

A CERTAIN FEELING OF HOMELESSNESS REMARKS ON ESTEBAN KROTZ'S 'ANTHROPOLOGIES OF THE SOUTH'

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I am caught within a circle from which there is no escape: the less human societies were able to communicate with each other and therefore to corrupt each other through contact, the less their respective emissaries were able to perceive the wealth and significance of their diversity. In short, I have only two possibilities: either I can be like some traveller of the olden days, who was faced with a stupendous spectacle, all, or almost all, of which eluded him, or worse still, filled him with scorn and disgust; or I can be a modern traveller, chasing the vestiges of a vanished reality. I lose on both counts ... for, while I complain of being able to glimpse no more than the shadow of the past, I may be insensitive to reality as it is taking shape at this very moment... (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 1977: 33-4).

I shall commence my commentary on Krotz's 'Anthropologies of the South' by recalling a personal anecdote. At the time, I was just beginning to write my doctoral dissertation to be submitted to a north-eastern university in the United States. I decided to entitle its first chapter 'Encounters', and proceeded to write a very personal and, I thought, literary account of fieldwork conditions and research problems. After one of my advisers read the piece, he fired back a two-page, single-spaced, typed reply. That was nearly ten years ago, but I still keep it - and I want to quote him now: What I don't like is the tone of your writing, and your insistence on being literary, on flights of imagination, on misplaced metaphors, and on implicit ideological considerations... Your job is to describe clearly, concisely, to the point, and with the greatest depth that your data permit. Your job is to produce a good description and analysis of a concrete ethnographic and historical situation. Your job is to present the facts as unbiasedly as possible, leaving to others to elucidate what a novelist's perspective can contribute to anthropological understanding. Forget about being fancy, just be a good ethnographer. This is not the place to be a philosopher, to express your ideological proclivities, and to obfuscate what good anthropology is... Please take my remarks as nothing more than my best effort ... to make things as easy as possible for you and to help you to produce a good piece of research.

Often times in the past I have thought of what my professor wrote me then. He not only was a teacher I respected but we had become good friends. Thus, I did not resent his comments at all. To the contrary - for perhaps he was the one who in the end set me on the right track. Now, upon reading Krotz's article, I began wondering yet again about what it was exactly that elicited my adviser's worry; what was so wrong with my literary fancies and metaphors; why were my ideological considerations so utterly misplaced; what sort of collision was growing between my teacher and myself? In short, I mused, what was it that he meant precisely by his words, for I sensed there was an implicit text that his words did not quite adumbrate, something deeper than his obvious positivistic outlook on anthropology. Paraphrasing Krotz, I asked, was my case an instance of those 'Southern discourses which defend a lack of scientific rigor and low standards by means of a vague reference to a hypo-

thetical originality legitimated as such only by the geo-cultural situation of the place where it is produced'. And I hasten to add that I was writing 'there', in the United States, and not 'here', in Colombia - a land whose international ill-repute surely has something to do with a very mischievous and perverse brand of so-called 'magical realism' among its novelists.

The deliverance from my old quandary may lie, at least in part, in Krotz's essay on the anthropologies of the South. For it appears to me that Krotz is generally right in his outline of the rise of a global anthropological community during the present century, a community in which the anthropology and anthropologists coming from the North hold the cards, as it were. Indeed, my tutor was not only *my* tutor. He was also the guardian of academic excellence, of scientific rigour. He was the holder of the keys to access that holiest of modern-age tabernacles, Science itself. And if I wanted to become one of the worshippers, perhaps even a minor priest, I had to render myself with submissiveness and fervour to the ordeals dispensed to those who dare to call at its gates, in the gruesome rite of passage that thesis-writing entails. (You realize, I still keep being metaphorical.)

To put the argument in a slightly different manner, if I wanted to graduate, I had to learn to mimic appropriately the ways of a scientist, his (her) culture, his idioms, even his demeanour. In a sense, I had to become him, I had to be 'him'. After all, he was making things as easy as possible for me, a *Latino* who did not quite know all the rules of the game. And we may recall, with Krotz, that this game, this performance, science, was not born nor did it grow to become what it is in my land, in the South. Therefore, it was no surprise that I was supposed to be 'modern' before I could even start dreaming of becoming 'postmodern', with all those latently deceiving pursuits such as writing experimental ethnographies of the sort which were making such a razzle-dazzle in those days. But, one may ask in fairness, was my adviser being so different than all we teachers, in this power game which is an intrinsic part of academia. The answer is no, of course, for in the educational system, in *all* educational systems, there are 'paternal figures', teachers, masters and models, who are to be imitated and identified with, and in due course, hopefully rejected by students, disciples and followers.

At this point, I may start examining the persuasiveness of Krotz's assessment of what he calls the anthropologies of the South vis-a-vis the anthropologies of the North. In order to accomplish that, I first want to recapitulate briefly what he writes. For him, anthropology, as we understand it nowadays, was one of the consequences of the global expansion of the 'North Atlantic civilization', and further, of the consolidation (he writes 'hegemonization') of a type of knowledge we have all come to term 'scientific' (notwithstanding the fact that his word, 'scientific', may have not altogether commensurable meanings depending upon philosophical paradigms). Moreover, the decline of the East-West conflict has had a most important effect in this regard: to highlight in stark characters the old divide between the capitalist, 'modern', 'developed' North, and the 'underdeveloped', 'traditional', 'local' and the like, South. What separates South from North, he argues, is not only a 'passing technological, economical or informational inequality gap' but likewise a *cultural* division. The latter proposition is a fundamental one in his analysis. For, he contends, if the rise and construction of anthropological discourse is related, in ways he chooses not to delve into, to its cultural context, we certainly cannot accept that the anthropology which is produced in the South be judged, as it now is, according to some rule of thumb or parameter

which is only relevant to assess the anthropology which is created in the North Atlantic civilization. Therefore, in anthropological matters, Krotz seems to imply, we still have to be relativistic. Or else, we stumble into the pitfalls of considering 'Other' anthropologies 'underdeveloped', a 'kind of echo or diluted version[s]\ 'extensions' or 'replicas', albeit imperfect ones, of the original North Atlantic anthropological model. Furthermore, these other anthropologies have histories in their own right, and it is not fair to consider these histories appendices to the proper history of anthropology, again, the history of anthropology as it is pursued in the North.

Thus, what we are confronted with in this article is an echo of a different sort. Indeed, what Krotz is trying to do is to bring to the fore of the history of anthropology some of the debates that the pot-pourri known as postmodernism has established in contemporary social thinking. In particular, it seems to me that he is concerned with postmodernism's critique of the notion of a universal, unilinear conception of history, whose centre of gravity always has to do with what comes into existence in the advanced capitalist countries of the West, whereas what happens in the rest of the world is somehow peripheral, marginal, subsidiary (not to say irrelevant). For Krotz appears to be in favour of a notion of history fully aware of cultural determinations, a history capable of taking issue with diverse and multiple cultural logics, with a plurality of human experience. In short, our author would like to support any appraisal of the rise and coming to fruition of anthropological discourse which meets the challenge to relate and articulate micro-processes, regional and local, within larger academic and intellectual traditions - even including the grand anthropological tradition which originated, as he puts it, in 19th-century Europe and its western (North America) and eastern annexes. Therefore Krotz would like to give a louder and more far-reaching voice to the South in anthropological matters. For he does not want to be silent or a late-arriving guest in the global forum of anthropology.

This is doubtless a very commendable intention. It has my wholehearted applause too. However, I am also quite puzzled by Krotz's choice of categories. For this opposition between the North and the South seems to me to be an already outdated, Manichean dichotomy, a very crude sort of alterity, for grasping the richness in nuances that his declared subject-matter entails - namely, that those lands of the world outside the areas where the North Atlantic civilization thrived allowed anthropology to become what it has, but now they are more than the habitat of the objects of study of anthropological science. Why, one is led to query, did our author not frame his analysis, say, in terms of a world-system or a global approach? Thus he might be in a better position to ascertain the relationships between the central, semi-peripheral and peripheral areas of the world in which anthropological knowledge and discourse are forged, in this ever increasingly interconnected and intercommunicated planet of the Internet age. Furthermore, he might assess in a more sophisticated way how anthropological information flows, and, what is perhaps even more important, evaluate better the relationships which are established in each case between different academic *communities* at the international and regional and local levels. What he calls the North, in effect, is far from being a homogeneous, solid entity without fissures, at least as far as the concept relates to anthropology. The anthropology which comes from, say, France, has its own peculiar flavours and accents, as compared with the anthropology which comes, say, from the United States in any given point in time. True, concrete scholastic communities rooted in the countries of our example, and made out of actual people, women and men who participate in different institutional arrangements or,

academic settings, may communicate dialogue with or contradict each other in books, journals, meetings, academic exchanges and so on - that is, their relationships may range from being very intense to being practically null, or what amounts to the same, may be of intense admiration or of intense repulsion. But these issues always have to be documented and elicited ethnographically, and not only theoretically -for surely, an ethnographic undertaking on the actual practice of anthropology is desperately needed before we go on assuming that 'this' North does exist, just as much as we need to do ethnographies of the relationships which are established between these 'central' places of anthropological pursuits and their semi-peripheries and peripheries. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning here that Immanuel Wallerstein, one of the helmsmen of world-system theory, was not only influenced by the work of the French historian Fernand Braudel. He was also anticipated by the work of a pleiad of Latin American dependency theorists which had a great impact upon social thought and politics in this part of the world during the 1960s. The latter, in turn, were working following an older tradition inaugurated earlier in the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA).

By the same token, and despite Krotz's repeated efforts to talk of the South in the plural, underscoring its diversity, his simplified picture does not quite match reality either. As a Colombian anthropologist I can attest to this fact. For *certain* communities of Mexican anthropologists tend to think of themselves and behave as though theirs was already another metropolitan anthropology. Their proper audience, as it were, is not some less sophisticated anthropological community, for instance that of Colombia, but instead the leading communities of international scholars who are advancing the frontiers of anthropological knowledge. Nevertheless, it is also true that there is a very large, active and mature community of anthropologists in Mexico, full of interesting possibilities, relevant results of enquiry, and a very significant number of publications. For Mexico, along with Spain, are the leading countries in terms of publishing anthropological, and anthropologically related materials in the Spanish language, both materials written originally in Spanish, and translations into Spanish mainly, but not exclusively, from English and French. Furthermore, here in Colombia, and in the past, we have acknowledged the leadership of Mexican anthropology within Latin America. Mexico is one of those countries where our students go to pursue graduate work in anthropology. Oftentimes, we have invited Mexican anthropologists to deliver the central lectures in our meetings — an opportunity some of them have taken advantage of to tutor us in the latest developments, as for instance one congress some ten years ago when they lectured us on Marxism in anthropology (!).

Another very strong anthropological community in the region is that of Brazil. Lately, some Colombian anthropologists have turned their attention to the original and relevant work their Brazilian colleagues are propounding. This is particularly true with regards to Amazonian studies, an obvious area of encounter inasmuch as both countries share profound interests and conflicts within the Amazon Basin. However, this is not the sole topic of exchange and communication between both anthropological communities. For Brazilian anthropologists also address other, non-traditional issues, such as Carnival and various rituals in urban settings, the 'hybridization' of cultures in the cities as a consequence of change and so-called modernization, and Afro-American studies, and the results of their work are met with approval and enthusiasm by Colombian anthropologists.

Therefore, it is my contention that Krotz's assertion that 'in most parts of the South the present leading generation of anthropologists have a better knowledge of the Northern than of the Southern anthropological communities, journals, etc., even of those of their neighboring countries' is slowly but surely becoming obsolete. There is nowadays much more of a flux of ideas and people between the anthropological communities of the Latin American region, and this claim also includes the Peruvian, Ecuadorean, Argentine and Chilean anthropologies - to name other countries where anthropology seems to be making headway in this part of the world, as far as the ongoing process of creating and consolidating regional and local anthropological communities is concerned. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that at least we in Colombia know much less of what is happening in anthropology, say, in Africa, New Guinea and Australia, although I am not sure whether Krotz would consider Australian anthropology within the 'Southern' group.

However, what I do not really approve of in Krotz's article is the tone of his writing, to use my adviser's formula above. It seems to me that he falls all too easily into a certain vein of complacent dejection. This is quite apparent in his rendering of the 'silencing' of the anthropologies of the South, and in his singling out of the four critical issues for the characterization of these anthropologies. Far from being a hindrance, as Krotz would lead us to believe, the fact that in the 'South' 'those studying and those being studied are citizens of the same country' may turn out to be an important asset for the future advancement of these anthropologies. To put matters straightforwardly, in countries such as Colombia we anthropologists do not have 'to go to the field', we are *in* the field. Thus, the forests, the mountains, the roads, the streets of my city, even my own university office, are parts of the *field*, and if I so desire, I may be doing field-work all the time, as I please. This, it seems to me, opens up a wide range of possible avenues to pursue our intellectual and anthropological interests, only, of course, if we confront the challenge and dare to be original and innovative. Moreover, a few Indian young persons from the group I do research on are now my anthropology students. They are no longer my 'informants', for they read what I write about them, they contradict me, they teach me and their fellow non-Indian classmates about their people, and in return we help them to understand our national state, and the country's conflicts, if that is possible at all. Our classroom, therefore, has become an exciting ethnographic setting very apt to carry on this 'long conversation' that anthropology is all about. What else could I have expected? And I am not, of course, the only, nor the most important, example I could offer as far as this potentially fruitful interaction goes. To give but one other, the very influential book written more than 30 years ago by Gerardo and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The People of Aritama: The Cultural Personality of a Colombian Mestizo Village* (1961), has become in the past few years a sort of a charter for the people the authors conceptualized as *mestizo* to reclaim and strive for their right to be considered an Indian group once again. Surely, the *aritameños* are skilfully combining anthropology with ethnic politics to take advantage of the opportunities the new 1991 National Constitution has to offer to ethnic minorities. And that, again, is welcome, for it shapes enthralling roads for research and action.

Lest I may be judged as a naive optimist, Krotz is on safer ground when he declares that in Latin America the traditional relationships between intellectuals, the state and society are often intricate; and, furthermore, that in some countries of the region - e.g. in Colombia - sometimes it may be difficult to survive as a critical social scientist in the face of censorship, political persecution and even personal menace. Likewise, Krotz is closer to the truth when he affirms that our universities are far from being optimal in terms of laboratories, libraries, computers and the like (although the Internet era creates immense

possibilities for us, as yet only beginning to be explored); that there is not much research funding available, and that there is a general lack of appreciation for locally produced knowledge, for we tend to rely more upon foreign expertise, scientific and technological. In matters anthropological, the latter difficulty is further compounded, as Krotz has correctly asserted, by a plain and simple ‘application’, instead of a ‘recreation’, of the ‘conceptual molds and methodological tools inherited from the dominant anthropological traditions’.

But the issues involved in this respect are much more complicated, if one really intends to appreciate in full the dilemmas that social science confronts in a country such as Colombia. When our author points out that in Latin America there is a combination of a sort of suspicion or even outright rejection of the social science produced in these countries by local intellectuals with a penchant for imitating dominant anthropological traditions, he is setting his sights on something which deserves to be further developed. For a dominant position always calls forth a subordinate position, and conversely, to be subordinate implies in a sense to accept that there is someone who is ‘higher-up’ in the hierarchy, with enough power to make one comply, desire and do as he or she pleases or deems appropriate, even if that means to doubt or reject one’s own attainments or possibilities. This is the inveterate condition of the master (teacher) and the disciple, the most important source of the typical phenomenon of copying or imitating, a mimetic condition we have been so far unable to supersede in the construction of our anthropological discourse - or, for that matter, in other realms of our cultural lives in this global world of fashions, advertising, likeness in style, and interconnectedness that we presently live in. For imitative desire is always the desire to be Another, to use here a formula coined by René Girard. Thus, it is not so much that some ‘Northern’ anthropology silences our ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘diluted replicas’ of anthropology, in a conspiratorial scenario, but rather that we are quite contented with attempting to become Other, to be like ‘them’, representatives of this metropolitan anthropology we are so intent on trying to duplicate, for it is our model and our rival. And the toll is heavy, for in the process we sacrifice whatever potential we have, and shall endlessly be torn between two opposite feelings towards our models - towards those we have chosen as models - namely, the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice (to use Girard’s words again). Here, I submit, may lie the basis of an alternate account of what Krotz refers to in his essay as the ‘paternalism’ that envelops all interaction between ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’ anthropologists. (In passing, this was precisely the predicament I was in with my thesis adviser.)

I have thus come to the point of concluding this appraisal of Esteban Krotz’s article on the anthropologies of the South. For if we anthropologists who belong to the semi-periphery and periphery of the anthropological circuits of information want to evince the ‘proper profile’ of our anthropological traditions, we had better take seriously the demand of being ourselves, or being our own models. That involves both to be as fully conversant as possible with anthropological discourse as it is produced elsewhere, and to be true to our own ideas and other modes of representing the human condition. We have to be us, and that implies setting aside, or at least holding back, our intense proclivity to mimesis and imitation, just as much as we must steer clear of those easy nationalistic discourses which often lead only to xenophobia and parochialism. In short, we have to remain firmly attuned to our cultural and social condition, always in search of more persuasive forms of interpreting and representing it, without becoming too entangled with our political and cultural establishments. For in intellectual matters, as Susan Sontag reminds us in her essay ‘The

melessness'. Perhaps a new form of 'heroism' is therefore called forth for these other anthropologies which rebel at their subordinate position - not the heroism of those travellers of olden and modern times whose records so annoyed Lévi-Strauss in his wanderings across those *tristes tropiques*, but the heroism of being sensitive to reality as it is taking shape at this very moment in these other lands, our lands. Then our voices shall be heard in the global anthropological forum without having to indulge in our consuetudinary jeremiads. Or else, as in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, we might not have a second chance.

Notes

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