

## **Why Bacup? An Oxford-style response**

*Author:* Terence Rajivan Edward

*Abstract.* This paper presents what I at least regard as a University of Oxford style response to a question often posed to social anthropologist Jeanette Edwards, “Why Bacup?” The question can be a brief way of communicating various puzzles which an inquirer is seeking to solve and I presume “an Oxford person” is going to ask for a clarification of the question, perhaps offering some options.

*Draft version:* Version 4 (1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, article removed).

*I opened the window thinking to shout*

*“Oxford: what exactly are you about?”*

In sentences that have been much quoted, if not widely quoted or exactly quoted, social anthropologist Jeanette Edwards tells us:

I am often asked, ‘Why Bacup?’ A question which requires me, I always think, to identify some significant or special feature that makes it a suitable focus for anthropological interest... perhaps the question, ‘Why Papua New Guinea?’ is asked but it seems peculiarly irrelevant to anthropologists. Non-Western localities are deemed axiomatically of anthropological interest and legitimate arenas of study. (2000: 8)

Soon she tells us how she usually responds:

...it seems to me that the question ‘Why Bacup?’ requires an answer which identifies a claim to special status. I usually point to the accidental and

adventitious when describing how I came to work in Bacup and emphasize that I knew little about the town before living there. (2000: 8)

Her book was published by Oxford University Press, the University of Oxford being a distinguished university. (Do you even know that?) But according to my preconceptions at least, hers is not a properly Oxford-style response to the question.

One has to regard “Why Bacup?” as a brief way of asking a longer question, but there are different longer questions it might stand for, so one has to ask the inquirer what exactly they have in mind. Drawing from earlier analyses of mine, which perhaps did not appear online in ideal order, it could mean:

- (a) Why did you do fieldwork in Bacup, because anthropologists are supposed to travel to exotic tribes and do fieldwork there? Do you not know where it is? (2022c)
- (b) Why did you do fieldwork in Bacup because, maybe it is an acceptable place for fieldwork, but what is of interest for anthropologists there?
- (c) Why did you do fieldwork in Bacup because what is of great interest for anthropologists there, and if nothing, why did you not do fieldwork elsewhere? (2022a)
- (d) Why did you do fieldwork in Bacup, because how can an anthropologist contribute to knowledge there because won't they have the same assumptions as those studied? (2022b)

Edwards assumes a single question, which is understandable given the surface appearance, but analysis reveals various possible questions and sources of puzzlement. Perhaps an especially nice Oxford type will suggest some clarifications of the question.

I stayed in an Oxford college for a few days, by the way. I don't know if that helps with writing a paper such as this.

## References

Edward, T.R. 2022a. Fieldwork places: legitimate, illegitimate, obviously legitimate, better, worse. Available at : <https://philpapers.org/rec/EDWFPL>

Edward, T.R. 2022b. Why Bacup? A boring standard answer! Available at: <https://philpapers.org/rec/EDWWBA>

Edward, T.R. 2022c. Non-Western localities as axiomatically legitimate areas of study for social anthropology: can that explain the questions? Available at: <https://philpapers.org/rec/EDWNLA-2>

Edwards, J. 2000. *Born and Bred*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.