Anthropological Reflections / Réflexions Anthropologiques

The Accidental Editor: An Interview with Andrew P. Lyons

Jasmin Habib *University of Waterloo*

In the Fall of 2010, and after three years at the helm, Andrew P. Lyons announced that he would not be seeking another term as the Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of *Anthropologica*. As he had retired in 2009 and is the co-author of two new edited collections, I thought it an opportune moment to ask Andrew to reflect on his work as well as his terms as Managing Editor and EIC of the journal of the Canadian Anthropology Society, which led to his receipt of CASCA's first Distinguished Service Award in 2010. We conducted the interview in the spring of 2011.

Jasmin Habib: Please tell us a little about your life in Britain, the environment in which you grew up, and the kind of things you feel most affected your sense of self and your future.

Andrew Lyons: I grew up in the city of Leeds, which is a city of half a million people in the north of England. It is known, mainly, because, before the takeover of garment manufacturing by East Asia, it produced 80% of Britain's trousers. The heavily polluted southern portions produced huge quantities of rhubarb, perhaps because nothing else would grow there. Some of my relatives were involved in the garment business, but had nothing to do with the rhubarb.

JH: [Laughs]

AL: And my father was a public health doctor, he was a Medical Officer of Health. My mother was a teacher who gave up teaching when I was five years old. I attended an all-boys high school, or, as it then called itself, Leeds Grammar School. It had a Latin motto, *Nullius Non Mater Disciplinae* which most of us couldn't translate but meant "the mother of no small amount of learning." Apart from being bullied there, I had a basically good time. I was hopeless at any form of athletics, but I did reasonably well academically. I specialized in Classics

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from the age of 15 to 17, prior to going to university. My parents were terrified that I might seek to pursue a career in it, as there might be no jobs. They encouraged me therefore to do Law. Going to Oxford University for my undergraduate degree, I quickly discovered the existence of other people of the opposite sex of which I had been almost totally unaware in high school and, also, I discovered I hated Law. The British system was not set up so that you could change your Major the way you can here. All the course work was in Law. I spent my third year having a nervous breakdown so that I would have to take an extra year over my degree, and then announced to my horrified parents that I had no intention of taking up the practice of law. I'd found something even more impractical than Classics to do, or so I thought: Anthropology. I had very little idea, actually, how many anthropologists are in this position when they first become anthropologists. I had very little real idea of what anthropologists did. I had two very contrasting ideas: of practical work in race relations, which you might do with an anthropology degree, and of very old-fashioned work in folklore, which was the only anthropology I was properly aware of. In fact, it was a kind of Frazerian atheistic impulse that pushed me, more than anything else, into Anthropology. Plus the fact that it was not Law.

JH: When would this be?

AL: I graduated with the law degree in 1966 and I did what was called the Diploma in Social Anthropology, which was a one-year post-graduate course at Oxford. Because they thought I must be clearly interested in legal anthropology they gave me a legal anthropologist as a supervisor, Jean Buxton. She turned out to be quite inspiring and a little disappointed when she found my interests were elsewhere. I looked like I was floundering in Anthropology too when I met one of the department's top students from the previous year, purely by accident. My date for the student ball had decided to dump me because she was looking for someone who could help her political career more. She was the daughter of a Tory M.P. And I went to a party at the Institute of Social Anthropology looking for a date. And my future wife, Harriet, went to look for someone to mend her motorbike. One of us succeeded. [Laughs]

JH: [Laughs] The motorbike remained unrepaired?

AL: For the time being. It was eventually repaired. Harriet with missionary zeal managed to convert the young atheist to a new religion: Anthropology. I did a thesis on racism. My supervisor gave me marvelous letters of recommendation based on the one chapter of the thesis that he ever read.

JH: Who was your supervisor?

AL: He was called Kenneth Kirkwood. He was the "Rhodes Professor of Race Relations." He was a very gentle person who was not a great publisher or a great reader of theses. I got to know him initially because of my involvement as a student in the anti-apartheid movement. He was a sponsor of the anti-racist student organization to which I belonged. But I really got very little academic criticism from him. Accordingly, when I eventually got my degree, in 1974, I had the knowledge that my supervisor had not read it completely. The supervisor was not on the committee. That was the Oxford practice.

JH: What do you mean?

AL: You had an internal and an external examiner, and the internal examiner had not usually read the thesis before submission—the supervisor was not supposed to be in the room when the exam took place. There had been seven students who had taken their doctoral exam the year before I came up, and the librarian, known for her tact, informed me just before the oral exam that they had all been referred or failed, except one.

JH: Oh my.

AL: The examiners couldn't face reading that one again. This was true of mine too. "Two *huge* volumes," said Godfrey Lienhardt who was my internal examiner and had the title of "Reader in African Sociology" within the Institute of Social Anthropology. The title, *Reader*, denoted a high status, a notch below the Professor. The thesis was entitled, *The Question of Race in Anthropology from the Time of J.F. Blumenbach to that of Franz Boas*. I approached the topic from the perspective of a social anthropologist with a passion for history. Lienhardt and Meyer Fortes (the External) said that, though they couldn't detect any errors in my treatment of physical anthropology, the distant and sometimes incredulous tone of my narrative made it clear that I had never really handled a skull. They said that the thesis was good, but my suspicion was that neither of them could face reading the 540 pages again, so they passed it. And my mother tried reading it and fell asleep. It's the only thesis written on the history of racism that caused people to fall asleep.

JH: [Laughs]

AL: Its problem, more seriously, was that it was a recitation of facts without a particularly original argument—except for the good side winning out over the bad side. And there was this is by no means innovative statement: ideas we think today are immoral were once prevalent among respectable scientists. Mind you there was some difficulty with saying that even in the 1970s, because when I tried to get the thesis published—and there were several reasons why it could not be published—one of the reviewers (who was clearly either very conservative in his academic approach, or much worse) attacked me for saying that Darwin was a racist. The reviewer said Darwin was quite enlightened for his time. I always worry about this kind of historicism, because Darwin did after all compare Australian Aborigines to his dog, with some intimation that the dog might be more intelligent. And I believe one could call this racist. [Laughter]

JH: Then and still, of course!

AL: It doesn't mean that Darwin was a bad scientist. We have to get out of these ideas that people who are good scientists in some respects are necessarily moral people. Meanwhile I had been encouraged to apply for a job in the United States and I got a job in early 1970 at a relatively unknown Ohio university called Kent State through a scheme operated through the English-Speaking Union and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation called the British Teacher Program. It allowed young British academics who had just got or who were about to get their doctorate to teach for two years tax-free with the understanding that they would return to Britain and on the premise that the U.S. was short of university teachers. The shortage had disappeared by 1970. I got the job at Kent State because the Dean of Arts and Sciences hadn't read the fine print and thought that Woodrow Wilson Foundation and English-Speaking Union would supply a British teacher for the anthropology program free of charge. He therefore named a munificent salary—didn't think why he'd been asked to suggest the amount. When I was already in the country he found he was unable to cancel the contract! That was my first job. [Laughter]

Meanwhile other things had happened at Kent State. I had been appointed in February 1970. Harriet had been given part-time work, though she was more qualified than I was. We had no idea what that meant, or how bad it would be. However on May 4th, 1970, the infamous Kent State shootings occurred, and we were asked, "did we still want to go?" I remember May 5th very well, because we went to the local newsagent on the Cowley Road in Oxford to pick up as many newspapers as possible to remind us of what had happened the previous day. And the gentleman at the counter said, "Why are you buying all these newspapers?" "Because we're going to teach at that place, Kent State next year" was our reply. "Pity they can't do that here," he said.

JH: Oh my!

AL: He was referring to student radicals, people who organized demonstrations. I once organized one. We occupied a cricket field in protest against a visiting South African team. We actually got onto the pitch...left wing demonstrations aren't supposed to do... you are *not* supposed to actually accomplish what you set out to do. [Chuckling] We actually out-foxed the police by pretending to be cricket fans, and then on two shrill whistles at five o'clock we moved onto the pitch and occupied it. And we'd have got off without an arrest, but for the fact that Christopher Hitchens seemed determined to get himself arrested. He also got his picture in all the papers, a rather famous picture by now.

JH: So what year was this?

AL: 1969. But anyway, so here we were at Kent State a year later.

JH: So, you arrived in September? Or July?

AL: September. And during that year, my first year ever of teaching, we had a visit from Jane Fonda, which caused a lecherous number of the sociology faculty to salivate. [Laughter] Joan Baez also visited, and spray-painted on the wall, "Would it hurt you very much if I told you I loved you?" There was also William Kunstler, the Chicago Seven lawyer. Phil Ochs who was a local boy sang "Boy from Ohio" to an excited audience. Allen Ginsberg came too. And the experience was strange not just because of the political climate but because I had never encountered any academic institution quite like Kent State before. In the same class you could find someone who could not spell elementary words in the English language as well as the son of a professor who became a colleague of Noam Chomsky at MIT, after an early excursion into the Oxford Institute in Social Anthropology. [Laughter] Our friend is called Richard Larson. He's now at Stony Brook. His main interest is in semantics and his fieldwork was on the grammar of Warlpiri.

JH: Is this at all related to Michael Jackson's work on the Walpiri?

AL: Well not quite. It preceded it. Its concern was whether Chomsky's ideas of universal forms of deep structure and linguistic competency could be applied to Warlpiri. And his conclusions were that they couldn't, which might mean that Chomsky's models were Eurocentric. I mainly associate Michael Jackson with work in West Africa, but that's because I was an Africanist and read and taught his work on the Kuranko.

JH: Okay, so, you're at Kent State and you have a classroom with students that couldn't spell and students who were sons of professors. What did that mean for you?

AL: It meant that you had to be able to pitch a lecture so that the people who were just literate could understand it, without turning off the person at the top. It meant developing the kind of skill that you never are taught at a British university, or in most universities. And it was an interesting adventure. It took me a while. At the end of two years I had a student-initiated teaching award and no job. [Laughs] I had several experiences of students who were sadly marginal...some of the stories about their howlers are funny after a fashion, but they're also very, very, very sad.

JH: Sad, yes.

AL: I took a year off to finish my thesis.

JH: Did you go back to Britain at that time then?

AL: No, no, no. Harriet took over a position at Kent State University for one year. And then we moved. We had long years of commuting, at first between Massachusetts and New Jersey, and then between Ontario and Massachusetts. Harriet taught at the University of Massachusetts, taking a one-year position, and then she moved to nearby Smith College. I taught at Rutgers-Newark for four years. It was then the least fashionable campus of the Rutgers system. Rutgers is simply the state university of New Jersey. So it's not just Rutgers College, in New Brunswick, New Jersey or Douglas College as the women's college was called. It's a state university system. So I was in the branch campus, rather like the equivalent of University of Toronto at Erindale [now Mississauga] or Scarborough, with privileges to teach at the graduate program in New Brunswick, which I did for my last two years, teaching theory and African ethnography. It was not a happy department at Newark. The anthropologists—my fellow anthropologists Janet Siskind, Alice Manning and Anne-Marie Cantwell—were superb, but the sociologists were exceptionally unhappy and the school was exceptionally unhappy. The dean and my department chair were at loggerheads.

JH: Hmm, okay.

AL: A long dispute ended with the election of a committee to investigate the governance of the college to get rid of the dean.

JH: Oh?

AL: The department chair was peering into our boxes to see if we'd picked up our ballots and phoning to ask me which way I'd voted, long distance! The chair got rid of the dean finally when he threatened him loudly, "If you don't resign in 24-hours, everybody will hear of your sexual peccadilloes." And a female voice from the next room yelled back, "We all hear you." The dean resigned and committed suicide.

JH: Oh no!

AL: And that was the atmosphere in that department at that university, in the Newark campus... while I was there. I had, however, received some preference in part because an ex-Marxist, who was by then the most conservative member of the department, adopted me as a suitable specimen of the younger generation and invited me to his seminar, the Columbia Seminar on the Contents and Methods of Social Sciences. My conservative friend, Joe Maier, was a member of the Frankfurt School, the literary executive of Max Horkheimer and a friend of Herbert Marcuse...And my wife made a comment that my English tendency to wear ties—she thought I'd been born wearing a tie—had contributed to this image of respectability, which masked my remaining radicalism. [Laughs] So I mean, I...at the end of four years I was at a dilemma. I had taken too long on the thesis; I didn't know how to publish it. I had developed other ideas, some of which turned out to be fertile, including starting fieldwork in Nigeria. But I was nowhere—we were spending all our time commuting—I was floundering. I needed time; the tenure clock was beating. And I had two terrors: one was that I'd get tenure at Rutgers Newark and the other was that I wouldn't.

JH: [Laughs] Right.

AL: I decided to look for other jobs. I went to the American [Anthropological Association] meetings and I applied

for about half a dozen positions. I got three interviews at the American meetings in 1976. Two of them were for Canadian universities. In one case, someone had accidentally deposited my application for Indiana University-Purdue in the Simon Fraser [University] box. And I got interviewed for a job in cultural ecology at Simon Fraser [University], though I didn't do cultural ecology. [Laughter] They said, "Well you've got to be able to do it, you've been to Oxford, you heard Evans-Pritchard and Lienhardt lecture, you know all about the Nuer cows. You can teach ecology!" "Well, there's more to cultural ecology," I tried to explain, "than teaching Oxford functionalism and I think, if you respect cultural ecology, you don't appoint me because I don't do it." So, I did myself out of that job.

JH: [Laughter]. Oh.

AL: There was an interview with an American university that didn't take me, and in fact declared an unfilled vacancy for that position that year. That was Stanford. I did have the opportunity to be interviewed for an hour by the remarkable Renato Rosaldo. And then I was interviewed for a job in a place I'd never heard of in Canada, by someone equally impressive, Mathias Guenther. I went for an interview; it was a terrible February day when I gave my talk at Laurier, February the 22nd, 1977. There'd been freezing rain; one of the two cab companies refused to take me from the hotel. The other came. I skidded my way into a portable. There were only about a dozen people there. I had a couple of talks prepared and I gave them a talk called "Why Anthropologists Should Read *The Water Babies*," which was a talk about the racism and whimsical anti-evolutionism of Charles Kingsley, the novelist, imperialist, clergyman and Cambridge Professor who was intellectually attracted to Darwinism but was concerned about its lack of moral certainty. The talk was deliberately gauged to annoy people who were very conservative. I decided to give this particular lecture because I had quickly decided that Laurier was a rather conservative place and I wanted to see whether they were prepared to tolerate me. The talk was enlivened by unintentional sight gags. In those days you could smoke anywhere. And I smoked a pipe. It was my habit to put the semi-extinguished pipe in my pocket from which bits of smoke would occasionally exude.

JH: [Laughs]

AL: I also hate standing still when I talk. I move around the room. In this particular case there was a step leading to a platform in the portable and a lot of wires. People were speculating as to whether I would set fire to myself, trip over the wires, fall over the step, or do all three at once! [Laughter] I then went to...I met the dean, a genial classicist who had taught at McGill University several years on one-year contracts and I asked him what my chances at tenure were, and what I needed to get tenure. And he said, "With your teaching record it shouldn't be too difficult: Just don't pee in front of the class." [Laughter]

JH: What?!

AL: I took these sage words to heart [laughter]...and received tenure a year later.

JH: [Laughing] Oh my! And Harriet followed?

AL: Harriet and I were stuck commuting a thousand miles a week. We took planes everywhere. Harriet was in a department in a school where she enjoyed teaching. Smith is a good college. The department politics weren't pleasant and she was by no means sure of tenure, because there were tenure quotas. They were in fact never applied, but there were also nasty politics—departments divided into two factions and she was worried. But above all else, the commuting proved terribly stressful for both of us. She'd gotten her doctorate in the interim, but a key publishing opportunity was lost because of delays caused by doctoral work and the commute. So she paid a price, and we found ourselves stranded all over the place. Allegheny Airlines, the predecessor of U.S. Airlines, managed to strand us in Chicago instead of Buffalo when we commuted between Ontario and Massachusetts...it was just horrendous. The winter weather meant that the connections were horrible. On one occasion, our friends Mathias and Patricia Guenther were to come to dinner and Harriet came in late after a flight delay. After that the department decided that they might try to do something. We looked for a joint-appointment. We both wanted to be in anthropology, in a tenured position. And we didn't want to give up anthropology, but we couldn't take commuting anymore. So we put up with the reduction of income and made up some of the difference with part-time teaching. Then Laurier President, John Weir, was interested in a model for joint appointments, so we sought advice. We found three examples: one at the University of Prince Edward Island, which interested John Weir because he came from that province, and another one that I forget, and the third, although they were by then full-time and no longer on the joint appointment, was that of Michelle and Renato Rosaldo at Stanford [University] who were very helpful by writing and describing the nature of their former appointment.

JH: So the commuting ended once Harriet came to Waterloo?

AL: The commuting ended. We had the joint appointment. The first few years went pretty well for both of us. Particularly when we adopted, had a young family, and did fieldwork. But when Harriet took over as Chair of the department it became quite clear that the university wanted more out of us than one person could really give on a full-time basis. They really wanted the work of two for a bargain price. We began to fret a bit. We had three years on a one-and-a-third position, but they couldn't guarantee us that, so Harriet, who had been teaching some courses in women's studies, applied for and obtained a job at the University of Waterloo. Meanwhile, however, I had taken over, with the help of Mathias and Harriet, the journal, *Anthropologica*.

JH: Ah, okay. So please tell us about that experience.

AL: It was an accident. My induction into journal editing occurred when I'd published relatively little. I was merely concerned about getting something into print. The article in question had been accepted for a Memorial Festschrift for one of the people who had been kindest to us in our academic careers, Victor Turner. He had greatly influenced my wife's work, and indeed he influenced some of work we did in the field in Nigeria, about which more later. I still think that his earlier ethnographic work, on the Ndembu, is some of the finest anthropology that has ever existed. But, what was most inspiring about Vic and his wife Edie was the help, and the amity that exuded from them to other young academics. I remember hearing a particularly awful presentation at one of Vic's sessions. And Vic came up to us and said,

> Now listen, Andy and Harriet, take this to heart. You think that talk was awful. I could tell by your faces. And you're probably wondering why this old fool was so kind. Well, let me tell you something. I listened very carefully to what was said and I picked out the one good thing in the paper and praised it. What's the point in doing anything else? You simply discourage a young scholar.

Vic was the father of a university friend of ours called Fred Turner, who is a poet. It was partly through Vic's and Fred's encouragement that we stayed in academia during the tough times of the commute. And Vic was a bit of our inspiration in the work we did on mass media in Nigeria, even though it was the kind of work he never did. We were interested in the way that politics and ritual played out in indigenous media. Sadly, while we were in the field, Vic died. We wrote an article called "Return of the Ikoi-Koi," and we contributed it to a Festschrift, which was being assembled by Paul Bouissac for *Anthropologica*, which was then under the editorship of Kathryn Molohon. Three years passed and the article did not appear.

JH: Right. Hmm, I didn't know you'd had the same experience that I did. [Laughs]

AL: It was not as long.

JH: No, it wasn't.

AL: But I still worried. This was not the first time this had happened to me. I'd already...I'd written an article with Harriet for a Festschrift for an elderly sociologist in New York City, Werner Cahnman. It took so long to come out that it turned out to be a memorial Festschrift. Of course, the Turner volume already was a volume of this kind. Anyway, I rang up the editor of *Anthropologica* to ask "When?" She commended me for my politeness and asked if I'd like to take over.

JH: And that was what year?

AL: Late 1987. What had happened was that *Anthropologica* had been run from Université St. Paul by a distinguished series of editors, many of whom were members of the Oblate Order. It was a private journal, but because of its prestige it had no rival in Canada. However, it depended greatly on efforts of a very small group of people. And in the end the stress and strain of running it at all was too much, so it collapsed. After a lapse of nearly two years, Kathryn Molohon took on the journal with the support of her university, Laurentian, who bought it. But what they offered her was not really adequate and Molohon ended up producing as many as five volumes, five or six volumes of the journal single-handedly, printing them herself.

JH: That's impressive!

AL: She did more than that because...many of the libraries had cancelled subscriptions when the journal did not appear for two years. She wrote to them one by one and restored the circulation. So a lot of what others took credit for since, was the work of Kathryn Molohon at Laurentian, who must be acknowledged and rarely is. All people knew was that it was taking a while for their work to appear. What they didn't know was that they were deal-

ing with a one-person operation. I took the idea of taking over the journal to the Vice-President Academic at Laurier, Russell Muncaster, and he said it was quite a good idea. They'd support it, provided that the press could take it on, and as I wasn't yet senior, provided Mathias Guenther would be the lead editor. Mathias and Harriet and I took the journal on. Mathias was Managing Editor; we handled the manuscripts. Then, when Harriet went to University of Waterloo and Mathias gave up the managing editor's job in 1992, I was left with the journal for five years, with some help from Karen Szala-Meneok who taught anthropology at Laurier, and two external editors, Stanley Barrett [who taught at the University of Guelph] and Regna Darnell [who taught at the University of Western Ontario]. And some help from Harriet. I did most of the work on the journal from 1993 to 1997. I kept it alive, but it really was too much. We'd also been turned down for a grant and we'd been told that there was room for only one journal in Canada. Both journals at the time had weaknesses. *Culture*, the journal which had been founded around the time *Anthropologica* temporarily ceased publication, had a basis in the CASCA membership, but had built up very little in the way of library subscriptions. We had the library subscriptions, but we had not enough individual subscribers. Together, I thought, we would make one viable journal. I had tried to persuade the then editor of *Culture*, Margaret Seguin to take over in 1993. She wasn't interested in any form of merger. In 1997, however, it so happened that because of printing difficulties the then editor of *Culture*, Christine Jourdan, approached Wilfrid Laurier Press with a view to having them publish it too. And it occurred to me here was a chance for merger. Consequently, Christine and I and the Press held negotiations and it was decided to have the merger.

JH: What were the articles published in that period, Andy? Can you say something about what was happening in Canadian Anthropology at that time?

AL: Well, in terms of what was published, I often think that we were the last source of Lévi-Strauss' structuralism in English. There was a heck of a lot of things we got which were structural analyses of myth, very much reflecting the tradition that *Anthropologica* had in indigenous studies—doing a lot of work not only on history or indigenous social organization, but on myth and folklore. We inherited some of that, but we did a lot of special issues on other topics too. David Howes did one of his first collections on the senses. David and Dorothy Counts and others did a volume for us on the anthropology of deviance. Karen Szala-Meneok edited a very good volume on women in the fisheries. So what we did was fairly diverse. We struggled, because we had always just enough to publish but no surfeit, and the volumes were thinner than the current volumes of *Anthropologica*. *Culture* also had financial problems at that time, so the merger benefitted everybody.

JH: Okay, let's turn to your more recent involvement with the Journal.

AL: All right, a couple of things. When the old *Anthropologica* and *Culture* merged to create the new *Anthropologica*, I took a back seat, of course. I thought my involvement with the journal was over. And unexpectedly, I was called back in 2004 to 2006 when the Managing Editor's job became vacant. I took it for two years, because the journal was in a spot and was about eight months behind schedule. Then three years ago, when the journal could not find an editor and needed someone on short notice, I was called back to assume the job of Editor-in-Chief...it's been three years. That's where we are. The journal has presented me with some challenges. There is no reason why with a population basis of 30 million, with quite so many departments of anthropology, we could not be an absolute alpha-plus journal, but, although we do quite well, we are not yet in that first rank, in the top ten internationally. We quite simply need more articles. Not just thematic or special issues, but articles with something new to say theoretically, that describe the best research—fieldwork research, library research—by young and established academics, both in Canadian and other universities. We can tell potential contributors that we do endeavour to have everything reviewed promptly so they have a decision within three months. Furthermore, we are little bit more patient than some journals in allowing revisions and supervising the revision process. So, it's worthwhile going with us.

JH: What do you think explains this? I mean I have some ideas as to why people aren't sending us more work. If every time we sit on hiring or promotion committees and we say, "There's a piece in *Anthropologica* here," and our colleagues' response is, "But, this person's got an article in *Cultural Anthropology* or an article in *American Ethnologist* or the *JRAI*..."

AL: Yes!

JH: Don't you think that's where the pressure is applied...

AL: ...it's the Canadian inferiority complex and it's absolutely groundless! I mean, there's an assumption that if it's American, it's better. And...

JH: More prestigious...

AL: Yes.

JH: It holds prestige...or if it's published in the U.K., not just by an American press. Even in a European journal.

AL: And I don't think this is just a problem in Canadian anthropology. It exists in other disciplines. I think it's pervasive except where you have fields like Canadian history and Canadian literature, which are not yet controlled by Americans. You know, Americans and Brits don't actually dominate the study of Margaret Atwood, let's say. But, aside from Canadian lit and Can-studies, there's just about no field in Canadian social science or in the humanities in Canada where this inferiority complex isn't operating...and having taught in both countries, and being educated in a third I see no reason for it. But I tell you that if people don't consciously decide...

JH: To contribute?

AL: ...to do something about it, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. It's no discredit to the excellent writers we have published to say that we could have.

JH: Okay, let's turn to your own research and writing. Could you tell us a little about your first fieldwork experiences?

AL: The first fieldwork experience was in Benin City, Nigeria briefly in 1976, and then in 1983 to 1984. In a certain sense, Benin City was an accident. It was where we had contacts but our initial destination was Onitsha in Igboland. We ended up in Benin City in 1976, and we became fascinated by the place and stayed there. The brother of someone who taught at Rutgers had a job in educational television. Our work on mass media was then a new kind of project, a new kind of fieldwork. We didn't think of ourselves as pioneers, but in a way we were among a group of pioneers in what was to become the anthropology of media. It was an accident in a way. I...we used to be friendly with Tom Beidelman at New York University. He was very much of an inspiration to us early in our career, because he'd done marvellous fieldwork in East Africa with the Kaguru, was extraordinarily funny, and was always sparkling with ideas. Now it so happened that he had a collection of market pamphlets from Onitsha, in eastern Nigeria. They were published between 1940, late 1940s, and the 1970s. There's a famous book on them by Emmanuel Obiechina (1973), and they were literally, as Obiechina says, literature of the people, by the people and for the people, written often by secondary school students, young men fresh out of school, for people who, like themselves, are in the first generation of learning English. And some of them are educational books, for example, "How to Learn Proverbs and other Important Things." There were inspirational stories about historical figures—in later years, John Kennedy made the list. There's even one on Hitler, who was seen as an anti-imperialist hero. And there are moralistic stories such as: "Elizabeth My Lover" and "Mabel, The Sweet Honey that Flowed Away." Pamphlets like "Mabel" and "Rosemary and the Taxi Driver" would tell stories of "good-time girls" who go adrift. The stock plot of wholesome melodramas like "Elizabeth my Lover" (written as a play) is the young lady who is about to be married against her will to an ugly old polygamist, because that's her father's wish, but is in love with a civil servant who has a proper education. The good guys all speak in hypercorrect and snotty Queen's English and the bad guys all speak Pidgin. But in the end, virtue wins. Now you could view these a little ironically and superciliously, as you can any amateur effort containing a lot of malapropisms, but the fact is, there was a great deal of creative energy in these pamphlets. One of the authors, Cyprian Ekwensi, became a serious novelist. This is a very different Nigerian literature from the elite writing of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Reading it gave us the idea that one way of studying people would be to study their expressive products not just in the field of ritual, but in the field of literature. And, in our short trip to Nigeria in 1976, we saw that the new medium of television was one in which some of the same creativity that had been present in the Onitsha pamphlets was now being expressed. So we went back in 1983 and 1984. One of our findings was that although much has been made of "coca-colonization" and the supposedly one-way impact of Western media in Nigeria, the most popular programs of all were local soap operas and farces created on a shoestring. One of them, called "Hotel de Jordan" was a particular focus of our work. Another program that we studied was produced right around the corner from us. It was the Church of God Mission's "Redemption Hour." It was the creation of one of the most successful televangelists in Nigeria, Benson Idahosa, who was in part funded by Jim Bakker's PTL Club in the USA.

JH: Hmm.

AL: So, we visited Bishop Idahosa and we could have made that into a fuller study, but his condition for consenting to such work was that we allow our young children who accompanied us to be admitted to his church and we were not sure about the ethics of doing that... Benin, you know, is a remarkable city. One of our friends, commenting on the few long pieces—we wrote about seven or eight of them—that came out of the fieldwork, remarked that we hadn't done postmodern ethnography. Our style wasn't postmodern, but the subjects were.

JH: Absolutely.

AL: One of our acquaintances was a witch-doctor, or traditional healer, who was a public personality and showed his patients videos of rituals before he treated them.

JH: Really?

AL: Yes.

JH: That's fascinating.

AL: We also got to meet one of the leading pop stars in Nigeria, who told us that all good music started with Bach and that it didn't matter whether you played a Bini melody on a traditional harp-lute or a synthesizer. It was an exciting period. But the chance to work in Nigeria took us from another project which Harriet had started and which we had continued, and which was on sexuality.

JH: And that's why you chose to write *Irregular Connections* then?

AL: Right, yeah. Harriet had written an article on female circumcision that ended up in the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 30 years ago. It was called "Anthropologists, Moralities and Relativities" and it still is the article which she is justly most proud of (Lyons 1981). And it is probably the most cited thing that she has written. Now, it happened that she had been very, very upset by the writings of Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978). Daly attacks female circumcision in Africa in a chapter called "Africa: The Dreadful Rites." And Harriet felt that there's a thin line crossed here between the defence of women's universal rights and racism. She thought she needed to draw attention to the problems anthropologists faced reconciling feminism and relativism—something that had not been done up to that point. In doing the article she went over some of my research on Victorian attitudes to race, because many of them involved stereotypes about the sexuality of other peoples.

JH: Right, right.

AL: It wasn't Philippe Rushton who was the first to make connections here. Stereotypes of others as being over-sexed or occasionally under-sexed as well as less intelligent were rife in the 19th century and often linked to perceived threats. And so, reading my work, Harriet discovered some of the ruminations of Sir Richard Burton, which I quoted in my thesis on racism. We thought of the idea of working out a manuscript on the history of anthropological attitudes toward sexuality. We read Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1979), which had just come out. I remember we organized a session at the American [Anthropological Association] meetings in 1981, and subsequently in 1983, I handed a badly typed 70-page oeuvre to the late Michel Foucault at the end of a lecture he gave. I wonder where it ended up. In his rubbish heap, who knows? [Laughter]

JH: Who knows?

AL: He was dead a year later. Meanwhile we got a fieldwork grant unexpectedly to finish the media project in Nigeria, which wasn't about sex, and we were also diverted quite sadly in another way. We had completed a lecture tour to present our early work on sexuality. On getting back we found that a close friend and ex-colleague from Kent State, who was gay, had been murdered in St. Louis. The police were *not* investigating. In a peculiar kind of psychological way the murder got associated with the lecture tour, and for about six or seven years while we were writing up the fieldwork we just didn't touch the topic. It seemed to be too painful.

JH: Oh, my gosh!

AL: When we ran dry on the fieldwork, we were about to consider going back to Nigeria in a situation that was dangerous politically, around 1990. However, there was also a crisis in our own family and we decided to return to the sexuality research. Friends of ours, including the late Arnold Pilling of Wayne State, encouraged us to do this. Meanwhile, Queer Studies in anthropology had grown apace since its early beginnings in the late 1970s and 1980s when we'd first started. The field was changing rapidly—it took us a while to catch up again and the kind of scholarship that was needed for a work which would trace anthropological ideas about sexuality and sexual moralities from the 18th century to the present involved a huge amount of work. I was, for part of the time, the department chair, and Harriet (who had also been a chair at Laurier) came to the University of Waterloo in 1991 as the

Director of Women's Studies. We had two adolescents in the family, parental death and illness. So it took us a while. But somehow the book got assembled. We read somewhere that Regna Darnell was putting out a new series, "Critical Studies in the History of Anthropology." We took it to her in 2002 and it was reviewed by her and by Steve Murray, who didn't know us. Murray saw a book in it, but he saw a hell of a lot that had to be done. There were eight pages of detailed critique. We thought, "do we want it done or not?" because it would take us a year to complete these changes. They were substantial but 90% of Murray's suggestions were sensible...and the other 10% weren't that bad.

JH: [Laughs quietly]

AL: And we followed them.

JH: Now it's a very successful book.

AL: Uh, well it hasn't sold that many copies.

JH: Nothing sells Andy. It's academia! [Laughs] But people are talking about it.

AL: It was successful in that it reached its core audience.

JH: Exactly.

AL: And it did get read by them. So, in that sense it was successful. I often wonder what would have happened if we'd have produced it ten years earlier. And what the effect would have been on the trajectory of our academic careers, but the answer is we couldn't and we didn't.

JH: So let's move the two books that you've just written, *Sexualities in Anthropology: A Reader* (2010) and *Fifty Key Anthropologists* (2011) that you edited with Robert Gordon, since we're talking about publishing. What drew you to these projects? Why do you think they are important? What gaps do you believe they fill, and what do you hope your readers will come away with?

AL: These are textbooks, but we believe that textbooks can be important in defining a field. Okay, I'll deal first with the sexuality reader. First of all, we think that sexuality is an exceptionally important topic within anthropology. And to the best of our awareness, there wasn't a reader that covers *all* of it as well as, say, some of the other readers like Michael Lambek's (2008) one on religion and Ellen Lewin's (2006) one on feminist studies. We thought of the great AMS readers that John Middleton edited, like *Myth and Cosmos* (Middleton 1967) and one on marriage and the family (Bohannan and Middleton 1968). We needed a classic reader because the field is still relatively new. We wanted something that would have narrative, and because our approach was historical, we wanted something that would be historical. And, our chance to do it was an accident because one of our ex-students happened to give a copy of *Irregular Connections* to one of her supervisors at graduate school at Boston, Parker Shipton, who edited the series. We didn't know him till then. He approached us with a view to doing a reader. It's a curious thing that most collections on sexuality in anthropology are either extraordinarily hetero-normative or entirely gay or lesbian studies, whereas we try to integrate both. It is a fact that in anthropology, the anthropology of sexuality, there's not only the well-known essentialist–constructivist divide, but also a kind of mutual forgetting of the heterosexual side of sexuality studies and the gay or queer side. We do try, in a new way, to integrate them and also to compare and contrast them. The book is moderately Foucauldian, but it doesn't have Foucault exuding in every page. We think that the topic is sexuality and not Foucault, so we don't want to get into where Foucault was wrong. A lot of people misprize or misrecognize *Irregular Connections* that way, because in many cases where we did not explore Foucault more deeply, the reason was that we disagreed with him and we felt that we would lose our own argument by saying why. One thing we do contend is that the weakness or strengths of anthropology show up particularly with regard to sexuality. After all, we're discussing the most intimate kinds of acts, the most intimate kinds of feelings, which may or may not be varied a great deal according to culture. And we are discussing differences in practice, how to interpret them, how to feel about them if we are members of other cultures, et cetera. For all these reasons the anthropology of sexuality ain't easy. Moreover, it is particularly liable to the problem we call *conscription*. That is to say, people will use the sexuality of others to advance their own agendas. This is inevitable. It happened with the missionaries in the 19th century, as well as the people who opposed Victorian values, including both Richard Burton and Havelock Ellis, and continuing onwards to the sexual reform movement of the 1920s. Malinowski and Mead were both on the fringes of that movement. We carry on right through to Freeman's use of socio-biology to refute Mead while claiming that he has no agenda whatsoever. And on to, I suppose, current trends in gay-lesbian anthropology. We note that conscription could be for causes we approve of, or causes we disapprove of, but it's an inevitable tendency. We were criticized for that relativistic...

JH: [Laughs quietly] Aren't we always?

AL: ...approach.

JH: Yes.

AL: In one of the reviews of *Irregular Connections*, the reviewer asked "Do they realize what they're doing?" Of course we realize what we're doing. *Fifty Key Anthropologists* is something which we've had a more minor role in. We wrote about just under a quarter of the articles, but this is a group project.

JH: Didn't you co-edit the work?

AL: We were co-editors with Rob Gordon.

JH: Yes, okay.

AL: But there are all-told about 25 or 30 authors, including a few from Canada.

JH: These are the *Fifty Key Anthropologists*?

AL: I'm talking about the authors of the articles. The Canadian writers are Regna Darnell on Boas and Sapir, Richard Lee on Eleanor Leacock, Tom Abler on Wallace, Karen Sykes on Marilyn Strathern, and Stanley Barrett, who has done work on Barth, Leach and Bailey. Harriet and I contributed, I think, a total of about eleven articles, a glossary and a timeline. And we selected some other authors. Rob Gordon is a good friend and a fine scholar, originally from Namibia, who had been contacted by Routledge and who approached us for assistance. He's at the University of Vermont.

JH: What were the pieces you wrote?

AL: Because the three of us didn't have the time to do all the articles ourselves in the time they wanted, we wrote about people we knew most about, and selected other specialists to do the rest. I wrote one on Lévi-Strauss, simply because I used to worship Lévi-Strauss, without seeing the flaws...I still have a lot of the structuralist in me. Except when I went to the field, how do I put it? I didn't do quite what I thought I might do. There was some fascinating stuff on mythology but other people had done it. We were looking at folklore and television, but I didn't end up taking a structuralist approach. I don't know why, but there you are. I did work on Tylor and Morgan because I'm fascinated by Victorian anthropology. That stems from my interest in evolutionism and racism. And Tylor and Morgan are both mixed bags with respect to racism. I mean that I had great respect for what Morgan achieved, but he was flawed in his attitude toward Africans. However, I deal dispassionately with his contribution to kinship studies in my little piece. Harriet and I did a lot of work on Malinowski's research on Trobriand sexuality. So I did a chapter on Malinowski and I did the chapter on Mauss, which I greatly enjoyed. I had to do a lot of reading for that.

JH: Why did you choose Mauss?

AL: Mauss's *The Gift* (1990) is *sacred text* to anyone brought up in British anthropology. Not just in the 1960s but even now, I'd argue. Read *JRAI*, even today. I re-read Mauss of course, as well the collection edited by Wendy James and Nick Allen (1998) in addition to Fournier's (2005) excellent new biography, and that helped in piecing things together. A lot of work there... I enjoyed doing the article because a lot of people still need to know what else there is aside from *The Gift*.

JH: Right, right, which is the book we all know.

AL: I also did Radin. That's because I taught *The Trickster* (1987) many times and had great admiration for Radin, and I was intrigued to read in David Price's work *Threatening Anthropology* (2004) about the huge F.B.I. file on him...you'd never have guessed.

JH: The perfect segue. What are some of the issues that most concern you as a scholar in these times?

AL: As an anthropologist?

JH: As a scholar. A second and related question follows: what do you believe are some of the greatest challenges we face as anthropologists in these times?

AL: Racism and inequality are issues that all scholars face and I think that there's...listen, you know, I've not addressed a lot of my work as a teacher. I've mainly been an undergraduate teacher, except for the brief period at Rutgers and the last few years of teaching at Laurier. But I would say that anthropologists, because we're all involved in teaching undergraduates, must help them observe, question and combat racism and various forms of ethnocentric bigotry. We have to realize most of our students are not going out to become anthropologists. What we can do is to offer them, to apostrophize a title

by H. H. Munro (Saki), an "Unrest-Cure" (1961). We can create a disturbance...in received wisdoms.

JH: Wonderful!

AL: And that, I think, is an important role. Regarding anthropology, Canadian anthropology in particular, I think that we have to...we are facing, very obviously, a crisis. Twenty-five years after the crisis in representations there is a question mark as to exactly where we are and whether or not we are distinctive, separate from other disciplines. And at a certain level, I'm not sure that matters. Can we define anthropology by participant observation? Perhaps. Can we define it by the writing of something called ethnography, an art, which may not be entirely confined to anthropologists? Perhaps. At the same time there's a quandary, a lack of fit, because a lot of our core concepts were developed at a stage when we still went "out there" to study "that." Alterity was at the root of the anthropological impulse, and original fieldwork was the initiation rite. Indeed, in early years, before we did work in Nigeria, both Harriet and I did theoretical historical theses and paid a price, because we had not had our initiation into alterity. I think that anthropology faces a choice between redefining its subject matter and its content, which in part it will do. Or else giving up some of the fetish of fieldwork and looking back over the vast amount of data that has been accumulated in a hundred years of ethnography and trying to make more sense of it.

JH: Hmm.

AL: And that work in the library has never had the kind of legitimation that perhaps it should have in anthropology, because of the stress on empiricism.

JH: This is true of all the sub-fields of anthropology. Some archaeologists, for instance, have noted that there are caches of findings (some claim they are "loots") that have yet to be examined and they question the need to dig another site...

AL: We have a unique problem. Historians always have dead people, they're not going to disappear. Anthropology did have "primitives"...have we replaced them? Fully?

JH: Quotes around "primitives."

AL: Quote-unquote. We had "peasants." And you've got to realize something: there's this stage where people really were doing twin killing, human sacrifice...not to mention the Inquisition and the Witch Craze in Europe. There really were differences as well as resemblances in culture. And we can gloss over this with whatever we want to say about the limits of globalization, but those things have changed. Here I think particularly about my friend, Bert N., and our last interview in the 1976 trip as he made a vain attempt to take us to the airport. "I'm taking you to Nigerian Airways because it's the safest way to get from Benin City to Lagos, but they may not go. Nigerian Airways is the safest in the world because Nigerian Airways *never* flies." Before we parted, he asked us, "Are there any questions you've wanted to ask us?" And I said, "I can think of one." "Let me guess," he said, "It's how come my wife and I are so well-heeled, despite the fact that I'm humble civil servant and she's a teacher." I said, "Well I did have that question." "Well," he replied,

> there is a little family money left. My great-grandfather was the Obi of a little village on the banks of the Niger. He was a great man, a very wealthy man, and we would all be proud of him three or four generations later, except that he sacrificed *far too many slaves*. Of course, you people should not be too *haughty* about this, too *proud* of yourselves, a civilization that has created Auschwitz and Hiroshima, should not lecture *us* about human sacrifice. However, the fact of that matter is that we can't be too proud of our great-grandfather. But that's how I'm so wealthy. Now I have a question for you. Where are you from?

And I said, "I'm from a city in the North of England." "Leeds by any chance?" "Yes. How do you guess?" "I have my M.A. from there in linguistics. While I was there I taught at a funny little school up the hill where the students wore grey flannel trousers, blue blazers, and a crest with a Latin motto, *Nullius Non Mater Disciplinae*." And I said, wait a minute, I'd come all way out here, I've taken a degree at Oxford, I've gone to North America to teach, and I've come to "the field" to interview one of the masters at my school! [Laughter]

JH: [Laughing] We're going to end it there, Andy. That's a perfect way to end this interview. Thank you.

Jasmin Habib, Department of Political Science, Hagey Hall, Room 355, 200 University Avenue West, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3G1. E-mail: jhabib@uwaterloo.ca.

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