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CRUZANDO FRONTERAS ENTRE DISCIPLINAS ACADÉMICAS: ICAF CELEBRA MEDIO SIGLO DE COOPERACIÓN BIOSOCIAL

CROSSING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES: ICAF CELEBRATES HALF A CENTURY OF BIOSOCIAL COOPERATION

CRUZANDO FRONTEIRAS ENTRE DISCIPLINAS ACADÊMICAS: ICAF CELEBRA MEIO SÉCULO DE COOPERAÇÃO BIOSSOCIAL

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RESUMEN

¿Qué es la alimentación y quién la estudia? ¿Qué es la nutrición y quién la estudia? … y, en todo caso, ¿qué es la antropología? Tal vez solo una persona de edad avanzada consideraría que estas preguntas deben abordarse. Lo hago en esta revista con la esperanza de que pueda estimular a los más jóvenes a escribir nuevos artículos para cuestionar y debatir. Así, en este artículo, primero pregunto '¿qué es la alimentación?', luego '¿qué es la nutrición?' y después '¿qué es la antropología?' y quién estudia estos temas. Por supuesto, he encontrado en todos ellos tantas perspectivas que podrían abordarse que, en este artículo, habré omitido muchas que podrían ser relevantes. Todo esto me lleva a mi propia visión sobre lo significativo que es que la *International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition* (ICAF) haya

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seguido, durante cincuenta años, su importante ambición de cruzar las fronteras tradicionales entre disciplinas académicas en la búsqueda de una comprensión realista de cualquier tema relacionado con la humanidad. Advierto a los lectores que hay elementos de autobiografía en este artículo. Por supuesto, las perspectivas de cada uno de nosotros serán diversas, pero aprovechemos esta diferencia y comuniquémonos con colegas que son expertos en lo que nosotros no lo somos, para intentar comprender sus perspectivas, así como las nuestras.

Palabras clave: Antropología, alimentación, nutrición, interdisciplinaridad, ICAF (International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition).

ABSTRACT

What is food and who studies it? What is nutrition and who studies it? … and, anyway, what is anthropology? Perhaps only a geriatric would consider that these questions need to be tackled. I do it in this journal in the hope that it might stimulate younger commentators to write further papers to question and debate with more contemporary knowledge of at least some of the masses of academic literature worldwide that could be relevant to the anthropology of food and nutrition. So, in this paper, I first ask 'what is food?', then 'what is nutrition?' and then 'what is anthropology?' and who studies these subjects. Of course, I found in all of them so many perspectives that could be covered that in this paper I shall have omitted many that could be relevant. This all leads to my own view about how significant it is that the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition (ICAF) has for fifty years followed their important ambition to cross the traditional boundaries between academic disciplines in the pursuit of a realistic understanding of any subject tackled that relates to humanity. I warn readers that there are elements of autobiography in this paper. Of course, the perspectives of each of us will be diverse, but let's use this difference and communicate with colleagues who are expert where each of us is not, to try to understand their perspectives as well as our own.

Keywords: Anthropology, food, nutrition, interdisciplinary, ICAF (International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition).

WHAT IS FOOD, AND WHO STUDIES IT?

All living biological matter requires other substances to sustain life; yet we only call some of that "food", even if in English the verb "feed" can be used far more liberally, such as water feeding a tank or a stream feeding into a river. As an anthropologist, I shall limit the word "food" to that which is consumed by humans and I shall include the more and the less fluid substances that might be eaten or drunk. So, even limiting the question to that, we still have to recognise many perspectives, cultural, environmental, agricultural, biochemical, processing, nutritional, medical, gastronomical, culinary, socioeconomic, marketing, catering and many more that have become specialisms in the studies of human food by different experts.

Then, there is diversity in what foods different humans consume. I doubt if today there is anywhere from the heart of the busiest city to the most isolated island, mountain valley or jungle clearing, where folk are not aware that different people have different food preferences. Very likely each of us knows this even within our own families, but I expect that most readers of this paper have immediately had ethnic differences in mind. Ethnic differences are even publicised in cosmopolitan centres for the diversity of restaurants and food outlets specialising in the foods of different cultures for their gastronomic experiences (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. A Charcuteries stall in La Boqueria Market, Barcelona. Photograph © Helen Macbeth

At the other extreme from such cities, I believe there is no longer any remote community in the world that has never encountered even a traveller or a government agent who had culturally different food habits. In summary, there is diversity in what is eaten, in what is grown or foraged and then produced, as well, of course, as what may be available to be grown or foraged depending on environmental conditions. However, for humans there is the significant further dimension of cultural diversity in what different people consider to be eatable. Cultural differences can exist despite relatively similar environments, even within the same geographic space, or, these days similar cultural views can exist across many environments due to contemporary world trade and travel. I wish to add one more highly significant cause of diversity and that is poverty, especially extreme poverty. So, please consider what traditional academic disciplines might study so much diversity in human consumption of food:

- Environmental sciences (a broad group of subjects, already very diverse),
- Technological subjects (from agriculture to methods of production and processing, from cooking and catering to the equipment needed for these),
- Biological and psychological sciences (about human biological diversity and all the physiological and psychological causes of food preferences and taste),
- Ethnological and other sociocultural studies (identifying how cultures affect food choices),
- Economics (in relation to wealth or poverty, to marketing, to international trade and tariffs),
- And more… What else occurs to you?

In summary, in the universities, colleges and schools of the world, human food can be part of the study and the research of many and diverse academic disciplines. Then, beyond education and academia, there will be all the research projects by specialists in food-related businesses.

WHAT IS NUTRITION AND WHO STUDIES IT?[1]

The Cambridge Dictionary definition of nutrition is: "The substances that you take into your body as food and the way that they influence your health; the process of taking in and using food, or the scientific study of this" (*Cambridge Dictionary online*). Obviously, nutritionists study nutrition[2], but again there are many other disciplines to consider. Perhaps, as an example, I might start with the following notes from the online information on what the BSc. (Hons) degree in Nutrition at *Oxford Brookes University*, today offers to potential students (Oxford Brookes University: www.brookes.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/nutrition):

"The course follows the competencies set out by the Association for Nutrition (AfN). You'll cover, amongst other things, the key topics of:

- Science - knowledge and understanding of the scientific basis of nutrition
- Food chain knowledge and impact on food choice
- Understanding food in a social or behavioural context
- Applying the scientific principles for health/wellbeing of all
- Professional conduct and the AfN[3] Standards of Ethics Conduct and Performance.

Throughout the course, you'll develop technical and practical skills suitable for a career in food science. You'll advance your academic and research skills. Also, you'll study important topics like the psychology of food, or the impact of physical activity on health".

Clearly this includes the chemical analyses of each food item, the diversity between varieties, age or origin of the same named food items, etc. In relation to studying the chemistry of the foods, it is also important to take note of the chemical aspects of diversity in human physiology between individuals. This would be partly due to inherited genes and partly due to their life experiences from conception onwards and then to the interaction between genetic coding and the available biochemical material acquired from

[1] For comments from World Health Organisation, see: https://www.who.int/health-topics/nutrition#tab=tab_1

[2] See also: https://www.associationfornutrition.org/careers-nutrition/what-nutritionists-do

[3] Association for Nutrition, which governs the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists.

those life conditions[4]. The point to stress is the constant interaction between components in the processes we call genetic and those we call non-genetic, and correct that popular misrepresentation of the situation as a simple Nature/Nurture dichotomy.

Much of the science of nutrition is directed not just at understanding such processes, but also at managing them for improving the health of the consumers, whether by increasing or decreasing certain chemical components or quantities. This also requires an understanding of the diversity in individual physiologies and so an analysis of needs per individual. Clearly, this involves a considerable amount of knowledge of the medical sciences, to understand the processes of human health, again differing between individuals and differing in frequency between different groupings of people, whether geographically, socio-economically or ethnically defined. As well as understanding these biological processes, the science of nutrition also needs to include food choices and food selection, as these profoundly influence what people eat and subsequently what nutrients they obtain. In seeking information on food choices, the value of liaising with anthropologists and their ethnographic studies on food cultures is obvious, and from different angles psychologists also provide useful insight. So, whether studying the general nutritional welfare of a population or a community or in suggesting supplements or essential evasions (e.g., for allergies) for different individuals, nutritionists have many perspectives to study.

I end this section with mention of studies of the economic, political and agricultural perspectives on nutrition in settings where local production of food is suddenly disrupted, due perhaps to warfare or siege or to some severe climatic disaster, or where food is frequently or regularly scarce due to long-term adverse environmental or economic conditions. I refer to the nutrition of the malnourished and the starving, which involves not only understanding the special nutritional needs of individuals of different ages, the chemical analyses and production of what is appropriate to feed them, and finally how

[4] Although for decades discussing this topic had been called the "Nature Nurture debate", I wish here to stress that that "debate" misrepresented the topic as a dichotomy between something called "Nature" and something called "Nurture". However, the reality is the continuous interaction between biochemical components both acquired and due to genetic coding. The so-called "genes", the DNA and RNA bases, only work as codes organising the biochemical processing of substances available in the body, mostly already processed but ultimately gained externally through nutrition, breathing, sunlight, etc. What is more the code of perhaps just one RNA base or one substance consumed may, in all or only in some individuals, inhibit or alter the effect of some other area of RNA coding, resulting in difference in the biochemical outcome.

such food can be physically and economically purveyed to reach those in need. It also involves understanding all the causes of such food scarcity in tandem with environmental, sociocultural, political and other conditions in order to consider any options there might be for changing methods to produce more, or any, food locally, and so to improve the nutritional situation in the future. I mention this example, because of the frequent need of the help of an anthropologist in understanding the sociocultural perspectives of the people who need to be assisted.

WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY AND WHO STUDIES IT?

General comments:

Since the ending -logy is familiar to most of us as the study of something, I want to concentrate on the Anthropo- part of the word, as it is essential for the theme of this paper. It is derived from the ancient Greek word, ’ανθρωπος (anthropos), meaning “man” in the sense of mankind, humanity or the more recently created word, humankind. Personally, I feel comfortable using the word, “man” in this ’ανθρωπος sense and the word, “mankind” for “humanity”, whereas I accept that others do not, for they only associate the word ‘man’ with the ancient Greek word, ’ανηρ (aner) for a male human. To me, with a school background in Latin and Greek, there simply are the two different perspectives on the word “man” in English.

Beyond that introduction, we humans all tend to be interested in everything about ourselves. At one extreme, we may be interested in humanity worldwide, perhaps in relation to world health or wars or the future of the United Nations Organisation, or in relation to the survival of humanity at all in changing global conditions, whether due to climate change or for fear of nuclear warfare. At the other extreme, humans tend to be interested in people as individuals, in their wellbeing (be that regarding health or wealth or happiness or place in society). They may be primarily concerned about themselves and family and then about others close to themselves whether emotionally or physically, whether as neighbours or through some other link or links significant in their lives. In between these two extremes of “all mankind” or “immediate family”, it is common for people to perceive social or cultural or simply spatial distances between themselves and “others”, sometimes gradual (closer and further), sometimes disrupted by physical or political barriers, usually accompanied by cultural and/or socioeconomic concepts of diversity between groups of people. In summary, we are all interested in people, but we all tend to have concepts of closeness or distance about “other”

people. Anthropology is about humanity and encompasses all humans, both close and distant, and those in between.

Anthropology and should there be subdisciplines?

For a quick search one might start checking "Who studies anthropology?" on Google, where what surprised me were the many similar responses that divide Anthropology into just four subdisciplines:

- Cultural or Social Anthropology,
- Biological or Physical Anthropology,
- Human Evolution and Archaeology,
- Linguistic Anthropology.

I wondered about the frequency of this particular choice on Google for the division of the study of all humanity, and I found that the explanation was probably just because this is a division common in American universities, and these universities each had a separate entry on that first page of the Google list that I was looking at, rather than for any more widespread theoretical reason for that particular division into four differentiated subdisciplines to be repeated so often.

I find division of who studies anthropology into those four titles misleading in several ways. Not only does it omit the far greater diversity of anthropological specialisms, but it also ignores the importance of links between and the overlaps across any categorisation of Anthropology into any subdisciplines. The pursuit of many of the diverse specialisms exposes the need to view areas of study that involve perspectives that blur the boundaries set by divisions between academic disciplines. Although simple divisions into subdisciplines have affected undergraduate education in anthropology for generations of students, in this paper I shall diverge from any such divisions and return to the essential meaning of the word, i.e. that anthropology is the study of humans, which includes their diversity, social, cultural and biological, as well as their prehistory and the qualities that unite all humanity, and a multitude of other perspectives about humans. Generally, anthropology is concerned with humans in totality or in communities defined in some way, whether geographically, socially or biologically, rather than with individuals separately, while still paying attention to individuals as part of the communities being studied.

Concepts of evolution, both pre-Darwinian and of a pre-genetic form of Darwinism, can be seen in early anthropological concepts. Those, who came to be called physical anthropologists, studied the origins of the human species and took measurements of archaeological finds of fossilised skulls and bones, while others took bodily measurements of their contemporary living humans and of the skulls and bones of more recently deceased humans (Anthropometry). Meanwhile other anthropologists, later to be called "social" or "cultural" anthropologists, were studying the lifestyles, beliefs and behaviours of groups of people, most frequently those remote from themselves, whether in South Pacific islands or in the Arctic or in relatively remote parts of Africa or anywhere where the people were perceived to be "different" and often considered to be more "primitive" than the anthropologists in their "advanced" societies. Where in past studies one finds use of words such as "primitive" or "advanced", one might presume a confusion within early evolutionary concepts, affecting both biological and sociocultural perspectives. Then, as the range of academic interests in what was called anthropology increased, divisions, first between the sociocultural and the physical, then beyond these, occurred in the teaching (and research) departments of Anthropology. However, those divisions could differ. Yet, the aim of this paper is to emphasise the need to cross boundaries between any such divisions wherever this is needed for the topic being studied holistically.

Although Darwin and Mendel were contemporaries, dying in 1882 and 1884 respectively (though Mendel was younger), the merging of Mendelian genetics with Darwinian ideas happened later, in the 1920s. It began to be relevant to anthropology later still. Nevertheless, by the late 1960s, the introduction to human evolution I was taught within Anthropology was already based firmly within a genetic understanding of Darwinian evolution, and by my postgraduate years the studies of human biological diversity expressed in population gene frequencies gained research funding and proliferated. I recall Oxford University beginning to use the words "Biological Anthropology" to replace "Physical Anthropology" in the early 1970s. By then, in U.K., anthropological studies of the anthropometry of the living had essentially ceased, although it did continue within Anthropology in some European countries and in biomedical studies generally. Meanwhile, the new title, Biological Anthropology, was increasingly concerned with contemporary "populations", gene frequencies and genetic perspectives on evolutionary processes of humans and their closest primate relatives, whereas the archaeology of hominid fossils, as in that part of Physical Anthropology, took on even closer links with Palaeoarchaeology and other studies of prehistory and became Palaeoanthropology.

An early research method in anthropology had been based on "participant observation" by lone anthropologists living for a period within a "society" considered to be quite different from their own. After periods of experiencing life within the studied communities, ethnographic reports were written, and academic anthropological interest and theoretical discussions followed based on the ethnographies and the experiences of such anthropologists. These studies then became somewhat split between what became Social Anthropology generally in British universities and Cultural Anthropology generally in American universities, whereas other interests in the ethnographic reports and especially in the material objects became known as Ethnology in some universities. Despite a great deal of overlap between all these, a certain amount of divergence increased between the Social Anthropology in UK and the Cultural Anthropology in USA. A useful discussion of the meaning of anthropology is explored in a recent short book by Tim Ingold (2018), *Anthropology: why it matters*, which I recommend that all anthropologists (and others interested) should read. Another relevant reference is a short chapter by Igor de Garine (2004) entitled "Anthropology of Food and Pluridisciplinarity".

Whereas I of course knew that languages were studied and analysed by linguists, I find it interesting that I had never heard of Linguistic Anthropology, even in my postgraduate student days in Oxford. Yet, I understand that the title was first used in the early 1960s. The topic was researched, for example, by American Anthropologists in relation to some Native American languages, but has progressed since then to a broader group of Anthropologists.

In general, one could say that from the mid-1940s onwards, the parts of Anthropology have been increasingly splitting into more subdisciplines and then to further specialisms. Initially, some of these fitted comfortably within one of the earlier named subdisciplines, whereas other specialisms benefitted from linking information from more than one of these earlier divisions of Anthropology. Meanwhile, this diversifying into specialisms has continued. To exemplify, I list a few specialisms that exist today: Environmental Anthropology, Medical Anthropology, Forensic Anthropology, Visual Anthropology, Museum Anthropology, Legal Anthropology, Feminist Anthropology, Anthropology of Sport, Anthropology of Tourism, and of course the topic of this paper, Anthropology of Food and Nutrition. There are also the regional specialisms, such as Africanist Anthropology, Anthropology of the Middle East, etc. As I perceive it, the change is that the "anthropology" is directed towards the different topics in these specialisms, and this means that whatever broad spectra of anthropological study is needed, that is what becomes appropriate.

I used to wonder whether starting a title as "Anthropology of" (rather than "anthropological perspectives on") was acceptable in English, but today I see it as logical, for I have come to see anthropology as a way of looking at topics in relation to humans. For me, that way is, and must be, cross-disciplinary to achieve the most holistic manner of understanding the topic involved. This is because anthropology then can be understood as drawing together so many perspectives, cultural, ecological, social, biological, etc. about humans, including the people's belief systems and other social concepts as well as their biological and environmental conditions, and how all these perspectives interact. What is then important is that the specialisms must indeed be topic-orientated in order to have a focus; and even so, each topic may turn out to be hugely diverse in the possible angles to be studied. Frankly, I do not know enough about all those specialisms above. Yet, I would emphasise how important it has been that they exist, so that, rather than the difficulties of dividing Anthropology into just a few subdisciplines while ignoring the importance of gathering information across different perspectives, what is "anthropology" can be viewed as a lens focussed on that particular aspect of human existence, while ready to use information across different academic disciplines and subdisciplines. As I see it, such is the case for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition, which I return to later below, but first I exemplify some problems I personally had encountered.

Trying to cross the boundaries between academic disciplines: a personal account

In my pursuit of cross-disciplinary research in the 1970s I was struck by the adverse reaction of too many academics to cooperation across the boundaries that they perceived between academic disciplines. Forgive me for continuing this section of the paper autobiographically since it illustrates my point. Having not gone to university on leaving school, I, at the age of 30, started an external London University BA. degree in Economics, Geography and Anthropology, because of an interest in human poverty and hunger in parts of the world. However, it was in that "general" B.A. degree within the section called Anthropology that I, who had had no background in any science at school, was completely smitten by the mathematics of Mendelian inheritance and of population genetics. It was just one very small part of that degree course, but I passed the rest, and was accepted on to the postgraduate Diploma (later called MSc.) in Human Biology, supervised by Professor Geoffrey Harrison at the University of Oxford. This was a postgraduate

introduction to what is today called Biological Anthropology. Whereas all my colleagues on the course had previously studied biology I had not, except for the relevant, but very specialist, genetics material in my BA general degree, directed primarily at human evolutionary theory. My total lack of any other background in basic biology sometimes amazed my lecturers, but I did bring to the course perspectives from my cross-disciplinary sociocultural and environmental studies, and a varied personal background before that. I found the course fascinating, was able to grasp the logic and the maths, found I had an unexpected ability to draw hominid skulls and so got through sufficiently well that to my surprise I was invited to continue to doctoral study in that department, with a research grant included. From all the above what has stayed with me, and, essentially before it was acceptable by many elsewhere, was the need to cross the traditional boundaries between academic disciplines to achieve the holistic view professed to be so important in anthropology.

My doctoral thesis was on human population genetics theory, but based on my general view that such theory for humans would not be the same as that commonly suggested for moths or fruit flies, because humans are constantly making decisions based on their social, cultural, economic, environmental and other situations. In short, the theme was that one cannot use the general, but simple, assumption of randomness for the migration of genes when considering human population genetics theory, because it is not random (whether or not it really is random for fruit flies either!). As for my approach to "fieldwork", it too was a bit hybrid. I interviewed folk in their homes, gathering information on each individual's past migration, defined as every move of home, whether within the same place-name or across the globe. Although not true participant observation, the material I gathered was based on questionnaires but pursued through longer personal chats per individual in the Oxfordshire villages where, in the summer vacation, I had already been a part-time paid assistant for the research by the Oxford Department of Biological Anthropology (see, e.g., Harrison et al. 1976). So, I was already known to the villagers I interviewed.

The migration data themselves could be transferred to relatively simple numerical data, scored by distance (e.g. distance birthplace to present, or distance between two moves) and by frequency of moves of home and by other values including age group and ages at which the moves were taken. Then those numerical data could be correlated statistically with existing anthropometric, genetic (blood group markers) and other social and economic data already collected by the Oxford department (including by me). However, the longer chats had also given me a much richer insight into the results when

I found plenty of positive statistical correlations (with significant p values) of the migration data with other data. The relevant Oxfordshire villages had both locally born people, many in farm-related jobs, and incomers, many of whom lived in these villages but were commuters into Oxford or London or elsewhere. Of significant interest was that past migration data, often and quite logically, correlated with the socioeconomic data. So, where I found that the migration data correlated with some of the biological data and with the socioeconomic data, I considered whether the biological correlations could be explained by the similar correlations with the socioeconomic data. Due to my longer chats with the participants, I had more information than in the numeric data, and was able to argue knowledgeably that many of their moves had been due to decisions related to their socioeconomic situations, as might be expected, and the biological correlates were unlikely to be causative variables, but dependent on the socioeconomic variables. As an example, given for your amusement, there was a statistically significant correlation between higher stature and higher migration scores, but both these also correlated positively with wealthier socioeconomic classifications. It is already known from other studies that higher stature and higher socioeconomic category correlate to a certain degree (e.g. Mascie-Taylor and Lasker 2005, Tyrrell et al. 2016). So, I personally was not tempted to argue that height alone increased mobility distances (*by larger strides perhaps*?!!), nor to suggest that this greater stature caused the mobility, except perhaps via the achievement of the higher socioeconomic status (see e.g., Blaker et al. 2013, arguing that taller people can have an advantage socially).

I then became a lecturer in Biological Anthropology at Oxford Polytechnic (later to become Oxford Brookes University) at a time relevant to developing their new Modular Course, where, initially, students in their first year could get a taste of the introduction to several quite different disciplines, because of the number of first-year modules required at the time. Such a broader first year of study is more common in universities of other countries (Scotland, for example) than in England, but I support it strongly. As well as the optional choice of modules from other disciplines, I was very keen that the compulsory first year modules in the Anthropology "field" covered both social and biological perspectives of anthropology, and that any combination of the advanced modules in Anthropology was acceptable for the rest of a student's degree course. Meanwhile, my own line of cross-disciplinary research based on theories of human population genetics continued to be considered in the light of other sociocultural and environmental factors, but I regularly found a resistance from some British social anthropologists to accepting or even

respecting cooperation across the divide between the sociocultural and biological subdisciplines of Anthropology.

Two examples of some problems found in trying to cross the biosocial divide in anthropology in the third quarter of the twentieth century

In university departments, at conferences and in journals I pursued perspectives on human motivations to move home, and sought information from different subdisciplines within Anthropology, as well as from economic and environmental and other named disciplines. I saw it (as I see it today) as trying to understand a wide range of perspectives affecting the humans in their decisions to move home, which in turn affected gene flow and so the geographic distributions of gene frequencies. However, I kept finding among some social anthropologists, especially in Oxford and Cambridge Universities, barriers to cooperating on this. It is perhaps significant to explain that when I tried to gain information from sociocultural studies about factors affecting migration and marital choices, the barriers frequently occurred only once it was known that I was interested in human genetics. There were, at the time, a couple of other developments within academia that I presume had an effect on these specific difficulties for biosocial cooperation.

The reason for one can be given the start date 1975, when E.O.Wilson published his book, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Wilson 1975), in which he applied theories he had developed from his study of insect behaviour to other animals, including that the organisation of social structures was due to inherited tendencies and had evolved due to Darwinian evolutionary theory based on genes. In his final chapter his hypothesis went as far as to suggest that biologically inherited factors were responsible for the hierarchical social organisations found among human populations. This tied in with other ideas of genetic determinism which spread to further perspectives not only in the animal behaviour studies of many species but also into some studies of humans. I had encountered this at the time among some who were studying the animal behaviour of primates, when I had generally found it among researchers with a greater knowledge of animal behaviour than of the biosynthetic pathways of genetic coding (Note footnote 4 above). It became personal for me when my recommendations for 'biosocial' cooperation were frequently misunderstood as in favour of "sociobiology" and genetic determinism! This was ironic as, in my view, what was relevant (although I would never say due to any <u>one</u> determinant) lay in the complexity of sociocultural and economic factors affecting human decisions about marriage, mating and

migration and so to the distribution of genes in following generations, and thus was almost the antithesis of genetic determinism. Furthermore, I was not even arguing for any specific "determinism", but for the need to understand the complex interaction of multiple factors from many different academic disciplines, social, cultural, economic, environmental and biological, affecting humans because of the complexity of their decision making. Furthermore, I often found a lack of basic understanding that genes are only codes for biochemical processes which in turn interact not only with each other, but also with nutrition (of course) and a myriad of other external factors, environmental conditions, sunlight, air and water qualities, exercise as well as whatever sociocultural and economic pressures or support might affect the body and mind through emotions and psychological pathways. I believe that anyone understanding all this could never be a genetic determinist…. or, I argue, even seek for any single-cause determinism!

A second barrier to good biosocial communication arose, I believe, in a very different way. When trying to gain information from colleagues in Social Anthropology about sociocultural studies leading to decisions that might be factors affecting human choices about migration, mating and marital choices, and therefore future gene flow, I saw it (as I see it today) as trying to understand a wide range of perspectives affecting the humans and their decisions. However, I kept finding among some social anthropologists that they pursued discussions of society as though "society" were the endpoint of their study rather than the humans themselves. Figure 2 shows a copy of the short letter I wrote in reaction to this to the (then new) journal. "Anthropology Today" in August 1985 (Macbeth 1985). I shall not repeat its points here.

Scope of anthropology

The recent advent of the new journal provides an appropriate moment to review the definition of the word, anthropology.

The first point is that it is not synonymous with social anthropology, although many have on occasion used the word in this way. The simplest definition seems the most appropriate and surely all first lectures of first courses in anthropology include the information that anthropology is the study of mankind. Generally there would follow further clarification about the study of groups of human beings rather than of individuals, perhaps the 'holistic' study of groups.

My own postgraduate study of anthropology followed a multidisciplinary degree with geography, economics, ethnography and physical anthropology, providing a framework into which Harrison and Boyce's (1972) theme on the 'structures' of human populations fitted comfortably. It seemed clear that information from a broad range of disciplines demonstrating relationships and chain reactions in a way familiar to ecologists was useful when considering topics relating to any human group(s). Recently, in order to help first term Modular Course students integrate material from diverse disciplines, I was lecturing on this interrelation of spatial, demographic, economic, political, social, genetic, etc. 'structures' of a human population.

This concentration on the human population itself stimulated interesting discussions, which have increased my understanding of the range of subject-matter in which social anthropologists specialize, but is it all anthropology? I had of course known of their use of the word 'society', but I had not realised that this could not be comfortably equated with what the biological anthropologists refer to as the 'social structure' of a population. According to many social anthropological accounts, a society can include dead ancestors or cattle or mythological beings or whatever. This means that the 'society' must be conceived of as having an existence at one remove from the humans themselves. As an anthropologist with leanings towards human population genetics, I have long been convinced of the vital need to understand social components of human population dynamics and I recognize the relevance of the whole concept of 'society' to this. In fact, it is hard to imagine a topic where it is not relevant.

Nevertheless, I suggest that, for the anthropologist, understanding society, or comparing societies, is not the ultimate aim, but a component step in the holistic approach to understanding the human group(s) themselves. Should not those whose ultimate academic interest is society *per se* be called anthropological sociologists rather than social anthropologists?

Since the contribution from social anthropology is vital to understanding topics concerned with humans, it might be useful if this source of possible confusion were resolved to allow proper cooperation across disciplines.

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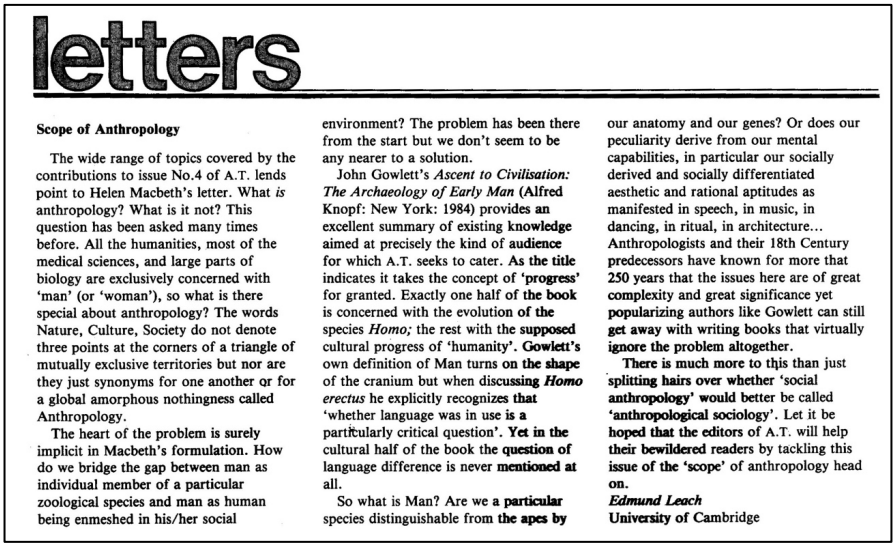
Harrison, G.A. and Boyce, A.J. (1972) The Structure of Human Populations. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Fig. 2. Letter to *Anthropology Today*, Volume 1, No.4, August 1985

That letter was answered in the next issue of the journal with a letter by Edmond Leach (Figure 3: Leach 1985). Different readers will no doubt have different reactions on reading both these letters, but please remember that the date was 1985 and I was often finding cooperation across different subdisciplines within Anthropology actively resisted because I felt that some were concentrating on human "societies" as their main topic rather than on the human beings themselves. I hasten to make clear that crossing such disciplinary boundaries has been far more readily accepted in the current millennium. In fact, these days, maybe that which I suggested in that 1985 letter be called "Anthropological Sociology", I might today suggest be called "Anthropology of Society". Such things are now for younger anthropologists to argue about, while I do hope they continue to see the need to cross the boundaries between academic disciplines and not be blinded by the rather stochastic boundaries that once developed between academic disciplines and subdisciplines.

As for my own research, I continued research based on interviews or recorded material (such as past marriage records) that theoretically could throw light on the migration of human genes, until the mathematics of population genetics became based on DNA and RNA bases, rather than on the conceptual "genes", at which point the mathematics became far more complicated and beyond me. Meanwhile, those discussing the anthropology of food and nutrition had already long been convinced of the need to integrate information from across different academic disciplines (Garine 2004), and I turned to studying the anthropology of food-related topics.



letters

Scope of Anthropology

The wide range of topics covered by the contributions to issue No.4 of A.T. lends point to Helen Macbeth's letter. What *is* anthropology? What is it not? This question has been asked many times before. All the humanities, most of the medical sciences, and large parts of biology are exclusively concerned with 'man' (or 'woman'), so what is there special about anthropology? The words Nature, Culture, Society do not denote three points at the corners of a triangle of mutually exclusive territories but nor are they just synonyms for one another or for a global amorphous nothingness called Anthropology.

The heart of the problem is surely implicit in Macbeth's formulation. How do we bridge the gap between man as individual member of a particular zoological species and man as human being enmeshed in his/her social environment? The problem has been there from the start but we don't seem to be any nearer to a solution.

John Gowlett's *Ascent to Civilisation: The Archaeology of Early Man* (Alfred Knopf: New York: 1984) provides an excellent summary of existing knowledge aimed at precisely the kind of audience for which A.T. seeks to cater. As the title indicates it takes the concept of 'progress' for granted. Exactly one half of the book is concerned with the evolution of the species *Homo;* the rest with the supposed cultural progress of 'humanity'. Gowlett's own definition of Man turns on the shape of the cranium but when discussing *Homo erectus* he explicitly recognizes that 'whether language was in use is a particularly critical question'. Yet in the cultural half of the book the question of language difference is never mentioned at all.

So what is Man? Are we a particular species distinguishable from the apes by our anatomy and our genes? Or does our peculiarity derive from our mental capabilities, in particular our socially derived and socially differentiated aesthetic and rational aptitudes as manifested in speech, in music, in dancing, in ritual, in architecture... Anthropologists and their 18th Century predecessors have known for more that 250 years that the issues here are of great complexity and great significance yet popularizing authors like Gowlett can still get away with writing books that virtually ignore the problem altogether.

There is much more to this than just splitting hairs over whether 'social anthropology' would better be called 'anthropological sociology'. Let it be hoped that the editors of A.T. will help their bewildered readers by tackling this issue of the 'scope' of anthropology head on.

Edmund Leach
University of Cambridge

Fig. 3. Letter to *Anthropology Today*, Volume 1, No.5, October 1985

Turning to the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition

Following an earlier migration study, undertaken with genetics colleagues from Barcelona, based on an analysis of a century of parish marriage records in the Cerdanya valley in the Pyrenees (Macbeth et al. 1996; Salvat et al. 1997), I later returned to that valley to study and compare the food consumption habits of those on the French and Spanish sides of that border. The Cerdanya valley is an interesting location for anthropological study, for it is surrounded by a ring of high Pyrenean mountains and yet it is divided by an international frontier. There, the border between France and Spain runs along the relatively flat valley floor, seldom marked[5] except where there is a road (Figure 4) rather than, as elsewhere in the Pyrenees, along the mountain peaks. The study of marital records had shown a significant number of cross-frontier marriages, from which one can presume gene migration.

[5] i.e. with no physical sign or marker, except for the language used in signs to prohibit hunting in an area.

Fig .4. Old stone marker of the Spanish-French border on a minor road in the Cerdanya Valley. This photo was before Spain entered the European Union, and yet there is no hindrance to passage. Photograph © Helen Macbeth.

Although one can consider the whole valley to have a Catalan affiliation, the sense of "Catalanism" is far stronger, and now politically established, on the Spanish side, whereas it is of variable significance on the French side. I shall not divert into the history of this, but it was an interesting place for cross-disciplinary anthropological study, where nearly all residents could speak two languages and many could speak all three. All three languages have Latin origins, but they are quite separate languages and written Catalan seems to me to be far more recognisable simply from a knowledge of Latin than either Spanish or French, each of which have had other significant influences. From our earlier study of marital records, some miscegenation could be assumed. So, with the personal support of school teachers and medical doctors from both sides of that easily crossable international border, I carried out studies of dietary habits, food intake surveys and children's food choices, in order to compare the results on the French with those on the Spanish sides of the border (e.g. Macbeth and Green 1997, Macbeth 2000). In brief: there

were many differences between those on each side of the border in these food habits at a statistically significant level as well as several other differences in lifestyle simply observed. Over quarter of a century later, bearing in mind the presumed miscegenation but different life factors, it would be an interesting study to compare mortality data for any French-Spanish differences in the frequencies of different causes of death.

From this research move I became involved in the anthropology of food and nutrition, where the need to cross disciplinary boundaries, including both biological and cultural variables, not only seems so obvious but even from the late 1970s had been acceptable to those involved in the topic. I found this so different from my experiences when genetics had been involved, that I have pursued cross-disciplinary anthropology in relation to food and nutrition ever since. From this I became associated with ICAF, and after all these years later I remain so.

The International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition (ICAF): a bit of history

In writing about ICAF, the relevance of what I have written above becomes clear and to me depends on the concept of viewing anthropology as a lens through which one can study subject matter of relevance to humanity in a truly holistic way without being restricted to any one traditional academic discipline or subdiscipline. However, the aim must first be to perceive the many different perspectives on any topic being considered and then to liaise freely with others who have expertise in those different perspectives. In my view, ICAF has not only attempted this, but achieved it now for half a century.

Since time immemorial food has been a topic of importance to every human and so to humanity in every culture and belief system, often including strong views, sometimes religious, sometimes for no remembered reason and sometimes through modern science, about whether a food item is “pure” or “impure”, “sacred” or “taboo”, safe or poisonous, beneficial to health or not, and so either can be eaten or should be avoided (e.g., Collinson and Macbeth 2023). Thus, commentators, whether as contemporaries or historians or ethnographers, who have written about different groups of people, whether as a “society” or a “population”, whether of their own or some other “community”, have frequently included food-related details and beliefs. This makes suggesting a period for the beginning of anthropological perspectives on food and nutrition impossible. However, one can reasonably consider the role of Mary Douglas as highly significant in bringing a subject called

Anthropology of Food to the notice of anthropologists. Her book, *Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (Douglas 1966), is frequently mentioned in regard to the beginning of considering something called the Anthropology of Food, although others had considered the topic before. For a very full history of studies of the topic, see Garine et al.'s *Nutrition and the Anthropology of Food* (2009) . de Garine's history also highlights how cooperation between individuals from different academic disciplines achieved appropriately holistic coverage of the many food-related topics studied, discussed at conferences and published in books and other articles.

It is also reasonable to say that with the work of Mary Douglas the history of ICAF starts, because in the mid-1970s she started what was called the Committee on the Anthropology of Food to coordinate anthropological studies of food in a social context, and later in 1977, with Ravindra Khare, she launched a commission within the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), which they named The Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Food Problems. This had an initial focus on world hunger and malnutrition from a generally sociocultural perspective. Beyond the IUAES, this commission became known as the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food, and so "ICAF". In due course, to emphasise the cross-disciplinary activities of ICAF, the formal title was altered to become the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition.

Meanwhile, in the early 1970s, Geoffrey Harrison with colleagues had been active in the launch of a new degree course at the University of Oxford, called "Human Sciences", which offered students a combination of social and biological courses in the study of humanity. Then, in the 1980s, Harrison played a significant role in the launch of "The Biosocial Society of Great Britain", and in this role edited the first of the Biosocial Society Series of books, published by Oxford University Press, entitled Famine (Harrison 1988).

However, relevant to the theme of this paper, I want to move on to emphasise the significance for the development of ICAF, as we know it, of Igor de Garine. He had been an early supporter of Mary Douglas and ICAF. In due course, it was de Garine, a social/cultural anthropologist, who so strongly supported cooperation between social and biological anthropologists, nutritionists and other food scientists, both in his own research and for ICAF, emphasising the importance of understanding the role of culture in relation to nutrition in human societies. In 1993 de Garine became the President of ICAF and was elected as its Commissioner within IUAES. It was due to his influence, while he was Commissioner, that the IUAES title of ICAF was changed to the

Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition to incorporate the cross-disciplinary approach into that title. Igor was also a very convivial and popular person making the conferences he organised attractive and notable for their friendly atmosphere. I think it was through their different roles in IUAES that Igor de Garine and Geoffrey Harrison came into contact, and when the social anthropologist de Garine organised, or encouraged others to organise, multidisciplinary ICAF conferences, each on a specific topic, he was frequently supported by the biological anthropologist Harrison, as well as by others from widely different anthropological and other traditions. (Topics of ICAF international conferences covered since the formal inauguration of ICAF into the IUAES in 1978 are listed by decade in Appendix 1.)

Whereas the influence of de Garine especially fostered links across Europe, these ICAF conferences attracted contributors from around the world. As discussed above, readers should understand how unusual this biosocial cooperation within Anthropology was in the latter part of last century (in Europe at least), but the conferences were a success, the papers of most conferences were published in books and such activities have remained an important part of ICAF's activities to this day. It would also seem that this cooperation and success became a lesson for those in other fields of Anthropology, because in the current century cross-disciplinary cooperation within Anthropology, especially when focussing on quite specific specialisms, occurs elsewhere, and I recommend that the trend should continue.

Meanwhile, such cross-disciplinary cooperation has indeed remained strong within ICAF, and its international conferences have continued to attract participants and publications. Once the value of multidisciplinary cooperation is accepted, then the variety of themes to be studied regarding the topic of food and nutrition through that lens of anthropology is huge. I exemplify this by comparing just a few titles of conferences from the list in Appendix 1. Some conferences relate to one food or drink item, such as meat or fish or birds or beer or wine or water, whereas others refer to geographic areas, such as "The Mediterranean" or Latin America, or to types of areas, such as ports or mountains or crossing borders. Some conferences were devoted to human evolution, while others on quite other specific topics included at least one paper from Palaeoanthropology or from Primatology, emphasising again the many perspectives that can be relevant to specific food topics. Many early conferences were aimed at health, such as obesity, children's growth or malnutrition. There were other conferences aimed at cultural traditions, such as the status quest, divinity, sharing, rites of passage, etc., which still included biological or evolutionary papers as well as the sociocultural. It is interesting

to see the more recent titles including words like biodiversity, sustainability, tourism, gastronomy, territory, locality, human diversity, conservation, etc. However, I end the list with two titles which I could not easily classify above:- Food and Art and Food and Love, but readers will no doubt imagine the diversity of perspectives to consider in each of these. I hope this tradition of ICAF will last for at least another half century.

As well as continuing conferences and the books arising from them, in the last two years, ICAF has created two new initiatives. The first is that ICAF launched this international online journal, Archives on Food, Culture and Nutrition (AFOCUN), publishing material in English, Spanish and Portuguese. It accepts multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary articles on human food and nutrition. The second is that it established the "Igor de Garine International Award" in memory of and to continue the work and intellectual legacy of the French anthropologist, Igor de Garine (1931-2018). Recognising the value of doctoral or masters' theses, it is an award for the best postgraduate research on food and nutrition from the fields of humanities and social sciences.

The Future of the International Commission on the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition

Readers of this article! Members of ICAF! I leave that future in your hands, and I hope you will always consider the unavoidable overlap of the sociocultural, the biological, the environmental and even the technical in considering humanity, and so please always continue to cooperate across the boundaries that exist or may in the future develop between any named academic disciplines. Now, all I can do, is to encourage you all and wish you well.

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APPENDIX I
ICAF CONFERENCES AND SYMPOSIA

1978 Meeting to found the Commission of IUAES	New Delhi, India
1980s	
1980 Organizational meeting to discuss topics	Bad Homburg, Germany
1981 ICAF meeting at ICAES InterCongress	Amsterdam, Holland
1982 *Coping with Uncertainty in Food Supply*	Bad Homburg, Germany
1983 *Fatness, Obesity and Culture*	Victoria, Canada (IUAES)
1984 *The Sharing of Food: From Phylogeny to History*	Bad Homburg, Germany
1988 *Cultural and Physiological Aspects of Fatness and Obesity*	Zagreb, Croatia (IUAES)
1989 *Seasonality*	Seoul, Korea (IUAES)
1989 *Il fermento divino*	Palermo, Sicily
1990s	
1990: *Food for Humanity*	Oxford, UK
1990 *Nutritional Problems of the Elderly*	Vienna, Austria
1991 *Food and the Status Quest*	Tegernsee, Germany
1992 *The Mediterranean: a style of food and a way of life*	Almeria, Spain
1993 *Food Preferences and Taste*	Oxford, UK
1993 ICAF meeting at the XIIIth ICAES, Congress	Mexico City, Mexico
1994 *The Mediterranean Diet: Ideal models and reality*	Seville, Spain
1995 *Food Specialities: Tradition and innovation*	Evora, Portugal
1997 *The Road of Food Habits in the Mediterranean Area*	Naples, Italy
1998 *Drinking: An Anthropological Approach*	Williamsburg, USA(ICAES)
1999 *Food Habits: Crossing Borders, East and West*	Sfantu Gheorghe, Romania
1999 *Children, Food and Growth*	Prague, Czech Republic
2000s	
2000 *Meat: Environment, Health, Food and Nutrition*	Bordeaux, France
2001 *Fluid Bread, Images and Usages of Beer in Cross-cultural Perspective*	Seewiesen, Germany
2001 *The Cultural Arbitrary: Rationality and Irrationality in Food Choice*	Borja, Spain
2002 *The Culture of Water, practices, symbolism and ritual*	Crotone, Italy
2002 *Research Methods in the Anthropology of Food*	Oxford, UK
2003 *Anthropology, Nutrition and Wildlife Conservation*	Florence, Italy (IUAES)
2003 *Hunting Meat, Drinking Wine*	Poysdorf, Austria

2004 *Beer in Prehistory and Antiquity*	Barcelona, Spain
2005 *Non-Food as Food*	Oxford, UK
2005 *Food in the Ports of the World*	Veracruz, Mexico
2005 *The Kitchen and Cooking as Territories*	Toulouse, France
2006 *Mountains, Food and Nutrition*	Vallouise, France
2006 *The Contemporary Uses of Cultural Heritage; processes of food, resources and culinary systems*	Seville, Spain
2007 *Food and Rites of Passage*,	Barsana, Romania
2008 *Sharing Food; Sharing Bonds*	Beijing, China (ICAES)
2008 *Contribution of Biodiversity to Food and Nutrition*	Paris, France
2009 *Fish and Seafood*	Kamilari, Crete, Greece

2010s

2010 *Food and Conflict*	Oxford, UK
2010 *Food and Globalisation*	Bilbao, Spain
2010 *Food Habits and Food Problems in the Middle East and Mediterranean Area*	Bellaterra, Spain
2011 *Food in Zones of Conflict*	Leiden, Holland
2011 *Food, Globalisation and Human Diversity*	Perth, W.Australia
2011 *Food Sharing*	Lasseube, France
2012 *Birds as Food: Cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary aspects*	Sopron, Hungary
2012 *Food and Love*	Daroca, Spain
2012 *Growth and Nutrition: a bio-cultural synthesis with special reference to children and youths*	Bhubaneswar, India (ICAES)
2013 *Food and Art*	Kamilari, Crete
2013 *Coevolution of Humans and their Foods*	Manchester, UK (ICAES)
2013 *Alimentary Responses to the Economic Crisis*	Cazalla de la Sierra, Spain
2014 *Food, Internet and Social Media*	Extremadura, Spain
2015: *Pure Food*	Bremen, Germany
2015 *Anthropology and Ethnography of Food*	Puebla, Mexico
2016: *Food and Sustainability in the Twenty-First Century*	Liverpool, UK
2017 *Food, Gastronomy and Tourism*	Tossa de Mar, Spain
2017 *Foodways in Motion, Food Sovereignty, Producer movements and Living Traditions*	Ottawa, Canada
2017 *Transdisciplinary challenges in the Anthropology of Food*	Puebla, Mexico
2018 *Food Matters in Anthropology of Food: debates. Limits and challenges*	Florianopolis, Brazil

2019 *Food Solidarity: moral economies of food production and consumption as a foundation for human and environmental security*	Poznan, Poland
2019 *The Diversity of Mediterranean Cultures and Food Systems*	Palermo, Italy

2020s

2020 *Gastronomy, Sustainability and Development*	(virtual) Caceres, Spain
2021 *Fish as Food: lifestyle and a sustainable future*	(virtual) Liverpool, UK
2021 *Small Scale Food Producers, Legacies and Food Systems*	(virtual) Huetla, Mexico
2021 *Food Heritagization, Public Policies and Tourism in Global Context*	Merida, Mexico
2022 *Popular Cuisines and Today's Gastronomies: common popular products and preparations go to gastronomic tables*	Evora, Portugal
2023 *Food for the Future: Livelihoods, Food Systems Security, Resilience and Renewal in the Age of Permacrisis*	Delhi, India
2023 *Food and gastronomy for the rest of the 21st Century. heritages, territories, innovations and good practices*	Mexico City, Mexico
2023 *Debates on the Anthropology of Food: Iberian perspectives: Past, present and future*	A Coruña, Spain
2024 *Tourism, Food and Culture*	Lisbon, Portugal
2024 *Remaining Knowledge about Anthropology of Food*	(virtual) Johannesburg, South Africa
2025 *Food Landscapes: Territories and sustainable identities*	Barreiros, Spain

Forthcoming meetings planned for 2025

2025 *Political economy of food heritage: critical approaches and interdisciplinary intersections*	Antigua, Guatemala
2025 *Food and Gastronomy: Social Perspectives*	Mexico City, Mexico