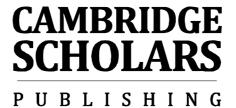# Making Sense of the Global

Making Sense of the Global:
Anthropological Perspectives
on Interconnections and Processes

Edited by

Raúl Acosta, Sadaf Rizvi, and Ana Santos

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RAÚL ACOSTA earned a doctoral degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Oxford in 2007. His thesis focused on political decision-making within advocacy networks in the Amazon and the Mediterranean. He currently teaches and carries out research at ITESO University, in Guadalajara, Mexico. He is interested in social solidarity, transnational activism, political ecology, communication, and configurations of what is public.

YARDEN ENAV has submitted his doctoral thesis in Social Anthropology to the University of Edinburgh (School of Social and Political Studies). His main research interests are in political anthropology, especially citizenship and national identities in Israel/Palestine, and the comparative study of politically contested territories. During the twenty months of his fieldwork, conducted in an Israeli college in the West Bank of Israel/Palestine, he focused his efforts on the (re)search for *Israeliness* as a "culture of citizenship." His thesis presents a hierarchical model of contemporary society in Israel/Palestine.

THOMAS ERIKSEN is professor of social anthropology at the University of Oslo. His interests focus on the politics of identity, ethnicity, nationalism, and globalization from a comparative perspective, often with an ethnographic focus on Mauritius and Trinidad. A considerable portion of Eriksen's work has focused on popularizing social anthropology and introducing basic cultural relativism to the Norwegian public. Selected works in English include *Ethnicity and Nationalism*; *Small Places, Large Issues*; *A History of Anthropology*; *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age*; *Globalisation: Studies in Anthropology*; *What Is Anthropology?* and *Engaging Anthropology*.

DAVID GELLNER is professor of social anthropology and fellow of All Souls at the University of Oxford. His doctoral research (1982–4) was on the traditional Vajrayana Buddhism of the Newars and on Newar social organization in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. He has carried out fieldwork in the Kathmandu Valley on many subsequent occasions, broadening his interests to include politics and ethnicity, healers, mediums, popular approaches to misfortune, and religious change—in particular, the history and effects of the newly introduced Theravada

Buddhist movement. In 1991 he did three months' exploratory fieldwork on Buddhist priests in Japan. For eight years he taught at Brunel University, West London, the first British university to introduce a master's course in Medical Anthropology. For three years, from 2002–5, he held a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship for research into the social history and practice of activism in Nepal (for the academic year 2003–4 he combined this with a visiting professorship at the Research Institute for Cultures and Languages of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies).

KEITH HART is professor of anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His main research has been on Africa and the African diaspora. He has taught at numerous universities, including Cambridge, where he was the director of the African Studies Centre. He has contributed the concept of the informal economy to the field of development studies and has published widely on economic anthropology. He is the author of *Money in an Unequal World*. One recurrent theme of his work has been the relationship between movement and identity in the transition from national to world society. More information about his work and projects can be obtained from http://www.thememorybank.co.uk/.

HORACIO ORTIZ was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1974. After graduating from Sciences Po, Paris, he obtained an MA from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, where he is currently a doctoral candidate (ATD) in anthropology. His work is on the everyday practices of contemporary global finance and how they are related to the global distribution of resources. He also holds an MA in philosophy from the New School for Social Research, New York, where he worked on the ethics of social sciences, in particular the relationship between Weber, Kant, and Nietzsche.

LAURA RIVAL is a fellow of Linacre College, appointed to the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford. Her teaching and research interests include Amerindian conceptualizations of nature and society, historical and political ecology, and environment and development. Rival's main interest lies in understanding the Huaorani society and culture within a comparative framework. She has published numerous papers, books, and edited volumes. Her recent books include: *Trekking Through History: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador*, *The*

Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism, and *What Constitutes a Human Body in Native Amazonia*.

SADAF RIZVI is a research officer at the Institute of Education, University of London. Her specific areas of interest are the anthropology of education, childhood ethnography, Islam in the West, multiculturalism, and social cohesion. Her DPhil research at the University of Oxford was on Muslim schools in Britain. Currently, she is conducting research on learning and life chances in city regions, funded by the ESRC. Prior to working in the UK, she was associated with the Institute for Educational Development, Aga Khan University, where she studied community-based education programs in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. She is the editor of *Multidisciplinary Approaches in Educational Research: Case Studies from Pakistan and the UK*, and has published articles on a number of anthropological issues, including the ethnography of Muslim schools and cross-generational perspectives among British Pakistanis.

ANA SANTOS is a doctoral student in Social Anthropology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA) at the University of Oxford. Her thesis focuses on identity at the Mozambique–Tanzania border, especially issues of memory, displacement, and social constructions of place and space at an international border. She holds an MA in African Studies from the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Technical University of Lisbon, and an MPhil in Social Anthropology from the University of Oxford. She is currently a teaching fellow in the Ethnography of East Africa at SOAS.

MOHAMMAD TALIB is a fellow of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and also the Islamic Centre Lecturer in the Anthropology of Muslim Societies at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford. His research interests focus on the institutions of religious education and spiritual practices among Muslims in India as well as in the UK. Some of his publications in the area of Islam/Muslims are: "Sufis and Politics," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*; "Personalising Islam in Communicating Divorce," in Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Divorce and Remarriage among Muslims in India*; "Soul of the Soulless: An Analysis of Pir–Murid Relationship in Sufi Discourse," in Christian W. Troll (ed.), *Muslim Shrines in India*; "Construction and Reconstruction of the World in the Tablighi Ideology," in Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*.

PNINA WERBNER is professor of social anthropology at the University of Keele. She is the author of "The Manchester Migration Trilogy," including *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*, *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims*, and *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*. In 2008 she edited *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives*. She has carried out research in Britain, Pakistan, and Botswana, and is the director of the ESRC-funded project "New African Migrants in the Gateway City" and the AHRC project "In the Footsteps of Jesus and the Prophet: Sociality, Caring and the Religious Imagination in the Filipino Diaspora."

INTRODUCTION

MAKING SENSE OF THE GLOBAL: ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON INTERCONNECTIONS AND PROCESSES

RAÚL ACOSTA, SADAF RIZVI, AND ANA SANTOS

This book is not another reification of the global, nor an attempt to set out what such a concept-metaphor brings to social analyses. It is, rather, an engagement with a dialogue among anthropologists about our discipline's contribution to understanding contemporary global developments. Social phenomena over recent decades have turned out to have a wide range of links to analyses either from academics or in tune with academic production. There is now a constant feedback of terms, concepts, analytical metaphors, and general information, which is allowing for constant social innovation. With this volume, we aim to call our colleagues' attention to the need to "make sense of the global." This effort is not intended as a defence of our academic discipline against others, but rather to point to the potential benefits that deep and thick analyses, such as the ones presented in this book, can bring to ongoing worldwide debates. Our take on the "global" seeks to demystify the scale of global social interaction by focusing on processes rather than units or bound social practices.

The more relevant our reflections are to social interactions, the more our insights and abstractions can enter into the ongoing dialogue about humanity with which we all engage. The development of anthropology as an academic discipline has been marked by an ongoing tension between grand abstractions and concrete narratives. This conflict has taken place alongside key transformations in political systems and models of social organization. Throughout most of the past century, there have been anthropologists who had significant influence outside the shaky boundaries of the discipline; the past few decades, however, have been quite different. The discipline seems to have fragmented to such an extent that it no longer has a unifying scope, or even clusters of theoretical depth.

One might argue that this diversity reflects the true complexity of the human world; but it also makes it harder for anthropology to gain the attention and credit it needs in order to provide potential solutions to social conflicts or problems.

This book seeks to make some simple points: that, in the current age, anthropology is more relevant than ever before to understanding social life, and can illuminate both the private and public spheres. Furthermore, we stress, it is possible for anthropology to contribute to understanding events and processes at the global level. Neither statement is intended to claim higher moral or intellectual standing for anthropology compared to other disciplines and specialized studies; rather, we wish to call attention to the usefulness of the anthropological perspective, which is unique in its capacity for philosophical and psychological depth. By claiming that our analyses can help make sense of the global, we put forward the need for a consideration of our discipline's history and its accumulated studies, to demonstrate thereby our specialization both in understanding diverse ways of living, and in understanding ourselves as a species. Although there are crossovers with other disciplines with respect to specific angles or issues, the overall inclusiveness of the anthropological approach leads us to insist on its value and relevance. It is a celebration of the holistic character of our endeavour (Parkin and Ulijaszek 2007).

Our aim is to help raise awareness of what Wendy James (2003: 50) describes as the "most powerful momentum in today's anthropology," that is, the "promise of seeing into the machinations of power more clearly, both at the level of gender and family affairs and at the national or international level of political policy and élites." This, in turn, also points to our conviction regarding the relevance of anthropology to understanding relations between social realities on different scales. Collective decision-making processes are constituted by the sum of small-scale situations and relationships, and in turn constitute what we define as the "global."

The complex interconnections that shape policies, ideologies, and even moral and ethical frameworks, increasingly take into account faraway situations and peoples. The global, therefore, is not a single social or cultural phenomenon taking place in isolated corners of our planet, but rather the flow of information, ideas, and objects that shapes our awareness of the existence of other such corners. In stating this, we do not intend to adopt a "globalist" stance, such as the one Tsing (2000) characterizes within the social sciences as an "endorsement of the importance of the global"; our position is more realist or matter-of-fact, stating simply that reference to the global is a necessary part of current

analysis. Our position represents a step beyond mere restatement of the facts of "interconnection" (Hall 1996: 619), or of globalism's imbalances and inequalities (Allen and Hamnett 1995); the significance of the "global" is a matter of fact, even though the term itself is a concept-metaphor (Moore 2004) freighted with pre-theoretical assumptions. The porous nature of the conceptual boundary that separates academic from social life should remind us how new ideas and abstractions continuously shape cultural responses to numerous phenomena.

In presenting this volume, therefore, we propose to position ourselves as "translators," making anthropological research on global relationships available to actors in the public sphere. We are certain that this stance will be seen as controversial, and we may be suspected of commitment to certain hidden agendas. We deny any such accusations, however: we limit ourselves to making a more assertive explanation, within the public sphere, of how anthropologists engage with the fluxes of meaning that crisscross our world at ever-greater speed. If we manage to place even a distilled version of the products of our academic discipline in the public domain, we may attract more attention as well as feed collective imaginations. This cannot but help the awkward, but ongoing, process of mutual understanding between populations in different parts of our world; and may perhaps even help to foster greater empathy.

These themes have long been present in anthropologists' own conceptions of their work. Anthropology has repeatedly been proven to inspire people all over the world: its practice would otherwise not be so widespread outside the mainstream, nor in such continuous transformation. The diversity of the approaches and schools that have sprung up in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, after the discipline's birth in Europe and the United States, challenges the notion of one-way academic production which at first characterized Euro-American departments. It is important, however, to consider the history of the discipline in order to understand its potential contributions and the ways in which it currently works. We are aware that it is more common for anthropologists to be public figures in some parts of our globe than in others (Eriksen 2006); such figures are able to feed public debate with provocative questions, appraisals, and analyses. If there were a collective effort to learn from their experiences, we could help induce much-needed debate on issues that suffer from oversimplification, shallowness of understanding, and narrow perspectives.

Anthropologists have on many occasions provided the sort of deep comprehension that has proven to hold the keys to a better interpretation of various social phenomena. It is also the case that some of the most

influential authors in our field have done their work on its fringes, often earning more respect and acclaim from outside than within: examples include the concept of the "informal sector," coined by Keith Hart in a study on Ghana published in the early seventies (Hart 1973), and the idea of "risk," brought to general attention by Mary Douglas (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). Both concepts, like many other contributions by anthropologists, have followed long routes through different disciplines and professional fields.

We need to clarify what our particular approach to social relations can contribute in contrast to other methods and analyses. It is not merely about going "public" with our results and texts, but rather about translating into relevant packets of data our potential contributions to furthering the understanding of humanity's interlinkages and collective decisions. An ongoing dialogue with other disciplines would end the isolationist tendencies that have for decades plagued anthropology: but this is no easy task, and not one that we undertake here. There have been several recent calls for such ventures, and with this volume we intend only to add a few more arguments in favour of its timeliness.

The chapters in this volume demonstrate the potential for deep analyses and thick descriptions to make valuable contributions to academic work across disciplinary boundaries. The first chapter, by Thomas Eriksen, strikes the keynote for this volume. In it, Eriksen calls for anthropology to abandon its own brand of identity politics. His sharp analysis of the reasons behind what he terms an increasingly timid intellectual output in recent decades may be controversial, but it does provide material for further debate. His main point is that our academic endeavour has not yet recovered from the "loss of the primitive"—the shift of emphasis away from studying small-scale societies. Notwithstanding the many publications that show the richness of studies focused on complex societies (e.g., MacClancy 2002), Eriksen argues that the transition has been traumatic. In our over-informed era, with new technologies being used as vehicles for simplification, there seems to be little patience for understanding the complex interweaving of processes and actions, relations and motivations, which anthropology portrays within social reality. We face a choice, according to Eriksen: either we place ourselves at the centre stage of intellectual life, or we could very quickly be seen as an anachronism from the twentieth century.

We follow this provocative call with Keith Hart's paper on the role of money in the making of world society. He argues that money has brought about an artificial orderliness to society, which in effect has created a rupture between the individual and the collective. It is not surprising,

therefore, that he sees parallels between money and religion in modern society: just as religion offers a clear narrative concerning an order to which we belong which transcends the everyday chaos that surrounds us, money provides a hierarchy and arrangement of social relations. In Hart's opinion, there needs to be a reappraisal of Kant and his Enlightenment ambition to understand humanity, rather than impose on it models of collective behaviour, as has been the case in the last few centuries. In fact, Hart perceives a growing need to repair the rupture between self and society that this false "order" has brought about. That is, through the cosmopolitan ideals of universalizing rights and a sense of polity, money will be dethroned. It is thus a vision of the role of academic analysis in aiding political developments on the global scale. Recent developments in world markets and financial institutions may well seem to prove his point.

The third chapter, by Laura Rival, is a fascinating case of a reflexive turn in debates regarding development, the valuation of "nature," and the Huaorani people in Ecuador. Her long experience in the area (twenty years) allows Rival to offer an incisive account of tensions between the Ecuadorian state, the oil industry, and indigenous communities—as well as other groupings. The case portrayed offers a view of how local political organizations, international institutions, and transnational networks of advocacy groups hold tense negotiations regarding conflicting visions of the future. Specifically, the case refers to the Clean Development Mechanism, which allows industrial countries to invest in greenhouse gas emission-reducing projects in developing countries, and claim credit for the reductions achieved. The protection of forests, and the livelihoods of populations around the world, are increasingly linked to tensions regarding the economic exploitation of "nature's" commodities, such as oil, timber, gems, or metals. This chapter offers an insight into experiments regarding values and collective priorities. It is a good example of what our discipline can contribute to difficult dialogues.

In a different take on the concept of value, the fourth chapter contains Horacio Ortiz's timely ethnography of global financial institutions. His work on investment companies in New York and Paris illustrates the insights that anthropology can provide into financial transactions that might, perhaps, be thought to be the preserve of economists. In analysing the value of instruments and stocks, as well as the roles of fund managers, Ortiz displays an understanding of markets and their mix of interests and expectations, of key information and knowledge. His ethnographic viewpoint allows him to shed light on obscure practices of value estimation, which seem to involve more guesswork than is actually claimed by the institutions themselves and those who regulate them. What

all such relations and outcomes contribute to, furthermore, is power and its flows within financial circuits. Ortiz calls for further ethnographic studies of global financial practices, in order to better understand crises and earnings, value and power. At root, these practices determine the distribution of global resources and commodities, and so have a direct effect on billions of lives.

In the fifth chapter, Mohammad Talib discusses the issues anthropologists often have to face as they embark on sponsored research. He highlights how certain principles of methodology and theoretical imagination are compromised in research projects with generous funding and a predetermined agenda visualised on a multinational scale. Between the anthropologist and the state authority that sets the conditions of research, there are issues of ethics, authority, and the rights of research subjects, as well as the bearing of the collective unconscious upon research initiatives. Anthropologists have laid emphasis on these issues throughout the history of the discipline. How do the methods of state agency–driven research compare with those of anthropologists? How differently do they relate to the people being studied? What is the nature of the conflicting demands on the anthropologist who owes contradictory allegiances both to the discipline and to the state employer? Talib's paper engages with the question of the sovereignty of the anthropological imagination, highlighting the possibility of the continued relevance of field-based research in building relations of knowledge and trust with the subjects of investigation.

Pnina Werbner explores the possibilities of an engaged public anthropology of "global terror" emerging in the West following the suicide bombings of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001. Arguably, anthropology was not meant to be a study of clandestine networks or unreachable social groups secretly plotting sudden, cataclysmic, international crises. These days, anthropologists study societies in motion and, increasingly, the impact of global media and global economic events on local communities. In order to do this, she argues, our conceptual tools have had to be stretched beyond the limits of their original roles in the study of small-scale societies. Yet our ethnographic mediations still start from the bottom—from the small places where we do our quotidian research. This includes—as in her own work— the study of religious mobilization and social movements, radical religious rhetoric, and ontologies of religious nationalism, as these are inflected and moved by mediated global crises. Importantly, also, anthropologists do study violence: in the face of civil war or the fallout from global and state terror, they have contributed to an understanding of the sufferings of

ordinary citizens, the force of their memories, and the activism of human rights NGOs. As anthropologists, she argues, we may indeed try to rely on journalistic accounts to supplement our knowledge of small places; after all, journalism too creates its own ethnographic mediations from the collocation of many small places. But are journalistic accounts of warzones or clandestine terror reliable? Her paper explores some of these issues for anthropology.

Sadaf Rizvi's chapter presents an example that highlights the usefulness of anthropology in enhancing understanding of complex issues, and of conflicts and misunderstandings between diverse social groups. She discusses the case of Muslim schools, which, in the last two decades, have been established in Britain with the objective of providing Islamic education for children of Muslim families. These schools provide mainstream formal education for pupils with the addition of a few Islamic subjects. However, in more recent years the idea of establishing such schools has become contested: many education experts and policymakers criticize the schools for being sectarian, for reproducing patriarchy, and limiting the personal autonomy of children. On the basis of research conducted in a Muslim school in England, her chapter examines the socio-cultural factors that have led to the establishment of such schools in Britain, using the voices and perceptions of Muslim parents and children. The analysis suggests that, far from being radical, the aim of such schools is simply to teach the national curriculum in an environment of Islamic faith. The Muslim community has established the schools to fulfil the demands of socializing their children within a religious environment, improving their academic outcomes, and inculcating in them a sense of Muslim identity. Her chapter presents an example in which anthropological analysis offers an opportunity for a rich dialogue, which could reduce tensions and misapprehensions arising from differing perceptions about the role of particular institutions in society.

Yarden Enav explores the concept of citizenship in the West Bank of Israel/Palestine, an area which is significant especially because its inhabitants are in fact *non*-citizens. Through extensive ethnographic work, he has concluded that the area is a "no man's land," *terra nullius*, or frontier, which confers on its inhabitants not only a dubious legal status, but a status similar to that of the "primitive," which captivated anthropologists for decades. Following Eriksen's work on "cultural islands," he suggests that current anthropological categories follow an image of the world as divided into "political islands." This in turn, his argument goes, is more due to geopolitics than to sociocultural behaviour. A consequence of this categorization is the excessive attention on issues of

ethnicity and nationalism. In Enav's view, the concept of citizenship thus inherits the "white man's burden," entailing a clear distinction between what is considered "civilized" and what is not. Anthropologists, he argues, should question the legitimacy of states and the sets of criteria that are used to define the differences between their inhabitants, as well as the consequences they thereby face. This would help to avoid perpetuating the Eurocentric view of hierarchical belongings and identities, on which many studies are based.

In chapter nine, Ana Santos analyses riots that broke out in 2005 in the Mozambican coastal town of Mocímboa da Praia. Violent events, she notes, have the potential to provide sudden illumination of longstanding and intractable social tensions, since patterns of resentment which may have long gone unmentioned are thereby dramatically brought to consciousness. Dissatisfied with simple essentializing explanations of the causes of the violence (those which appeal to unproblematized notions of ethnicity, religion, political party affiliation, etc.), she searches for fundamental causes in colonial history, in the population displacements experienced during the Mozambican civil war, and in the resentments engendered by national economic strategy.

Comparing her findings with recent work on violence in South Asia, she notes that riots can sometimes engender social transformation: the bringing to consciousness of tensions can be a route to reconciliation when, in the aftermath, life returns to the quotidian. However, she notes sombrely, such cathartic transformation does not happen automatically: and in the case of Mocímboa da Praia the opportunity for a reconstellation of relationships appears to have been lost.

Santos's analysis stands in contrast to the superficial analysis of violence which has effectively been normalized by the contemporary mass media, and serves as a practical demonstration of the potential for anthropology to offer an alternative.

In chapter ten, Raúl Acosta focuses on voluntary associations that are based on a common understanding among their members of a need for action to change something. They thus "advocate" for a cause or an issue in order to exercise pressure on political decision-making institutions, or to convince more people to support their efforts in favour of change. These associations are considered networks because of their loose institutional arrangements. They bring together non-governmental organizations, social movements, expert groups, and other individuals for a single purpose. They are also transnational because of the participation of many individuals across state borders, even where the cause or locus of their interest is located within one single state. An extensive research period

within two such advocacy networks, one in the Brazilian Amazon and another in the Mediterranean, allows Acosta to argue that these associations are privileged settings, which are witnessing a redefinition of collective action. Through an exploration of conflicts and tensions within the Brazilian network, identity politics and the negotiation of discourses are shown to lie at the heart of a strong association. The convening mediators of a network may focus on overcoming distrust and cultural misunderstandings, as happened in the Brazilian case presented. He argues that cosmopolitan values provide some of the motivation that brings together numerous individuals to exercise political influence from outside formal political institutions and procedures.

David Gellner closes the volume with an afterword on anthropology's existential crisis in the face of the global perspective. He explains this in the light of two agendas: the question of making sense of the global *for anthropology*, and the question of what anthropology can contribute to *others'* understanding of globalization. He argues that in order to tackle the latter, we must first sort out the former. His overview of the volume offers well-crafted lines of reasoning about the evolution of anthropology over the last few decades, while constantly making reference to the discipline's history. Through a review of recent monographs, as well as the chapters in this volume, he shows how much our discipline has changed in its selection of topics. Regarding the potential contribution of anthropology to a better understanding of global phenomena, he treads cautiously. The diversity of scholars and students of the discipline illustrates the variety of canons of good evidence that are deployed in ethnographic analysis. Gellner's scrutiny of the reasons for our subject's reclusiveness provides a controversial yet healthy reflection on the purpose of our intellectual endeavour.

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CHAPTER ONE

PERILOUS IDENTITY POLITICS, THE LOSS OF THE PRIMITIVE, AND AN ANTHROPOLOGY THAT MATTERS: SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE NEW CENTURY

THOMAS ERIKSEN

This essay is intended as a contribution to what Keith Hart (1998) has called "the long conversation of anthropology." My aim is straightforward. I am going raise a few critical questions about the state of our art in the early twentieth-first century, aided by a very limited, slanted, and selective reading of the anthropology of the last century. This will be about some of our successes and some of our failures, and, given the topic, it is almost inevitable that I shall also speculate somewhat on future prospects.

Allow me to begin with an anecdote from my home department, the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo. Back in the 1970s, the young and brilliant anthropologist Jorun Solheim wrote a rather knotty and theoretical article with the lengthy title, if my memory serves me correctly, "Er det riktig å si at moderne antropologiske forskere som Barth og Bailey 'står på skuldrene til' Raymond Firth?" In other words, or plain English, "Is it correct to assume that modern anthropological scholars such as Barth and Bailey are 'standing on the shoulders' of Raymond Firth?" Generations of students had to read the mimeographed typescript, originally an exam paper and an exceptional one at that, which concluded that there was a strong and clear continuity from Firth's reworking of functionalism to the transactional models devised by people like Barth and Bailey.

In 1989, the department decided to organize a grand celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary, for reasons still obscure to me. A quarter-century is not an impressive time span and, besides, the foundation of the department was very much a technical and even terminological affair: before 1964, social anthropology had been taught in the same dilapidated building, aptly named Barracks B, by roughly the same staff, in the Section of Ethnography. Be this as it may, in connection with the

celebration, Raymond Firth was invited over. Firth, then pushing ninety, gave two lectures during his visit, one of which was entitled "The Future of Social Anthropology," where he spoke of biotechnology, computers, and other recent phenomena that demanded the attention of anthropologists. It was during question time after this lecture that a colleague, known for his quirky sense of humour, rose in the packed auditorium and asked the venerable old man: "Is it true, Professor Firth, that Fredrik Barth and other contemporary anthropological scholars are standing on your shoulders?"

Firth, vaguely sensing that he had been given a part in an in-joke, answered roundly and graciously: "Well, if they do, at least that suggests that they can see further than me."

Now, the question is, do we see further than the people on whose shoulders we are perched, or has a nasty fog descended on the scenery? Clifford Geertz seems to have come to favour the latter position towards the end of his life, although he was frequently seen, by self-professed scientific anthropologists, as one who had paved the way for the horrors of postmodern obscurantism. In a recent book essay comparing James Clifford and Pierre Clastres—an unlikely pair, but offering a thought-provoking contrast—Geertz (1998) concludes: "Whatever the flaws of his approach, Clastres knew where he was going, and he got there." Clastres, in *Society Against the State*, describes a South American tribe struggling to retain its old way of life. Clifford, on the contrary, in his *Routes*—a book about travel, movement, and ethnography—"seems stalled, unsteady, fumbling for direction," and his text has "a hesitant, stuttering quality (what can I say? how can I say it? with what right do I do so?)." Postmodernism taught a generation of anthropologists to dissect the menu without bothering to look at such banalities as the food; it concentrates on the wallpaper patterns instead of the quality of the woodwork, just as scholars with a neo-Darwinian bent—adherents of selfish-gene biology— appear to mistake the recipe for the food. The most evangelical expressions of neo-Darwinism, representing a search for simple answers to complex questions, could be seen as resulting from despair at apparent postmodern fragmentation, but, ironically, deal in abstractions of a kind comparable to those of a Derrida or Lyotard.

Is the party over? Anthropologists of my generation were somehow given the distinct impression that early- to mid-twentieth century anthropology was sparkling with magic. It held a confident belief in its huge intellectual task and—quite evidently, even if usually muttered under one's breath or even denied up front—its moral mission, consisting in improving the world, but especially improving the Western middle classes.

Disdainful of the competition, be it quantitative social research, a-theoretical historiography, or reductionist sociobiology, social anthropology held the banner high, but not so high as to make itself vulnerable to criticism for vulgarity and sensationalism. The era of anthropological identity politics proper began just after the Second World War, by which time the number of professionals and teachers in the discipline was sufficient for anthropological scholars not to have to worry about making their writings accessible or interesting to outsiders.

Haven't we all sat in social anthropology seminar rooms, whether in Oxford, Oslo, or elsewhere, listening to presenters taking liberties with certain conventions of the discipline, only to be met with reactions of the generic kind: "Hmm . . . very interesting, fascinating even, but is it anthropology?" In sum, and I do not want to go into details at this stage, there is a lack of openness in social anthropology which is at best puzzling, at worst embarrassing. Some years ago, there was widespread professional concern with the ways in which our battered old concept of culture had been hijacked by academic non-anthropologists while we were simultaneously busy dismantling it. Although anthropologists are nowadays everywhere outside the academy, the internal identity politics of our discipline is still militantly obsessed with boundary maintenance and gatekeeping. I can think of several departments that wouldn't dream of hiring a member of staff with a PhD in a subject other than anthropology. Collaborating with academics in other disciplines is considered respectable as long as one doesn't "lose one's professional identity as an anthropologist." You know this as well as I do. But isn't this somewhat out of character for a discipline for which one of the truly foundational texts is Marcel Mauss's *The Gift?* Mauss begins his essay by distinguishing between the three phases of gift exchange: giving, receiving, and returning the gift. Anthropologists, almost like Scandinavian aid donors, are perfectly happy to give their concepts and theories to outsiders, but are less enthusiastic about the offered return gifts in the form of analyses inspired by anthropological thought but not part of it. There is a fear of impurity in anthropology, a fear which makes sense, perhaps, in the context of Mary Douglas's theory, but not in intellectual life.

This fear of impurity, or of intellectual contamination, is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the realm of popular anthropology, or, if you like, public anthropology. I have recently devoted a whole book to this topic (Eriksen 2006) and will not reiterate my argument about popularisation here. Attitudes to light-hearted "popular anthropology"—typically represented in this country by Kate Fox and her very entertaining

book *Watching the English* (Fox 2004)—vary, and, I think, should vary. However, there are different kinds of popular anthropology. Some books are plainly populist, commercial literature aiming to entertain but not to make substantial new contributions to knowledge about the condition of humanity. I have no grumbles against such books, but they fall outside the scope of the present concerns, which are about the ability of anthropology to contribute intellectually to the long conversation about humanity, not just the one about anthropology. It is disconcerting to note that on recent lists of the 100 most important intellectuals in the UK and the world, respectively, a grand total of one anthropologist was represented, namely Clifford Geertz on the global list. Now that he is gone, the number would be nil.

You may not be interested in lists of this kind, but I could mention other examples, such as the very comprehensive bestseller lists on Amazon, the professional backgrounds of contributors to the *London Review of Books*, *Prospect*, or the *New York Review of Books*, or a dozen similar indicators suggesting the wider intellectual significance of social anthropology. This is not a time for complacency. Anthropology has, in the past, succeeded spectacularly in combating racial prejudices and biological determinism, accounting for—and, at least in the case of Margaret Mead, contributing to—cultural change, and throwing unexpected analogies and thought-provoking contrasts into the world, sometimes succeeding in "making the exotic familiar and the familiar exotic," to paraphrase Malinowski. Our failure to define a single public agenda over the last decades—and I am using the word "public" loosely, to include the media, politics, and general intellectual debate—is actually quite serious. It does not mean that anthropologists are, generally, working with useless and irrelevant topics, that they are engaged in a self-enclosed activity of high sophistication akin to the "glass bead game" described in Herman Hesse's last and most important novel, *Das Glasperlenspiel*, translated into English variously as *The Glass Bead Game* and as *Magister Ludi*. The glass bead game has no ulterior point beyond that of allowing its players to display their dazzling skill and intellectual dexterity, and as the novel shows so clearly, the single-minded commitment to the game demanded of its players makes them unfit for living in the world. Among other things, Hesse's novel was clearly a comment on self-enclosed, self-congratulatory academic pursuits with little relevance beyond the academy. Novelists and poets have been known to regard literary studies, not least in their poststructuralist versions, in such terms. But anthropology? Well, clearly no. What attracted many of us to anthropology in the first place—the possibility of raising fundamental

philosophical questions while simultaneously engaging with the world of real, existing people—is still there. But, and I regret this very deeply, it is increasingly to be found inside a cocoon.

One feature of contemporary anthropology which may contribute to its failure to attract intellectual interest from outside could be the absence of clear theoretical positions. As Bruce Knauft recently pointed out (Knauft 2006), theoretical perspectives are not so much absent in contemporary anthropology as they are mixed:

> [T]he reification and contestation of named "isms" and their progeny— materialism, Marxism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and even those that cultivate a distinctive subject position of politics or authorship, such as feminism or multiculturalism—are no longer as subject to explicit theorization or paradigmatic contestation as they were 10 or 15 years ago, notwithstanding their enduring threads, lineaments, and academic politics. Theoretical disputes between paradigms or subject positions are no longer as prominent as they were. (Knauft 2006: 408)

Knauft then gives a partial list of the "first team" of American anthropology, noting that not a single one of them is associated with a particular theoretical paradigm. Perhaps what Knauft is really saying is that anthropology has become more like history (only less eloquent), an ideographic field of study, far from being a nomothetic science. But there is more to his argument than that. His view is that the opposing poles that defined anthropology for most of the last century have lost their magnetic force and are no longer seen as indispensable. Versions of Marxism, structuralism, hermeneutics, and phenomenology, even healthy injections of structural-functionalism, have made their way into the shared theoretical toolbox of anthropologists to which nobody has a right of priority. In saying this, it is clear that Knauft is playing down a few real existing polarities, such as the rather deep gulf between interpretive anthropologists and neo-Darwinists, but as a diagnosis of American cultural anthropology and most European social anthropology, it is fair enough. Knauft nevertheless uses the word "post-paradigmatic" to designate contemporary sociocultural anthropology, but this usage of the term must remind us of Lévi-Strauss's Brazilians, or Baudrillard's Americans, who had ostensibly taken the journey directly from barbarism to decadence without passing through civilization on the way.

The timidity of contemporary anthropology contrasts sharply with the grand visions and ambitious theoretical programmes characteristic of early- to mid-twentieth century anthropologies. In this country, indeed in this city, the end was announced as early as 1950 by Evans-Pritchard in

his lecture "Anthropology and History." Expanding on his earlier critique of Radcliffe-Brown's positivism, Evans-Pritchard now seemed content to see social anthropology as an interpretive discipline. This statement did not deter many of his contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic from continuing to develop their distinctive, and often hugely ambitious, theoretical programmes, from Lévi-Straussian structuralism to Marxist anthropologies and the so-called cultural materialism of Marvin Harris, as the latest projection of what Edwin Ardener—another great Oxford man—called "high modernism" in anthropology. In Ardener's view, modernism in anthropology ended around 1980, when the grand theories seemed to fizzle out. A decade later, Henrietta Moore suggested that anthropology as a unified discipline had ceased to exist (Moore 1996), having been replaced by a series of overlapping but distinct practices. This is clearly an overstatement at the very least: I can think of few academic professions with a stronger collective identity than anthropologists—and perhaps this is where our current problem lies: we have, it appears, so much to tell each other that we forget to invite others to join the conversation and, similarly, have little time, on our own part, to join theirs.

I said that this is not a time for complacency, but it is also, like it or not, not a time for grand theory. Contemporary anthropologists commenting on the state of the art, from Wendy James to Kirsten Hastrup, from Talal Asad to João de Pina-Cabral, never seem to call for the resurgence of all-encompassing theories with an objectivist bent. Their caution is obviously well founded—as Evans-Pritchard noted more than half a century ago, the scientific programme of structural-functionalism had failed to yield a single "natural law of society"—yet, what we have taken away from our students (and ourselves) is the joy and enlightenment involved in comparing and evaluating distinct theoretical programmes. For my own part, one of my great formative moments as an undergraduate was the departmental seminar—it must have been around 1982—in which Eduardo Archetti accused Marvin Harris of being a vulgar Marxist, following Harris's just-so materialist stories about cultural changes in American society. Things, we thought then, are more complex than they seem—but we remained Pyrrhic sceptics, and not mere disillusioned sceptics, in that we continued to believe that the answers were to be found somewhere.

Be this as it may. It is nonetheless a fact that when grand theory tries to return in this postmodern era, it recalls the famous formulation from the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* about history repeating itself as farce. I am thinking, of course, of the evangelical movement known variously as sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and Darwinist social