary anthropology.

The Ethnographic Wager

The wager that we took on in this book was to ask people to write about their anthropological trajectories as ‘self-ethnography’ in the hope that what they produced would provide readers with a unique entry into the historical contours of the professional experience of a cohort of academics and anthropologists coming out of Oxford at a time when anthropology in Europe had fallen under a cloud. The chapters are both declarations and examinations; they respond to a view of ethnography that sees it as both rooted in everyday living experiences and as analytically universal. In applying the ethnographic mode of narration and analysis to ourselves we are, in a sense, prolonging the long-established tradition of writing about our informants (e.g. Casagrande 1960). The chapters fall naturally into three parts: the first deals with the Oxford experience and beyond; the second reflects on the varied conditions of ethnography as a vocation; and the third asks ‘why anthropology?’, and looks at the theoretical implications of the poststructuralist legacy and its equivocal implications.

The Oxford Experience and Beyond

The book opens with Jeremy MacClancy’s attempt to give an ethnographic response to the question of how professional trajectories reflected the momentous changes that social anthropology underwent in the 1980s and 1990s. He compares two cohorts of post-graduate students with whom he was associated at the Institute of Social Anthropology in 1976 and 1988, and unveils new material concerning the process that led to the institutional troubles that happened between these two dates. In reading through his chapter, one is struck not only by the extraordinary robustness that institutions can

display in the face of internal and external challenge but also by the emphasis that ex-students' responses place on intellectual and scholarly achievement. Even as higher education was being transformed into an industrial activity and scientific research was made to be profitable, the old attitudes of scholarly learning based on antiquated humanitarian ideals seem to have remained resilient. It would appear that this is why people still want to be academics and are willing to give up more remunerative alternative career paths. Fascination with the broader anthropological project survived the challenges posed to it through the troubled 1980s and early 1990s, even when confronted with the serious doubts that anthropologists entertained throughout that period concerning what precisely was the anthropological project (see Benthall 2007). The considerable changes and renewed vigour that we witnessed in the discipline in the late 1990s and early 2000s were only made possible by that resilience.

Glenn Bowman contributes a reflexive piece inspired by Nietzsche's concept of *amor fati*, that is, how one comes to love one's fate. His sometimes painful memories of the lack of guidance he experienced at Oxford accord with his equally strong enjoyment of the scholarly freedom and experimentation that the university allowed and encouraged. Here a fundamental interdisciplinarity is shown as both millstone and lodestar, and, in a manner echoed in David Napier's chapter, demonstrates that the ability to wander intellectually in a context rich with academic resources allows one, in time, to discover that to which one has always unwittingly aspired. Again, the theme of intellectual fascination comes up as a strong guiding impetus in a career initially marked by uncertainty and doubt.

In a similarly confessional chapter, Dolores Martinez reflects upon the way in which hers was a vocational career, and what drove her to carry through with it in the face of oppositions and disappointments. The central impact on her of the Oxford tradition seems to have been the kind of inspired empiricism (nothing to do with positivism, note) that turned the study of anthropology from a bookish activity into a lived attempt at understanding conjointly all known human forms of life. In this way, her experience meets with Bowman's, whose round-about path to the field was, in the end, the door to a lifetime of academic activity. Martinez's description of the changes to academic life happening at SOAS during the early 1990s is particularly illustrative of the profound transformations taking place in British universities.

Roger Just's brief but intense chapter is about how he managed to obtain his degree in spite of serious financial difficulties, becoming a professional anthropologist in the face of significant doubts and

challenges. Just's assessment of the fate of the cohort of students that surrounded him there addresses a topic largely left out of this book, and indicates that a social anthropological training not only prepares one for an academic career but also opens the way to a multitude of ways of being 'conscious' in the world.

David Napier provides an intimate phenomenology of being in Oxford during the period, which brings to the fore the themes of adventure and impediment also evident in other chapters. The latter part of his text explicitly analyses the impact of the Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite agendas on academia and the intellectual life, arguing that innovation within fixed parameters has come to replace invention and creativity, and lamenting the impact of this on teaching and research in anthropology. He echoes some of the concerns that Martinez explores, and constitutes a hinge between the more introspective chapters of the first part of the book and those of the following part.

Ethnography as a Vocation

Part II investigates how our generation has experienced its vocational engagement with the discipline. David Gellner's chapter explores the roots of his vocation as an anthropologist of South Asia in light of his inspiration by the work of Nick Allen and Louis Dumont, underlining the latter's association with Oxford and the Institute. The profound comparativism of this current of anthropological thinking is highlighted, while the historical impact of Weberian thought in post-war Oxford is interestingly revealed. The comparativism that impelled Allen and Dumont as well as David Gellner's attention to European scholars who significantly shaped the Institute, calls to mind the recent rediscovery of Franz Baermann Steiner's influence in Oxford long after his early death. Not only did he inspire a large number of his students and colleagues in the immediate aftermath of the war, but he also opened the door to forms of fieldwork that distanced themselves from the primitivist paradigm of mid-century African ethnography (see Fardon and Adler 1999).

Signe Howell addresses ethnography as a central aspect of the anthropological vocation, and shows how this practice has been transformed in her work over the past decades. She introduces her two large-scale fieldwork experiences (among the Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia and among the Lio of Central Flores, Indonesia), illustrating how the conditions for the practice of ethnography have changed over the years. She is particularly interested in the experience

of 'returning to the field' that is now increasingly possible due to changes in modes of travel and has indeed become a hallmark of the discipline, distinguishing it considerably from the mid-twentieth-century experience of our teachers. The challenges and advantages of multitemporal fieldwork are explored in the light of an evolving tradition of ethnographic research.

The relation between ethnography and time takes on another guise in Sandra Ott's chapter. Here, she reflects on her own evolving relation with her supervisor (Rodney Needham), giving us a picture of how her life as a researcher was moulded by academic relations as well as by successive encounters in the field. After a distinguished career as a field ethnographer, Ott has recently been following her field experience backwards, as it were, in trying to understand some of the central traumatic events that lie behind the contemporary history of the French Basque region. She engages directly with the issue of how ethnographic methodology and anthropological theory can come to inform archival work in the area of contemporary political history. The close and necessary link between history and anthropology, seminally explored by Evans-Pritchard (1961) in his essay on 'Anthropology and History', is demonstrated in the work of many social anthropologists of our generation – highlighting how the past shapes the present as well as how the present continually reshapes the past.

Why Anthropology? Beyond Poststructuralism

As concluding remarks, Part III brings together three chapters that present a broader view on the period in which the contributors to the volume developed their careers as academics. Tim Jenkins argues that anthropology has changed much less than one often thinks and that it has retained its essential strengths in the face of the other disciplines of the humanities. He provides us with a lucid account of the trajectory of the thought of his teacher, Edwin Ardener, identifying the way in which the latter's early version of structuralism slowly moved to the poststructuralist stance that continues to constitute a valuable ground for the way in which we question our ethnographic evidence today. That perspective is grounded on the essential notion that anthropologists can only do ethnography because they are like their subjects in fundamental ways.

Maryon McDonald engagingly describes her itinerary through the process of unmaking structuralism as it occurred in Oxford in the early 1980s, and sets out the theoretical discoveries she made in that

course. Her subsequent career through Cambridge, Brunel and back to Cambridge provides a fascinating intellectual history of the evolving British social anthropology milieu. Through her experience of fieldwork in EU institutions, McDonald was confirmed in her commitment to a blend of ethnography and epistemologically sophisticated anthropological analysis.

The book ends with João Pina-Cabral's discussion of his lifelong need to contend with a series of deeply equivocal attributions of Mediterraneanness elicited by his personal and familial history, by the people he studied in Portugal, by how Europe is constituted in its changing shapes, and most of all by how anthropologists are usually incapable or unwilling to go beyond the media-validated categories of geopolitical comparison, which are ethically suspect and analytically invalid. His engagement with the ambiguities of definition which have haunted his career take him from South Africa, through Oxford, and out into the wider British and European anthropological world. The chapter calls for an ecumenical anthropology (see Pina-Cabral 2017a) that responds to the politically relevant questions of the day, not by adopting politically constituted comparative categories but by questioning them both ethnographically and analytically, and by understanding the inherent multipolarity of the task of de-ethnocentrification that is ours (see Pitt-Rivers 1992).

Why Anthropology, Then?

One answer to that question might be anthropology's ability to investigate and demonstrate the complexities and genealogies of those commonsensical modes of classification that divide the world into essentialized antagonistic entities. The drive for de-objectification, which originally impelled Evans-Pritchard and his colleagues to query 'society', is a vital project today in a world in which another assault on 'society', that launched under the aegis of neoliberalism, has produced images of a world divided into carefully delineated and fundamentally incompatible 'cultures'. Ethnographic practice and anthropological theory have variously demonstrated to us that these constructs are artifices behind which often lie dangerous political agendas meant to efface the awareness of our shared and common humanity.

Mauss's early engagement with the Dreyfusian events, and their ethical impact on his view of social sciences, remains with us to this day. Fortunately, there are many of us who still see the need to learn

from this history: his seminal *The Gift* has recently been retranslated and the works of critical thinkers like De Martino, Needham, Pitt-Rivers and Van Gennep are once again being brought to light. Mauss's heritage constitutes a constant humanist echo that must forever accompany the very notion of possibility of an anthropological practice. A concern with politically validated walls and the way they are both deeply unsubstantial and deeply violent (Bowman 2007) brings us together as editors of this volume. In the end, it is probably an apt symbol of the sort of poststructuralist critical legacy that, in one way or another, under the wing of one or another mentor, we all brought out of Oxford.

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Glenn Bowman is Professor Emeritus in Sociohistorical Anthropology at the University of Kent. The mix of research classically deemed 'humanities' (in history, literature, philosophy and even theology) with that termed 'social sciences' (anthropology, politics) has marked his work, leading him in 2014 to set up the University of Kent's new BA degree in Liberal Arts.

Notes

1. This is how Mauss qualified the essence of his thought in the inaugural lecture to his chair in the *École des Hautes Études* of Paris in 1902 (see Leenhardt, in Weber and Sembal 2019: 44), thus distancing himself from the positivist inspiration.
2. The unicity of the Durkheimian orthodoxy that Florence Weber so strongly defends from a Parisian perspective (see Weber and Sembal 2019: 1–42) never seemed quite so unitary when approached from a British angle. For example, Evans-Pritchard tells us of 'an excellent lecture on Mauss delivered recently (1952) at Oxford by one of his former pupils, M. Louis Dumont', where the later 'pointed out that though Mauss, out of loyalty and affection, studiously avoided any criticism of Durkheim, such criticism is nevertheless implicit in his writings, which

- are so much more empirical than Durkheim's that it might be said that with Mauss sociology in France reached its experimental stage' (Evans-Pritchard 1966: vii).
3. E.g. Hertz (Needham) 1960; Durkheim and Mauss (Needham) 1963; Hubert and Mauss (W.C. Halls) 1964; Mauss (Cunnison) 1967; Cazeneuve on Lévy-Bruhl (Rivière) 1972; Mauss (Bain) 1972; Lévy-Bruhl (Rivière) 1975; Mauss (Fox) 1979.
 4. Judging from the introductions to the volumes and to Needham's own personal account, the latter's exploration of a series of authors marginalized by the sociocentric orthodoxy was largely inspired by Evans-Pritchard – we have in mind a series of re-editions and analytical comments on the works of Hocart, Hertz, Van Gennep, Andrew Lang, Carl Nikolai Stracke and Charles Staniland Wake.
 5. We are grateful to Stephan Palmié for calling our attention to the impact of Polanyi's philosophy of science on British anthropology in the 1950s (see also Gordon 2018: 362).
 6. At the end of a filmed interview that Alan MacFarlane has made available on his site – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi1xmCdc7XU>. Last accessed 16 February 2020.

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