

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC REVOLUTION*

BY PETER LAWRENCE

JUST after the Boer War, the first Lord Leverhulme—soap millionaire and social progressive—commented that the triumph of the nineteenth century was to have harnessed steam power to industry but the problem of the twentieth would be that of solving human relations. The last seventy years would seem to have vindicated him: after an era of sunny bourgeois and imperial prosperity, we have seen two world cataclysms, pointless genocide on a scale previously never even contemplated, the triumph of repressive totalitarianism over much of the earth's surface, and the disintegration of colonial empires without any obvious increase in the liberties of their former subjects or advance towards a stable international order. I have often been tempted, therefore, to see in Lord Leverhulme's remark a justification of my own profession, my *Apologia pro Vita Sua*: surely the spread of knowledge of different peoples and cultures, the anthropologist's stock in trade, must help guarantee for man a haven of perpetual tranquillity, the ultimate realization of utopia. Mature consideration has led me to reject such a radical interpretation as a pipe-dream. Certainly, this sort of knowledge has improved interethnic contacts, particularly at the local level, but I do not believe that the problem of human relations as a whole will ever be solved in the consummate manner Lord Leverhulme might be thought to have implied. The problem will always be with us and need adjustment in every generation. Apart from its academic value, anthropology's practical importance will be—as it has been—its contribution to this continual process.

From a narrow standpoint, Lord Leverhulme spoke against a background of limited social progress which he himself had tried to implement in two hemispheres: the ideal workers' settlement at Port Sunlight on the River Mersey; and his South Seas plantations, intended not only to produce copra for his factories but also to educate native labourers to what he saw as a more disciplined, productive, and therefore satisfying way of life. Yet his statement assumes greater consequence if we review it in a wider context: global history since the Age of Discovery, when Europeans started to span the oceans, establish their commercial domains, and thereby expand the horizon of virtually every people in the world. It refers implicitly to three great movements during these five hundred years, which I shall call respectively the scientific-economic revolution, the political revolution and—the subject of this lecture—the ethnographic revolution, and which have had the most profound impact on our understanding of and ability to exploit the material environment, on the structure and government of society, and on general knowledge of socio-

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cultural systems other than our own. Nevertheless, despite their common designation and legacy, these movements differ from each other in at least one important respect. Although they have all brought considerable, if never total, change in outlook and behaviour, only the political revolution has ever been based without question on an ideology of a predetermined order in this world, either immediate or ultimate: a charter for the sudden or eventual but finite and complete metamorphosis of society. The scientific-economic revolution, except where it has been specifically harnessed to the political revolution, has lacked such ideological direction, emphasizing rather a sort of *ad hoc laissez-faire*. I shall argue that, despite comparable political pressures, this is an essential feature of the ethnographic revolution also although, before I do so, I wish to examine in greater detail the contrast I have suggested.

The scientific-economic revolution is, of course, as old as man himself. Human beings have always acquired new knowledge and methods of using material resources. But, in Europe, it gathered momentum after 1500 when the recently discovered continents were opened up and the individual was liberated by the Protestant Reformation from the epistemological and commercial restraints of medieval society so that he could amass information by means of his own intellect (rather than having to attribute it to divine revelation) and profit by lending out his money at reasonable rates of interest without fear of spiritual damnation. It reached its peak after 1750 when James Watt demonstrated that steam power could indeed be harnessed to industry, and thereby transformed within a century a manufacturing technology that had changed little since the fall of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, despite its consequences for Western and much of Eastern society, this revolution—the Industrial Revolution, as we now call it—has never envisaged the establishment of a perfect order that would endure until the end of time itself: an ideology of instant or prospective but terminal change. At most, as in Protestant Britain and America, it was believed that God was on the side of successful entrepreneurs, who were His Elect. Yet this did not imply a final and inviolate solution for society, for the utopia promised the Elect was Heaven, the next rather than this world. In short, as it depended on the perpetual discovery of new knowledge, resources, and modes of production, the scientific-economic revolution recognized the inevitability of continuous innovation.

The political revolution also is, in a sense, as old as man himself, for each century, each year, alters the structures of human societies. Yet it is not conceived as undirected but rather, as I have indicated, predetermined: either as a distinct and instantaneous convulsion or a protracted transfiguration leading to total change, the culmination of history. Again, we cannot speak of just one political revolution but of several which are chronologically linked. Often they are reactions to the inexorable scientific-economic revolution, which they try to arrest. They are of two kinds, religious or secular: the religious represented by the chiliastic cults in Europe since the early Middle Ages, and in North America and Oceania since European colonization; and the secular erupting in their modern form, first, in Britain during the seventeenth century and, second and more drastically, in America, Europe, and the ex-colonial world from the late eighteenth century until now—the national wars of independence,

and the revolutions of the Left and Right. Except in Britain and the United States of America, most examples of political revolution, religious and secular, shared the feature I have stressed: a patent for an immediate or future social millennium. Robespierre claimed that the aim of his political surgery was to establish the "final order of things (that) had been opened up by the French Revolution".¹ Even when the prophecy of imminent fulfilment fails, a substitute is quickly found: the date of the millennium is postponed but its doctrine of inevitability is retained. In the early nineteenth century, after the collapse of the experiment of 1789, the zany but illustrious protosociologist Saint-Simon forecast that European society was moving towards a "*révolution régénératrice*", which would be, like Calvin's personal *regeneratio* or rebirth, "the termination of the revolution".² Later, evolutionary theorists believed that all societies were progressing through fixed stages, with or without struggle, to a standard, ubiquitous, and final structural form.

Finally, I expand a point to which I have alluded and which is important for my argument. Normally, the two revolutions I have discussed are mutually antagonistic. The political revolution is, paradoxically, in the long run conservative: its aim is endless conformity and stability. It tries to control the scientific-economic revolution but usually gives ground to or is undermined by it. As so many human relationships depend on economic content, which is always in flux, they cannot be permanently fixed, so that a final solution is never possible. This was implicit in the medieval Catholic Church's abortive struggle with usury, and in the national constitutions evolved or drawn up by the pragmatic British and Americans, who have invariably been disdained by the doctrinally purer but politically more tempestuous Europeans. Aldous Huxley made it explicit in his *Brave New World*, perhaps still the most perceptive modern satire on utopia. The Resident Controller for Western Europe in the *almost* perfected world society of tomorrow had authority to prevent scientific and technological inventions. "We don't want change," he said. "Every change is a menace to stability. That's another reason why we're so chary of applying new inventions. Every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive; even science must sometimes be treated as a possible enemy. . . . It isn't only art that's incompatible with happiness; it's also science. Science is dangerous; we have to keep it most carefully chained and muzzled."³ Inevitably, the unforeseen occurred. The Resident Controller could not handle it, and the brave new world tottered.

I have drawn this distinction between the scientific-economic and political revolutions to shed light on the third, the revolution in ethnographic knowledge. Ethnography is an anthropological term for the raw facts the field worker records, and uses to describe and analyse the society he has studied: information about economics, technology, culture, structure, religion, and so forth. To many it may seem presumptuous to speak of an ethnographic in the same breath as a scientific-

¹ See J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, Mercury Paperback, 1961); pp. 20 and 80.

² Talmon, *Political Messianism* (New York, 1960), pp. 35-6.

³ *Brave New World* (London, Penguin Paperback, 1963), pp. 141 and 176-7.

economic or a political revolution. Yet one has only to contrast our present knowledge of peoples other than ourselves with what it was even fifty, certainly a hundred, years ago to appreciate that such a revolution, if only by analogy, has taken place and that it has practical as well as academic significance. We must consider it not as an isolate but against the background of the discussion so far : man's general desire to know more about the world around him, and his need for advantageous economic and political relations outside his own society.

This brings me to the main theme of this lecture : a review of the ethnographic revolution, especially in Oceania. First, I give an impression of the development of ethnographic knowledge during the last century and the contribution made by the Department of Anthropology of this University. Second, I suggest that the current wealth and quality of ethnographic knowledge are due not to strict theoretical discipline but to the field worker's opportunity to pursue his interests along a broad spectrum of inquiry. Yet this accentuates a perennial problem : how—indeed, whether or not—to place ethnographic knowledge within a consistent intellectual framework. I refer to recent attempts to solve it by trying to incorporate ethnography in doctrinaire political ideology. I give my reasons for regarding this as a potentially sterile experiment if it is intended to have immediate effects and as wishful thinking even from a long-term evolutionary standpoint, and for believing that, while every theory must be taken into account, more is still to be gained by continuing to follow the model of the flexible scientific-economic revolution and collect ethnographic information in accordance with actual circumstances rather than a rigid and predetermined plan.

My first point, the development of ethnographic knowledge, is perhaps best prefaced by another reference to Saint-Simon. About 1813, he remarked about education in France, which two decades previously had switched from a classical humanist to a natural scientific emphasis : " Such is the difference in this respect between the state of . . . even thirty years ago and that of today that while in those not distant days, if one wanted to know whether a person had received a distinguished education, one asked : ' Does he know his Greek and Latin authors well? ', today one asks : ' Is he good at mathematics? Is he familiar with the achievements of physics, of chemistry, of natural history, in short, of the positive sciences and those of observation?,' " ⁴ I think back to my own introduction to my subject almost thirty years ago when, certainly in lay circles, it was little known and even less esteemed. In 1943, reared more in the classical humanist tradition than Saint-Simon would have liked, I had been sent to the Far East to help reconquer an Empire about which I knew so little that I am ashamed to recall my ignorance. What I had been taught was about on a par with the views of George MacDonald Fraser's fictitious character of the late 1840s, the ex-classical don and then slaver Captain John Charity Spring in *Flash for Freedom* (London, 1971), whose main ambition was to purchase two female West African soldiers so that he could redeem the Oxford fellowship he

⁴ See F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (Glencoe, Free Press Paperback, 1964), p. 110.

had lost by showing the anthropological world of the period the true nature of the ancient Amazons. When I returned to Britain in 1945, I might as well have never been away. I had not even been in the position of the Australians in Papua New Guinea who came to recognize the humanity of the "Fuzzy Wuzzies" and thereby, after years of colonialist indifference, began to rediscover their own. Travelling home in a cruiser, I was discussing the problems of Asia with an Indian naval officer. He politely suggested, but I could not understand, that certain customs which had seemed to me insane made sense in terms of local cultures. I just did not envisage that there were such things. A few weeks later I was back in Cambridge, where I was advised to read Anthropology. My immediate reaction was: "Good God, what's that?"

I do not suggest that my generation's education was worse than that offered the young today. My experience after teaching in tertiary institutions for eighteen years is that in many respects it was a good deal better: we were generally more literate, and had greater mastery of essential subjects such as history and foreign languages. Nevertheless, educational values change and those now leaving school ought to be more aware of international sociocultural differences than we could ever be. For the intelligent person, ethnography has become part of general knowledge: it is commonplace in courses run by Departments of Adult Education, and will soon be found in secondary and even primary school curricula. The names of Margaret Mead and Lévi-Strauss, for instance, are household words and, although not everyone would endorse all their views, they can always draw to their public lectures audiences far wider than their professional colleagues. Technical terms such as *mana*, *totem*, *animism*, and *The Dreaming* now have international currency, and even the xenophobic French have found a place for *mouvement cargoiste* in their dictionaries. What is more important, thirty years ago an assiduous scholar could read virtually all reliable ethnographic literature: about Aboriginal America and Australia, India, South America, Africa, and Papua New Guinea. Nowadays, he would be pretentious to aspire to such an accomplishment. The volume is too great: there are few regions for which there is not a wide selection of monographs of high quality. Mastery of them demands a lifetime.

The origins of professional ethnographic field work, certainly among traditionally non-literate peoples, go back over a hundred years. Before the 1860s, French sociologists had written about the need to observe human—by which they meant Western—society. During the twentieth century, a number of scholars have taken them at their word and studied communities in Europe, Britain, America, and Australia. But since the late nineteenth century the main target of ethnographic research has been, for obvious reasons, non-literate peoples. Europeans have dominated the world for the last two hundred years. In the early stages, their contacts with other groups were superficial and neither side felt the need of greater knowledge of the other, although missionaries, travellers, and navigators such as James Cook and William Bligh published vivid accounts of the natives of the Pacific Islands and elsewhere. In India, the British began the study of its principal languages

before 1800, although official policy, endorsed by Lord Macaulay's famous minute of 1835, was to westernize the country. After 1870, as a result of wider commercial and colonial expansion, Europeans were increasingly forced to have practical dealings with non-literate peoples. Knowledge became essential. In the 1840s, the American lawyer and pioneer anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan spent some time with the Iroquois Indians, and indicated what could be learnt from such an experience. Between 1871 and 1883, the Russian Baron Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay spent about three years on the northeast coast of Papua New Guinea before there was European administration. In Indonesia, the Dutch began serious research into customary law. In 1898, a group of Cambridge scholars visited Torres Strait. This inaugurated the classic age of field work. The pupils of Boas in New York—Lowie, Kroeber, Goldenweiser, Benedict, Mead, and others—covered North America. W. H. R. Rivers worked in South India and Melanesia. Between 1906 and 1908, Radcliffe-Brown—an impeccable Englishman, so rumour has it, with top hat, kid gloves, and monocle—was in the Andaman Islands. During the First World War, Malinowski—a good Continental who by way of contrast, so rumour has it, in the interstices between bouts of field work taught the Australian ladies to tango on the verandah of Government House in Port Moresby—carried out his seminal research in the Trobriand Islands of Papua. Since then, to put it vulgarly, the world has become lousy with anthropologists.

The same period witnessed also a marked change in the aim of ethnographic research, which at first tended to be diffuse. The field worker recorded and described everything he saw, often without any immediately apparent plan: snippets of material culture, custom, and religious belief. There was good reason for this. So little was known about non-literate peoples that it was necessary to start from scratch and collect every possible fact without too much regard to the constraint of theory. Moreover, the approach brought no complaint from the armchair pundits at home. They could select the material they wanted and adapt it to their then fashionable grand evolutionary designs that ignored local microsystems at the expense of the macroscheme of universal human development. Yet, by about 1920, definite themes began to emerge, two of which I regard as particularly important. First, under the influence of the French sociologist Durkheim, and capitalizing the practical genius of Lewis Morgan and Rivers, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski inaugurated the analysis of social and cultural systems or what is now called structural-functionalism. This became the cornerstone of British social anthropology and dominated research in the Empire, especially the African colonies, which were regarded as a sort of finishing school for the more successful English scholars. It clearly served the needs of colonial civil servants by providing information that improved administrative standards and protected traditional institutions from excessive exploitation. In America, the Boasians, already famous for their meticulous and panoptic research, borrowed from Freudian psychology to produce the study of culture and personality, or the basic personality of a social group. This had obvious relevance in a country

that was grappling with the problem of helping large numbers of immigrants of diverse national origins adjust to its way of life.

The contribution of the Department of Anthropology in this University to the expansion of ethnography has an international reputation. The Department was founded in 1926 under Professor Radcliffe-Brown, who was succeeded temporarily by Sir Raymond Firth and then, until 1956, by Professor Elkin. Professor Barnes, now in Cambridge, held the chair until 1958, when Professor Geddes was appointed. A second chair was created in 1969, which I had the honour to take up in 1971. All my predecessors have had distinguished field careers, variously in the Andaman Islands, Africa, Aboriginal Australia, Polynesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Borneo, and Thailand.

During these forty-eight years the Department's ethnographic and academic horizon has been expanded. From the ethnographic point of view, the shortage of trained staff, the richness of the material to be gathered near to home, and the type of financial support available at the time made it inevitable that Radcliffe-Brown, Firth, Elkin, and Barnes should concentrate research in Aboriginal Australia and Oceania, although during the last war Elkin initiated field work in European Australian communities. At the same time, Dr. A. Capell was making his name as a linguist throughout the Pacific. After 1958, as different kinds of funds and more staff became available, Geddes extended and diversified the programme. He continued to send students to Aboriginal Australia, Melanesia, and European Australia (the Department can boast two recent and notable studies of small towns in New South Wales), and preserved our interest in anthropological linguistics. But he inaugurated research also in Thailand and enabled others to go to Fiji, Indonesia, Ceylon, and the Philippines. He has encouraged interest in the Far East, and established a vigorous and successful prehistory section, whose members have worked in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Spain, and recently an ethnographic film unit which has an enviable reputation overseas. From the academic point of view, although we still examine traditional sociocultural systems, we have extended our interests into such fields as ecology (in which prehistorians and social anthropologists reinforce each other), ethology, cognitive anthropology (which demands linguistic skills), ethnoarchaeology, ethnohistory, epistemology, and problems of development and cultural continuity in the new nations, especially in the fields of comparative economics and law. We have recently joined the Faculty of Economics. Yet I still rate as the Department's crowning achievement Mr. Wright's success in training an orang-utang in Bristol to make a stone tool, which has been acclaimed as an important contribution to our knowledge of human evolution.⁵

I have summarized our accomplishments not merely because, as Raymond Firth has said, an inaugural lecture is an occasion for graceful compliments but rather to introduce my second point. Modern anthropology suffers from what the Germans

⁵ See R. V. S. Wright, "Imitative Learning of a Flaked Stone Technology: The Case of an Orang-Utang", *Mankind*, VIII, 1972.

call *Materialhuberei*:⁶ as the activities of just one, admittedly quite large, department suggest, it has accumulated a huge storehouse of factual knowledge. Yet, as I have stated, it has done this not as the result of strict discipline but, to quote Professor Peter Worsley of Manchester (1966), "patchily", according to no single plan. On the whole, although, as I shall suggest later, it is easy to exaggerate, we have worked in the regions that have interested us or for which we could get financial support, each adopting any one of several unique approaches. Hence, again if only by analogy, the pattern of ethnographic research closely resembles that of the scientific-ethnographic revolution which, like Topsy, "just grewed". It is vulnerable to the attack of those who see intellectual diversity, like material affluence, as chaos, and feel secure only if they can impose a rigid ideology akin to that of the political revolution.

The problem of *Materialhuberei* was dramatized for me in 1970 when I attended the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. With a professional population so much greater than our own, it was like Paddy's Market or Petticoat Lane after the corner shop. In America, there seemed to be no centralizing theme. The papers covered every conceivable topic including, so it was put about, one not in the official programme: "The Difficulty of Participant Observation in a Study of Prostitution." Even in Britain, where anthropology, dominated for decades, as I hinted, by the structuralist party line, has been a relatively conservative subject, a similar trend was apparent by 1973, when the Association of Social Anthropologists met in Oxford in an atmosphere of sherry, port, and college silver. The title of the conference was "New Directions in Social Anthropology" but was recast by Lady Firth as "Anthropology in All Directions".⁷ For a body hitherto hardly notorious for intellectual adventure, the meeting must have been memorable. There were papers on ethology stating "how the (individual) movements of different animals control social behaviour within the group", on psychology "to show how individual perception of external signs—sound, colour, behaviour—is influenced by categories of thought expressed in words", and on symbolism exploring "in some detail the relationship between words and other symbols, how objects come to denote concepts, abstractness arises from concreteness and 'culture' from 'nature' in Lévi-Straussian terms". Even in Australia, we have had similar experiences. We cannot compete with the Americans in sociosexual analysis or with the British in civilized drinking, but our departmental interests, as I have listed them, and the programmes of our conferences no longer follow closely the old British structuralist line. They stress heterogeneity rather than convention.

As I have said, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that ethnographic fact has been amassed entirely mindlessly. Field work is a skilled occupation demanding great patience and carried out to set procedures. Each of the dominant interests I have listed for the Sydney Department—social structure, epistemology, ethology,

⁶ See E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago, 1952), p. 9.

⁷ "Anthropology in All Directions", *Contemporary Review*, CCXXXIII, 1973.

and so forth—has its rules of inquiry and canons by which results are judged. Yet the variety of these interests is a challenge to the ideologues, who wish to cast ethnography in a single mould and interpret it in the light of the political revolution. This, they believe, will provide the coherence our subject lacks. The main protagonists at the present are, of course, the academic left. Raymond Firth has recently divided them into two classes: “gut Marxists” and “cerebral Marxists”.⁸ I use the terms with caution and in inverted commas, for I wish to comment not on the politics but on the intellectual restringency of these scholars.

This applies particularly to Firth’s “gut Marxists”, who are nothing if not direct. He has described the position they adopted at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association in 1971. In order “to infuse anthropological discussion with a greater sense of relevance for problems of radical change”, they devoted several open sessions “to symposia on Marxism”. They appraised “contemporary anthropology in the light of historical materialism as an explanatory method”, discussed Western imperialism, “proletarian consciousness”, “class identity and struggle”, and “the political role of a peasantry”, and clearly wanted “a reorientation of anthropological theory towards a more ideological position”. Professor Dell Hymes seems to speak for them when he writes: “I would hope to see the consensual ethos of anthropology move from a liberal humanism, defending the powerless, to a socialist humanism, confronting the powerful and seeking to transform the structure of power.”⁹ Such a view is, I think, in keeping with the dream of a final social order but the real danger for the anthropologist is that it rests on the assumption of a monistic theory that will clarify all problems, and place all ethnographic fact in a simple and immediately intelligible framework.

I make three general comments. First, in social scientific circles, the anthropologist *qua* ethnographer is often held in contempt as a mere recorder, an academic dwarf beside the pure theoretician. Few consider the trade he has to master. His study of a community involves understanding its beliefs, ideology, customs, religion, and relationship patterns that are the key to its social structure. He must be unobtrusive and on good terms with everybody but avoid involvement in local conflicts. If he works, as he often does, within his own society, the burden is great enough. Yet, in rather more cases, he works in foreign countries among non-literate people. His load may be then much heavier, and skills derived from the old classical humanist education may stand him in good stead. He must live in conditions from which many Europeans would shrink, and also acquire one or more local languages for which there may be no recorded grammars and in which categories of thought are completely alien to him. He has to work them out on his own; and my experience in Papua New Guinea has been that the exercise is a good deal more difficult even than fluency in the sociological jargon used by his critics to expound the often

⁸ “The Sceptical Anthropologist? Social Anthropology and Marxist Views on Society”, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LVIII (1972).

⁹ *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. D. Hymes (New York, Vintage Paperback, 1974).

commonplace hypotheses they boast to be intellectually superior to careful observation, tabulation, and analysis of fact.

Second, I do not mean by this that every time I hear the word theory I reach for my revolver. No good ethnographic research can be conducted without some theoretical direction or at least a proper understanding of the history of our own intellectual development over the centuries, which alone makes possible a dispassionate appraisal of our interpretations of other sociocultural systems. All theories should be considered and tested but the ultimate criterion is their relevance. As is well known and has recently been reaffirmed by Dumont¹⁰ and Raymond Firth, social anthropologists have disregarded Marx because he could tell them little—certainly in the practical and instrumental sense—about the stateless societies in which most of them were interested. Yet social anthropologists would recognize that as these societies are incorporated into hierarchically structured nation-states—I shall say more about this later on—his ideas become at once more pertinent, whether or not they be accepted. There has to be a golden mean, for theory is a good servant but a bad master. I agree with Dell Hymes when he urges anthropologists to develop their own personal approaches to their subject, for there is nothing worse than “the deep sleep of a settled opinion”. This precludes reliance on a monistic theory and demands flexibility. Just as inexorable economic change invalidates political predeterminism, even so carefully observed ethnographic fact ultimately undermines hidebound dogma. We have seen a notable example of this in Oceania since 1945: the fruitless attempt to impose on the highlands of Papua New Guinea a conservative and doctrinaire structural model derived ultimately from Durkheimian sociology. British field workers in Africa had set up for stateless societies something that they called Segmentary Theory and regarded as virtually synonymous with social anthropology: the view that these societies consisted of a number of rigidly unilineal descent groups which maintained order by being balanced in opposition to each other. When anthropologists first went to the highlands after the last war, they found large language groups divided into local units which they equated with the African prototypes. Those of us who had worked in other parts of the country and reported local groups by no means strictly unilineal—in fact, genealogically profoundly irregular—were dismissed as fools and heretics. Eventually the sleepers were rudely awoken: the accumulation of evidence led Professor Barnes, then in Canberra, trained in Africa though he was, to demonstrate the fallacy of Segmentary Theory for the Papua New Guinea highlands, vindicate the fools and heretics, and necessitate the rewriting of a good deal of ethnography.¹¹ You may regard this as a storm in the anthropological teacup but for me it was a Lysenko case: the obliteration of reality by blind, not to say wicked, devotion to a single received doctrine. By the same token, uncritical adherence to “gut Marxism” could result in similar wasted effort. Third and last, it is obvious that if monistic theories, whatever their source, are academically abortive

¹⁰ L. C. J. Dumont, *Religion, Politics, and History in India* (Paris, 1970), pp. 136ff.

¹¹ See J. A. Barnes, “African Models in the New Guinea Highlands”, *Man*, LXII (1962).

they spell disaster for those anthropologists who try to become political activists. In the long run, fact must find them out and tie them down.

The approach of the "cerebral Marxists" is far more judicious and worthy of greater attention than I can devote here. It is geared to the doctrine not of political immediacy but of evolution: that all societies are progressing through fixed stages to a standard, ubiquitous, and final structural form. Raymond Firth cites the distinguished Frenchmen Lévi-Strauss and Godelier, who have obviously left their mark on the subject, but, in the present context, I find more relevant the Anglo-Saxon Peter Worsley of Manchester, who eight years ago presented an important paper called the "The End of Anthropology?"¹² His thesis is that, over a long period of time, small non-literate societies must fall before the onslaught of modernization. He quotes the opening paragraph of Malinowski's famous *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* published in 1922:

(Anthropology) is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic, position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, . . . the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity. Just now, when the methods and aims of scientific field (anthropology) have taken shape, when men fully trained for the work have begun to travel into savage countries and study their inhabitants—they die away before our very eyes. (p.xv)¹³

Worsley argues that small-scale societies must inevitably be merged into nation-states, becoming parts of "even wider fields, world society being the only meaningful 'total system' today". If the anthropologist wants to stay in business, he must examine these societies as parts of this greater whole. Yet many social anthropologists remain obdurately wedded to the analysis of the particular structural forms of single stateless societies. Hence we get "the multiplication of monographs that do not cumulatively lead to the reinforcement and development of a general body of theory as part of a collective on-going debate within a community of scholars, but merely co-exist as encapsulated entities that only make the most perfunctory of gestures, in the last few pages, in the direction of current theoretical and methodological debate. In fact, there is no debate. The only relationship established between such works is a physical one of continuous location in the space on library shelves." He demands, instead of atomism, studies based on broader categorization of the varieties of sociocultural systems: hydraulic society; pastoral society; and so forth. This categorization must have one quality: the ability to handle "directional process" and understand "one of the crucial thresholds in the evolution of human society . . . the crossing of the development barrier".

To a large extent, I agree with Worsley. At one level, small-scale societies, most of which once belonged to former colonies, are now being merged into nation-states. Yet I cannot accept the uniform evolutionary process his argument implies.

¹² Paper for Sociology and Social Anthropology, Working Group, Sixth World Congress of Sociology, mimeographed (1966).

¹³ For reasons of simplicity and conformity to modern usage, I have substituted "Anthropology" for Malinowski's original "Ethnology".

It is once again to tie ethnography to political dogma, which seeks to blot out irritating individual cultural differences and postulates that the ultimate world society will reject dissimilarity of any kind. In fact, ethnographic fact in many areas suggests that Malinowski's prophecy of doom and Worsley's specific interpretation of it are unfounded. We might rephrase Horace and say: "[*Culturam*] *expellas furca, tamen usque recurret,*" interpreting *cultura* somewhat freely as the total way of life, and the quotation from the points of view of the erstwhile governors and the erstwhile governed.¹⁴

From the point of view of the erstwhile governors, colonialism, the imported culture, was never a homogeneous phenomenon. It brought with it and left behind markedly different traditions, as these examples suggest. The Germans and French saw their colonies as extensions of their national boundaries: *Das überseeische Deutschland* and *La France Outre-mer*. New Caledonia is part of metropolitan France, as President de Gaulle publicly reaffirmed in Noumea a few years ago. (The Portuguese have preserved the same tradition and use the term *ultramar* for their colonies.)¹⁵ The British, by way of contrast, have never been dogmatic but in so far as they have had a view it was of a commonwealth of independent nations, which possibly has medieval feudal roots but can be dated at least from 1775, when Burke defined empire as "... the aggregate of many states under one head; whether this head be a monarch, or a presiding republic",¹⁶ and which began to be implemented as policy in 1839 when Lord Durham went to Canada to pave the way for dominion status. It is surprising how much rubs off. Germany held her colonies for too short a time for the obvious effects to be on public record, and I cannot speak for Portugal. But in the case of the French and British, in 1959, a seminar was held at Ibadan University in Nigeria and attended by Africans from their respective former colonies. The French-speaking Africans, as "the inheritors of Cartesian principles", were influenced by "philosophical idealism and logical clarity", and the "rhetoric of the Great Revolution of 1789", while the English-speaking Africans were empirical, hardheaded, but perhaps less elegant.¹⁷ Many have pondered the Australian legacy in Papua New Guinea. Professor Brookfield has written of Chimbu feast-exchanges in the eastern highlands: "... in former times it was common to see large numbers of pig-jaws on trees near men's houses to record the number of pigs killed. By 1969 well-

¹⁴ The original line reads: *Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret*—you may toss out nature with a pitchfork but always it will come running back. *Cultura*, the word I have substituted, fits the scansion but is probably inexact. In classical Latin at least, it did not have the broad meaning of the German *Kultur* or the anthropological *culture*: the total way of life. It has been suggested to me that (*Mores*) *expellas furca, tamen usque (recurrent)* would have both scanned and also been classically correct. Yet *mores* have by now assumed a specific meaning in anthropology: custom as just one part of culture.

¹⁵ Cf. Peter Hastings, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November 1974, quoting an official in Portuguese Timor: "Here in Portugal, you understand, things have greatly changed since the events of April 25".

¹⁶ Quoted in *The Concept of Empire, Burke to Attlee, 1774-1967*, ed. G. Bennett (London, 1962), p. 40.

¹⁷ *Africa: The Dynamics of Change*, ed. H. Passin and K. A. B. Jones Quartey (Nigeria, 1963), p. 3.

stacked pyramids of beer bottles, sometimes running into many hundreds, served a similar purpose."¹⁸

Nevertheless, the point of view of the erstwhile governed is more important. We have long recognized the capacity of minorities in industrialized societies to survive oppression, as did the Poles, who rejected over a century of German and Russian domination, or even incredible persecution, as did the Jews. Likewise, Basques, Ukrainians, American Negroes, Irish, Welsh and Scots have all established their claims. Yet we have been unprepared for the durability of the sociocultural systems of non-literate peoples, which have been, as Margaret Mead recently remarked, brought to our notice and conscience by anthropologists, so that they now enjoy greater dignity than they might otherwise have done. Like Malinowski, we expected them to disintegrate under the differential impact of colonial regimes and are surprised that they did not. The Nagas of Assam and various groups in Indonesia and the Philippines continually demand their freedom. In the United States and Canada, the Indians have forced Washington and Ottawa to honour or draw up land treaties. In Australia, Aborigines demand land rights and, at the very least, drive hard bargains with mining companies. (Professor Elkin noted the genesis of this movement on the north coast of New South Wales in the early 1930s.) Finally, in Papua New Guinea, which will soon achieve full independence, the indigenous government's greatest problem is to create national unity while at the same time granting reasonable autonomy to regional and local cultures, which refuse to surrender their individuality. As the quotation from Malinowski used by Worsley to support his thesis refers specifically to Papua New Guinea, it is fair to consider briefly the situation in that country.

Australia has been concerned with Papua New Guinea for a century but has paid serious attention to it only since the Japanese invasion of 1942, when she decided gradually to abandon paternalist colonialism for a policy of self-determination. In 1949, when I first visited the country, we assumed that this would take a hundred years. In fact, it has taken thirty, a remarkable feat for both the indigenes and ourselves, when one considers the pervasive material destruction and lack of development after the last war.

At that time we believed that, however slow self-determination, the impact of development would bear out Malinowski's prediction by the end of this century: little would remain of traditional sociocultural systems. Anthropologists who went to the recently contacted highlands were briefed to record all they could of these untouched cultures before they had been changed out of all recognition. Those who, like myself, became interested in problems of development tacitly accepted this view although by 1957, when I had completed my own field work, I was satisfied that the case as presented was too extreme: indigenous cultures were putting up an unexpectedly stout resistance, although in the long run they would have to give way to what we began to call the supranational sociocultural system. We argued that Western society and Papua New Guinean societies differed in three respects. In the

¹⁸ H. D. Brookfield with D. Hart, *Melanesia* (London, 1971), p. 319 fn.

economic field, we distinguished between our specialized, profit-maximizing, and innovative system, and one which stressed generalization, subsistence, and changelessness. In the sociopolitical field, we distinguished between our hierarchy of occupational groups held together by centralized authority delegated by a head of state, and depending little on ties of kinship, marriage, and descent, and their system of local groups based on kinship, marriage, and descent, and lacking occupational specialization and centralized authority. In the intellectual field, we distinguished between our emphasis on human secular inquiry and their strong reliance on a principle we discarded several hundred years ago, knowledge revealed to man by deities as the means of explaining and exploiting the material world. We assumed that, by cold logic, however long the struggle, our system must prevail. The Protestant Ethic would dominate production. The clansman and kinsman would give way to the citizen-isolate of Western law. Secular rationalists would replace the old big men and cargo leaders with their faith in superhuman beings. We buttressed our case by referring to nineteenth-century Japan. As Dr. Edwin Dowdy of Queensland has recently demonstrated,¹⁹ with its *han* and *samurai* structures Japan could easily absorb new economic enterprises and deploy a class of dedicated officials to staff a modern civil service or become officers in the new armed forces. But, in Papua New Guinea, we could see no comparable indigenous institutions to make this sort of growth possible.

More recently, however, a number of scholars have argued that, although the problem of cultural contradiction cannot be ignored, the ultimate reality in Papua New Guinea will be cultural continuity. The people will eventually develop their nationhood along essentially Melanesian lines. We have certainly imposed the outward forms of statehood: modern industries, a central parliament, local government councils, a public service, and primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Yet we have by no means obliterated traditional sociocultural forms, which are adapting, as the earlier Chimbu example suggests, to modernization far better than we had guessed. Given their heads, the people are energetic and, as recent threats of secession make clear, proud of their local cultures. They are producing a new literature, recasting their art styles, and evolving a new language, Pidgin English, which I regard as the measure of their genius. Now that the Papua New Guinean Government, through its *Eight Point Plan*, has set a goal for development modest enough to be achieved by a fair percentage of the population—" . . . opportunity and contentment [for] every villager . . . up to something equivalent to the general level of welfare now enjoyed by the Tolais"²⁰—we could see in time a Burkean organic development of something new and intensely interesting: the same sort of process David Thomson describes²¹ for nineteenth-century Britain, whereby an Englishman of 1800 could

¹⁹ E. H. R. Dowdy, *Japanese Bureaucracy* (Melbourne, 1973).

²⁰ The Hon. M. T. Somare, "Building Papua New Guinea", *University of Sydney Current Affairs Bulletin* 50 (12), quoted in I. Grosart, *Gazelles and Elephants: An Administrative Problem*, University of Sydney, Department of Government, mimeographed (1974).

²¹ In *England in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914* (London, Penguin Paperback, 1960).

have found his way around his own country in 1900 despite a century of economic and sociopolitical reform.

Thus, in the economic field, whereas many modern enterprises run on Western lines have failed after the removal of European supervision, there is evidence that Gorokans and Tolai can gear traditional social forms to modern commerce provided that it is kept within reasonable limits. E. K. Fisk of the Australian National University has recently described²² the case of a village which has turned itself into a successful co-operative for raising cattle, running trade stores, and trucking. I know one Madang villager who has grown rich by adapting traditional trade ties to a number of modern concerns. In the sociocultural field, Papua New Guineans, as I have suggested, show strong concern for the survival of their culture. University students on vacation take pride in going home to play their parts as ordinary villagers, and even in Hanuabada, now virtually a suburb of Port Moresby, people still pay bride price. Yet there are signs that traditional structures can adopt and adapt Western political forms. Local government councils and the House of Assembly seem to function as legitimate expressions of popular views. They are suited to the compromise, pragmatism, and shifting alliances that are the hallmarks of Melanesian politics. It is perhaps significant that, although it ruled out the idea of a head of state as having no place in traditional Papua New Guinean society, the official report of the Constitutional Planning Committee retained the Westminster parliamentary system as an essential institution.

The law is certainly one sphere in which traditional and modern forms will be amalgamated as is apparent in three areas: village and local courts; land law; and the recognition of older forms of settlement in higher courts. Recent outbreaks of fighting have induced the government to establish village courts within regional circuits. This must serve to codify and preserve local custom, and will be most important in land law. For several years the Australian Administration tried to demarcate land boundaries on the basis of uniform fixed title intelligible to Europeans. The people were unenthusiastic. In the long run, they accept only a pattern that endorses the crosscutting rights, obligations, and relationships inherent in their original systems of tenure. Finally, in the higher courts, judges now recognize the indigenous principle of forestalling bloodfeud by paying compensation to the next of kin in homicide cases, especially motor accidents.

The most difficult field will be education. Sixteen years ago many of us argued for the introduction of a totally European programme up to tertiary level for as many people as possible on the grounds that a nation-state could afford nothing less. We dismissed what we saw as the patronizing arguments of the pre-war Government Anthropologist, Dr. F. E. Williams,²³ for an educated villager and nothing higher. Yet it is to F. E. Williams that the present government implicitly turns. The urban job market cannot cope even with those who reach secondary level and current policy

²² In "Rural Development", *New Guinea and Australia, The Pacific, and South-East Asia*, IX (1974).

²³ In *The Blending of Cultures* (Port Moresby, Government Printer, 1935, reissued 1951).

aims to keep people in the villages with school curricula tailored to suit. Yet there is a danger here. Traditional economic and sociopolitical forms may be adapted to the needs of the new society but I doubt whether this could be claimed for the old intellectual system. As I have stated, the people believe that knowledge is a gift from gods to man, so that if they rely on this rather than new practical skills stagnation will be inevitable.

The evidence from Papua New Guinea probably typifies, *mutatis mutandis*, most former colonies. It does not support any prophecy of a final international order of dull uniformity. Perhaps we should look rather to the theory of ebb and flow in history propounded by Vico in the eighteenth century, eliminating suggestions of foreordained progress and remembering, as I submitted at the outset, that human affairs need continual adjustment. If anthropology contributes to understanding this process, the need for ethnographic research must remain. In a world so contracted by modern communications that sociocultural differences become increasingly obtrusive, it has an essential ambassadorial role. Yet there is still one question: Will the governments of new nations allow it to continue? Understandably, they do not wish their citizens to be regarded as "guinea pigs", as they put it. This is just one of many problems to be adjusted periodically. For the present, I make two suggestions.

First, we must make it plain that ethnographic research is not a European prerogative. I should like to see anthropologists from Papua New Guinea, and other Pacific and Asian countries, working in European Australian communities. Their need to understand us is equally great. Second, we should take stock of the kind of research we pursue. As I have argued, it will still be *ad hoc* and *laissez-faire* to the extent that it must deal with issues as they arise. But it can no longer limit itself to reconstructing precontact sociocultural systems, whereby it is often seen to dehumanize the people it studies as if they were unique exhibits in a museum. It must recognize and describe them as men and women in the modern world, treating knowledge of these traditional systems primarily as necessary introductions to the understanding of such fields as modern economics and law, and history—the genuine people's history that Professor Denoon of Port Moresby sees as the proper foundation of national self-respect.²⁴ The study of history in the southwest Pacific is only beginning and, in one obvious and literal sense, we have only scratched the surface. We have made too little use of archaeology. Oceania differs from Europe in one important respect: prehistory reaches from the very depths to just underneath the topsoil, with no great gap between it and the modern social reality anthropologists investigate.

This kind of research demands imagination and sophistication. We have seen ethnography progress from the amateurism of the late nineteenth century to the professionalism of Malinowski and his successors but, if it is to sustain this trend, we need to augment our skills both in and out of the field, especially, as Rodney Needham has urged,²⁵ in the learning of local as well as scholarly languages. Moreover, until

²⁴ See D. Denoon, *People's History* (University of Papua New Guinea, 1973).

²⁵ In *Belief, Language and Experience* (Oxford, 1972), p. 186 *passim*.

recently we have been jacks of all trades, turning our hands to many facets of traditional cultures : traditional economics, land tenure, politics, law, religion, and epistemology. If we are to explore these topics for their relevance to the modern world, we must be prepared to collaborate with experts from other disciplines—economics, geography, political science, and law—who are now moving out from their own society into regions they previously left to us. There are already pioneer examples from the Australian National University that demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary research under proper control. I should hope that our recent incorporation in the Faculty of Economics is an earnest of our good intentions and I should welcome a close liaison with law. I do not forget art, literature, and music, although they pose greater technical difficulties.

I began with a remark by Lord Leverhulme that reflects two perennial ambitions of Western society : the search for greater knowledge and improved production ; and the establishment of a finite stable order. I shall conclude with a subsequent incident in his career, had he known the full circumstances of which he might never have spoken of solving human relations. In 1917, he bought the Island of Lewis in the Hebrides, planning to improve its inhabitants' lives by establishing a fish cannery to provide regular employment. But they would not co-operate and, in the 1920s, he gave the island to them. After 1945, a Scots friend of mine asked them why they rejected the scheme. The crofters replied that they were used to working in their own time and at their own pace according to weather and necessity. Much like the labourers on the South Seas plantations, they did not relish punching the clock at 8 a.m. and not leaving until 6 p.m. from Monday till Friday. Thus, they described Lord Leverhulme as " a very wicked man " and preferred to remain unimproved. The moral is that people are predictable only in terms of their own cultures. The first duty of the anthropologist, if he is to contribute to the constant process of social adjustment, is to capture this kind of image with as little distortion as possible. He should heed the advice of the Frenchman : "*Je n'impose rien ; je ne propose rien ; j'expose*", which I am tempted to translate by a phrase from an American comic strip : " You gotta tell it like it is, Charlie Brown !"