

**THE FUNDING OF SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH: A PRELIMINARY NOTE TO A FRAGMENT OF
HISTORY WRITTEN BY E. M. CHILVER IN 1955**

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THE preoccupation of so many anthropologists and anthropological departments with securing funding raises many questions about the control of the direction in which anthropological research is going. One is forced to take note not only of the kind and quantity of factual knowledge produced (or ignored), but also the effect this must have on the development of thought in anthropology. There is, of course, an old refrain that research of all kinds must adapt to the needs of society—which leads to the obvious question: who decides what those needs are? The structures of sponsorship and funding for anthropology deserve more research attention than they sometimes receive in this busy world. Some attention was focused on these processes at the EASA Biennial Conference in Frankfurt in September 1998. We were accused of pusillanimity in the face of bureaucratic requirements. But how often are these challenged? We are normally delighted when a colleague is funded by the ESRC or ODA or an NGO like Oxfam, CAFOD, and so on, or by the British Council at the request of an overseas government or university. We are reassured by knowing that it is likely that the selection board will be composed of scholars, among whom we hope will be at least some experienced social anthropologists. Such representatives of the profession will, nevertheless, probably have to make their selections within the guidelines and known proclivities of those who sanction the expenditure. As John Davis has recently noted (1999: 7):

When—as a referee in a peer review—we write to commend a research proposal, we do so in terms that will satisfy the council: we say the project is related to themes announced by the council; that it will increase material wealth in Britain; that it will be ‘value for money’.

Assessors may well feel, given the expectations of politicians and the public they represent, that they cannot make a decision on how to allocate money until the would-be researchers provide detailed hypotheses (will a question not do?), requiring them to anticipate their findings before leaving for the field. So much for open-mindedness! All this we accept as the way of the world. We even acquiesce when faced with the requirement, which I think is locally imposed, that if an applicant is not already in a post, some person who is in one must sign the funding application, not merely as having approved it as a head of department might reasonably do, but as ‘principal investigator’. This can happen even when it is well known that the latter has neither the time nor the experience to do any of the research in question. This is neither honest nor equitable. It must be especially galling when the *real* investigator is already an experienced researcher with a good track record, possibly as good as, maybe even better than, the so-called ‘principal investigator’. The humiliation of searching for a principal investigator is sometimes only equalled by the reluctance of those approached to be put in this embarrassing position, which they may accept only in order to open a way for the researcher. What other fudges are there?

The academic climate and academic careers are changing. Davis (*ibid.*: 5–6) writes that

For about seven hundred years the specialists in explanation...have belonged to chartered corporations [collegial organizations] with an internal organization that has generally been non-bureaucratic, and in which tasks are allocated according to skill and aptitude rather than by formal position in a hierarchy of rule-governed roles.

This is a model he favours, but fears is passing. In protesting against ‘market rationality’, he makes a plea for collegiality (*ibid.*: 8):

...in our university lives [we should] do what we can to preserve collegiality in a hostile environment, even if we have to flavour our Dionysian organization with increasing amounts of Zeus. That is because a Dionysian organization department gives more opportunity to our younger colleagues to create and innovate under the shelter of a defending leader, and gives them a temporary exemption from the new regime of audit and control conformity.

The problem is that those who need ‘shelter’ are not always the inexperienced young students for whom the model was intended, and furthermore, many mature scholars, of either sex, are excluded from the collegiate life. Currently, and per-

haps for some time to come, many have to exist for years (forever?) on 'soft money', hovering at times like displaced persons, *sans papiers*, 'not eligible to apply', perhaps 'over age' at 31. Unfunded married women are likely to be told they shouldn't worry about it—as if neither death nor desertion were possibilities, and that prestige and career opportunities (and all the access, expenses, and perks that these entail) are not for them. Members of this growing caste contrast with their fellow academics in post: for those that have, so often, more can they obtain. It is good that studies of bureaucracies of various kinds have been made in recent years and that the modern practice of auditing has received attention (for example, by Strathern 1997). But perhaps in the rush of life we still have blind spots and cannot see everything beyond ourselves, where we are going, and the effect of the institutions that aid or hinder this.

Perhaps a rethinking of the past in the light of our present condition might now be helpful. We need not go back 700 years—the middle third of the twentieth century can be revealing. It is not uncommon to hear disparaging remarks about the social anthropologists who, through no default of their own, did their fieldwork when political colonialism was widespread, as opposed to today, when dominion comes in the guise of development, humanitarian or other aid, or globalization. Despite the moles in our own eyes, we can take another look at the support structures of those days, reflect further on their implications, and see what we can learn from them.

It is in keeping with *JASO*'s occasional backward look through the archives of anthropology that the editors have decided to publish below a hitherto unpublished paper given in December 1955 by Mrs E. M. (Sally) Chilver to a postgraduate seminar at London University's Institute of Commonwealth Studies on 'British Tropical Dependencies during the Past Hundred Years' (and asked me to write this preamble). Chilver entitled her talk 'The Organization of Social and Economic Research in the British Colonial Territories'. It has existed only in mimeographed form till now. *JASO* readers will remember the biographical note by Chilver in the special 1995 edition of *JASO* (Vol. XXVI, no. 1: see Chilver 1995, Fowler and Zeitlyn 1995a), which included papers in her honour edited by Ian Fowler and David Zeitlyn. This was only one publication of a group of three dedicated to her at that time, the others being *African Crossroads* (Fowler and Zeitlyn 1996), and a special issue of *Paideuma* (Fowler and Zeitlyn 1995b). These three publications are testimonies to Chilver's standing as an academic, especially in the field of Cameroon studies. Her role in the allocation and administering of research grants is less well known. She has, however, published two papers on the structures within which research was conducted in the immediate post-war situation. How was she in a position to know about these matters? After graduating from Somerville in 1935, she odd-jobbed for her journalist father in the Near East and Balkans, returned to London, and published a book (1939), as well as (under the name Sally Graves) reviews, poems, and other pieces for weeklies. When the war broke

out, like other graduates she was recruited into the civil service, in which, for a time, she was involved in liaison work with the Free French forces. After a brief return to journalism with the *News Chronicle*, she was lured back into the civil service in the form of the Colonial Office. She writes:

At the time [1947] the higher home civil servants in the Colonial office were a remarkable group. One was to become Director of LSE; another had compiled the best Turkish lexicon of his day and was a leading Orientalist; most were scholarly. (Chilver 1977: 103–4)

For some time Chilver worked in an economic division of the Colonial Office as, among other things, assistant to Kenneth Robinson, a scholarly civil servant who later became Director of the London University Institute of Commonwealth Studies and the Vice-Chancellor of Hong Kong University. In 1948 she took over as Secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council, which had been established in 1944, a post she held for ten years.

Before the war, interest in Africa had been exemplified by the establishment of the International African Institute in 1926. In her text below, Chilver refers to a paper by Malinowski in *Africa*. There are indeed three papers by him in early volumes of the journal (1929, 1930, 1939) which make particularly interesting reading. They concern his view of the proper role at that time for the long-established International African Institute and give justification for the engagement of social anthropologists in ‘practical anthropology’—his functionalist anthropology. Together they demonstrate Malinowski’s case for anthropologists to give assistance to men of affairs. His 1929 paper sets the scene: ‘...anthropology would obviously be of the highest importance to the practical man in the colonies’ (1929: 36); ‘...the Institute could be a general meeting-place or central exchange between the practical and theoretical interests in anthropology’ (ibid.: 38). Yet the Institute must be apolitical: it should concentrate upon ‘the study of the facts and processes which bear upon the practical problems and leave to statesmen (and journalists) the final decision of how to apply the results’ (1929: 23; see also Richards 1944). There was a critical response in *Africa* by a Tanganyika Provincial Commissioner (later Governor of Kenya), P. E. Mitchell, who scathingly described Malinowski as

waking up to the splendid prospects of service to mankind which the science to which he has devoted himself holds out, and [as] casting around for the means of applying to practical things the knowledge which he possesses, or feels confident that he can acquire; and he stands a little dismayed before a world which hurries past him and seems to care little for the help which he can give. (Mitchell 1930: 220)

Malinowski was not one to let this go by meekly. He summed up Mitchell’s position regarding the IAI: ‘...practical men should, to the exclusion of the specialist [anthropologist], be organized by [the] Institute in order to work out their own sal-

vation' (1930: 408), then proceeding to shred Mitchell's argument, before ending with an emollient 'olive branch and a few conclusions' (ibid.: 424). Another article by Malinowski (1939) includes a polemical review of Herskovits's book *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact* (1938) and talks of the 'new subject' of culture change. These debates from the 1930s suggest that the professional anthropologists, especially those connected with the IAI, were rethinking their role—and no doubt the sponsorship of anthropological research too.

Changes in the colonies were anticipated in the pre-war survey by Lord Hailey (1938). The 1957 revised version of this influential volume was to be the subject of an anonymous review article by Chilver (1957). In 1938, the year Hailey first published his book, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute was set up. War did not stop the momentum for change:

The statement of policy on Colonial Development and Welfare of February 1940 [was] made at the height of the Battle of Britain.... The funds reserved for central schemes for research, higher education and training included the provision for £5 million a year for research. (Chilver 1957: 120).

Interest in the colonies continued despite the war. For example,

In 1943 a West African Institute of Arts, Industries and Social Science had been established at Achimota, with the purpose of preventing the disintegration of those arts and crafts which appeared capable of survival and development by the study of their social implications and technology. (Chilver 1951: 183)

In her paper for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, printed below, Chilver gives an overview of her work at the Colonial Social Science Research Council, a predecessor of the Social Science Research Council and its successor the ESRC. She wrote a retrospective article in *Anthropological Forum* (1977) on her time as secretary of the CSSRC. Audrey Richards' paper in the same volume records the contribution made in the 1940s by Raymond Firth to the Colonial Research Council, and to the Colonial Social Science Research Council, of which he was the first Secretary. It should be remembered that Firth, like others of his generation and even younger, had been swept into the war effort, in his case into the Admiralty's Naval Intelligence Division. Like Chilver, Audrey Richards became a temporary civil servant dealing with colonial matters. In common with other wartime institutions, the civil service really did represent the democratic civil society so much talked of today. Meanwhile Major Edmund Leach was in the army. Jack Goody and John Barnes, indeed most of the younger anthropologists, were drawn into national service, some even before they had engaged with anthropology. Many acquired overseas experience of unfamiliar cultures. With the professional

anthropologists involved in the war effort and those of graduate age called up, the teaching of social anthropology was reduced.

After the war, the country came under a Labour government, and a spirit of reconstruction was in the air. There was renewed interest in the colonies and their moves towards the independence that most of them achieved twenty years later.

At that time Labour Ministers were heavily influenced by the Fabian Colonial Bureau, especially in so far as African matters were concerned; these bulked large, and Ministers had abandoned any hope of indirect rule as a route to independence, except in a few areas, in which the past refused to lie down (Chilver 1977: 105).

Anthropology departments began to function more normally again. Edwin Ardener was the first, and in his year the only, student taking the BA in social anthropology at LSE; he had been too young for conscription. He was joined in his second year by Wilfred Whitely. There was an age and experience gap between them and those they mingled with, most of whom were graduates.

Chilver left the secretaryship of the CSSRC late in 1957. Among her comments in her retrospective evaluation of 1977, she notes that there were relatively few constraints upon the work of those who obtained grants (valued at a million pounds a year in her time). Of her colleagues in the civil service she noted: 'It was a donnish group and it was as far from their minds as it was from those of their academic advisers to work out any particularly restrictive machinery' (1977: 104). Moreover, 'mere radical opinions did not interest anybody: there were quite a few in the Colonial Office who shared them.' In theory, the government owned the copyright of reports by persons paid for and employed by it, and it published some. But no formal constraint was placed upon the publication of papers in learned journals, and when research workers made their own arrangements for publication a copyright dispensation was automatic. She records some of the complaints of researchers, and of district officers about research workers—for example, of the latter driving like demons to the danger of people and livestock—and behavioural restraints due to the sensibilities of local dignitaries.

But by and large some sartorial and general social eccentricity was expected of CSSRC workers and rather appreciated. Professor Goody arrived attired in second-hand football jerseys and, it is alleged, called on the District Officer in his areas in the colours of Manchester United (*ibid.*: 109–10): I am sure this is an exaggeration, though if so, a pity! Mrs Bohannon in the middle of Tivland (as the records of her remarkable pseudonymous novel agree) dressed for dinner and had candles on her camp table to keep up her morale. One young man came off the boat in a topee and white ducks and was mistaken for a deputy-governor.

Chilver lists some of the names of those whose books were published by HMSO under the auspices of the Colonial Office. They included Phyllis Kaberry, Edmund Leach, Philip Mayer, Lucy Mair, Stephen Morris, G. W. B. Huntingford, J. D. Freeman, Jack Goody, Maurice Freedman, C. K. Meek, F. K. Girling, A. L. Epstein, M. G. Smith, John Middleton and Burton Benedict. She highlights the

excellent Oxford B.Litt. thesis by Conrad Reining, an American, recruited by the Sudan Government, whose wife was a member of the East African Institute of Social Research; this was his 'Applied Anthropology in Theory and Practice' (1952).

More publications were issued from the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the new overseas Research Institutes at Makerere University in Uganda and Ibadan University in Nigeria. It is interesting that two of the overseas institutes, the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute and the East African Institute of Social Research at one time came under the direction of United States citizens (Dr Elizabeth Colson and Lloyd Fallers). Changing African conditions had been anticipated, and epitomised by Richards, who became Director of the Institute at Makerere:

The need for fundamental research by independent fieldworkers cannot be over-emphasized, because anthropological science will perish without it. But it will have to be recognized that African Governments need investigations of a special type and publications suited to their particular needs, and that they will, presumably, have to provide for these as they do for the work of their chemists, botanists, and other scientists. The production of senior investigators, qualified to organize studies of the kind required, takes a considerable time, and if these are going to be needed, the training of a new generation of research workers will have to be planned in advance. The training of African investigators and the development of focal research centres would greatly contribute to the success of such schemes. The study of culture change has brought anthropologists into the field of modern administrative, social, and economic problems, and the best form of co-operation with specialists in these subjects, having regard to the particular difficulties of cross-cultural study, will need to be worked out in future programmes of research. (Richards 1944: 300)

Looking back, we can see that the Colonial Social Science Research Council and the overseas research institutes gave some newly graduated anthropologists, both expatriate to them and locally educated, opportunities for sustained fieldwork at a formative age not open to many young scholars today. In the light of the foregoing and of Chilver's paper here, we can also detect a familiar ring, as, even before the war, anthropologists searched for new relevance and new claims for sponsorship. It is such factors that give the text below its relevance for the history of the funding of field research in anthropology, a history which needs to be reappraised and rewritten in the light of current preoccupations, and vice versa. It may well be discovered that the anthropologists of the 1940s and 1950s had more academic freedom than those of today. Particularly valuable would be a new content analysis of the published works, according to period, and the theoretical contributions embodied in them. These could be matched against analyses, not only of the effects of sponsorship, but of the reception of these works by both 'the practical man' and the anthropological specialist. This field would make an excellent topic for a doctoral thesis, assuming one has not been recently undertaken on this

topic—the texts quoted here and the references therein would make a possible place to begin.

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