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History and Theory in Anthropology

Anthropology is a discipline very conscious of its history, and Alan Barnard has written a clear, balanced, and judicious textbook that surveys the historical contexts of the great debates in the discipline, tracing the genealogies of theories and schools of thought and considering the problems involved in assessing these theories. The book covers the precursors of anthropology; evolutionism in all its guises; diffusionism and culture area theories, functionalism and structural-functionalism; action-centred theories; processual and Marxist perspectives; the many faces of relativism, structuralism and post-structuralism; and recent interpretive and postmodernist viewpoints.

ALAN BARNARD is Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. His previous books include *Research Practices in the Study of Kinship* (with Anthony Good, 1984), *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa* (1992), and, edited with Jonathan Spencer, *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (1996).

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For Joy

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Preface

This book began life as a set of lecture notes for a course in anthropological theory, but it has evolved into something very different. In struggling through several drafts, I have toyed with arguments for regarding anthropological theory in terms of the history of ideas, the development of national traditions and schools of thought, and the impact of individuals and the new perspectives they have introduced to the discipline. I have ended up with what I believe is a unique but eclectic approach, and the one which makes best sense of anthropological theory in all its variety.

My goal is to present the development of anthropological ideas against a background of the converging and diverging interests of its practitioners, each with their own assumptions and questions. For example, Boas' consideration of culture as a shared body of knowledge leads to quite different questions from those which engaged Radcliffe-Brown with his interest in society as an interlocking set of relationships. Today's anthropologists pay homage to both, though our questions and assumptions may be different again. The organization of this book has both thematic and chronological elements, and I have tried to emphasize both the continuity and transformation of anthropological ideas, on the one hand, and the impact of great figures of the past and present, on the other. Where relevant I stress disjunction too, as when anthropologists change their questions or reject their old assumptions or, as has often been the case, when they reject the premises of their immediate predecessors. The personal and social reasons behind these continuities, transformations and disjunctions are topics of great fascination.

For those who do not already have a knowledge of the history of the discipline, I have included suggested reading at the end of each chapter, a glossary, and an appendix of dates of birth and death covering nearly all the writers whose work is touched on in the text. The very few dates of birth which remain shrouded in mist are primarily those of youngish, living anthropologists. I have also taken care to cite the date of original publication in square brackets as well as the date of the edition to be found in the references. Wherever in the text I refer to an essay within a

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book, the date in square brackets is that of the original publication of the essay. In the references, a single date in square brackets is that of the first publication of a given volume in its original language; a range of dates in square brackets is that of the original dates of publication of all the essays in a collection.

A number of people have contributed to the improvement of my text. Joy Barnard, Iris Jean-Klein, Charles Jędrej, Adam Kuper, Jessica Kuper, Peter Skalník, Dimitri Tsintjilonis, and three anonymous readers have all made helpful suggestions. My students have helped too, in asking some of the best questions and directing my attention to the issues which matter.