Gluckman's Legacy

A Seminar Review

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Werbner, Richard. (2020), *Anthropology after Gluckman: The Manchester School, Colonial and Postcolonial Transformations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

Richard Werbner's new monograph was the topic of a lively online African Studies Seminar held at Oxford University on 21 January 2021. Hosted by Wale Adebanwi, the seminar drew 180 attendants – from the United Kingdom, continental Europe, North America, Israel and Africa. This was a sign both of the worldwide interests in the legacies of the Manchester School, and also of the sorts of online assemblages emerging in COVID times. Adam Kuper, myself, Marilyn Strathern and Richard Fardon acted as discussants.

Werbner's deeply reflective, playful, voice is most authoritative on the continued relevance of works by Max Gluckman and the network of anthropologists he assembled at Manchester. The monograph, he said, was designed to help current generations of anthropologists gain a sense of where they come from, and why this sense might matter for the way forward. Being well over six feet tall, he recalled, Gluckman described himself as a pygmy who was fond of standing on the shoulders of a giant, so that he could see much further than the giant himself. From Manchester, those of us anthropologists who experience vulnerability and endure risk researching politically sensitive issues can take the lessons of endurance, of resilience and of the need to keep on rethinking our subject.

After Gluckman experiments in bringing together intellectual history and social biography. It builds on Robert Gordon's (2018) intimately informed biography of Gluckman. As intellectual history, it tells of rich collaboration and intense argument within Gluckman's inner circle. As social biography, Werbner's book focusses on Gluckman, Elizabeth Colson, Clyde Mitchell, A. L. Epstein and Victor Turner as primary subjects, each powerfully significant for one another. They were mavericks

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who claimed a unity not in research interests or theoretical assumptions but in evolving conversations. As such, there are different perspectives on the 'schoolness' of the Manchester School. The outsider, Mary Douglas, identified the emergence of a body of scholars who worked in close discussions on common problems. As insider, Clyde Mitchell, saw searing contradictions. Their only common denominator was that they had Gluckman as a teacher and wrote ethnographies rich in actual cases. They argued intensely at seminars but disagreed more respectfully in publications.

In his presentation, Werbner admitted to riding his hobbyhorse – the destabilisation of ethnographic texts – at some length in the book. He spoke of three strategies: 'deconstruction', 're-description' and 're-analysis'. Deconstruction, which had its heyday after James Clifford and George Marcus' *Writing Culture* (1986), aims at the critical recovery of concealment, usually of political biases, in ethnographic texts. The interrogation led to severe doubt about the value and even possibility of ethnography. He associated re-description with Strathern's (1988) attempt to rethink sociality. She examines taken-for-granted premises and constructs in ethnographic texts and makes them explicit. Her re-descriptions did not lead to self-doubt, but to an efflorescence of writing known as the 'new Melanesian ethnography'. Re-analysis is an older strategy, which was cultivated by Gluckman. The aim is to hunt for mistakes and what is missing, and discover how theoretical orientations constitute blinkers. In Werbner's own re-analysis of the Chihamba ritual (Turner [1962] 1975), he asks how Turner's familiar ideas shed light on the ritual.

Werbner then turned to his portraits of Colson and Mitchell. Colson came from a small town in Minnesota, where Ojibwa Indians lived in uneasy co-existence with white settlers. These experiences led to an abiding interest in discrimination, placement and displacement. *Contra* Gluckman, she was a sceptic of any system as a consistent and well-integrated totality. In her monograph on the Makah Indians, Colson (1953) captures the Rashomon Effect, which is the way witnesses tell stories from different perspectives. In an essay on the ethics of heroism, martyrdom and courage, she argued that for the Tonga of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) a virtuous man was readier to resist domination by running away than by standing up to it (Colson 1971). Published in a *Festschrift* to Edward Evans-Pritchard, the essay creates an ironic contrast to heroic Nuer men, and to Evans-Pritchard's tales about his own war-time exploits. From the United States, she brought field theory, sociometry and small group sociology, which were crucial to the creation of network analysis.

Werbner speculated that Mitchell's early experiences of having a Scottish father who worked for South African Railways might have contributed to the lifelong disposition to follow people on the move, particularly strangers encountering new situations in town. He had an affinity for using mathematics to map out how people navigate through flux and complexity. Mitchell's (1956) study of the Kalela dance showed how, in the face of adversity, people still celebrated with playful creativity. Werbner described Bernard Magubane's (1971) attack on Mitchell's work as *ad hominem*. Magubane spoke with the moral authority of an African National Congress activist, whose meta-narrative about race, class and imperial domination left little room for the concepts of social situation and social field. For Magubane, the very notion of a white person claiming expertise on Africa was suspect, and any focus on everyday life obscured the class struggle. Nonetheless, there is much of value to Mitchell's approach to cultural innovation in the Copper Belt, and his ideas on networks find a contemporary expression in Strathern's relational thought.

Adam Kuper gave a group portrait of the original Manchester School, in line with Mary Douglas' concepts of groups and grids. Fifty years ago, he said, his description of the school provoked an angry reaction, amongst others, from Gluckman himself (Kuper 1973). This backlash gives insight into the very nature of the Manchester School. Gluckman, its charismatic leader, was formed by the radical milieu of the University of the Witwatersrand and by the critique of colonial race relations. To the Rhodes-Livingston Institute and Manchester he brought a critique of conventional British anthropology, which posited stable, homogeneous, tribal societies as its object of study. Gluckman attracted ex-servicemen who were also radical, some being on the margins of the Communist Party. They shared his anti-colonial rhetoric and his concern to understand local societies in a broader political and economic framework. Ronald Frankenberg would joke: 'We are all Maxists here'. This approach was translated into method and theory during departmental seminars. The seminars involved challenges, often conducted in an aggressive, masculine, style, that alienated outsiders. One consequence was the virtual exclusion of women from Gluckman's circle. Kuper suggested that Colson came in later, and that she was somewhat on the margins of the Manchester group.

One key idea was that of process and change, which had to be studied both on a large scale and at the level of local conditions. Another was that conflict was part and parcel of everyday life. Gluckman and Turner used case studies to explore how internal divisions regularly

brought about crises. Network analysis came in later, and was another attempt to capture changing factional relations at the local level. The Manchester School also introduced the study of urban areas, migrant labour, trade unions and the rising bourgeoisie. These topics had already been pioneered in South Africa. Although Emrys Peters worked in the Middle East, and Frankenberg in Wales, African case material was the common reference in the development of theoretical ideas. Kuper referred to the troubled secessions of Victor Turner, in many ways the outstanding ethnographer and theorist of this cohort, and those of Peter Worsley. Mary Douglas would possibly say that these successions were inevitable, given the kind of chattel structure Gluckman had built and developed.

I spoke about Gluckman's left-liberal political orientation, marked by an opposition to racial segregation, support for African independence movements and empathy with the Kenyan Mau Mau. This orientation, he argued, was continuous with anthropological thinking in South Africa, his country of origin.

The South African liberal tradition of social anthropology was established with the appointment of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown to the University of Cape Town in 1921, and of Winifred Hoernlé to the University of the Witwatersrand in 1924. Both were students of Alfred Haddon at Cambridge. Haddon, a socialist of some sort, observed the disastrous consequences of colonialism in Ireland, where he taught, and in the Torres Straits, where he did research. The result of colonial policy, he wrote to Thomas Huxley in 1891, is that we 'exterminate, intentionally or by force, the inhabitants of the countries we annex'. Anthropological knowledge, he believed, could counter the 'ignorance' that 'engenders callousness', 'the mother of injustice, cruelty and legalised murder' (cited in Stocking 1993: 8). Haddon believed in the unity of unity of humankind, a belief confirmed by physiological and psychometric tests that showed no significant differences between Torres Straits Islanders and the English.

During his fieldwork in the Andaman Islands and Western Australia, Radcliffe-Brown witnessed some of the worst brutalities of colonial rule. In the Andaman Islands, colonial diseases had reduced the native population from 5,500 to 1,589. In Western Australia, he worked among Aboriginal people who had been dispossessed of their land and survived the Punjara Massacre. The central theme of his inaugural lecture was the impossibility of racial segregation and the need South Africa had to form a new society, incorporating both whites and Blacks. He also argued that the government should formulate laws in accord-

ance with the dictates of native consciousness. Radcliffe-Brown was a member of the Cape Peninsula Joint Society, in which Black and white citizens discussed matters of mutual concern. He testified to the Economic and Wage Commission of 1925 that Black labourers were primarily responsible for the creation of the country's wealth and deserved the same rights of citizenship as white settlers.

During Hoernlé's fieldwork in German West Africa during 1913, her primary research participants were the Witboois, who basically lived as prisoners of war on the outskirts of Windhoek. She taught common principles and values in a country obsessed with difference. Her students were the children of Jewish immigrants, such as Ellen Hellman, Hilda Kuper and Gluckman; and loyalists of South Africa's former prime minister, Jan Smuts, such as Eileen and Jack Krige. Gluckman and his colleagues worked closely with liberal organisations. Hilda Kuper interviewed women prisoners, and Hellman did fieldwork in Rooiyard, a slum on the outskirts of the city. No fewer than 109 of its 365 women residents suffered police arrests.

The differences between Hoernlé and Bronislaw Malinowski's views of South Africa were apparent in presentations they gave to a conference on education in Johannesburg in 1934. Malinowski called for African self-government and objected to the imposition of European schooling on Africans. Hoernlé called for the creation of a spirit of South Africanism that would animate both Blacks and whites. She objected to the fact that few Africans were taught the universal principles of science (see Niehaus 2015).

South African connections to Manchester, I said, continued well after Gluckman. This is evident in the background of staff members such as Mitchell, John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff; and of visitors such as Radcliffe-Brown, Hilda Kuper and David Webster. Their most abiding message was that knowledge of human similarities and differences has profoundly important political consequences.

Marylin Strathern discussed some aspects of the international trajectory of the Manchester School. Werbner, she said, shows that the life of the school had unexpected continuities for the macro-history of anthropology. She said that Werbner gives us a wonderful portrait of the dynamism that kept people within the orbit of common problems: 'Every portrait is also a multiple portrait and the whole is a priceless record of a social milieu'.

She focussed specifically on the contributions of A. L. Epstein. Epstein was the first student to openly challenge his teacher, and his rebellion throws light on the heterogeneity that flourished under

Gluckman. Initially, Epstein closely followed Gluckman's work on legal systems. In an iconic paper, 'The case method in the field of law', he suggests that the case study method and cases assembled in courts imprint upon each other. He also asked how the reasonable man might act, given the conflicting demands of social life (Epstein 1967). But in 1973, Epstein thought Gluckman had confused things, and that he had failed to distinguish between 'fairness' and 'plausibility' as different criteria for reasonableness (Epstein 1973). The growing controversy concerned the very role of ethnography in the derivation of analytical insight. In Werbner's opinion, Epstein's distinctions stripped away the complexity of the dilemmas judges faced. Epstein's revisionism was a harbinger of a greater departure from Gluckman, and a move towards the anthropology of affect. In his analysis of dispute settlement among the Tolai of Melanesia, Epstein (1992) argued that the force of emotion was absent from Gluckman's framework. Here, the forensic use of emotional expressions, the significance of displays and concealment, and the use of appeals to compassion were most apparent.

Strathern contemplated Werbner' s thesis about the connections between Mitchell and Epstein's network analysis and Melanesian relationism. Because relational thinking was not in debate at the time, she argued, we can only pose these questions retrospectively. But academic debate did leave recognisable trails and markers. Here, Werbner draws, not only on written records, but also on his intimate connections with the actors themselves. He does not merely describe the interactions but continues them. He brings these interactions into the present, and uses present events to illuminate them. In conclusion, Strathern invoked Colson's notion of the paradox circle – engaging in old dilemmas but dismissing our forebearers' efforts in these matters. Werbner shows that, in the legal case that originally led Gluckman to formulate his concept of 'the reasonable man', the judge did actually show compassion for the personal circumstances of the accused. This means that Gluckman did take cognisance of affect. This observation led Strathern to ask: 'Did Epstein's intervention have to happen before Gluckman could be heard again?'

Richard Fardon addressed Werbner's chapters on Turner and the Chihamba ritual. He sensed a serious purpose and also a sense of playful mischief, and wondered whether through his re-analysis of the Chihamba ritual Werbner did a hatchet job on Turner. There is something of the following aphorism in Werbner's treatment of Turner: 'A presentiment becomes certainty; if the presentiment is wrong, it still becomes certainty, and if nothing occurs as the presentiment predicted,

it still becomes certainty'. Little of what Turner goes looking for, especially in the latter part of his intellectual journey, is based on correct assumptions, and things do not turn out as they are supposed to. But they still become certainty.

For Fardon, the chapter on Turner' biography appears as a sort of abstract case, and the re-analysis of Chihamba concrete evidence, for the prosecution. Between 1950 and 1954, Turner undertook a total of two years' fieldwork. He never returned, reportedly saying that he would simply find more of what he had already found. This is a very striking way in which experience seems to have concretised in someone's mind. The period between 1957 and 1963, during which Turner was most closely associated with the enduring values of the Manchester School, was the most productive phase in his career. Turner explored the tensions between matriliny and virilocality, and the social dramas following breaches. His essays addressed symbols, Machona, colour classification, liminality and so forth. In 1961, Turner left for the United States, never returning, to make a home for himself in the United States. The break was terribly difficult for both sides. Now Turner explored new sorts of concerns, such as the opposition between structure and *communitas*, and his thinking became unnuanced.

Turner's account of Chihamba, first published in 1962, is representative of the period where, it seems, he was going over to the 'dark side', to use Werbnerian terms. It was part of his transition from analysing ritual within a social drama to analysing something which is more intrinsically ritual drama. In his re-analysis, Werbner reconstitutes the initial ethnography in terms of sequencing. He observes that Turner seems to work more in terms of a binary than a triad. His presentiment comes from Catholicism, and he sees the culmination of the ritual as revealing the essence of the sub-deity Kavula to be illusive. In the end, participants are shown an emptiness. For Turner, this demonstrates the 'unsayability' of what lies at the existential heart of ritual. Had Turner followed Arnold van Gennep's model more closely, he would have recognised that the second day had all the characteristics of liminality. The ritual deals not with what is unsayable, but with things that are not sayable in polite company. Werbner looks at the phallic symbolism and at the mimed sexual intercourse, which participants find hysterically funny. Turner fails to recognise the extraordinary ambivalence in ritual, and that people can find things simultaneously comic and tragic, dominating and liberating.

Werbner responded to each discussant. He felt that Kuper was wrong about masculinity and politics in the Manchester School.

Gluckman saw Colson as a worthy successor at the Rhodes-Livingston Institute, and listened to her very carefully. Werbner also claimed that the Manchester School was politically varied. There was a difference, he said, between the hard-leftist orientations of Frankenberg and Worsley, and the anti-colonial stance of Mitchell and Epstein. Werbner described Kuper's account as unitary, and his own as plural. Werbner agreed with me that the South African context had made Gluckman more aware of change and deep social conflicts. He pointed to Emmanuel Gluckman, Max's father, who had defended African clients and popularised the cause of the Birwa people, who had been dispossessed of their land in Bechuanaland. Werbner thanked Strathern for pointing out the transformations in Epstein's work, and acknowledged her insight that we see time as linear and have an aversion to turning back. Werbner endorsed Fardon's claims about presentiment, and added that working on Turner's period in the United States opened his eyes to celebrity as a potentially destructive force. Turner's undoing was celebrity and his notion that he kept on living in the world of the Ndembu as it had been.

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