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Anthropology and cosmopolitanism

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Making friends in different worlds:

The anthropologist as a professional cosmopolitan

While I am very grateful to Pnina Werbner for her kind invitation to participate in this encounter on anthropology and cosmopolitanism, I should confess that from the moment she asked me, I have been troubled not only by the weight of such an honour, but also by my uneasiness about the very notion of cosmopolitanism. I have tried frantically to figure out what it could mean, but I should say that I am still hesitant about its ultimate meaning and fruitfulness as an anthropological concept.

My uneasiness mainly stems from the fact that it is a notion imbued with normativity. Even if it might also be occasionally used as a slur, sometimes with anti-Semitic undertones, for instance among some radical nationalists, it is usually, at least among intellectuals seen as a desirable quality. 'Cosmopolitan', in its etymological meaning as « citizen of the world », is usually a self-congratulatory epithet that intellectuals like to put forward¹. Most of us here would probably prefer to be considered 'cosmopolitan' rather than 'parochial'.

We are convened here to answer to the following query: is anthropology a cosmopolitan discipline? On the face of it, the answer seems obvious enough: anthropology can claim to be *the* "cosmopolitan discipline", in so far as its field is the whole world, not only its western part, and one of its stated aims is to struggle against "ethnocentric" prejudice in favour of a tolerance of other ways of being in the world².

The real question that is raised is, of course: is anthropology *really* cosmopolitan? That is, does it live up to its own ideals? The issue has been raised with force in relation to the involvement of anthropology in the colonial enterprise, with the allegation that the

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¹ See Karl Mannheim's ideal of 'free-floating intellectual', unattached by class or nation.

² Adam Kuper, "Culture, Identity and the Project of a Cosmopolitan Anthropology", *Man*, New Series, Vol. 29, No. 3. (Sep., 1994), pp. 537-554.

cosmopolitan rhetoric was but a hypocritical mask covering a reality of colonial exploitation. Much of the ensuing debate has been framed in mutually exclusive terms: if anthropology could be shown to be colonial, it was not truly cosmopolitan. Conversely, those who held that anthropology was cosmopolitan felt bound to claim that anthropology had not really been colonial, but only superficially so: its practitioners admittedly paid lip-service to colonial powers, but they were really pursuing their 'own academic interests'³.

I surmise that one of the reasons for Pnina asking me to be here, is that, having the advantage of being a complete outsider to British anthropology, I could afford to be up to a certain extent morally uncommitted, when I studied anthropology in the 1930s⁴. My first move was to try to unpack anthropology's cosmopolitan project by looking at the radical transformations it underwent in the 1930s with the discovery of the diversity of cultures in connection of the rise of Indirect Rule in British Africa.

I grew however increasingly dissatisfied with an approach that remained at the level of values and norms. If we want to look at things from an ethical point of view, there is of course no problem with keeping a normative definition of cosmopolitanism. If however, we want to try to have an analytic look at it, then an effort to build up a more sociological definition of cosmopolitan is in order.

Social networks and knowledge

A good place to start is by looking at actual uses of the term « cosmopolitan » in the 1930s. In 1939 *Man* published a review by the government-anthropologist Meek of a book by Sylvia Leith-Ross *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*. Meek wrote:

« Ibo women were more capable of co-operation than men and had a more cosmopolitan outlook, due partly to the system of exogamy which gives women experience of life in more than one community, and partly to the marketing system which brings together women of countless different communities three or four times every week »⁵

In this very simple use of the term, « cosmopolitan » is clearly seen as a desirable state; it is equated with « openness », capacity for co-operation, and opposed to « closure ». But there is

³ E.g., Goody. For a discussion, see « Introduction : Anthropology and the government of natives : a comparative approach » in Benoît de L'Estoile, Federico Neiburg et Lygia Sigaud (ed.), *Empires, Nations and Natives. Anthropology and State-making*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2005, p.1-29.

⁴ My position is thus different from a number of American anthropologists of previous generations, who when they discussed the issue of 'colonial anthropology' often seemed to be settling other accounts with their British colleagues.

also a sketch of a more sociological analysis: cosmopolitanism is linked both to a diversity of life experiences, through kinship, and to the meeting of people belonging to various « communities », through the market. Now I think this gives us a clue to start with by linking up « cosmopolitanism » and variety of networks.

I would like to elaborate on this insight and suggest that we tentatively define a cosmopolitan not by the possession of moral qualities, nor by such characteristics as a « taste for diversity », « a willingness to engage with the other », a « personal ability to make one's way into other cultures »⁶, or to speak a variety of languages, and so on, but rather by the kind of network in which she is involved, and by one's ability to build and make use of networks. Sociologically speaking, a cosmopolitan would be someone who is involved in a variety of translocal networks instead of local networks. In other terms, being a cosmopolitan entails a capacity for making friends in unfamiliar worlds⁷. Conversely, what is negatively described as 'parochialism' could be redefined sociologically as embedment within close-knit local networks⁸.

The notion of social network is, of course, associated with the Manchester School. Since this ASA conference is to a certain extent a tribute to it, it is probably fitting to use such a notion here.⁹ The social network approach has however usually been used with regard to action, in order to understand the capacity to influence others. What is most prominent in anthropology however is not action, but knowledge, and that is what I want to illuminate here.

To do this, I would like to give a twist to the notion of social network, by linking it up with another theoretical strand: the « interactional theory of thought » developed by the sociologist Randall Collins, who argues that thought is a product of social networks. Taking his cue from

⁵ C. K. Meek, Review of *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, by Sylvia Leith-Ross, *Man*, Vol. 39 (Jul., 1939), pp. 113-114

⁶ Cf. Ulf Hannerz,

⁷ I use 'friends' here as a generic terms to denote personal relationships, without further differentiating between « friendships » and other « personal relationships ». 'Friends' is also the anthropologists' native category in many accounts, as we shall see. Similarly I use the term 'native' here without quotation marks, as it was used at the time.

⁸ Cf Norbert Elias and Scotson :

⁹ Jeremy Boissevain, «Network Analysis: A Reappraisal», *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 20, No. 2. (Jun., 1979), pp. 392-394. cf. Ulf Hannerz, « A quoi servent les réseaux ? », in *Exploring the city*, 1980. J. Boissevain. *Friends of Friends - Networks, Manipulators, and Coalitions*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1974. J. Clyde Mitchell, 1974. « Social networks ». *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3(4):279-299.

Herbert Mead's analyses, Collins proposes to see thought as an internalised conversation, seen as a continuation of ongoing conversations.¹⁰ In Collins' words:

« Thinking is, most centrally, internalised conversation. What we think about is a reflection of what we talk about with other people, and what we communicate with them about on paper. ».¹¹

Collins insists upon the effects of communication interactions on the definition of the objects of thought. If we translate it in a very crude way, it boils down to something like: "Tell me whom you talk to, and I'll tell you what you think about".

The notion of « coalitions in the mind » offers a tool to analyse the relationships between interaction networks (in Collins's words « ritual interactions chains ») and intellectual creativity. In other words, thought may be analysed sociologically as the product of interactions. It is, of course, illusory to try to document extensively the whole set of interactions, that would allow for a full reconstruction of the process of « intellectual creation »; we can however at least try to analyse the « conversations » in which intellectuals take part, by identifying the « interlocutors » and the various spaces in which conversation develops¹². If some of these conversations take place within academic space, in occasions such as seminars, conferences, lectures, and so on, other happen in more informal ways and involve « interlocutors » who may not be part of the academic world *stricto sensu*.

The main interest of Collins' approach from our perspective is thus to suggest a way of linking up the individual process of intellectual creation with its social dimension, by way of its insertion within a network of interactions. As Collins writes, « the network structure of the intellectual world is transposed into the creative individual's mind »¹³. So, if we want to understand the production of knowledge, we have to study social networks.

The anthropologist might be defined as a cosmopolitan by trade. He practices what one can call practical cosmopolitanism¹⁴. The anthropologist, or rather, the ethnographer, can be said

¹⁰ Randall Collins, *The Sociology of philosophies. A global theory of intellectual change*, Harvard University Press, 1998, chap.1, « Coalitions in the mind ». My use of this notion does not however entail that I accept the whole of the very stimulating, but problematic, theory of « chains of ritual interactions » developed by Collins in his book. For a discussion of Collins, see "Review symposium" (C.Camic ; J.Rössel, J.L.Fabiani, R.Collins), *European Journal of Social Theory* 3 (1) : 995-118.

¹¹ p.49.

¹² What is specific to intellectual activity is that such an interaction is not necessarily direct, but can be mediated by way of the written word, which allows for having "interactions" with interlocutors distant not only spatially but also in time.

¹³ p.51.

¹⁴ Practical cosmopolitanism does not necessarily entail adherence to cosmopolitan values, nor the other way round : it is dubious if the arch-cosmopolitan Immanuel Kant would have been at ease among, say, Russian peasants or Irish fishermen.

to have a professional duty to make friends in unfamiliar settings¹⁵. In this way, being a « practical cosmopolitan » is to a certain extent a key factor to a successful ethnography. This is so because of the peculiar character of ethnographic knowledge, as opposed to other ways of knowing. Ethnography may be defined as the production of knowledge through the successful building and manipulation of personal networks¹⁶. In fact, the revolution in British ethnographic practice in the interwar years, associated with Malinowski, can be described as a shift from a reliance mostly on colonial networks (interviewing natives that were supplied by the local official or missionary¹⁷) to a capacity to penetrate local networks, thus offering a much greater insight into what anthropologists called the “native point of view”.¹⁸

The anthropologist was able to, and indeed had to, develop networks both among the local European colonisers and among colonised (natives), which indeed gave him a very special position. This comes out very clearly in the famous ethnographic masterpiece « Analysis of a social situation in modern Zululand », where Max Gluckman precisely appears as the only one (with the partial exception of the Swedish missionary) who was able to circulate on both sides of the bridge, that is in both worlds that together made up colonial society. Precisely what his brilliant ethnography documents is the extent of his networks, from his former schoolmates within the administrative staff to his connections in the Zulu royal family, that allowed him to move apparently unhampered in various worlds. The anthropologist is, in a literal sense, a go-between. We will come back to the specificity of this situation later.

What I propose to do here is to sketch out the social networks of the anthropologists working in Africa during the 1930s, a number of whom were among the ASA founders 60 years ago. I cannot enter here into the fascinating story of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, which as you know played a major role in the shaping of British social anthropology. Suffice it to say that it came into existence in 1926 as a sort of network of networks, bringing together an odd lot of missionaries, colonial educationists and officials and

¹⁵ Some might argue that a good ethnographer ought precisely not to have to develop friendship with the people he is studying, and that one can study people one dislikes for whatever ground, from political to ethical ; however, ethnography is premised to a great extent on one's ability to build relationships of friendly cooperation with a number of diverse persons, not just the kind of people one usually likes.

¹⁶ I rely here on my ethnographic experience, both in Brazil and in France.

¹⁷ Such was the practice of the Torres Straits Expedition, of Radcliffe-Brown in the Andaman, or to a large extent of Malinowski himself in Mailu.

¹⁸ Michael Young sheds light on ethnographic knowledge as a product of social interactions by his careful reconstruction of the actual framework of fieldwork. 2004. *Malinowski: Odyssey of an Anthropologist 1884-1920*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

academics. In 1931, the Institute received a large grant by the Rockefeller Foundation to undertake a 5-year *Plan of research* on the effects upon African societies of the integration of the continent into world's economy; it started a programme of Fellowships which became the principal means for funding fieldwork research in Africa throughout the 1930s.

Progressively, the Institute developed a routine of consultation before sending Fellows to Africa. The Institute's administrative director, the missionary diplomat Joseph Oldham introduced applicants to the Colonial Office, while informally consulting the local administration; if the answer was forthcoming, the next step was an official despatch by the Colonial Office asking the Governor's agreement, and a confidential inquiry by the intelligence services on the applicant's personality. Thus, the departure of an anthropologist to the field was prepared by a series of consultations at different levels, both with the Governor and with local officials, who were asked for advice on the choice of the group to be studied.

Thus in 1934, Oldham forwarded the application of Margaret Read «to undertake anthropological and sociological research in North Rhodesia»¹⁹. Oldham stated that he personally consulted the Governor, Sir Hubert Young about her plans, and that M.Read proposed to study the Kahonde after discussing with Northern Rhodesia officials, on leave or retired.

The ability of the future *fieldworker* to establish social relationships, in particular with colonial officials, was a significant element for appreciating an application. Malinowski, wishing to present Meyer Fortes in a favourable light to the Colonial Office, described him as «an excellent mixer»²⁰. Conversely, a political officer who was doing an anthropology course in London said that «Dr Nadel is essentially not a good "mixer"»²¹.

The network of informal relations built through the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures played a central role in the process of negotiation of choice and access to the field. Those networks insured that the anthropologist, even if he personally failed to get along well with local officials, could benefit at least from a certain amount of co-operation on part of the administration.

¹⁹ Oldham to Colonial Office, 21/9/1934

²⁰ cité par Goody, op.cit., p.51.

²¹ Minute G Creasy (?).

The extremely detailed *Reports on fieldwork* the Fellows had to send regularly to the Executive Council of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures are extremely rich in information on the actual conditions of their work.

Once in the field, the anthropologist was generally on his arrival highly dependent on the European colonial network, especially local officials and missionaries that gave him shelter, information, and initial access to native networks²². Fieldwork consisted for the anthropologist in progressively building his/her own personal network, starting from the initial network and in some cases moving away from them.

The anthropologist had to secure the support of key figures that opened access to the networks they were controlling. In hierarchised polities, winning the chief was a prerequisite.

The experience of Margaret Read among the Ngoni makes apparent the ambivalence of the anthropologist's at the same time a beneficiary of the help of the administration, and trying to distance herself from it in order not to be taken for a spy.

For my first camp a Boma [administrative headquarters] messenger came with me to help set it up, but I have never had one since, for some of these messengers are very much feared in the villages, and it was hardly a good introduction.²³

She gained the support of the Paramount Chief, who used his authority on her behalf :

The Paramount called two big « *msonkhano* » or assemblies of chiefs and *indunas** to meet me, at which the old men told me history, the warriors danced and everyone drank beer and was happy.²⁴

The support of the native authorities was crucial in overcoming this suspicion:

I had the backing of the Paramount Chief who assured his people in public that I was not a Boma spy.

Hilda Kuper (Beemer) was able to use an already existing network: she had met Sobhuza in Johannesburg in 1934 at the Conference on Native Education. Sobhuza, a member of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures from 1928, found in anthropologists allies for his neo-traditional policy²⁵. Kuper enjoyed the full support of the Swazi king,

²² To simplify, I speak of « native network » and « colonial European network », overlooking the fact that there are in fact a series of interconnected networks, and that every colonial European was himself part of a native network.

²³ Read 1935, « Quarterly report on Fellowship », March-May 1935, p.2

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²⁴ Read 1935, Quarterly report on Fellowship, March-May 1935, p.5

²⁵ Paul Cocks, « The King and I: Bronislaw Malinowski, King Sobhuza II of Swaziland, and the vision of culture change in Africa »,

Sobhuza II, Kuper added that in a society as hierarchised as the Swazi, conducting an inquiry without the support of tribal authorities would have been next to impossible²⁶.

I was introduced by the Governor of the capital to the council of the nation as ‘a European brought by the Lion (Sobhuza). Fear her, respect her. The King says her work is to show we are not wild animals, we do not live in the mountains, we have our laws. Do not trouble her.’

This was a double-edged endorsement, which did not allay all suspicion! Royal patronage structured all her fieldwork, to begin with the choice of her assistants:

Umnjakaza was ‘given me’ by Sobhuza as my *umfana*. The basic meaning of *umfana* is ‘boy’; in the context of political relations it is a subject bound by political loyalty. [...] In addition to Umnjakaza, Sobhuza selected other assistants and companions for special occasions.²⁷

Similarly, Schapera initially entered the field among the Tswana in Bechuanaland with the Resident Commissioner, at the occasion of the installation of a new paramount chief of the Bakgatla, and slept at the local trader’s place. He soon befriended the former Regent, Isang, who “spoke fluent English”, who opened up native networks for him²⁸. He wrote in 1933:

My work was greatly facilitated from the start by the encouragement given me by the former regent Isang, a man of outstanding ability and intelligence who appreciated the value of having the customs of his people put on record. He not only himself acted as informant, but generously placed at my disposal all his files of official correspondence, and helped to provide me with other informants. The fact that he often expressed public approval of my investigations helped a good deal to make the people more approachable and less suspicious than they might have been.²⁹

To start research in other places, access was again through official channels. Schapera told me how he had been solemnly invested with the mission to record Tswana customs by the *Resident Commissioner*, Colonel Rey, in front of the Tswana chiefs he had summoned, during a meeting of the Native Advisory Council.³⁰

Colonel Rey brought me to the Council, and introduced me to the people. I was going to do this work as they had requested.

Schapera made no bones about his insertion in the administrative network, which allowed him both to have access to data, and gave him interlocutors.

²⁶ Kuper, *An African aristocracy. Rank among the Swazi*, Oxford University Press, 1961 (1947), « Conditions of work and the status of the investigator », p.1-5.

²⁷ H.Kuper, p.2

²⁸ Comaroffs, « A conversation with Isaac Schapera », p.558

²⁹ I.Schapera, « Preliminary report on field investigations among the Bakxatla Baxackxafêla », Feb.1933, Archives IAI.

³⁰ interview, March1996. Cf. aussi Kuper-Schapera, 1998.

I travelled with a district commissioner from one place to another - that's how I travelled, I didn't have a car.³¹

Schapera also recalled how Bathoen, chief of the Ngwaketse, had later introduced him.

When I went to these people, the ruler just announced that I was there at his invitation to write down *ditso le mekgwa*, the history and customs of the Ngwaketse. And he added, « the people whom I call upon to give Dr Schapera their knowledge must do so ». Then he told those he had summoned — the recognised authorities on law and custom, history and so on — to answer my questions. That was so beautiful.³²

The recurrent character of these solemn introduction scenes is certainly not a chance, but points to a highly significant moment in gaining access to the local native network.

Monica Hunter's account of her « Methods of field-work », are particularly rich on her use of a series of networks according to the situation. Monica Hunter started her fieldwork in a "familiar ground", at the very place where she grew up as daughter of a missionary:

"I began fieldwork [...] in Auckland, a village of 583 inhabitants, in the eastern half of the Cape Province. [...] I took a room in the village store kept by Europeans, and began in the orthodox fashion to make geographical and genealogical plans of the village. A number of the people I had known since childhood—my home was near—and I spent days chatting in their huts, and visiting others in the company of the local school mistress, a Fingo girl of my own age. I played with the children, sat through their all-night concerts in the school-house, joined the women when they went to build the hut for the boys to be circumcised that year. The people were friendly and contact easily made."³³

She then moved to Pondoland, in order to continue fieldwork in a supposedly more « traditional » region. In an area where she did not appear to have had previous contacts, she proceeded not « bottom up », but « top down », visiting first the paramount, then the local, chiefs:

[...] After visiting the Paramount Chief of Western Pondoland and his great wife and getting his support and that of the district chief, I settled down in a store for seven months to study the people immediately surrounding it. In Pondoland there are no villages, but household groups averaging four to five adults are scattered through the country. A store serves as a club for the district, the people gather there to meet friends, hear the gossip, flirt, and be [?] tobacco. Trade was good where I lived, and there was always a crowd of men and women hanging about. The store-keeper's wife made the cotton-skirts which Pondo women wear, and customers used to arrive in the morning, order a skirt and wait until afternoon when it was finished. I heard much gossip, sitting in a corner, or joining in the conversation of the women. They were in the habit of chatting with my hostess who herself had coloured blood, and was very popular. I was accepted as her sister, and shared

³¹ in Kuper-Schapera, 1998

³² « A conversation with Isaac Schapera », p.559.

³³ « Contact between European and Native in South Africa », Methods of study of Culture contact, p.9-10

the goodwill shown to her. Often we talked about marriage, initiation, gardening, children. One woman would give her views, and another chip in with comments. I kept a bag of tobacco which helped along the conversation. One heard about the latest « affairs », who had been beaten by their husbands, and why, who was pregnant, what sort of a crop « A » had reaped, who was sick, and who had bewitched them. All festivals were public affairs, and hearing about them in the shop I was free to attend them³⁴

Such a narrative reads as a wonderful illustration of the malinowskian method of insertion into the field, where the researcher tries to insert herself as far as possible within existing social relationships, finding a place of her own. The store appears itself a kind of « contact zone » between the European and native worlds, which allows a relatively easy to native life without being really included in native networks. It is significant that the anthropologist should be classified as a « sister » of the store-keeper's wife, who was herself placed within the intermediate category of « coloured », that is who was precisely on the boundary of two worlds³⁵. Monica Hunter's behaviour as described here appears significantly different from what was expected from a White woman in the colonial context (even a wife or daughter of missionary); more than any political apprehension, this is this kind of "deviant" behaviour that provoked the suspicion of infringing the « colour bar » or, worse, the risk of *going native*. In contrast with other Europeans, officers, missionaries or settlers, the anthropologist has no other duty but to hang around, and listen to native conversations.

In fact, the actual chance of *going native* was non-existent, precisely because the anthropologists' involvement in local native networks was both non exclusive (they were still part of other networks) and temporary. The anthropologist appears here as a special kind of mediator in the colonial setting: she lives not « as a native » nor really « among the natives », but on the edge, on the frontier between two worlds, to which she can have access through her networks.

The reports from the field give insight on the specific position anthropologists held in colonial society. They could act as mediators between native and European society, not only because they were able to give information on the « native point of view » to administrative officials and others, but also because their insertion, even partial, into local networks made them more accessible to the natives than most of the more standard colonial characters. Even if the anthropologist always remained a « European », he occupied a special position in colonial society, that allowed for the possibility of a certain kind of interactions, partially outside of

³⁴ « Methods of field-work », first May, 1933, IIALC, p. 2. See also *Reaction to Conquest*, p.10-12.

usual frames. H.Kuper thus stressed the exceptional character of social relationship in which the anthropologist engaged, more reciprocal than most relationships between White and native in a colonial setting:

I, as an anthropologist, was used as a source of knowledge on European modes of thought and action. Questions put to informants were returned— with interest. Moreover, I was in a position different from that usually held by the European. I did not blame, try to convert, or seek labourers.

Audrey Richards also was led to reflect upon the particularities of the position of the anthropologist, relatively outside of the normal social game of interactions:

This is in fact the great asset of the anthropologist—the time he has to spend. (...) he is probably the only observer in the district who has the time to sit down and watch the passage of native life from day to day.³⁶

The second advantage of the anthropologist's position is that he is "probably the only White on the territory who can afford to have a really detached point of view on the native", simply because "his interests are never at stake."

He is usually the only man [sic], who is not trying to influence or coerce the people in one way or other, either to accept new codes or ideas, or to adopt new habits of work. [...] Simultaneously the native rarely comes into contact with a white man who is not trying to make him do or be something to which he is not accustomed.³⁷

The "ethnographic situation " is thus characterised by what Bourdieu later called "scholastic detachment" that stops at the exact moment when the definition of the situation changes:

He has nothing to do but observe and record, and no responsibility to take, until his period of field-work is over at least. He is therefore able to assume an attitude of tolerance towards the native which would be impossible for most of his fellow countrymen. Let him for one moment put down his notebook and turn employer to a band of villagers whom he has engaged as carriers to take him to his next destination. The very men who showed such amiable characteristics as informants in the setting of their own village life, often cause him almost unbearable exasperation, when they are asked to rise at a certain hour, and reach a certain village at a fixed time. It is my very brief experience of the other role that makes me appeal for impartial studies of native tribes by those not themselves engaged in any other work in the country.³⁸

Beyond the self-serving plea in defence of professional anthropologists, Audrey Richards captures the specificity of interactions outside of usual colonial " interaction frameworks". In

³⁵ On categories in South Africa, see Kuper, "Today we have calling of parts", in L'Estoile, Neiburg and Sigaud (ed.), *Empires, Nations and Natives. Anthropology and State-making*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2005.

³⁶ id. p.142

³⁷ p.143.

³⁸ id., p.144.

fact, Richards points up to the relatively fragile character of the anthropologist's cosmopolitan tolerance, which is premised in her not having to enter into relationships of authority. So the (relative) « detachment » of the anthropologist appears not so much a result of ideological commitment or methodological choice, but rather a consequence of her position in the colonial system.

On her second visit to the field, after a time spent in the rural zone, Monica Hunter follows up her study in an urban setting (East London and Grahamstown), following the research priorities of the 5-year plan of research. Again, her entrance is through the religious network, which opens other doors, and also through trade-unions

I applied to a native minister who has great influence in the location for help in getting in touch with the people and was supported by him and provided with a well-known man, an ex-headman, to take me about, and introduce me to the people. Clements Kadali, the leader of a native Trades Union, the Independent Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, also gave his support, introducing me in a public meeting to members of the I.I.C.W.U. and intimating that I had its official support. As the anti-European feeling in East London location is very strong special care was necessary to get on to good terms with the people.

Her native guide proved to be a key character in getting to know more people. Hunter describes her time as divided among two different kinds of task: survey work in the morning and « hanging around » with friends in the afternoon:

I spent each morning on house to house visits ; taking a different section of the location each week, so that we covered the worst slum « Gomorro » and also the more respectable parts of the location. The man who accompanied me was extremely useful in selecting useful people to visit and in giving private information about them, as well as helping me to gain their confidence. A questionnaire was filled up at each house we visited, but I regarded it more as an excuse for a visit and conversation than as an end in itself. [...]

Friendship is itself part of fieldwork. Here, she relied on her inherited network:

In the afternoons I went to friends, natives. Many of the educated people knew my father. Some of them had known me as a child. They gave me tea, and told me about life in the location. The girls also told me about their tennis clubs and bathing parties, and how foolish old people still objected to mixed tennis. [...] A social service committee » of young teachers and nurses co-opted me as a member, and I listened to their discussion as to whether it was wise to undermine the obligations of relatives and of neighbours to look after those who were starving by giving poor relief.³⁹

Hunter's account stresses the importance of mediations, and in particular her reliance on the missionary network. The allies of the ethnographer were notably those who themselves occupy a position of brokers within colonial society, between the European and the native

worlds, part of an emerging African middle-class: pastors or members of the church, trade-unionists, teachers, nurses.

A few years later, Monica Hunter, who had in between married her fellow-anthropologist Godfrey Wilson, joined her husband in Nyakusaland (Tanganyika, a territory that had formerly been a German colony). They lived in a house lent to them by the « Berlin mission ». She describes an excellent insertion in the colonial European network:

Government officials and missionaries have all been friendly and hospitable towards us. We have visited the K.A.R. station at Masoko and have twice been up to Tukuyu to spend week-ends with government officials, once with the District Officer and his wife. The District Officer is extremely sympathetic towards the work and the Assistant District Officer is eager to borrow language notes. The German nurse in charge of Itete mission we see quite frequently and the one German planter living near us also drops in for a meal occasionally.⁴⁰

It seems that being with her husband completely changed Monica Hunter's status. They now enter the system of reciprocity between domestic households. The following excerpt makes plain that the acquisition of knowledge is premised on the establishment of a network of personal relationships among the natives:

We are working on the method of reciprocal social intercourse started before I came by my husband. Every day people drop in to visit us in the same way as we go about the villages visiting friends. Those who come in casually usually have a cup of tea or milk with us; old or important men, or special friends, are usually invited to a meal. We are very often given food in the villages and are occasionally invited to a specially prepared meal. I admit that I, not having yet a completely anthropological stomach, watch rather anxiously out of the corner of my eye to see whether the usual hen is going to be given us alive or cooked (the greater compliment), and I dislike visitors when I am writing reports, but the system seems to us to be quite worth slight discomfort for we gain so much in friendship and intimacy. Friendship in this culture always implies exchange of gifts and eating together. When people are constantly dropping in one hears of what ceremonies are going on, besides getting gossip and more systematic information in answer to questions. From the economic point of view it is easy, since we get back at least 50% of the value of what we give away in gifts or hens, milk, bananas, eggs, etc. When I arrived the servants had prepared a gift of beer that my husband might invite his friends to celebrate, and after drinking, the chief, in whose district we live, presented us with an ox to eat !⁴¹

« Making friends » appears here tightly connected with acquiring knowledge.

³⁹ Report, p.4-5

⁴⁰ Mrs Hunter-Wilson (Monica Hunter), *Quarterly report on fieldwork*, March-June 1935.

A number of testimonies comfort this picture of good relations with colonial officials on the ground. Thus, according to Peter Loizos, who analysed the diary kept by Nadel during his second stay in Nupeland, from December 1935 à December 1936, Nadel had "excellent access to Bida officials, and was frequently consulted by them"⁴². Nadel, accompanied by his wife Lisbeth, benefited from the hospitality of the administration, finding shelter in the lodgings built for officers on tour.⁴³

In 1936, during her second period on the field, Margaret Read, Another Fellow of the Institute, wrote that the officials at all levels had favourably received her⁴⁴. After her arrival in the Angoni Highlands, she was invited by the Provincial Commissioner of the Northern Province to discuss her work.

He had himself made a study of the Angoni in another province, and it was most useful to talk over with him the various changes ... in Angoni life due to mixture with other tribes and to contact with Europeans.

She spent the second half of May visiting the Provincial Commissioner and two District Commissioners to discuss her programme of inquiry. She describes them as being "extremely kind and helpful and also interested in the work." Read soon started to look at the political organisation of the Ngoni.

This case leads us to formulate a more general hypothesis on the genesis of knowledge interests from interactions: a topic is not « interesting » in itself, but because it is attracting the interest of the members of a particular network, because it is recognised as *wissenswert*, as writes Max Weber, « worth to be known ». The various testimonies I could find, regarding Audrey Richards, Meyer Fortes, Nadel, Evans-Pritchard, Isaac Schapera, Hilda Kuper, Monica Hunter, suggest consistently that enquiries on political organisation met with approval among the anthropologists' interlocutors within the administration. One has to imagine conditions of interaction, in a colonial society where the White anthropologist and officials saw themselves as natural interlocutors. Political organisation thus appears as a topic of discussion which offered a « common ground », or a « topic of common interest », as writes Read. There is reason to think that the 'interest' thus shown for the anthropologist's work in his interactions with government officials, acted as a kind of confirmation that such an issue

⁴¹ Monica Hunter, « Quarterly report of fieldwork », March-June, 1935

⁴² Peter Loizos, "Nadel and the Bida Journals: a view from distance", unpublished manuscript. However, other notations suggest his "contempt" for British officials.

⁴³ "Arrived in Lokoja we are given an excellent bungalow and recognise in everything the protecting and recommending hand of Kaduna [administration]", 26-27.9.1936, Loizos, p.16.

is « interesting ». In other words, the local colonial network in which the anthropologists were included played an essential role in the changing definition of concerns and 'research priorities'.

Read also met the Governor of Nyasaland, who became so enthused with anthropological study that he asked for the support of the Colonial Office in obtaining from the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures funding for a new enquiry into the effects of emigration to South Africa on village life in Nyasaland. He concluded: "I consider her to be exceptionally well qualified for the task ".⁴⁵

Read's « qualifications » for the task refer on the one hand to her technical anthropological competence, such as her « excellent knowledge of language », and « wide knowledge of habits and customs of Angoni », but also to the possession of social qualities (usually referred to as « personality ») that allowed her to circulate between various networks in the colonial world, both male and female, native and colonial:

« She has gained the confidence of the Ngoni chiefs and established friendly relationships with Europeans of all professions and classes: and by virtue of her sex she is particularly qualified to investigate the effect upon home life. »

It would probably be extremely rewarding to be able to chart out the various networks of each ethnographer: one would probably see differences between networks according to the social origin or the gender of the ethnographer. The last point would need to be qualified: in many respects women anthropologists seem to have enjoyed (or endured) a male status in the colonial field, at least as seen from the native point of view. It was not however the case from the point of view of the colonial administration or the missionaries. Monica Hunter thus obviously strongly relied on an initial missionary network partly inherited from her father, while local colonial officials drove Isaac Schapera. Meyer Fortes befriended colonial officials in Taleland.

One of the things that set the ethnographer apart is, of course, that he is only temporarily part of local networks. When his fieldwork period is over, he comes back to his old network (which in most cases he never lost completely touch with, be it by way of mail, etc.).

⁴⁴ First report on fieldwork during second tour. May-July 1936

⁴⁵ "The Governor of Nyasaland has approached the Institute to enquire about the possibilities of financial support to enable Miss M Read to continue her research by an enquiry into the effects of emigration to South Africa on village life in Nyasaland. Miss Read is regarded by the Government as particularly qualified for this task ". CO 847/6/5

This is the moment of “writing up”, when one proceeds to the information accumulated in the field. Knowledge obtained through the practical mastering of local networks is reformatted and translated into terms that make sense for the translocal network, academics, and other audiences. This social activity, even if apparently more solitary than fieldwork, is in fact never conducted in isolation; if we take up again Collins’ image of thought as conversation, one writes in actual or virtual conversation with a number of interlocutors.

While intellectuals tend most of the time to put forward their intellectual interlocutors, a social network approach makes other relevant links apparent. I have studied in detail some of the colonial networks in which the anthropologists around Malinowski were moving in the 1930s. What is striking is the number of « meeting grounds » favouring informal interactions.

Little Parkhurst, country-house of the colonial pundit Lord Lugard, was one of these. To give you an idea, let me quote the description by the Oxford colonial scholar Margery Perham, who was a regular host from 1929 on:

One cannot think of Lugard in this last busy period of his life without seeing him against the background of his beautiful house and garden on the wooded hills of Surrey. He turned this into a conference-house to which for meals, for nights, and for week-ends came a ceaseless stream of colonial governors and other ranks of the service, officials from the Colonial Office, politicians and ministers, anthropologists, missionaries, Kenya settlers and their opponents. They found themselves greeted with that considerate, ceremonious courtesy which was passing with their host’s generation; they walked up and down the paths of a garden walled by great pines and beeches, carrying on discussions which went far into the night.⁴⁶

Those meetings took place in a number of places, including academic ones. To take but one example, the "Anthropology and administration" seminar, run at the LSE by Malinowski, Coatman, Lucy Mair, was explicitly devised to be « a meeting ground for anthropologists and administrators ». Thus, in May 1933, Margery Perham gave a *paper* on "The political officer as an anthropologist"⁴⁷, followed by a discussion⁴⁸. Two weeks later, Major Orde-Brown talked about « Sociology and the African Labourer ».

If we add up the names mentioned in the discussions following these two papers, about 25 participants in the discussion, from various origins: teachers of colonial administration and anthropology at the LSE (Coatman⁴⁹, Lucy Mair, Margery Perham, et Malinowski, plus

⁴⁶ M.Perham, Lord Lugard, a general appreciation », Africa, 1945, 114-122, ici p.119-120. Dinner was formal every night.

⁴⁷ (Colonial administration seminar, May 1933, Mal. 588) ; original "The political officer as an anthropologist" given at the LSE on May 2. Rhodes House, M Perham 229 : 4 ff 1-30: 1933.

⁴⁸ 9.5.1933 Discussion on Margery Perham's Paper.

⁴⁹ Coatman, retired from the Indian Civil Service, held a Chair in Imperial Economic Relations at LSE.

Raymond Firth), the missionary Oldham; retired colonials (Lord Lugard, Clifton⁵⁰), various students in anthropology and colonial administration (Hilda Beemer (later Kuper); Margery Lawrence, Margaret Read, Hofstra, Meyer Fortes, Siegfried Nadel; F.Meyer; H.Simons⁵¹), and colonial officials interested in anthropology (Williams⁵², G.I.Jones⁵³, Aston Smith, and Green?); three anonymous officials and an unnamed African.

The discussion of Perham's paper is a fascinating document on the genesis of political anthropology from the discussions about Indirect Rule between colonial reformers and anthropologists. The discussion of Orde-Brown's paper was extremely rich, bearing on a number of topics, from the adequacy to African reality of Orde-Brown's description, its relevance for an understanding of the transformations of the contemporary world beyond Africa, on the definition of « issues » and of possible « solutions », and on conceptual tools allowing to analyse the situation. Both discussions were at the same time a meeting of experts in colonial matters, and a research seminar. Similar discussions happened with the same or other participants in a number of places.

In fact, these two discussions illustrate the progressive emergence the 1930s of new research interests in anthropology: studies of political organisation on the one hand, and what was then called “culture contact” studies on the other.

Indeed, one can demonstrate that the general shift of interest towards political problems, culminating in the publication in 1940 of *African Political Systems*, was to a large extent a result of colonial interactions, not in the crude vision of the critics of « anthropology as colonial handmaiden », but, in a more subtle way, through the kind of conversations anthropologists were engaged in both in the field with local officers and at home with colonial reformers. As a result, the topics privileged by most anthropologists working in Africa in the 1930s were not so much the tradition subject matter of the discipline, but those that were central to the networks they belonged to, political organisation and “culture contact”.

All anthropologists were not active to the same degree in those circles; women anthropologists, a number of which came from what Noel Annan called the “intellectual

⁵⁰ Possibly C.Clifton Roberts, Senior Magistrate in Uganda, 1920-1930, former Attorney-General au Nyasaland, member Howard League for Penal Reform.

⁵¹ H.J. Simons, former member of the South African Civil service, student in Colonial Administration, Chairman of the LSE Marxist Society was expelled in 1934 following attacks against Coatman. Cf.Darhendorf, 1995.

⁵² F.E. Williams, Government Ethnographer in Papua, benefited from a Rockefeller special Fellowship to « familiarise himself with the most recent developments in anthropological theory » under the supervision of Malinowski. Kittredge to Malinowski, 31/8/33.

⁵³ Later teaching anthropology at Cambridge.

aristocracy”, tended to be more active. The interactions produced by these networks did not only bring about major changes in anthropology, they also changed the vision of British colonial officials, leading among other things to a reformulation of colonial priorities in the language of social anthropology.

Conclusion: I will now try to sum up, what I proposed here.

- 1) I suggested to replace an approach in terms of value by a sociological (or indeed, ethnographic) definition of a cosmopolitan as a person whose personal network extends over a number of distant social worlds, and who is able to make use of and extend these networks. Such a definition is both relative and plastic. It does not entail any value-judgement and encompasses many kinds of cosmopolitanism, from the European aristocracy to international executives to so-called ‘grass-root cosmopolitanism’ to intellectuals.
- 2) Looking at social networks allows shedding new light on the process of production of anthropological knowledge and better understanding its specificity. The specificity of ethnography (as contrasted with archival work, statistics, or even ‘qualitative research’) is that the acquisition of knowledge is premised in meeting friends and friends of friends of friends; in other words knowledge progresses alongside the building of personal networks. Conventional wisdom among anthropologists is that the topics one chooses to delve oneself in are usually the outcome of a transaction between the theoretical interests of the anthropologist on the one hand, developed in relation with one’s teachers and colleagues, and the main concerns of the people one visits on the other. While this is to a certain extent true, my contention is that is only one part of the picture, and that by taking into account more fully the various networks anthropologists are engaged in, we understand better the process of knowledge production.
- 3) When I say that anthropology is a cosmopolitan discipline, I do not intend to pass a moral or political judgement, but to offer an ethnographic description. The anthropologist is a professional cosmopolitan in so far as he moves between various networks: local field networks and translocal metropolitan networks. In consequence, there is no contradiction in anthropology being both colonial and cosmopolitan. In fact, a social network approach shows that British social anthropology in the 1930’s was colonial from top to toe, but also that it was cosmopolitan. Not only because, as is well known, it was made up of persons

originating from many European and colonial countries, but because it was based to a large extent on the development of a particular kind of practical cosmopolitanism called fieldwork, that depended on mastering both colonial and native local networks. What defines anthropological knowledge is the circulation of knowledge from local networks to larger translocal, often international networks.

This cosmopolitanism in a sociological sense does not however makes anthropology immune from becoming parochial, if it becomes too centred on a “local” network. Some critics hold that British anthropology tended towards such a state in the years that followed the creation of ASA which we are celebrating today, when social anthropology was dominated intellectually and socially by a small network of powerful individuals, passionately, albeit not always harmoniously, interacting with one another⁵⁴. Such a criticism is probably unfair, as it reduces the internal diversity of what was then British anthropology⁵⁵, but for a time this internal debate overshadowed debates with those that were outside the inner network. Indeed, its cosmopolitan project has not prevented anthropology from being largely defined by national (and imperial) boundaries. Developing networks across the borders is the best way to ensure that anthropology will be more and more cosmopolitan.

⁵⁴ See the famous stricture by G.P. Murdock, 1951, "British Social Anthropology", *American Anthropologist*, 465-473.

⁵⁵ As Firth was prompt to point. Raymond Firth, "Contemporary British Social Anthropology", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, No. 4. (Oct. - Dec., 1951), pp. 474-489. See also R. Radcliffe-Brown "Historical Note on British Social Anthropology" (Letter to the Editor), *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 1952, pp. 275-277.