

C O M M E N T A R Y

TEN YEARS OF JASO: 1970 - 1980

When one compares the appearance of early issues of *JASO* with the present handsome format it is a little hard to recall why it remained so long in its old stencilled form. The reason was, I think, not unrelated to its main achievement, that of actually surviving, issue after issue, for ten years (despite the decadal symmetry of the figures 1970-1980, this is of course the *eleventh* year of publication). It should not be forgotten that this is a journal edited by graduate students, and that the last ten years have covered the complete period of transition from the enthusiastic attitudes of the 'sixties' to that period of relative sobriety and constraint in which we live today. The old format had the advantage that it could be produced with the minimum of assistance and instruction, and was adapted to the very varied levels of business acumen shown by the editors, and the wild fluctuations in student support. At the very worst the whole thing could be produced by the editors and one or two *ad hoc* assistants. The typing was usually done by a standing arrangement with a secretarial agency at a relatively low price, related to the fact that sometimes the typists were learners themselves. The heaps of sheets were collated by the time-honoured process of walking round tables on which the pages were laid out in a circuitous route. In the first years this took place in Paul Heelas' house in Cardigan Street in the Jericho district of Oxford, where the night-time tramp of feet added to the 'freaky' reputation of that well-known address!

There were for long no departmental facilities for this enterprise, and only in the latter part of the period has there even been a room to work from. Now there is a small office, and headed paper, rubber-stamps, an arm-chair, and a general air of tidiness. But usually the journal has been the beneficiary of the characteristic Oxford tolerance - individual enterprise, no funds, with no-one too seriously opposing it, and generally ignored.

That is the background to those tightly-rolled scrolls that travelled very soon to 250 and more addresses. The opening of the issue without tearing off several pages was a skill in itself. Holding the issue flat for long enough to read, before the wrists weakened and the thing sprang back into a complex paper sculpture, was another. The pierced thumbs from the ill-flattened staples

were due to the difficulty of borrowing for long enough a big enough stapler to fasten the often enthusiastically fat issues. A subscriber has said that until he met JASO he had no convincing response to the MacLuhan cliché 'The medium is the message'. No message could possibly embody that medium.

Economies of time, effort and money in the production were imposed on the Journal if it was ever to appear more than once or twice, and was to meet its termly deadline. The temptation to give issues away for nothing, and to send them 'for sale' (often these ended as free gifts) at other Universities, led to the Editorial Adviser being owed £80 after a year. Malcolm Crick by an almost monastic regime wiped out this deficit. Small grants were received from various sources, including the Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Fund, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. From 1971 to the present the Journal has received no further subvention and has even made a profit sufficient for the present improvements to be attempted.

The very name of the Journal expresses a strategy to acquire funds. In order to qualify for any assistance from the University's Clubs' Office (some typing and other facilities were optimistically hoped for) the Journal had to be under the auspices of a recognized University club. The long-standing Oxford University Anthropological Society was asked to lend its name for this purpose - but the Journal itself was given the name of a non-existent institution - the Anthropological Society of Oxford - to preserve its independence. In fact, JASO very quickly exhausted the meagre resources and patience of the Clubs' Office, occupying the typing facilities during the Crick economy period to such a degree that it was no longer a practical proposition. Vol.I no.3 (1970) and Vol.II no.1 (1971) show signs of all the problems of the time. During the winter power-strike the stencils were typed by candle-light, which meant practically blind, and corrections were particularly difficult. There are tales of female tears splashing on the text. The flickering type-face remains as a record, beneath the confident tone of the articles.

The necessity for an Editorial Adviser arose from the Proctors' regulations of the University, which required a 'senior sponsor' and I suppose that is still the case, despite JASO's present relative self-sufficiency. For practical purposes I have been treasurer of the Journal, monitoring its financial transactions, and despite occasional head-aches (as when most of an uncollated issue was thrown out from a College office in mistake for rubbish! - the College paid for a reprint), that side has not for long presented a problem. The Editors have always selected or rejected papers, and copy-edited them totally independently. It is quite usual for me to read the contents for the first time only on publication day.

There have been similar journals during the last ten years from anthropological departments in other Universities, but most seem to manage one issue and then go into decline. Too much concentration on smart production makes it difficult to meet deadlines. The difficulty of maintaining a succession of editors and reliable helpers is another obstacle. Certainly the editors of

JASO have usually had something to say and some kind of dedication even in hard times, of which there have been a few.

The Journal was always encouraged by Evans-Pritchard, who was still Professor for its first two issues. He contributed frequently until his death. There were articles by him on Ferguson, Condorcet, Lord Kames, John Millar, and Montesquieu. He allowed JASO to reprint in its first form his classic paper 'The Intellectualist (English) Interpretation of Magic', originally published in Cairo. His article on 'Social Anthropology at Oxford' (I:3) is still of great interest. In the year of his death he contributed 'Some Reminiscences and Reflections on Fieldwork' (IV:1, 1973). On the question of entering into the thought of other people, he wrote:

I wonder whether anthropologists always realize that in the course of their field work they can be, and sometimes are, transformed by the people they are making a study of, that in a subtle kind of way and possibly unknown to themselves they have what used to be called 'gone native'. If an anthropologist is a sensitive person it could hardly be otherwise. This is a highly personal matter and I will only say that I learnt from African 'primitives' much more than they learnt from me, much that I was never taught at school, something more of courage, endurance, patience, resignation and forbearance that I had no great understanding of before. (IV:1, p.5)

He concluded, on the subject of books:

A certain degree of abstraction is of course required, otherwise we would get nowhere, but is it really necessary to just make books out of human beings? I find the usual account of field research so boring as often to be unreadable - kinship systems, political systems, ritual systems, every sort of system, structure and function, but little flesh and blood. One seldom gets the impression that the anthropologist felt at one with the people about whom he writes. If this is romanticism and sentimentality I accept these terms. (*Ibid.*, p.12)

Other contributions of historical interest throw some light on early anthropological figures. Phyllis Kaberry (who died tragically in 1977) supplied a lively reminiscence of Malinowski:

The atmosphere of Malinowski's seminars was exhilarating, but to begin with overpowering for diffident postgraduates, and most of us were that. The first few weeks were agonizing because, inexorably, would come the question 'What do you think of that Miss K?'. Paralyzed I would utter something barely audible and articulate, and then would be asked 'to develop' what was in many cases a non-existent point. However, after the initial stages of 'arrested development' we did venture on criticism and the occasional frivolous remark. (V:2, 1974, p.105)

Soon afterwards she 'fell from grace' after refusing the honour of becoming Malinowski's research assistant. Later while writing *Aboriginal Women* she wished to dedicate the volume to him, stating, however, that she disagreed with his theory of derived needs and the nature of 'institutions'. Malinowski's letters to her on the subject in 1939 and 1940 were good-humoured and magnanimous and are printed in her article. There is a sentence in one of them in which certain names were replaced by letters:

I would be very glad if the criticism came from you in a free and courteous way rather than from some of my pet aversions in the anthropological world, a X, a Y, or some other Boasinine peep-squeak [sic]. (*Ibid.*, p.107)

'X' was in fact 'E.P.' in the original. 'Y' was an American, possibly Margaret Mead.

Later *JASO* published two letters from Radcliffe-Brown to Evans-Pritchard supplied by Godfrey Lienhardt, and dated about 1950. Radcliffe-Brown was rather testily defending his view of what a 'law' was in social anthropology:

I have written two criticisms of your BBC lectures. I do hope you will not find them too severe. I think a little severity might be called for but I prefer to leave that to the *Economist*. So I have been as tender as I can in all honesty and sincerity. I feel you have recently been somewhat led astray, and scientific methodology is something you are not very strong on. (VIII:1, 1977, p.50)

There have been other contributions over the years by senior academics like John Beattie ('Has Social Anthropology a Future?' I:3), Rosemary Firth ('Anthropology within and without the Ivory Towers', II:2), Lucy Mair ('Recent Writings on Witchcraft', III:1), David Pocock ('Nuer Religion: a Supplementary View', V:2), and others. At all times however, the bulk of the contributions have come from within Oxford and mainly from within the group of graduate students.

It was Brian Street (now at Sussex and author of an important book on the treatment of the primitive in British fiction) and Paul Heelas (now at Lancaster) who started the Journal. There were complicated reasons why the need was felt for it, and memories gradually fail. My own recollection is that Oxford students felt that the Institute had not received full recognition of its recent intellectual contribution. In those days, it is hard to recall, structuralism and other newer waves were relatively unfamiliar in Britain outside one or two centres. One must tread carefully here as no two Oxford persons would agree on what the Oxford contribution was then or is now. But, whatever may be said about that, *JASO* embarked on a course of continual debate and discussion that was felt to be essentially modern at the time.

The first issues of the Journal opened up topics that still are unresolved. The very first article in 1970 was entitled 'Meaning for Whom?'. At its birth *JASO* expounded such topics in

a critical manner. In the first year all the names that now seem a roll-call of the 'trend' appeared: Winch, MacIntyre, Lévi-Strauss, the British structuralists, Althusser and the structuralist-Marxists, Castaneda, the linguistic philosophers, Lacan, Derrida. *JASO* was on to the 'Modern Masters' almost as if it had supplied the names for Fontana in advance. When looking back on the early issues I expected to find an embarrassingly uncritical treatment. But, as I have already hinted, there was born with *JASO* a note of dissatisfaction with heroes. It is true that the Journal discussed people and topics that two or three years later became, in other places, merely trendy. But usually by then *JASO* had already assimilated the message and had moved on. The Journal certainly started with its own set of 'goodies' and 'baddies', but it soon moved beyond such simple football-team values.

Jairus Banaji, then a student at the Institute, contributed two articles in the first year, as well as writing a critique of British Social Anthropology from a Marxist point of view - the latter while still in his Diploma year. It is now a standard work of Marxist social anthropology - part of the 'New Left Critique'. It might just as well have been named the '*JASO* critique'. Its response to an earlier article by Goddard was to show that British Marxists did not then even know what social anthropology was about. The Banaji article carries an internal critique of its own critique which has outlasted the fashion for the structuralist-Marxism it helped to popularize. By the end of the decade the Marxist approach in social anthropology had been discussed as exhaustively as I have seen in a Journal not explicitly of the tendency. Can it be wondered that it has been viewed with puzzlement and concern - plundered but rarely cited on this as on many other topics. Jenkins (VI:1, VIII:3), Dresch (VI:3, VII:2) and Ovesen (IX:1) are some of the other contributors to this stream of the *JASO* discussions, whose views have sometimes caused pain in quite sophisticated Parisian circles. I single out the critique of Marxism because many local observers of *JASO* became impatient with it. Yet it was *JASO's* own, in a way that some of its other interests were not entirely. I single it out also because there are several stereotypes of *JASO* as 'idealist', 'semiological' or the like. Occasionally for an issue or two a particular needle may have become stuck in a groove. Yet a perusal of the texts shows the continuous emergence of new topics and themes. It is, however, a feature of journals like *JASO* (and like small literary magazines) often to be collected rather than really closely read.

Needless to say, everything connected with women's studies took off quickly. *JASO* was never the primary source at Oxford for these developments, but it was a useful model for self-help, and it must be seen in retrospect as no coincidence that the local style of women's studies has had the same kind of intellectual stamina.

The continuous examination of language and meaning echoed wider Oxford concerns. I do not intend to go into detail in this often misunderstood area, but over the period the move was in the direction of less and less trust in formalistic approaches and increasingly towards more simple expositions. *JASO* began, as we

saw earlier, by supporting a handful of famous names, the 'modern masters'. Ten years later it is as if these names have been consumed. Two excellent books were produced by *JASO* editors on the theme of meaning and identity which express some of this process: Malcolm Crick's *Explorations in Language and Meaning* (London 1976) and Malcolm Chapman's *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London 1978). The field-work insights of *JASO* contributors have been quite considerable despite the early editorial note that articles should concentrate on analysis rather than description (already questioned in the second year by Tonkin - II:3). The contributors even came by an Einsteinian paradox to see that their search for a semantic anthropology was remarkably like that search for the noble savage, or the pure Celt, or the feminine, which in other phases of their research they had identified as chimeras (Chapman VIII:2). (Thus often does a theoretical approach raise the question of whether it is itself accounted for by its own theory. The point at which such a question arises usually represents a new point of advance.)

Maryon McDonald threw her own light on some contradictions ('Language "At Home" to Educated Radicalism', IX:1), which reminds us that there has always been a little leaven of wit in the Journal. Her translation of the satirical article 'GERTRUDE: A Postface to a Few Prefaces' (IX:2), with its parodies of the great French masters' approaches, as applied to the (in themselves hilarious) published acknowledgements of ethnographers to their wives, is a classic. McCall's humorous analysis of the supposed quadripartite structure of English society (I:3) was reprinted later in a national weekly. Joan Leopold contributed ('Tylor's Solar Sixpence', IV:1) a parody of Max Müller from the Tylor archives. But *JASO* has never had or encouraged cartoons or student jokes, or anything savouring of the house-magazine. (Just to prove me wrong, there is an excellent cartoon in the present issue!)

What of the readership? What indeed? Perhaps this article will encourage any long-standing overseas contributors to write in and say what they have got out of *JASO* for ten years. The whole issue is virtually sold on subscriptions, and a large increase came early on from a notice in *Current Anthropology*. It has stimulated other enterprises in other departments - *Semesterskrift* (Copenhagen) and *Journal of the Anthropological Study of Human Movement* (New York), among others. It is now taken by 125 University Libraries all over the world, about 40 being in the U.S. and 21 in the United Kingdom (one in the State Lenin Library of the USSR at Moscow). The subscription list, both corporate and private, could probably have been doubled at any time in the last few years, but the tiny production structure in the past could not have coped with twice as many issues. After all there are plenty of professional journals. We know for a fact that xeroxing *JASO* articles is one of the smaller pleasures resulting from scarcity (the sale of back-numbers has, however, always been a steady source of income).

The Journal has been singled out for mention here and there. Professor Victor Turner on symbolism in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* referred to 'the excellent *JASO*'. Mr. Keith Thomas

JASO EDITORS from 1970 to 1980

1970	Vol. I, Nos. 1 & 2	Paul Heelas and Brian V. Street
	" " No. 3	Paul Heelas and Malcolm Crick
1971	Vol. II, Nos. 1, 2 & 3	Paul Heelas and Malcolm Crick
1972	Vol. III, Nos. 1, 2 & 3	Paul Heelas and Malcolm Crick
1973	Vol. IV, No. 1	Paul Heelas and Malcolm Crick
	" " No. 2	Paul Heelas, Malcolm Crick and Martin Cantor
	" " No. 3	Paul Heelas and Martin Cantor
1974	Vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2	Paul Heelas and Martin Cantor
	" " No. 3	Martin Cantor, Tim Jenkins and John Ryle
1975	Vol. VI, Nos. 1 & 2	Martin Cantor, Tim Jenkins and John Ryle
	" " No. 3	John Ryle and Tim Jenkins
1976	Vol. VII, Nos. 1 & 2	Tim Jenkins and Malcolm Chapman
	" " No. 3	Malcolm Chapman, Roger Rouse and Diana Martin
1977	Vol. VIII, Nos. 1 & 2	Malcolm Chapman, Roger Rouse and Diana Martin
	" " No. 3	Malcolm Chapman, Roger Rouse and Maryon McDonald
1978	Vol. IX, Nos. 1 & 2	Malcolm Chapman, Roger Rouse, Maryon McDonald and David Scobey
	" " No. 3	Roger Rouse and David Scobey
1979	Vol. X, Nos. 1 & 2	Roger Rouse and David Scobey
	" " No. 3	Jonathan Webber and Elizabeth Munday
1980	Vol. XI, Nos. 1 & 2	Jonathan Webber, Patricia Holden and Steven Seidenberg

noted that 'even the avant-garde' *JASO* had absolved him of the charge of Frazerianism (Randal Keynes' review of Thomas's book, III:3, was an excellent contribution). Elsewhere the bibliographies and sometimes the arguments of *JASO* articles have evidently been of use to other writers in the occasionally recondite areas covered by its contributors. On the other hand the contributors have also avidly gathered all that they could, and perhaps not all that they might. The charge can well be made that *JASO* is untypical of social anthropology at Oxford. It would certainly be misleading if any other impression were widespread, for the title should make it clear that the Journal is independent. *JASO* represents only a fraction of the work and interests of Oxford graduate students, the great majority of whom have never contributed to it. There have been times when it has been difficult to get an issue together. And yet it has succeeded in not always being disowned in its own land. Its occasional deficiencies are not due to any overridingly rigid editorial policy but largely reflect the way the papers come in. They are not (perhaps this should be made clear) really the proceedings of the fictive 'Anthropological Society of Oxford', nor (despite the onomastic connexion, and the good relations now subsisting with it) even of the real 'Oxford University Anthropological Society'. There is no guaranteed supply of contributions. It is perhaps credit enough that a pigeon-hole (shades of Lady Bracknell's '*a handbag!*') should have for so long been the incubator from which so far-travelled an object should have so regularly issued (and good money to be paid for it as well!).

At various times there have been thoughts of improving the format (by 1978 the Journal was at least being sent flat), but we owe it to Jonathan Webber and his colleagues for taking on the task of organizing the office and business side to make this a possibility. The rapid rise in the cost of subscriptions that has been necessary seems to have been more than balanced by the gains in readability and attractiveness. So far only a half-dozen subscriptions have been cancelled since the rise. The feel of work-in-progress should not be lost - it would be a pity if *JASO* simply became an 'ordinary' journal. It ought to retain its air of 'urgent provisionality', while being less of a physical trial to its readers. The continuity, as I said at the beginning, is the great achievement of *JASO*. It has travelled light, and stuck to some kind of theme, through the theoretical shoals of a far from easy decade. I would like to offer my personal congratulations to all the editors and their assistants, past and present. Their names are listed opposite.

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