Applied Anthropology: A viable career path in contemporary Britain?

Roger Ballard

DRAFT ONLY

Prepared for presentation in a workshop on *Public Anthropology for a World in Crisis*
at the 2010 EASA Conference, Maynooth

A discipline in decline?

Routinely perceived as a junior (and exotic) partner to Sociology, the discipline Social Anthropology hardly makes a blip on the radars of the makers and shakers of social policy in contemporary Britain are concerned. The same may well be true elsewhere in Western Europe. In the wider order of things Sociology no longer occupies the position of authority with which it occupied half a century ago. Since then its role in the analysis of social processes has been steadily marginalised by its trendier and more seemingly empiricist competitors operating under more specialist banners such as gender studies, criminology, social and evolutionary psychology, and so forth. Not that sociology has done much to help or defend itself. As the commitment of leading its theoreticians to abstract neo-Marxist formulations of gave way to the even more obscure and abstracted vocabulary of post-modernism, mainline sociology's attempts to engage with the real world began to look ever more stratospheric in character. No matter how vigorously the eager practitioners of post-modernism may have insisted that their perspectives on contemporary manifestations of social reality generated unprecedented insights into what was going on, the wider world in general, and social policy makers in particular, remained unimpressed. As far as they were concerned data, and especially statistical data, provided the only reliable foundation for the articulation of effective social policy.

Against this background anthropology found itself pressed out yet further to the sidelines. Long committed to the qualitative rather than the quantitative exploration of human affairs, and apparently addicted to the empirical study of 'them' rather than us, it was discipline which appeared to have only the sketchiest degree of traction with respect to issues of social policy in the metropolis itself. If anthropology was in any sense 'applied', in historical terms its principal audience appeared to have been those despised creatures, colonial administrators, who had subsequently been replaced by their more respectable post-colonial successors,

specialists in 'development studies' – many of whom were only too keen to cast off the insights of anthropologists as comprehensively outmoded.

But if anthropologists were consequently exceeding keen to throw off the 'embarrassment' of its colonial heritage in the aftermath of the collapse Imperial jurisdictions in the context of which they had hitherto operate, such that they engaged in a lengthy process of self-critical navel gazing, I can see little sign that the discipline has yet managed to establish a clear and coherent raison d'être for its existence in the contemporary world. To be sure anthropology it sustains itself a small self-referential discipline, whose survival for the immediate future is guaranteed by the treacle of the academy's institutional conservatism. However institutional viscosity is most unlikely to offer much in the way of serious protection in the face of the swingeing cuts about to be let loose in the aftermath of the credit crunch.

Prospects for the future in an increasingly pluralised world

In these circumstances some urgent questions come to the fore. Is there a meaningful disciplinary and institutional future for British – and beyond that for European – anthropology? With such questions in mind I'd like to take the opportunity to reflect on my own career as a social analyst with an initial training in anthropology who has been exploring the growth and internal dynamics South Asian colonies in Britain, together with their globally extended transjurisdictional networks, during the course of the past four decades. In doing so I also found myself drawn into a parallel role as a commentator on the way in which the steady growth of these processes of 'reverse colonisation' have introduced new, and ever more salient, dimensions of ethnic plurality into every western European jurisdiction, giving rise to ever more pressing challenges to established priorities and practices in virtually every conceivable sphere of social policy.

That the issues I have found myself addressing form a single coherent arena – albeit one in which all potential options are vigorously contested – is clear. Nevertheless my professional career path in pursuit of the issues being thrown up in this arena proved to be distinctly chequered, not least because – as I have recently begun to realise – my disciplinary interests and connections are just as transjurisdictional and transcultural in character as are the activities of the long-standing subjects of my research. This raises a major issue. Is it the case that analysis of the dynamics of ethnic plurality – an increasingly salient issue in all parts of the globe – is an irredeemably cross-disciplinary exercise, with no specific home in the academy? Or is it, to the contrary, one in which anthropologists are particularly well placed

to make a coherent contribution, always provided that they get their act together? After decades of experience in this arena I find myself strongly committed, at least in principle, to the latter view; but at the same time I remain deeply sceptical as to whether our discipline will manage to get its act together in such a way as to pull it off.

A review of my personal experience

Given that I completed my first degree under Edmund Leach and Meyer Fortes, and with Adam Kuper as my personal supervisor, and that I completed my doctorate in the University of Delhi, under supervisors who had been trained in Oxford, Cambridge, the LSE and Canberra, by all the conventions of the tribe my training identifies me as a fully fledged anthropologist. But to identify a tribe in terms of its intellectual ancestry is one thing: the identification of the character of the 'stuff' round which the activities of the tribe revolves is quite another. This was self-evident as soon as I reached Delhi, where all the 'anthropologists' whose work I had been reading in Cambridge turned out to be locates in the Department of Sociology: my teachers in India took the view that they were not studying social constructions put together by exotic aliens, but their own society. Hence long before I set off to do fieldwork in a conventionally exotic arena – village buried deep in the foothills of the Himalayas – in order to complete a key component of my professional *rite de passage*, I had already stumbled into an alternative conceptual universe in which the conventional Eurocentric distinction between the study of 'us' and 'them' was in the process of being discarded as one which was as irrelevant as it was obfuscatory. From an Indian perspective the activities in which my teachers were engaged was not, and could in no way be meaningfully conceived as, as a small and specialist corner of the social sciences, namely the qualitatively oriented study non-European 'others'. In an arena as diverse and plural as South Asia, this conventional distinction made no sense: 'we' included all manner of diversities, so much so that otherness was either a meaningless category on the grounds that it was fully incorporated into the 'we', or alternatively that alterity started at everyone's doorsteps, since it was an intrinsic feature of everyone's social experience. I confess that I was converted: logic demanded that sociology (in the Indian sense) of necessity subsumed what I had hitherto regarded as the more specialist and narrowly focussed discipline of anthropology.

But no matter how great the insights I had gained as a result of my experiences in India might be, once I returned to Europe it became clear that the conceptual distinction between the study of 'us' and them' remained as firmly entrenched as ever, and – but for a few marginal

adjustments – remains so to this day. So how was I to identify myself in disciplinary terms on my return home? Given that the theoretical and methodological perspectives on which I relied for intellectual inspiration were heavily conditioned by the academic tradition known as anthropology in the local vernacular, and that from a Eurocentric perspective the focus of my research was on 'them' rather than 'us' (albeit located 'here' rather than 'there' in spatial terms), I began to identify myself as an Applied Anthropologist, a term I continue to use to this day.

Nevertheless it soon transpired that the insights I had gained in Delhi and the Himalayas, further exacerbated by the focus of my research interests in UK, had left me inescapably betwixt and between. From an anthropological perspective I was studying the right people in the wrong place; whilst from a sociological perspective I was regarded as exploring the hot topic of the day from a totally misguided 'colonial' and 'ethnicist' perspective – or in other words the right people in the wrong way. Meanwhile those identified themselves as operating at the more applied end of sociological activity, commonly identified as Social Policy, routinely dismissed most of my observations and conclusions as outrageous. All this had a substantial impact on my academic career. I have never held an appointment in a Department of Anthropology, Sociology or indeed of Social Policy; always anomaly, I had spent fifteen interesting years teaching in the Department of Religions and Theology in Manchester before I decided to opt out of the academy nearly a decade ago. Most of my colleagues – bar one or two notable exceptions – appeared to be particularly saddened to see me go.

Although I miss the opportunity to continue teaching, leaving the academy has proved to be a liberating experience, especially in terms of research. Despite my long-standing interest in series which have been a source of escalating feelings of socio-political unease during the course past half-century, I found it increasingly difficult to raise the funds which are the prerequisite for engaging in intensive research, and have had even less success in persuading the academy and its sponsors to take an institutional interest in the issues in this field from an anthropological perspective. Moreover as the issues in this field more egregious, access to funding – and especially to funding on a sufficiently substantial scale to enable me to pass on my insights to a further generation of successors – came to a dead end. An objective observer might well conclude that I was barking up the wrong tree.

But up just which tree should anthropologists be barking? Many years ago Edmund Leach warned me that just because I was an anthropologist by training, it did not necessarily follow that I would be 'doing anthropology' if I spent my career exploring the problems being

experienced by South Asian settlers in Britain. Although I ignored his advice, and have no regrets about having done so, I have since discovered that he was both right and wrong at multiplicity of levels.

Much has changed since Edmund enunciated his dictum. Four decades later, globalisation has comprehensively undermined the once-stark distinction between here and there, and hence between 'them' and 'us'. Just as significantly the academy has lost the condition of largely unbridled autonomy that it once enjoyed. Universities are now business enterprise in which the agenda is ultimately set by the bottom line, and in the social sciences in particular, their principal source of funding is now the state. But if the flow of funding from that source has proved to be substantial, given a steadily rising commitment to evidence-based policy making, it has simultaneously turned into a poisoned chalice – especially with respect to matter of social policy. It is easy to see why: it is *politicians* make policy, not critically minded academics, not least when it comes to dealing with the hottest potato in the sack. It follows that in commissioning the research on which they intend to base policies at the cutting edge of politics, state agencies routinely commission research which is structured in a way as to produce the right answers. Silly me! I had indeed been barking up the wrong tree.

However it took some time before I realised this self-evident truth. It was only when I sought a sympathetic reaction from my Vice-Chancellor after all three of the α-rated research proposals which I had recently submitted had fallen at the last hurdle. "Perhaps you should trim your sails a little" was his suggestion. Having been given similar advice to the effect that "He who pays the Piper always calls the tune" by a senior (and sympathetic) DfID official – also anthropologist – a few months earlier, the scales at long last dropped from my eyes: the prospect of gaining institutional support for research whose findings might run counter to ingrained strands of public policy was close to zero. The time had come to bale of academia: I submitted an application for early retirement the following day. There were no objections.

An alternative career

That was by no means the end of the story. One of the key reasons why I was able to bail out in this way is that I had found my way an alternative source of income on the basis of which to ply my trade as an Consultant Anthropologist; but it was not along a route which I had in any way envisaged at the outset of my involvement in the field. As I began to get to grips with the situation in which my South Asian informants found themselves in the UK, it soon became apparent that in addition to the daily grind of marginalisation, disparagement and

rather less frequent incidents of outright violence on racial grounds, one of their principal sources of disadvantage was a consequence of their ethnic alterity, particularly in personal, domestic and familial contexts. Moreover it was equally clear that this condition of disadvantage did not arise because the cultural and conceptual premises in terms of which their ordered their familial relationships were *ipso facto* dysfunctional, as numerous external observers assumed was the case, but rather because state agents – particularly in the field of Medical, Psychiatric and Social Services lacked the skills and competencies which would allow them to get to grips with their client's difficulties in a manner which worked with, rather than across, the grain of the premises in terms of which their minority clients routinely ordered their personal behaviour.

Having pursued this line of argument for the best part of four decades, I can only report that no matter how much of a commonsense proposition this may be from an anthropological perspective, it has turned out to be an exceptionally hard row to hoe. Despite a good deal of interest from professional practitioners – especially when they found the going tough with their minority clientele – they regularly found my analytical perspective to be counter-intuitive at best, and downright insulting at worst. In further paradox I also began to realise that largely self-selecting audiences who turned up at my lectures rarely lacked sympathy with their clients: few beyond those who were actively concerned about their inability to provide a professionally effective service to their minority clients could be bothered to raise their head above the parapet. However I gradually began to realise that the driving force behind their sympathetic impulses was a concern to assist, and to provide to advice and to support those in need.

Within this frame of reference my audiences they were ready and willing to listen to accounts of the way in which their clients might have been disadvantaged as result of the impact of racism, classism, patriarchy, culture conflict and so forth, and to seek advice as to how they as professionals could best assist their clients to overcome these handicaps (when I began to work in this field 1960s idealism still had a great deal of traction); and to a somewhat lesser extent they were for the most part also interested being provided with what I quickly began to identify (at least to myself) as 'brain implants': self contained nuggets of cultural information which would serve to explain why members of community x would behave in manner y in situation z.

In the face of such expectations audiences were often disappointed with the fare a placed before them, on the grounds that I failed to meet their pressing practical needs, and had

instead embarked on perverse and abstruse arguments about conceptual structures, my insistence that 'cultural knowledge' cannot be acquired on a nugget by nugget basis. Likewise my suggestions that the core of their problems might not so much lie in the alterity of the beliefs and practices of their clientele, but rather from the difficulties that they experienced in thinking 'outside the box' of their own prior – and necessarily culturally grounded – assumptions, and that this was especially so when such emic premises were embedded in the nominally etic premises in terms of which they routinely organised their own professional practice.

To but it plainly, what I was arguing was that as the clientele they were serving was becoming steadily more plural in religious, cultural and hence conceptual terms, they could not hope to provide services on an equitable basis across the board solely by means of their technical competence, no matter how sophisticated that might be. Instead I argued that if they really wished to overcome the challenges with which they found themselves confronted they had no alternative but to acquire a of ethno-sensitivity – or to put it more plainly, of cultural competence – to match their undoubted technical competence, which enable them to better appreciate the behavioural consequences of their minority patients and clients' use of their own preferred system of conceptual categories to order their behaviour in personal, domestic and familial arenas, which would in turn allow them to work with, rather than across the grain of their cultural resources.

Although I still hold strongly to that position – which, if it were to take off on an institutionalised basis, would undoubtedly give rise to a wide range of novel career opportunities for applied anthropologists – I must confess that my efforts to persuade engaged in the human professions to get to grips with the challenges they are undoubtedly facing in this field on the basis which I have just outlined has had no significant impact. That those responsible for the delivery of professional services – and behind them the makers of social policy – will at some stage have to take these issues more seriously is plain enough. The pressure within the kettle is rising steadily, but so, too, are the countervailing forces. As cuts rain down with ever greater vigour on all the public services, reinforced yet further by steadily more far-reaching consequences of globalisation, the hatches are being screwed down ever more firmly. But if warnings that Nemesis may be approaching still as yet cut very little ice, it is hardly surprising that initiatives of this kind have failed to gain any kind of institutional traction. But if, in consequence, the time is not ripe for the implementation of such initiatives, the central piece of wisdom I have acquired during the course of my

academic career it is that knocking one's head against a brick wall precipitates nothing more useful than a headache. Hence my retirement.

Opportunities in the Anthropology and Law

Well before I took the plunge I realised that I was gradually inveigled into another – and wholly unexpected – sphere in which I could conduct my trade as an applied anthropologist: the preparation of reports commissioned by for lawyers for use in legal proceeding in which members of the British-based South Asian communities with whose lifestyles I was familiar had become involved, and in which it appeared that I might be in a position to assist the court by providing an expert evidence on the cultural backgrounds of the litigants. Initially such requests came in dribs and drabs. But as my ability to meet the requirements of the law courts improved, so my availability and potential utility as an expert began to spread, largely by word of mouth. In the face of these developments my next step was obvious: rather than continuing with my futile efforts to persuade established professional institutions make a more positive response to the challenges thrown up the growing salience of ethnic plurality, here was an opportunity to step right out of that structure, and to embark on a new career as a freelancing Consultant Anthropologist.

My switch of route took place nearly a decade ago. Since then I have earned my living by preparing expert reports for use in all manner of proceedings – no less in the Civil, Criminal and Family courts than in the Asylum and Immigration tribunal. But in doing so I have in no way abandoned my academic career. As briefs from solicitors have pop through my letter box on an almost daily basis, I have found myself in a position where I have access to a stream of immensely illuminating ethnographic data about the internal dynamics of transjurisdictionally extended South Asian families, at a level of detail to which it would be almost impossible to gain access by means of more orthodox fieldwork methodologies. Nor are the insights I have gained from this solely restricted to family matters: in cases brought by the Police, Customs and Revenue and the Serious and Organised Crime Agency I have learnt a great deal about South Asian business practices, and especially about operation of the multi-billion dollar Informal Value Transfer System known Hawala, through whose good offices the vast majority of South Asian settlers route their financial transfers to the subcontinent, much to the alarm of the Department of Homeland Security. Last but not least I have also gained all manner of insights into the ways in which a major British institutional structure – the English

legal system – is struggling to cope with the *de facto* plurality of the population over which it currently exercises jurisdiction.

In so doing I found myself in a position which was strikingly different from that which I had occupied whilst I was ineffectively seeking to persuade those responsible for the delivery of public services of the need to take ethnic plurality seriously. In my role as an expert I was not only given a specific brief to do just that: given that legal proceedings rely heavily on documentation, I also found myself in a position to trace through at first hand the ways in which lawyers and judges were coping with the consequents challenges, as well as the way in which an ever-increasing volume of legislation touching on such matters was being interpreted in the courts. It is also worth commenting on the principal reason as to why I have not only been able to contribute to legal proceedings in this way, but also to make a living from so doing. The answer is straightforward: given the proceedings in English law are adversarial in character, with a consequent acceptance that for the fight to be fair there should be broad equality of arms on either side, state-provided legal aid is available in many – although by no means all – kinds of proceedings. To be sure cuts are steadily being applied to the budget, just as they are in all other areas of state-funded activity, but the principle that as active agents litigants are entitled to call expert witnesses to illuminate their contentions, and that the state has a duty provide the financial wherewithal required to commission reports from them remains in place, albeit in a steadily shrinking range of contexts.

A view from the ringside

So what have I learned as a result of my opportunity to observe such proceedings from the ringside? In the first place it has become as plain as a pikestaff that this component of Britain's contemporary socio-political order – no less than that most other contemporary Euro-American jurisdictions – is in a state of considerable confusion, and as such is in urgent need of the intellectual and conceptual tools with which to lubricate the many disjunctions which are coming to the fore as a result of the contradictions been the ever-increasing salience of ethno-religious plurality on the one hand, have precipitated, the rising strength of parochial, nationalistic and xenophobic responses to those self-same developments. Such developments are manifestly in no way unique to Britain: similar battles are also being played out across the length and breadth of Europe.

It is also clear that the resultant contradictions are at least as much a matter of politics as they are of law. That should not be a cause for any surprise or indeed of concern. One of the most

ancient and honourable tasks of the academy has been to speak truth to power, and above all to raise clear warnings in situations where untrammelled hubris has begun to precipitate stirrings of nemesis. But if it is indeed to fulfil that role, the academy must of necessity stand outside the immediate purview of both the authoritarian state and the populist mob – especially when those two forces can so easily intertwine into a singular anti-pluralist conjunction in the popular democracies which we currently inhabit. In these circumstances one of most significant roles of the academy is to act as an arena within which alternative visions can be explored: to put it plainly, to take the opportunity to think 'outside the box', and above all to challenge the foundations of hubristic claims of universally valid righteousness to which those occupying so-far unchallenged (or at least un-displaced) positions of hegemony can so easily become addicted.

From that perspective Euro-America currently stands at a highly significant cusp. Half a millennium ago a small group of European navigators embarked on an initiative which was in due course to shift the centre of gravity of global economic activity away from the southern and eastern parts of the Asiatic landmass towards the Atlantic archipelago far to the West, thereby giving rise not to the first, but rather to the *second* phase of globalisation. As this began the first phase of globalisation – sustained most saliently by Muslim seamen operating complex trade routes stretching from Sofala to Yokohama, and from Basra to Timor – connected all the globe's major centres of manufacturing, agriculture and resource extraction, was reaching its peak. The second phase of took several centuries to get going, and it was not until the early part of the eighteenth century that the productive capacity of Euro-America began to surpass that that of South and East Asia, before racing ahead to reach its apogee towards the end of the nineteenth century. But these processes have not stood still. For all the talk of the globalising consequences of coca-colonisation, or in other words of the activities of Euro-American multinational corporations acting firmly from above, at set of countervailing processes began to stir during the course of the twentieth century. Emanating primarily but by no means exclusively from South and East Asia, the last century gave birth to processes of globalisation *from below*, whose transgressive successes began steadily to erode the position of global hegemony to which Euro-Americans had grown so accustomed taken as given.

The processes have become far more salient since the turn of the millennium, and have taken many forms – of which one of the most obvious has been the reversion of the centre of gravity global manufacturing activity to South and East Asia in the aftermath of its temporary

excursion to Western Europe and North America. But what is in many ways an equally significant manifestation of these self-same processes has been precipitated by the entrepreneurial efforts of millions efforts emigrants from the global South who have establish thriving ethnic colonies in the metropolitan heartlands of their former imperial masters during the course of the past half century. Despite ever more desperate legislative measures currently being taken these processes of reverse colonisation to a halt, there is no reason to suppose that current initiatives in the field of 'border control' will do anything more than to precipitate a temporary degree of restraint on the still accelerating impact of globalisation from below. Every Euro-American jurisdiction has already been significantly pluralised as a result of these developments, and the thought that the tide of history will suddenly reverse itself, especially in the light of the recent shift in the centre of gravity of the world economy, is as vain as it is remote.

At least in principle, these developments should open up vast new opportunities for the application of anthropological insights – always provided that legions of anthropologists with the training, the knowledge, and above all the conceptual analytical nous to apply these insights are ready and waiting to fill the gaps. However if I read the agendas of most anthropology departments in contemporary Europe aright, I can see little sign that their products are equipped to take advantage of these opportunities – most particularly since they will also find themselves swimming against the tide of settled (albeit largely mistaken) public and academic opinion if they were to do so. In this context the Euro-American branch of our discipline should beware. Anthropology is not a Euro-American monopoly: like all the rest of our institutions, it is vulnerable to transgressive challenges from below, most especially from competitors whose conceptual perspective has not been rendered myopic by the illusions of hubris.

An anthropological agenda for a plural/post-modern future

But if I am right in thinking that the contemporary Euro-American conceptual order is badly contaminated by the illusions of hubris, what kind of changes in the anthropological agenda might be required if it is to play a significant role in penetrating those illusions, such that it can provide the public at large a more meaningful route-map on the basis of which to navigate the unfamiliar seas of our upcoming plural and post-modern future? Just as the second wave of globalisation up-ended the premises in terms of which the authors and beneficiaries of the first phase of globalisation ordered their lives, so established Euro-

American visions modernity are in the midst of being up-ended in just the same way. But since these developments are manifestly dialectic in character, its stands to reason that the roots of the coming post-modern global order in which Euro-American pretensions to global hegemony will have been reduced to history will be as 'old' as much as they are 'new', given that the old world of temporarily colonised civilizations are coming into their own once again. Ideas, practices and conceptual systems which hubristic modernisers thought they had safely dumped into the dustbin of history have suddenly begun to re-emerge with reinvigorated strength in a post-colonial, post-modern and above all an ever more *plural* global order.

In a world turned upside-down, there are good reasons to suppose that ideas and practices once dismissed as *passé* may well prove to provide some far more illuminating guides to the structure of our post-modern future than the ever more comprehensively discredited visions of progress towards a singular condition of modernity on which we had hitherto relied. Indeed that has been precisely my own experience as I have become ever more deeply engaged in seeking to apply my anthropological insights as an expert witness. Although I rarely cite the source of the analytical and conceptual inspirations in the course of preparing my reports, whenever I conduct a reflexive analysis on what I have been up to in so doing, I become ever more acutely aware of the extent to which I have relied on the insights I gained in reading the work of the likes of Sir Henry Maine, Arnold van Gennep, Marcel Mauss, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Levi-Strauss, Fortes and Leach during the course of my undergraduate studies. What I also began to appreciate is that whilst all these ancestors of the tribe conducted their fieldwork in regions subject to imperial hegemony, all insisted that anthropology (as opposed to ethnography) should proceed as a comparative exercise, and that such an approach should be limited to comparisons between 'them' and 'them', but that they should also extend to comparisons between 'them' and 'us'. That is not to suggest that the achievements of the ancestors were fault-free: on the one hand they for the most part severely underestimated the dynamic character of the societies which they were able cheerfully designated as being as stable as they were 'primitive'; and on the other their commitment to include 'us' no less than 'them' within their comparative frameworks often turned to be disappointingly thin. Their hearts may well have been in the right place, but the forces of Imperial hubris ultimately proved overwhelming at a conceptual and intellectual level.

Nevertheless a careful examination of the contents of the conceptual and analytical toolkit which our ancestors bequeathed to us reveals that it contains all manner of insights on the basis of which to get to grips with the character of the social and cultural resources which have inspired and underpinned current processes of globalisation from below, and consequently opens up – given the benefits of hindsight – the prospect of breaking out of the conceptual iron cage of modernistic hubris.

From that perspective one of the greatest achievements of our ancestors was their success in demonstrating that whilst all societies manifest themselves in empirical terms as networks of social relationships, the key resource which held each such enterprise together, and which also ultimately accounted for the greater part of the distinctive character of each such network, was the specific character of the conceptual universe on which the participants in each such network drew in the process of ordering their reciprocal interactions with one another. Hence it was the identification of culture in this functionalist sense – together with the development of analytical schemes for analysis of the phenomenon they had identified on a comparative basis – which should not only be regarded as the key achievement of our disciplinary ancestors, but also the key resource required to extract ourselves from our current conceptual morass. However this is in no way to suggest that the ancestors provided us with all the answers. Over and above their failure to generate a sufficiently dynamic understanding of the phenomenon of culture, they also failed to do was to follow their insights through on a reflexive basis, by using their carefully constructed conceptual tool-bag to explore the conceptual premises which underpinned the operation of the social universe which they themselves inhabited – of 'us' in other words.

The conceptual and cosmological foundations of Western European cultures

Such an exercise in self-reflexive analysis is never easy: what 'we' do always appears to be 'sensible' and 'normal' as compared with the weird and exotic beliefs and practices deployed by others. But in our own Euro-American context we were also beset with further conceptual difficulties. Given that place our interest in 'otherness' was precipitated by our encounters with hitherto unknown forms of alterity in the midst of a process of Imperial expansion, the impulse to identify our own conceptual presuppositions not just as 'sensible' and 'normal', but also as more rational, and indeed more civilised than their proved to be overwhelming, and in due course precipitated all the problems of hegemonistically generated hubris in which Euro-America currently finds itself entrapped.

But no matter how much the heady feelings of hubris generated by the successful implementation of the second phase may have provided a fertile arena for the amplification of this perspective, it would be idle – and indeed thoroughly un-anthropological – to take the view that these ideas emerged from out of the blue without any sort of precedent. All cultures are a product of lengthy developmental processes, with the result that the indigenous religio-cultural heritage of Western Europe is as much the product of the specific character of its historical roots as that of any other major civilization. As is so often the case, theology – and most especially the cosmological vision which its proponents generated – provided the key components of a characteristically Western European cosmological vision. Although it goes without saying that this was Christian in character, that label can in no way be left unqualified. Rather the conceptual vision around which Western European interpretations of the Christian tradition – as articulated by the Roman Catholic church, together with the various offshoots which it has produced during the course of the past sixteen hundred years – can all be traced back to the teachings of Augustine of Hippo, who was in turn building on the interpretations of the tradition which were initially articulated by Paul of Tarsus. A key feature of Augustine's theological perspective – whose heritage has pervaded Western European philosophical debates ever since – was its markedly unilateral, and hence strongly anti-pluralistic outlook, on the grounds (to put the argument at its simplest) that the aftermath of Christ's cataclysmic act of self-sacrifice, is only one route is available into the City of God, whilst all others of necessity lead to hell and damnation.

 Nor is that all. Although the premises of the enlightenment – which subsequently provided the foundations for our current conceptualisations of modernity – may in principle have banished the 'superstitious' premises of the Catholic tradition to the far periphery of the social order, the founding fathers of that conceptual universe only made a partial escape from the strongly anti-pluralistic premises of Augustinian cosmology. So it was that whilst the founders of 'modernity' utilised the profoundly individualistic vision of the human condition which was generated during the course of the Protestant reformation to sweep away – or so they hoped – the last vestiges the hierarchical and collectivists principle derived from Catholic theology, in order to construct a new and more perfect social order grounded in premises of individualistic and egalitarian rationalism, they still retained the key feature of Augustinian theology: that the object of human existence (now understood in 'secular' rather than in religious terms) was to find their way forward to a more perfect future which would of necessity be *singular* in character.

In the light of all this it follows that the authors of the principles of the enlightenment – which in normative terms now underpin the cultural premises deployed within almost every section the indigenous populations of western Europe, no less than those deployed in the multitude of ethnic colonies which they have established elsewhere around the globe – took it for granted that the path on which they had set out was not just inherently progressive, but also of *universal* applicability. What is equally remarkable is the extent to which that notion has continued to gain traction ever since, despite (or perhaps because of) the fading strength of Euro-American hegemony in global contexts.

The role of the enlightenment in the generation and maintenance of Imperial hubris

On the face of things, the liberal and egalitarian premises of the enlightenment would appear to be an unlikely conceptual foundation around which to legitimate the construction of a global empire. Yet that is precisely what happened: whilst the principles of the enlightenment provided a powerful ideological justification for the abolition of monarchical tyrannies, they simultaneously turned out to provide an equally effective set of justifications on the basis of which to legitimise the burgeoning development of Euro-American imperial domination of Asia, Africa and South America during the course of the nineteenth century; and in an even more remarkable development, this self-same ideology has no way been undermine in the aftermath of the formal collapse of all of those imperial projects during the course of the twentieth century, such that it came to be utilised as a justification for all manner of 'humanitarian interventions' and policies of 'regime change' articulated by the 'International Community' during the course of the first decade of the twenty-first.

How has this come about? A central feature of the enlightenment project, at least as far as it authors were concerned, was to put all traces of the past behind them as they set about tracing their way into a more rational, more scientific and hence inherently progressive and universalistic applicable vision of the future. In so doing they not only trashed organised religion, but virtually all forms of 'tradition', on the grounds that the premises which underpinned them were as irrational as they were superstitious, and that in due course both would be replaced on a universal by steadily more rational modes of belief and practice. From this perspective the philosophy of the enlightenment should not be regarded as being a distant product of late eighteenth century ideologues: rather it is project which enjoyed ongoing development throughout the twentieth century, and which remains as active as ever in all manner of formats across the length and breadth of Euro-America to this day. To take

just one particularly salient example, the 'objectivist' teachings of the novelist/philosopher Ayn Rand (1905 - 1982) were vital sources of inspiration on founders the Chicago School of neo-classical economics, whose principles and premises were subsequently utilised to promote the view that unlimited trading in unfettered markets provided by far the best route towards global economic prosperity – only to bring the Euro-American banking system to the point of collapse during the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The magnetic attractions of 'freedom'

Given the disastrous consequences of the untrammelled pursuit of untrammelled freedom in this as in so many other spheres, it is worth asking just why it is the that premises of the enlightenment continued to exercise such a powerful influence over the thought-processes of the indigenous inhabitants of Euro-America? In making sense of this conundrum, it is worth noting that one the most remarkable features of this conceptual edifice is that its exponents have managed to convince themselves that because their 'progressive' ideology is grounded in modes of thought and practice which they identify as being inherently 'rational' and hence 'scientific' in character, it will not only be *ipso facto* of universal applicability, but also (and consequently) a construction which intrinsically *a-cultural* in character.

Such hubris! Nothing could be further from the truth. From a more global perspective and historically grounded perspective it is instantly apparent that 'modernity' in this sense is no more than the contemporary manifestation of a much more parochial set of ideas and values: the dynamic product of cultural traditions whose common roots lie in the past history of western Europe, and most especially in its inhabitants preferred interpretations of the Christian theology.

However the comprehensive denial of the specificity of the cultural tradition within which they were operating brought the propagators of the premises of the enlightenment all sorts of strategic advantages, whose doubtful benefits continue to be experienced to this day. Once they had convinced themselves that their operating premises were 'rational', rather than cultural (and hence unburned by irrational primitive superstitions), it followed that the practices to which the application of these premises gave rise would in due course lead to all those guided by them to arrive at a position of personal and social utopia; and it also went without saying that even if the comprehensive achievement of paradise might still lie at some distance in the future, the resultant path of rational modernity was infinitely superior to those pursued by the benighted inhabitants of the less progressive, and hence more primitive,

societies located elsewhere round the globe. With such a strategically organised conceptual vision to hand, the way was open for the all the Great Powers of Euro-America to represent, and hence to legitimate, their many territorial conquests during the height of the second phase of globalisation as 'civilising missions' which would bring freedom and enlightenment to 'the natives', their hitherto benighted subjects.

But the worm has since turned: as the third phase of globalisation has gathered pace, so ever-increasing numbers of settlers from below have established themselves in the metropolitan heartlands of their former imperial masters – whose former world-dominating manufacturing base has disappeared almost overnight to be resurrected in south and east Asia. In these circumstances it is no wonder that the indigenes of Euro-America find themselves in a position of conceptual bewilderment. Their history has caught up with them with unexpected speed and from an unexpected direction: just when they thought that were in a position to put memories of their colonial past safely behind them, their historical chickens have home to roost. As all kinds of global initiatives have taken off from below, their once-proud condition of untrammelled global hegemony has become increasingly threadbare, so much so that is currently much more of a still-convenient fiction than a fact. As a result all the various components of Euro-America are feeling increasingly embattled.

Euro-America on the back foot

However extensive their downsides may be, all ideologies are a strategic resource: as a result they can as easily be deployed in efforts to defensive as opposed transgressive objectives. With that in mind it is clear that the values of the enlightenment have provided no exception to that proposition. To the extent that the vast majority of contemporary transgressors 'from below' have skins of a darker shade (even if only marginally so) than those whose ancestries lie in Western Europe, differences in physiology and physiognomy provides the most overt marker of the alterity of the newcomers 'from below', and consequently it is frequently precipitates a process of marginalisation when such 'aliens' begin to compete with indigenes for access to scare resources. However it is a grave mistake to assume that it is member's the new minorities' distinctive *biological* heritage in this sense is of necessity the principal source of contemporary enmity towards their competitive presence: rather there is an overwhelming body of evidence – especially from jurisdictions on the eastern shores of the Atlantic Ocean – that is the newcomers' commitment to maintaining a sense of their own

distinctive religio-cultural roots, and hence their more or less explicit rejection of the premises of 'modernity' which routinely leads them to be regarded as 'matter out of place'.

Mary Douglas long ago taught us, the identification of matter as being out of place derives not so much the intrinsic qualities of the matter itself, but the lack of fit between the perceived characteristics of the stuff in question and the available slots in their conceptual framework into which the observers are seeking to fit it. From this perspective the principal anomaly to which the arrival of settlers emanating from below are alleged to have given rise derives their increasingly patent reluctance to 'rationalise' and 'modernise' their personal behaviour, and hence to 'liberate' themselves into the freedoms opened up by, and sustained by, the premises of the enlightenment. Hence, amongst other things, the current extraordinary fervour aroused by efforts to criminalise self-hating Muslim women who chose to wear the *niqab*, reinforced by threats of even more draconian sanctions to be directed at men who force their womenfolk to behave in this way. Muslim activism, it is said, threatens the integrity of European civilization: hence ever more active steps must be taken, and indeed are being taken, to contain it.

Conclusion

All this may seem at first sight to be a far cry from my experiences as an expert witness, let alone having anything much to do with my efforts to persuade those responsible for the delivery of public services of the potential utility of taking aboard anthropological insights if they are to improve the quality of their professional practice. However two narrow a focus on the arenas where the shoe pinches most tightly leaves with one with no prospect of discerning the wood from the trees – or to more precisely of identifying the nature of the dominant conceptual schema within which all these more complex empirical processes are being played out. That, after all, is what our ancestors taught us distinguished anthropology from ethnography.

If I am right in so thinking, it follows that if we are ever to gain a meaningful understanding of the intensity of the difficulties with which members of the indigenous majority, *including otherwise sophisticated and well educated professionals,* find themselves confronted with ever-increasing frequency as a result of the rising tide of plurality precipitated by globalisation from below, their difficulties will of necessity have to be set – and above all *appreciated* – within the context of a conceptual perspective of the kind which I have sought to set out in this paper. If my arguments are correct, their initial reactions to the challenges of

the scale and scope which I have set out here is that they reach so far into their understandings of their beings as to be quite unconscionable. For the avoidance doubt – a useful phrase which I have borrowed from legal discourse – it is worth spelling out just why.

Just as a contented flatfish might well be deeply disturbed if it was informed that its familiar two dimensional world no more than a couple of centimetres clear of the sand was in fact located at the bottom of a three dimensional ocean hundreds and thousands of metres deep, so those who have hitherto occupied what they considered to a scientifically and rationally grounded – and hence a-cultural – social and conceptual universe can find themselves equally confused when confronted with the proposition that the given assumptions in terms of which they have hitherto organised their lives are irretrievably myopic. Such reactions also become even more intense when they realise that what is also being suggested if they acknowledge their myopia they will also have to confront the prospect that the consequences of so doing will in all probability reach way into the premises in terms of which they order their professional practice, no matter how elevated and sophisticated those at whom I am directing my arguments – be they lawyers, psychologists, psychiatrists, economists, bankers and, policemen or social workers – may consider their professional status as to be.

If culture in the sense I have defined it here is as much an inescapable dimension of the human condition as is depth in the case of the ocean, it follows that the significant sub-set of the conceptual assumptions on the basis of which they order their professional practice are in no way inherently 'normal', 'rational' and 'scientific' in character: rather they are a grounded in a set of parochial conventions into which they themselves have been socialised – or perhaps more accurately into which they have been *acculturated* – during the course of their professional training. I know of few spheres where that process of acculturation is more elaborate, or as closely guarded, than at the English bar, although bankers and economists appear to run them a close second.

To have those who have been so carefully socialised into a singular universe, the prospect of being required to 'think plural' – or in other words to gain the capacity to acknowledge that alternative conceptual universes, including those which address their own specialist sphere of professional activity, must at least in some contexts be regarded operating on a par with their own – is regularly perceived as an alarming, upsetting and above all an outrageously presumptive exercise. In these circumstances it is no wonder that my difficulties in gaining the attention of audiences in my role as an Applied Anthropologist has proved to be an uphill task.

Against that background, it is also worth noting just where the most salient sticking points in the way of 'thinking plural' are likely to arise. My experience so far suggests that virtually all of them lie in the midst of what can only be regarded as classical anthropological territory. They include:

- *'Occult' dimensions religion* – most especially in its popular formats, such as rituals, especially *rites de passage*, sacrificial practices, 'Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic', and last but not least spirit possession and exorcism.

- *Binding notions of reciprocity* – most especially when utilised as a means of underpinning relationships of solidarity, both within domestic contexts and with respect to financial transactions

- *Hierarchically structured relationships of reciprocity within the family* – no less by age than by gender generation

- *Commitment to status rather than contract* (as Sir Henry Maine put it) in the organisation of interpersonal relationships, especially although by no means exclusively in domestic contexts

- *Acute sensitivity to matters of honour and shame*

All these issues played a salient role in the agenda when I studied anthropology as an undergraduate rather more the four decades ago; whether they occupy such a substantial place in the contemporary syllabus I do not know – but I suspect not.

Not that I am suggesting that a familiarity with the classic texts in the field are a *sufficient* basis on which to embark on a career as an applied anthropologist in contemporary Europe: rather they are simply a necessary starting point for adventures beyond the limits of enlightened understandings of rationality. To have any chance of making any kind of impact in this sphere, what is also required is a detailed knowledge of how all these factors play out in the context of the internal dynamics of at least one substantial minority group, and consequently the ways in which their members are rejigging, reconstructing and reinterpreting their 'traditional' practices in the midst of an alien, and generally hostile, social universe. But in no way does knowledge of 'them' – whether as an insider or as an outsider – provide a sufficient foundation to break the mould. What is ultimately absolutely essential is the capacity to do all this with the context of an analytical framework which is capable of examining the supposedly a-cultural cultural practices of the indigenous minority as fluently and insightfully as the nominally super-exotic new minorities, in such a way that *both* can be understood within a single overarching conceptual framework. Only then can one hope to persuade one's audience that once one has acquired a modicum of cultural competence the

depth of the ocean of plurality is far less difficult to navigate than they originally feared, and that the disjunction between 'us' and 'them' is no sense matter chalk and cheese.

But persuading sceptical audiences that such navigational skills can relatively easily be acquired once they let go of their own fears is a tall order: I am by no means certain that I have come anywhere near cracking that task myself.

Does this mean that there is now a career path open from neophyte applied anthropologists to follow in my footsteps, as well as those of a small group of other pioneers who have also been exploring this territory? All I can say is that whilst a great deal has changed since I stumbled into this arena four decades ago, such that I am probably longer in the tooth than any of my co-explorers, there is little sign that the contemporary opportunities in this field are any less strewn with pitfalls than was the case when I began. To be sure 'minority problems' are a considerably more salient issue on the political agenda than they were back in the days of Enoch Powell: indeed one of the most salient features of the contemporary scene is that most of Powell's once-outrageous proposals have by now been adopted as mainline government policy, whilst popular pressure now takes the form of complaints that these policies are not being implemented with sufficient rigour. Likewise whilst it was once the case that liberal opinion held that incoming migrants should be offered a welcome in their new homes, since them community cohesion (aka assimilation) and anti-terrorism strategies have become the touchstone of social policy. As a result there is less interest than ever in recognising the *de facto* existence of ethnic plurality, and that there might in consequence be a strong case for recognising its *de jure* presence as an integral component of the established jurisdictional order.

There is also the issue of how and where such neophyte applied anthropologists should train up in such a way as to equip themselves for professional activities. Although the United Kingdom has a longer history of playing host to post-colonial settlers pressing upwards into the metropolis from below than any other European jurisdiction, in its wisdom the Economic and Social Research council has never considered it necessary to establish well financed institutional centre focusing on the religious, cultural and familial dimensions the resultant minority presence, nor has any established department of anthropology taken the opportunity to pick up the baton and run with it. Instead initiatives Sociology and Social Policy, and more recently in Geography and Psychology, have been the order of the day. To be sure research from these perspectives has given rise to a substantial literature on the degree of social and economic marginalisation which members of the minorities experience; however these

findings have done little or nothing to highlight the extent to which members of the many components of the minority population have acted as agents in their own right, and have consequently been able to drawn on the resources of their own distinctive and richly varied cultural traditions to resist, to subvert, and in many cases to overcome the exclusionary obstacles with which they have found themselves confronted. Although a small group of scholars, myself included, have sought to remedy that deficiency, we have all done so on an individual basis, above all as the result of a lack of institutional support. Moreover to the extent to which institutional support is now available, it is invariably best with tight strings linking in to the prescribed policy priorities of the state. As a result Britain still lacks an established institution with sufficient internal synergy on this front within which neophytes can get themselves trained up in intellectual, analytical, and conceptual terms, such that they can launch their careers in this field from a flying start. I suspect the same may well be the case across the length and breadth of Western Europe.

I only hope that someone can convince me that this is an unnecessarily gloomy conclusion.