Anthropological Reflections: 1959-2019
David Parkin
From Social Anthropology to Anthropology: 1959-2019

• The great Teachers
• Persistence of the ‘social’
• What kinds of continuity over the sixty years?
• Diversification of many ‘anthropologies’ versus ‘Closed Systems and Open Minds’ (Gluckman 1964)?
• The ‘Visceral’ tradition of Anthropology. An outrageous claim.
• ASA: RAI :: social anthropology: anthropology :: SOAS : Oxford
Continuous Incorporation and expansion

- An on-going project of continuous incorporation within the expanding subject of Anthropology

- The paradox of Holistic Anthropology (centrifugal) and Specialist Anthropologies (centripetal)

- Meeting the challenges of the current global episteme
  The fate of methodological basics: long-term, locally intensive, population-specific, in the local language, inductive, comparison leading to generalisation.
The Self-Assessing Anthropocene

• Reflexivity: feminist and post-Marxist influence. Two senses.
• 1) Personal Reflections from fieldwork to self-fashioning Rabinow 1977, Poewe 1982)
• 2) Halliday ‘This sentence is six words long’. Language/society talking about itself
• Recursivity: “…ethnographic concepts (which) feed back and affect analytical ones” (Heywood). Experience and not just perceptions.
• Or, distrusting the ‘intuitive’ but not the ‘counter-intuitive. But how to make comparisons leading to generalisation?
• Problem of ‘meaning’ and whether epistemology presupposes ontology.
Post-WW2 Rethinking and Rescue 1950s-70s

The Big Picture (Macro)
• ‘Thought’ Structuralism (Levi-Strauss)

Marxism (Althusser, Asad 1973) et al

Rescuing ‘Universalism/Common Humanity’ from Fascist abuse of Boas’s cultural egalitarianism. (See also Merleau-Ponty and Sartre-de Beauvoir). Phenomenology and Existentialism.

The Kaleidoscope (Micro)
• Methdological Individualism (Firth 1951)

• Transactionalism (Barth 1966)

• More Weber than Marx
The Manchester School

• “Analysis of a Social Situation” Gluckman 1940 as Micro Method into Macro Marxist (Marxisant?) analysis.

• Abner Cohen: reconciling micro and macro (Symbolism and Power). Echoes of Durkheim.


• Later Manchester: Equal Marx < Weber via ‘situational analysis’, ‘situational selection’ and social networks and transactionalism
Communication, Language and Meaning

• Questioning the Big Picture and the Kaleidoscope. How to keep diasporic populations cohesive and distinctive through common modes of communication: i.e. individual networks instantiating corporate and geographically dispersed identities.

Edwin Ardener. Neo-Saussurian langue and parole as “master exemplar.”


• Post-structuralism? Post-modernism? Not all nonsense, e.g. ‘political correctness’.

• Hymes, Gumperze, Searle –speech acts. Kenya Luo 1978. Words making Politics and the materiality of language via 1) Sapir-Whorf and 2) semiosis via the five bodily senses
Evolution of a Discipline

• A chronology of -isms, ‘turns’ and incremental ‘was-ms’.

• Polythetic threads of continuity

• Polythetic concept drawn from evolutionary classification.

• So, will Anthropology sixty years from now be unrecognisable to us?

Meanwhile, East Africa to East Asia and back again via SOAS and Oxford.