



The Global Financial Crisis, Anthropology and Public Education: A Review Essay

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Introduction: a good crisis?

The financial crash of 2008 (involving losses estimated at between \$2-4 trillion¹) and ensuing economic crisis have been widely interpreted as a systematic failure of the globalised, dominant, neo-liberal economic order. The economic crisis may have done little for the intellectual reputation of an economics discipline that largely failed to predict that crisis. However, from an educational perspective, the crisis seems to have increased perceptions of the relevance of studying the subject. Economics has never been more attractive to prospective undergraduates², and the number of school students examined in GCE Advanced level (A-level) economics has risen by 50% since 2007 to its present total of over 27,500 entries.³

In the wider public sphere, aside from a ritualistic pillorying of bankers, the broad consensus seems to accept the need for continuing austerity measures. Unsurprisingly, much of the serious public discussion of financial and economic crisis has been conducted among economists and by those 'practical men' [sic] whom Keynes (1936) famously argued "believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, [but] are usually slaves of some defunct economist" ..

But has anthropology had a good crisis? To answer this, the review focuses on anthropologically informed contributions to the public understanding of a financial crisis using these as a case study for the consideration of anthropology in the sphere of public education. This review essay compares two book-length contributions, one by a journalist with an anthropological training and one by an academic anthropologist. Whilst most anthropological responses to the ongoing crisis have been for the consumption of an anthropological audience, these contributions seek to shape public understandings of these issues.

Comparative anthropological perspectives on the financial crisis

Paradoxically, the most purposeful attempt to demonstrate anthropology's relevance to an understanding of financial failure has come from a senior journalist at the *Financial Times*. Gillian Tett's best-selling book *Fool's Gold* provides a detailed narrative of greed and hubris at the heart of investment banking culminating in its 2008 nemesis. As head of the capital markets team at the *Financial Times*, Tett was able to immerse herself in this exclusive world, observing the innovation of new credit derivatives and, ahead of most of her peers, foretelling the catastrophe that would follow an unsustainable credit bubble built upon this new foundation.

Tett's credentials include a doctorate in social anthropology from Cambridge based on fieldwork in Soviet Tajikistan. Her explicit references⁴ to this fieldwork contributing insights to her analysis of the "tribe" of investment bankers have won her the attention of the anthropological community both in Britain and in the USA where she is now based: witness invitations to give

¹ Quoted in Tett (2009), this flexible estimate serves to demonstrate the magnitude of the crisis.

² Application data from UCAS .

³ Data from jqc.org.uk

⁴ See, for example, an interview reported in *The Guardian* (31st October 2008).

keynote addresses to conferences of both the AAA in 2010 and the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) the following year.

In *Fool's Gold*, social anthropology is referenced in the Preface: “the same approach I had once used to decode Tajik weddings seemed useful in the credit derivatives tribe too” (2009: xii); and in an Epilogue nearly 300 pages later where the author briefly directs the reader to the discipline’s relevance: “What social anthropology teaches is that nothing in society ever exists in a vacuum or in isolation...Anthropology also instils a sense of scepticism about official rhetoric” (p298).

Whilst Tett may have drawn upon her anthropological training to frame or sharpen her understanding of the structures and behaviours she describes, anthropology is not explicitly referenced in the main body of the text. The book’s intended audience would be hard-pushed to identify any anthropological connection in the narrative

If anthropology can be used to identify the causes of failure it might also identify possible antidotes. To the extent that a coterie of investment bankers was agent to their own destruction, greater anthropological insight on their own part might have gone some way to prevent this outcome. Innovation of credit derivatives spawns ever more complex financial products reducible to sets of quantitative relations. What is lost is the recognition that bank credit (the term derived from the Latin *credere*, to believe) is founded on trust, implying a set of *social* relations. The notion of finance as a social activity, servicing human connectivity, is lost to the notion of finance as *self*-serving, as master. Anthropology has the capacity to lay bare such far-reaching distortions. If this education of bankers seems implausible, not least given their established *habitus*, a more modest aim may be to influence the thinking of those responsible for regulating the financial sector, a group whose poverty of vision was clearly a leading factor behind the crisis that broke in 2008. Tett has proposed policy experts as her target audience for a social anthropological education, including government regulators and those managerial elites within the financial institutions themselves. However, it could be argued that fundamental changes to so-called banking culture are more likely to emerge from the bottom up. Anthropology, that is, needs a wider audience.

The counterpart of credit is debt, the subject of this paper’s second contribution, David Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5000 Years*. But this author cuts a very different figure. Whilst Tett now occupies a place at the top table of journalism, from where she has ready access to economic and political elites, Graeber combines academic anthropology (now professor at the London School of Economics) with direct political activism, most recently his involvement in the anti-capitalist *Occupy* movement. As his book’s title implies, he argues for the antiquity of the concept of debt; historical evidence identifies systems of debt preceding systems of exchange based on barter or money – a reversal of the common economists’ assumption that money as a medium of exchange preceded systems of debt or *virtual* money. As with finance in general, the *social* nature of debt is a fundamental insight; systems of debt bring social cohesion but, where these reflect inequality and hierarchies of power, also raise the spectre of social tensions. Morality is one device for maintaining the power of creditors: debtors are given responsibility for the circumstances of their own indebtedness; or “paying off one’s debts” is accepted as obligatory.

Graeber’s historical account of debt, drawing on evidence and analysis, ultimately provides an intellectual justification for action, a form of “applied” anthropology, in this case in support of those movements on behalf of the most indebted, be they nations (e.g. the Jubilee 2000 campaign) or individuals (e.g. the post-crash *Occupy* movement). He argues, again with evidence from antiquity, that the interests of maintaining a social stability threatened by excessive debt obligations may require forgiveness of that debt. It follows that his intended audience beyond the academy is broad, to both mobilise grass-roots support and to influence policy elites.

Tett and Graeber’s interventions draw further points of comparison. Both contributions are a reminder that discussion and analysis of the financial crisis is not value-free; both critiques take an ethical stance. Tett, the financial journalist and self-identified amateur anthropologist (her

doctorate notwithstanding), has cast a critical eye over the financial system, seeking to mediate its errors; the innovation of credit instruments is viewed positively; it is the corruption of a basically good development that heralds disaster; capitalism does not merit a reference in her book. In contrast, Graeber, the professional anthropologist and activist, offers a system critique from the margin and speaks for the marginalised.

How does this play with an audience of academic anthropologists? Graeber's respectability, influencing the reception of his work, derives from his privileged position within the academy.⁵ But Tett's emergence as an advocate for anthropological approaches has not been uncritically received from within the academic community. She herself recounts an email encounter with a European anthropologist: "Gillian, you are a journalist now, not an anthropologist, please stop [saying you are]." ⁶ Perhaps this reflects a concern for some within the academy to resist a perceived dumbing down of the discipline, a dilution of its intellectual worth for consumption in the public sphere.⁷ Advocates of greater public engagement need little reminding from the history of the discipline that British anthropology, at least, has form in this respect!

The elitism of the discipline's post-WW2 Oxbridge leadership simultaneously confined anthropology's development to a handful of universities and denigrated applied anthropology. This ensured that anthropology missed out from a major expansion of British higher education in which the other social sciences were major beneficiaries, not least because of their identification with the contemporary practice of economic and social planning. Of course, Malinowski at the LSE had earlier provided a contrasting direction for the discipline through his careful soliciting of benefactors to support African ethnography with an applied bent. The response from Oxbridge was scathing: Evans-Pritchard took to referring to the LSE as £SD – not the hallucinogen but “pounds, shillings and pence”.⁸ Through the troubled decade of the 1930s, Malinowski had drawn upon social anthropology to engage in wider public debate – in his case giving much attention to the nature and threat to western *civilisation* of war, his pacifist stance contrasting with that of the leading evolutionary anthropologist Sir Arthur Keith.⁹ Admittedly, Evans-Pritchard was himself a participant in anthropology-as-public-education, as shown by his series of radio broadcasts on the nature of the discipline, subsequently published as *Social Anthropology* in 1951. And nearly two decades later, Leach delivered the prestigious BBC *Reith Lectures* under the title *A Runaway World*, although in this example, whilst the content was informed by learned anthropological insight, anthropology was not explicitly referenced. However, these public contributions of the discipline's *Mandarins*¹⁰ were self-consciously refined, whether in choice of subject matter or channel of delivery, compared to Malinowski's earlier, more engaged approach to contemporary debates.

⁵ Graeber now holds (from 2013) a professorial position at LSE. When, earlier, he controversially failed to secure tenure at Yale, LSE's Maurice Bloch wrote in his defence of: “the best anthropological theorist of his generation” (quote taken from New York Times, 28th December 2005).

⁶ Quoted in McKenna, B. Society for Applied Anthropology Newsletter, February 2011. At <http://www.sfaa.net/newsletter/feb11nl.pdf>

⁷ That said, her work appears not to have drawn the criticism applied to other recent ‘popularising’ contributions such as Kate Fox's *Watching the English* or the televised *Tribes*. The emergence of the GCE advanced level in anthropology has prompted discussion of the suitability of these sources as teaching materials for pre-university students.

⁸ Goody (1995). MacClancey (2013: 38) relates the ability of the “hegemonic [Oxbridge] professors” to acquire funds with few strings attached, enabling them to redirect the proceeds to theoretical rather than intended practical outcomes.

⁹ Interestingly, in *The Morbid Age* historian Richard Overly identifies Malinowski as one of several leading intellectuals for whom despair of a “sick civilisation” was projected back into a personal physical disorder (Overly 2009: 366).

¹⁰ The term *Mandarins* was coined in 1964 by Paul Stirling to distinguish those British anthropologists who stood for the elitism of “social anthropology for professionals and mature minds only” in opposition to the discipline's *Missionaries* who held that “social anthropology has a message for everyone” (cited in Mills (2008: 167).

There is no doubt that during the first half of the twentieth century social anthropology enjoyed a stronger, more accurate profile beyond the academy than is the case today, albeit because of its colonial association. The subsequent de-colonisation and paradigm break-up, and the passing of an older generation of disciplinary leaders, contributed to a defensiveness, exemplified by an anthropological establishment *still* keen to promote an “intellectual austerity” (Leach 1974: 8) and to protect “the discipline from the opprobrium heaped on sociology for engaging in public controversy” (Bennett, 2011).¹¹ Sociology’s radical image was drawn from its association with contemporary issues such as multiculturalism and anti-racism, itself a mark of that subject’s relevance. Even an earlier period of cuts to higher education budgets – the 1980s – bringing issues closer to home, failed to deter anthropology’s contrasting, defensive stance, one that required a withdrawal from public engagement and controversy. The turn to structuralism or the increasing interpretivist identification of anthropology with the humanities rather than as a social science only accentuated this separation¹². Given the persistence of anthropology’s marginal status, this disciplinary history continues to resonate. As Eriksen warned more recently, “anthropology has become its own worst enemy when it comes to communicating with the wider public” (2006:34).

Anthropology and the public understanding of a crisis

I began by noting that economics had had a good crisis; the intellectual deficiencies exposed by the crisis had been offset by a heightened public perception of the discipline's relevance. But economics is increasingly a technical subject, almost a subset of applied mathematics; a discipline accorded the distinction of a 'hard' social science that contributes to the presumption of its relevance. The porosity of disciplinary boundaries between mathematics and economics has moved the practice of economics further from its earlier moorings in social science. Social anthropology is intellectually well placed to restore the social to the science!

The challenge is to identify the *specific* contributions that anthropology can bring to an understanding of financial crisis. One solution to a long-running crisis of disciplinary identity has been to argue the distinctiveness of anthropology’s methodology; in this view ethnography is anthropology’s contribution to social science. However, Hannerz provides a succinct rejection of any attempt to treat anthropology and ethnography as synonymous: “anthropology cannot be reduced to a method – perhaps some sort of qualitative counterpart to statistics” (2010: 48).

Recalling Graeber’s contribution in particular, we might argue that intellectually anthropology is well placed to promote criticism and even dissidence as strengths. Beck has written of “public anthropology prov[iding] a critical edge” (2009). Within Norwegian anthropology (in close affinity to anthropology as practised in Britain), Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2006, 2008) has witnessed a discipline cultivating its “self identity as a counter-culture”. This explains why, for some, anthropology’s institutional marginality is no bad thing, cultural critique from the periphery coming more readily than from a place in the mainstream. However, given higher education’s realities, a position on the institutional margin appears unsustainable and somewhat ironically the threat of anthropology regressing to a very few elite university departments is not inconceivable (cf. Sillitoe, 2003: 2). Meanwhile, Tett’s financial journalism evokes the constraints of speaking truth unto power whilst attempting to maintain working relationships with policy elites.

¹¹ In his 1974 (RAI) Presidential address, Leach argued “specialised work **can** be popularised and made comprehensible to a lay public and, in my view, this is something that is supremely worth doing” but added “It is also my view that the job can only be done properly by the professionals themselves.”(Reprinted in 1974, RAIN 4: 8)

¹² Here I am conscious that in France the status of Levi-Strauss as a public intellectual suggests a contrasting experience and might point to a popular anthropology around this time. However, as Dominique Casajus has suggested (1996), it is unlikely that the wider public read much of his output, preferring to fix attention on the man rather than his anthropological ideas.

For Kuper (2010) anthropology satisfies “the need for a broader perspective”, that contests the cultural insularity of other social scientific disciplines. Hannerz (2010) agrees, proposing diversity as the core theme of anthropology and as an antidote to the ethnocentrism that assigns universality to familiar ideas. Economists take note! The financial crash of 2008 demonstrated the limitations of economists attempting to model behaviour that is assumed to be universal and rational, effectively ruling out the impact of culture and history. Anthropology is singularly placed to expose these limitations of conventional economics.¹³ The failure of most economists to predict impending crisis reflected in part the obscurity of the world of “collateralised debt obligations” and “credit default swaps” from which the crisis evolved, obscure even to many highly placed individuals within the financial sector. Anthropological insight helped identify the participants in that world as an elite whose power derived in part from maintaining a “social silence” around their activities that discouraged communication even within institutions, using their expert status to maintain barriers to entry into their respective and competing “silos” (Tett, 2010). In *Liquidated: An ethnography of Wall Street* (2009), the American anthropologist Karen Ho similarly identifies a culture of smartness, a self-regarding meritocracy; and a sense of innate and exclusive ability to correct problems notwithstanding their own responsibility for those problems.

Eriksen points to the generalist mind-set of anthropologists, “opposed to the fragmenting specialization typical of knowledge production in fully modern societies.” Unlike the more technocratic contributions of other social scientists, anthropology’s take on current issues can offer “unexpected and thought-provoking perspectives on apparently pedestrian and mundane matters” (2008: 175). But, given the specialist interests of research anthropologists from which ethnographies emerge, a generalist mind-set assumes some understanding of the “collective intellectual enterprise” (Hannerz, 2010: 50) of generating knowledge of diversity. For effective public engagement, anthropologists must not lose sight of the wood for the trees.

One of the common references used in discussions of the financial crisis is to the culture of banking, a phrase absent from the pre-crash conversations of bankers. By now, the term has become a virtual cliché for greed or aggressive competitiveness. This referencing of culture again demonstrates how anthropology is uniquely placed to contribute to more penetrating analyses of financial and economic crisis. But a comment from Florida’s Governor Rick Scott in 2011 demonstrates that anthropology has its work cut out:

We don’t need a lot more anthropologists in the state. It’s a great degree if people want to get it, but we don’t need them here. I want to spend our dollars giving people science, technology, engineering, math degrees...so when they get out of school, they can get a job.¹⁴

In the context of market culture, the inference is that anthropology is a poor foundation for the workforce; in the jargon, it fails to produce transferable skills. The financial crisis provides an excellent case study to refute this assertion. Underlying the financial crisis was the creation of a bewildering array of new financial derivatives. Their expert creators were typically trained in mathematics or the so-called ‘hard’ disciplines. *Profit*, *risk* and *debt* are treated as technical terms, ‘universals’ shorn of their cultural or inter-personal context. What these participants lacked was the critical thinking and ability to see the bigger picture that is part of the anthropologist’s toolkit. And that lack was a factor in the origin of the crisis.

¹³ A response *within* economics to these limitations is provided by the developing school of **behavioural economics** which contests the conventional assumption of rationality and draws upon empirical studies to demonstrate irrational aspects of economic behaviour. At least this development shows a willingness of some economists to cross their disciplinary boundary – in this case to psychology – and apply induction to their theorising.

¹⁴ Scott’s comment was made on the Florida-based Marc Benier talk show in October 2011, drawing a swift response from the American Anthropological Association. Coincidentally, Scott’s daughter has a first degree in anthropology!

Producing an effective public understanding of financial crisis necessarily requires contributions from a number of disciplines. The challenge for anthropology is to stake out a distinctive role by both contributing to an analysis of crisis and communicating the results to a wide public. By 'distinctive' I mean one that conveys a clear sense of anthropology and its relevance. But does anthropology participate as an equal partner, complementing the contributions of other disciplines? If so, what does anthropology uniquely bring to the table? One problem is that anthropology's defining concepts – culture, holism, diversity, etc. – are readily appropriated by other disciplines and most obviously by history. Or does anthropology seek to redefine itself as a synthesising discipline, a science of humankind, acknowledging the porosity of its boundaries and wide territorial range? And if so, what role is there for a synthesising discipline? Perhaps geography is the closest equivalent to anthropology in this respect. But intellectually geography has found in spatial relationships a unifying principle, and institutionally it is well grounded in the educational system from the earliest level. In contrast, anthropology lacks this clarity of definition.

Eriksen (2006, 2008) has regularly highlighted the high public profile of Norwegian anthropology. In the context of a small domestic population, the discipline attracts large student numbers to its few university departments, and enjoys a high visibility from wide engagement in public issues through a variety of media. In 2005, one national newspaper identified three anthropologists in a list of the country's ten most important intellectuals. One explanation he offers for this level of exposure is the presence of anthropology in schools: for example, in their final three years (akin to years 11, 12 and 13 in Britain) students have the option to take sociology and anthropology; annually 7-10,000 students take this option.

Anthropology *in* public education

Few doubt that anthropologists can contribute intellectual insight to real world issues, communicating their understanding to audiences beyond the academy through a variety of media. Putting wider definitions of public anthropology aside (see Beck 2009), public engagement is also an opportunity for public education. To what extent do disciplinary pedagogic considerations also include public education? My contact with A-level anthropology students confirmed their ready identification *with* anthropology, and even an emergent sense of "anthropological sensibility" (Coleman and Simpson 1999). This supports Eriksen's emphasis on the importance of locating anthropology in mainstream education.

But some elements of disciplinary socialisation could be communicated to a wider public beyond formal education. Encouraging financial elites to incorporate greater reflexivity into their behaviour would be a good start. Beyond this, promoting a wider rapport with the discipline's social norms and values is to be encouraged, whether this enables an enhanced world-view (one that invites more critical approaches or acknowledges diversity, for example) or facilitates the development of personal *life skills* such as self-understanding or empathy. This is not novel advocacy: in the forward to his 1975 book *Understanding Social Anthropology*, David Pocock set out his aim "to teach the reader how to *think* anthropologically, to develop, that is, an anthropological sensibility" (p. ix, original italic). His work was not intended specifically for a student readership but for a more general audience. My paperback copy was published in the series 'Teach Yourself Books'.

Applying such general considerations to specific issues, anthropology has the potential not merely to participate in conversations, but to help frame these dialogues. Within the anthropological community the case for greater public engagement has been largely won. Anthropology is simply too important to stand in the wings. And enhancing the discipline's public profile would reduce anthropology's vulnerability to changes within higher education. It would also benefit from this engagement, with its contributions and interventions recognised *as anthropology*.

Anthropology already enjoys a considerable applied presence outside the university, with its multiple applications showcased, for example, during the RAI's 2012 conference, *Anthropology in the World*. There is a strong recognition of the discipline's relevance among those 'outsiders' who engage with it professionally. But in Britain anthropology's public profile is far from the Norwegian experience. For MacClancy, summing up the British perspective: "in the language of public relations, contemporary anthropology has an image problem and a shrinking audience" (2013: 191).

Public responses to financial and economic crisis have largely reflected the dominant discourses of policy experts, popular journalism and the general public: the negative behaviour of bankers has been exposed and excoriated, but with much less attention to the structures and processes that leave their post-crisis power largely intact; meanwhile welfare cuts are justified as reasonable responses to crisis; the neo-liberal discourse confers the language of *choice* and *personal responsibility* upon vulnerable groups.

There are two components to anthropology's potential (Goode 2009). The first relates to the use of the media to raise awareness of the discipline's relevance and expertise (and dispel outmoded stereotypes) – the "branding" of anthropological expertise" (p.6). To be effective this must move beyond a naïve belief that the availability of relevant knowledge changes minds. The public must be, at the same time, encouraged to appreciate and comprehend complexity. This is more ambitious, and involves challenging simplistic claims to scientific certainty that "extend the reach of neo-liberal 'common sense'" (p.16), and instead insisting on the detail, complexity and contextualisation that qualitative research alone can provide. This implies anthropology conversing with both the general public and critically engaging those who seek to frame (control) public knowledge.

For example, historian and biographer Robert Skidelsky¹⁵ has analysed the financial crash of 2008 and ensuing economic crisis as, in part, a failure of mainstream academic economics to break out of its own narrow, and highly mathematical, silo. His ambitious proposal for gradual reform of the university economics curriculum allows a place for anthropology and other human sciences in establishing a broader curriculum, necessary "to equip economists to understand the proper scope and method of their discipline" and to give substance to Keynes's observation that for an economist "no part of man's nature or his institutions must be entirely outside his regard". Taught postgraduate courses in macroeconomics [the economics of whole economies] should be "joint degrees, with an equally weighted non-economic component" (2009: 189); anthropology is one candidate. He suggests locating such degrees in the departments of the non-economic disciplines – providing a necessary spur for economics students *and* their teachers to communicate across disciplinary boundaries, both intellectual and institutional. Student campaigns for curriculum reform have also received wide media attention¹⁶.

These changes would in turn challenge anthropology. Anthropologists have regularly sought to expose the epistemological limitations of an institutionally entrenched and intellectually ethnocentric mainstream economics. A new interdisciplinary economics would force anthropology to go beyond critique. Continuing to charge Economics with complicity may lead to being dismissed as "mystifying" (Goode, 2008: 13). The discipline's opaque public image can make it easier to dismiss analyses that run counter to more straightforward, common sense explanations.

¹⁵ Lord Skidelsky is Emeritus Professor of Political Economy at the University of Warwick. A historian by training, he is the author of a three-volume biography of economist John Maynard Keynes. This required immersion in macroeconomic theory and policy over three decades.

¹⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/may/11/after-crash-need-revolution-in-economics-teaching-chang-aldred>

Conclusion: promoting anthropology *through* public education

The profiles achieved by Graeber and Tett reveal the opportunities for those with anthropological sensibilities willing to communicate with a public beyond the university. In Britain, occasional media contributions apart, the limits of current anthropological input are gauged, for example, by noting the dearth of anthropologists invited to participate as public intellectuals in debates and discussions. But in urging increased media participation, recognition must be given to the interest already shown in anthropology itself; the problem here is less one of invisibility than of distortion. Anthropologists should be willing to engage in the public arena in ways that play to anthropology's strengths, but careful to avoid contributing to negative stereotypes of the discipline as preoccupied with marginalia or trivia – a sort of *New Age* or *pop* anthropology. From personal observation, the volume of shelf space devoted to anthropology in academic bookshops has steadily declined. Anthropology is now as likely to be located next to mythology or as the poor relation of cultural studies. But if anthropology is to be called upon for discussion of serious issues then stereotypes need to be broken down. This requires a calculated engagement on the part of anthropologists with the media. Writing from the Norwegian experience, Eriksen cautions “The relationship between media and academics should...not be seen as a form of one-way parasitism [by the media], but as a complex relationship where there is a struggle over the definition of the situation” (2008 p. 181). The question is not whether to engage with public media but rather when and how.

Among themselves some anthropologists use opaque language as a mark of disciplinary *habitus*. But there also exists a basic reticence of anthropologists to communicate more widely. This was perhaps understandable when professional advancement and status were measured by the quality of academic output, not by public engagement. Perhaps it is no coincidence, therefore, that some of the best-known popular accounts are from established, senior academics. The risk is that this activity remains marginalised rather than an integral aspect of anthropology. The shift in science policy and the funders' emphasis on knowledge exchange and impact means that anthropologists can now prioritise the public understanding of *their* discipline

Distorted images of anthropology sit alongside the discipline's marginal position in higher education. And smallness fosters a continuing charge of elitism. One conclusion is that raising anthropology's public profile can ultimately be best achieved through greater exposure to the discipline at school, supporting a more democratic anthropology. Encouragingly, from a British perspective university departments are increasingly engaged in outreach activities, bringing their knowledge and skills to partnerships with school and college teachers. This requires a constructive humility on the part of professional anthropologists as they engage with a cohort of educators, many of whom will have no anthropological qualifications beyond an abiding interest in the discipline; more obviously ‘the amateur’ than Tett's self-depiction. The role of the amateur, so crucial to the nineteenth century development of anthropology in Britain, has been largely overlooked in twentieth century accounts of the discipline's development (but see MacClancy [2013] for a recent exception).¹⁷ A democratic anthropology relies on the participation of the amateur, in my case that of the school teacher.

Current developments within schools' education are discouraging: the flagship A-level anthropology has been cut, whilst curriculum changes affecting younger students serve to shore up the core or traditional school-based subjects at a cost to innovation. The future may involve the more modest approach of introducing anthropological elements into established subjects such as geography or history at various levels of schools' education. But this has been tried in the past and, whatever its merits, does not address the concern to present anthropology *as*

¹⁷ The involvement of late Victorian “public scholars” (Beck, 2009) contributed to a porous disciplinary boundary in the early institutional development of the discipline.

anthropology.¹⁸ Jeremy MacClancy (2013) has recently responded to a perceived existential crisis in the discipline by arguing it is time “for anthropologists to stop beating [the discipline’s bounds], and start becoming repeat boundary-crossers” (2013). But in dissolving boundaries the challenge is not to lose sight of what defines a distinctive anthropology.

I have argued that, anthropology has an opportunity to contribute towards the public understanding of economic and political issues and, at a deeper level, to help shape the discourses that frame discussions and direct change. This challenges disciplinary identity and its relationship with other fields. Changes in higher education along neo-liberal lines make for a difficult context. But the financial crisis carries a further lesson for anthropology. Societal elites deemed the financial sector as 'too big to fail'. Anthropology is unlikely to benefit from the same protection.

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¹⁸ One recent criterion for assessing sixth form departmental performance is the measure of subject progression to higher education. This might be seen to discourage the disciplinary co-operation required for cognate subjects to take anthropological elements on board explicitly as anthropology.

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