

**Theoretical Avatars:
Drafts on 'classical anthropologists'**

Eduardo Restrepo
Papers unpublished (2000-2001)

Department of anthropology
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill

Content

Under the pressure of facts: the emergence of modern social science (Tylor, Morgan, Dégerando, and Marx)	3
About gifts and discontents in archaic and modern societies (Mauss and Freud)	9
Without mountains of things: notes to a critique of Sahlins' concept of "original affluence"	18
Explanation, ecology and culture in anthropology: Julian H. Steward and Roy A. Rappaport	23
Collecting butterflies, making bricoleur: Notes for a comparison between Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss	34

Under the pressure of facts: The emergence of modern social science¹

[...] academic theories do not simply drop out the sky ready-formed; they are as much the products of the historical and political context in which they arise as any of the data that these theories strive to make sense of. (Banks 1996: 48).

I am convinced, after a lifetime of study, that very few anthropological ideas are really new. Indeed I have the feeling that practically all of the great theories in all the social sciences are old philosophies renamed. “The ancients have stolen all our best ideas,” as some wag put it. (Adams 1998:viii).

Introduction

From the establishment perspective, Tylor and Morgan had operated, among others “authors”, as “ancestors” or “founders” of the anthropological discipline. Tylor is often seen as the “father of modern anthropology”, while Morgan has been called the precursor of kinship studies (Stocking 1987). In this sense, this naturalization of the ancestors or precursors is expressed institutionally in core courses of anthropological theory that use typologies like “evolutionary anthropology”, “funcionalism”, “structuralism” or “postmodernism” to teach the “history of anthropology”. However, my point here is not to bring into focus the mechanisms that make this naturalization possible and how they are reproduced through apparently neutral and objective pedagogical technologies. My aim in this paper is more conventional and in itself the product of these institutional requirements. I plan to articulate some pertinent issues on the emergence of “evolutionary anthropology” and “social science” relative to “Enlightenment philosophy”. More specifically, I have chosen Tylor, Morgan, Dégerando, and Marx to explore what they understand science to be, and how they locate themselves in relation to philosophical discourse.

A empirical world to discover: observation versus speculation

The Observation of Savage Peoples is the title of Degerando’s book. Among the authors that I analyze here, he is the only one that belongs to the early nineteenth-century. He wrote in 1800 in France when philosophers were the “authorities” and gatekeepers of knowledge. Nevertheless, his whole project is based on the idea that it is necessary to carefully and systematically observe the world: “The method of observation has a sure procedure; it gathers facts to compare them, and compares them to know better.” (Dégerando [1800] 1969: 61). From his perspective, it is clear that “to know better” means to make rigorous observations. This claim to empirical-based knowledge is a cardinal difference with speculative philosophical approaches (metaphysic or scholastic, for instance) in which the logical coherence and consistence of propositions has more importance: “It

¹ Sociocultural Theory and Ethnography (Anthropology 201). Fall 2000.

were wiser to gather a large number of facts, before trying to explain them, and to allow hypothesis only after exhausting the light of experience.” (Degerando [1800] 1969: 67).

Half a century later, Marx also argues against idealistic philosophical speculations. However, in contrast with Degerando, for Marx the claim for empirical based knowledge has others connotations. On the one hand, Marx has a strong Hegelian philosophical background. On the other hand, Marx has at least two moments in his work, and it depends on the moment he deals with philosophy and empirical observations in different ways. In fact, in the so called “young Marx” (Godelier 1977), the question is raised in a philosophical framework i. e. *German Ideology* or *Thesis on Feuerbach*. But, in the “mature Marx”, when his work is strongly influenced by political economy (for example, *Contribution to the Critic of Political Economy* or *The Capital*), his position regarding empirical inquiry is closer to a positivistic idea of science.

In general, we can see a problematization of “idealistic philosophy” in Marx based on his “dialect materialistic” approach. In particular, he critiqued those philosophers that supposed that ideas were “[...] founded in immanent categories given in the human mind independently of experience.” (Giddens 1971: 21). Obviously, here we are dealing with the “young Marx” of the 1840s and his contestation of philosophy in the most conventional philosophical terms:

“The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, that is, they really and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.” (Marx [1845] 1978: 144).

However, in later works Marx’s narrative is quite different. He presents himself as undertaking historical and economical research based on data and his conclusions are the inevitable consequence of their objective analysis. At that moment, direct observation and recollection of historical and statistical data are important pieces of his work. Then, he became closer to our notion of researcher rather than philosopher in his later texts which not only can be seen in his narrative, but also on the privileged place that he gave observation and social data. Moreover, it is in that phase when Marx dichotomized the relationship between science and philosophy.

Tylor and Morgan’s projects are also ground in the presumption of the nodal importance of observation and data and both reject the philosophical emphasis on speculations. They wrote in the last three decades of the century in an Anglo-Saxon context in which the relationships between science and philosophy had different connotations than in France at the beginning of the century (Degerando) or in the Germany of the 1840s (Marx). It is important keep these contexts in mind, even if we do not have enough space here to elaborate its implications in detail. Therefore, their narrative style is abundant on data that they gather from travels, missionaries, and colonial agents. Morgan not only quoted them frequently, but he also did important observation among Native Americans. Likewise, Tylor explicitly raised the question about the methodological problem of validity of that kind of information resource (Tylor [1871] 1970: 9-10). Undoubtedly, empirical observation, directly and indirectly collected, is a core trope of Morgan and Tylor’s work.

Under the pressure of facts: objectivity and reality

Objectivity and reality are axioms for all these authors helping us to better understand the emergence of “evolutionary anthropology” and “social science” related with “Enlightenment philosophy”. Of course, objectivity and reality are mediated by the “fact” category, which is crucial in the nineteenth-century notions of science. For all of them, science should be objective or, more precisely, objectivity is a necessarily condition of science. In general terms, they make a contrast between beliefs based on prejudices and free scientific inquiry, that is, objective conclusions as the product of unbiased thought ruled by facts.

In fact, for Dégerando this contrast has an important methodological implication given that the objectivity and relevance of data are in inverse relation with an increase in the prejudices of the person who observes the facts. In other words, while more biased is the gaze, the registry is less pertinent:

“[...] they limit themselves to summary descriptions of the impressions which they received, and of the general judgments which they inferred on the character of people. Yet this drawback could easily have been avoided by making it a policy *either to describe things without judging them, or to choose expression whose sense is more agreed, or to give a precise stipulation of the sense in which one intends their use.*

This is not the place to enumerate the inaccuracies springing from *a lack of impartiality in explores, from prejudices imposed by their particular opinions, from the interests of vanity or the impulse of resentment.*” (Dégerando [1800] 1969: 67).

In a similar direction, Marx strongly claims that in the truly scientific enterprise one must avoid any prejudice. In more general terms, he considers this prejudice to be a constituency of ideology, which is embodied in both social practices and in class-based contradictions:

“This sketch of the course of my studies in the sphere of political economy is intended only to show that my views, however they may be judged and however little they coincide with the interested prejudices of the ruling classes, are the results of conscientious investigation lasting many years. But at the entrance to science, as the entrance to hell, the demand must be posted: “*Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto; ogni vità convien che qui sia morta*”. [Here all mistrust must be abandoned, and here must perish every craven thought.]” (Marx [1859] 1978: 6).

“Every opinion based on scientific criticism I welcome. As to the prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now as aforesaid the maxim of the great Florentine is mine: “*Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti.*” (Marx [1867] 1978: 297).

Tylor, for instance, celebrated that not only philosophical and theological schools admit to the reality and vitality of “ethnological facts”, but also the “perceptible movement of public opinion has here justified the belief that the English mind, not readily swayed by rhetoric, moves freely under the pressure of facts.” (Tylor [1871] 1970: i).

Social enquiry as natural science

Although Dégerando, Marx, Tylor, and Morgan have different categories in which they situate their social analysis (anthropology, ethnology, sociology or history),² they agree in the presumption that this kind of analysis belongs to the natural science. Indeed, the nineteenth-century model of natural science becomes the paradigm for social analysis. The categories of “causality” and “natural law” have particular relevance to understand this point.

Dégerando ([1800] 1969: 61-62) argues that the “Science of Man” (with capital letters) is a natural science because, like other natural sciences, it implies methodical observation, the gathering of facts, their comparison, and, most important, it seeks to understand the causes of each particular action in order to establish general laws.

For the “matured Marx”, it is also clear that he is doing a scientific work, and he labels his approach in terms of “natural history”: “My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic

² Underlying these distinct categories are different analytical targets.

formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history [...]” (Marx [1867] 1978: 297). Moreover, he understands that his research conducted him to the “discovery of laws” for human history as well as particular ones for capitalist mode of production.³ In relation with the particular laws, Marx is explicit about it: “Intrinsically, it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonism that result from the *natural laws* of the capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, or *these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results.*” (Marx [1867] 1978: 296; my emphasis).

On the other hand, Marx’s narrative is full of references to physics, chemistry and biology. This rhetoric style is quite similar to Morgan, Tylor, and Dégerando’s narratives. In particular, when Marx ([1867] 1978: 295) argues why he undertook the analysis of capitalism with the commodity-form, and the theory of value that are his most abstracts and complex issues, he uses the biological analogy of the relationship between cell and body, and how the first is the unit of body however, for that same reason, the most difficult to study.

It is evident Tylor thought of anthropology as a science. Moreover, he spend a whole chapter explaining how anthropology is the science of “Culture” (with capital letters). Indeed, it is not random that he considers that: “The tendency of modern enquiry is more and more towards the conclusion that if law is anywhere, it is everywhere.” (Tylor [1871] 1970: 24). Like Marx, Tylor ([1871] 1970: 2-3) argues that the history of mankind is a part and parcel of the history of nature. In his perspective, “Culture” or “Civilization” responds to regularities, it is not a chaotic or causal phenomena. Indeed, he argues how these regularities must be thought of in terms of relationships of causality and, then, in terms of natural laws. Thus, the origin of Culture is seen in terms of a process that may be explained by these regularities:

“The studying both the recurrence of special habits or ideas in several districts, and their prevalence within each district, there come before us ever-reiterated proofs of regular causation producing the phenomena of human life, and laws of maintenance and diffusion according to which these phenomena settle into permanent standard conditions of society, at definitive stages of culture.” (Tylor [1871] 1970: 13).

Morgan is less explicit in claiming a status of natural science for his type of research. However, his model of ethnological periods and conditions has a strong sense of regularity and necessity, as natural laws do: “It can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all the tribes of mankind, as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization. The history of human race is one in source, one in experience, one in progress.” (Morgan [1877] 1969: 3-4).

Why social analysis matters: between curiosity and social engineering

Perhaps one of the most famous quotations of Marx is the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.” (Marx [1845] 1978: 145). It is not accident, then, that his grave has this quotation. One could say, playing with his words, that intellectuals and militants have interpreted it in various (and contradictory) ways; the point, however, is that it constitutes an “empty significant”.⁴ Anyway, for the aim of this brief paper is just to highlight two extremes of one continuum constitutive of a

³ In relation to this, Engels, in his famous speech at Marx’s graveside, said: “Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history [...] But that is not all. Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production and the bourgeois society that this mode of production has created.” (Engels [1883] 1978: 681).

⁴ To more information about the Laclau’s category of “empty significant” see Olson and Worsham (1999).

modernist notion of science that could be easily understood if we take Marx in one side and Morgan on the other.

From Morgan's perspective, social analysis has its objective in knowledge itself. Moreover, the study of primitive societies is pertinent due to the fact that we come to know our past through them because they are like our ancestors in many ways: "In studying the conditions of tribes and nations in these several ethnical periods we are dealing, substantially, with the ancient history or our own remote ancestors" (Morgan [1877] 1969: 18). Consequently, he is totally worried about the advancement of the "civilization" since it involves an enormous loss of data can never again be known:

"When discovered, the American Indian tribes represented three distinct ethnical periods, and more completely than they were elsewhere then represented upon the earth. Materials for ethnology, philology and archeology were offered in unparalleled abundance; but as these sciences scarcely existed until the present century; and are but feebly prosecuted among us at the present time, the workmen have been unequal to the work. Moreover, while fossil remains buried in the earth will keep for the future student, the remains of Indian arts, languages and institutions will not. They are perishing daily, and have been perishing for upwards of three centuries. The ethnic life of the Indian tribes is declining under the influence of American civilization, their arts and languages are disappearing, and their institutions are dissolving. After a few more years, facts that may now be gathered with ease will become impossible of discovery. These circumstances appeal strongly to Americans to enter this great field and gather its abundant harvest." (Morgan [1877] 1969: iii-iv).

In contrast, Marx has in mind a notion of science that is closer to the idea of "social engineering", that is, that scientific knowledge must be instrumentalized. However, it is only possible if it is real. But in contrast with positivist epistemology, he claims that it is in social praxis where real knowledge becomes possible. From Marx's point of view, science is non-separable from praxis and its aim is to emancipate human being from any kind of alienation. In sum, it is under this framework that one could understand his words:

"Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life [...] [in] this method of approach [...] its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirical perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealist. Where speculation ends—in real life—the real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence." (Marx [1845-46] 1978: 155).

Reference cited

- Adams, William. 1998. *The Philosophical Roots of Anthropology*. Stanford: CSLI Publications
- Banks, Marcus. 1996. *Ethnicity: anthropological constructions*. London-New York: Routledge
- Dégerando, Joseph-Marie. [1800] 1969. *The observation of Savage Peoples*. Berkeley: University California Press.
- Engels, Federic. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Rober C. Turker (ed.). New York-London: W. W. Norton & Company.

- Giddens, Anthony. 1971. *Capitalism & Modern Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Godelier, Maurice. 1977. *Perspectives in Marxist anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marx, Karl. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Rober C. Turker (ed.). New York-London: W. w> Norton & Company
- Morgan, Lewis Henry. [1877] 1963. *Ancient society*. New York: The Wold Publishing Company.
- Olson, Gary and Lynn Worsham. 1999. *Race, rhetoric and the Postcolonial*. New-York: State University of New York Press.
- Stocking, George Jr. 1987. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York-London: The Free Press-Collier Macmillan Publisher.
- Tylor, Edward. 1970. *The origins of Culture*. Gloucester: Peter Smith.

About gifts and discontents in archaic and modern societies¹

“[...] many of the concepts on which we rely to describe modern life [...] are our own rationalizing cosmology posing as science, our culture paradigm as historical causality.” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 6).

“[...] is not possible to write or speak about the past without the use of concepts and presuppositions derived from one’s experience and understanding of the present, that is, from this ideas by which the writer or speaker interprets his own times to himself and to others” (Guha, 1997:6).

In a well-known reader, Foucault (1980) argues how science has been a Western modality of knowledge/power produced through ritualized procedures and specific obligations of truth. In that sense, he examines how the claims of scientific knowledge are themselves an effect of power that disempower other modalities of knowledge that are not recognized as science. These aspects of the politics of knowledge have traversed the whole of Western society. Nevertheless, they are not immutable, but historically and sociologically located. From this point of view, it is pertinent to analyze how a particular “author” engages these politics of knowledge. Furthermore, if one can examine his/her statements from the (dis)advantage that the strangeness of distance in time give us in relation with his/her arguments.

Undoubtedly, this is an arduous enterprise that one cannot argue successfully in a few pages. For this reason, I will work on a problem that I hope may be a pertinent (but only a beginning) step in analyzing the politics of knowledge in the so-called “social (or human) sciences”. In fact, I plan to examine Mauss and Freud’s claims about the universal significance and value of their respective models, and specifically how they hold these arguments to contrast particular historical condition / universal condition of human nature. I will refer mainly to two well-known books among anthropologists: *Civilization and its Discontents* and *The Gift*. I will begin with Mauss and Freud analogies that I found in their representations about science. Then I will explain their contrast about their units of analysis and methodologies. My aim is to show how, on the one hand, they share a model of science in which they base their claims of universal significance and value of their statements, and, on the other hand, how they elaborate in totally different ways their explications anchored on the particular historical situations or on the universal human nature.

The common sense of science/ the science of common sense

Science has long been defined as something that is not only different from common sense, but also that science is the systematical way of knowledge against common sense. Even for radical thinkers like Marx ([1859] 1978: 6, 297), science and common sense are contradictory and incompatible projects.² One could say that for many authors in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century science began just when common sense ended.³

¹ Sociocultural Theory and Ethnography (Anthropology 201). Fall 2000.

² We cannot forget that, following Foucault’s approach, the drastic split between them could be analyzed as a patent expression of the politics of knowledge.

In contrast to that widespread conception, by “common sense” of science I mean the net of suppositions that is taken for granted in a particular moment among some people, and that based on this set of suppositions (and on others that are explicitly articulated) called themselves and are recognized by others as scientists. So by the science of common sense I denote the deeply and unconscious embodiment in the scientific knowledge of these social representations that emerged in a particular historical moment and that could be considered broadly as “common sense”.

Based in this double anchor of the so called scientific knowledge and common sense, I posit my hypothesis to understand Mauss and Freud’s claims about the universal significance and value of their respective models. My first hypothesis is that both Mauss and Freud suppose that their statements about the social are real and objective because they are scientific based. In fact, they assume that their descriptions of specific human phenomena are the result of a systematic collection of “data” and that their theories are coherent explications of those phenomena using those data. Their claim for the objectivity of data and the reality of theories expresses their common sense of science.

Mauss ([1950] 1990: 80) argues his notion of “total social facts” based on the idea that it has the double advantage of *generality* and of *reality*. From his point of view, he is dealing with a kind of facts that (if one applies the “correct” method to get them) guarantee the reality and objectivity of his theories. Therefore, following Durkheim’s (1964) methodology of a positivistic sociology, Mauss argues for the systematic collection of concrete data that allow for sociological generalizations:

“[...] [T]he sociologists are too ready with abstractions and unduly separate the various elements of societies from one another. We must [...] observe what is given [...] After having of necessity divided things up too much, and abstracted from them, the sociologists must strive to reconstitute the whole [...] The principle and the end of sociology is to perceive the whole group and its behavior in its entirety.” (Mauss [1950] 1990: 80-81).

Furthermore, through his book, Mauss supposes that he was describing and comparing objective and real “facts”. When he analyzed the *potlatch* or the *kula*, for example, he not only systematically referenced and quoted academic sources, but also he configured his authority through an objectivistic rhetoric that has the effect of reality and truth.

Freud’s common sense of science was not explicitly argued in his book *Civilization and its Discontents*. To find his position explicitly, one has to look in his other works. Through his writings, Freud explicitly argued that psychoanalysis was a science. I will quote one piece in which Freud’s the common sense of science is evident:

“As special science, a branch of psychology –a depth-psychology or psychology of the unconscious– it is quite unfit to construct a *Weltanschauung* of its own: it must accept the scientific one. But the *Weltanschauung* of science already departs noticeable from our definition. It is true that it too assumes the *uniformity* of the explanation of the universe; but it does so only a programme, the fulfilment of which is relegated to the future. Apart from this it is marked by negative characteristics, by its limitation to what is at the moment knowable and by its sharp rejection of certain elements that are alien to it. It asserts that there are no sources of knowledge of the universe other than the intellectual working-over of carefully scrutinized observation –in other words, what we call research– and alongside of it no knowledge derived from revelation,

³ In the case of the “foundational moment” of anthropology, for example, see Tylor ([1871] 1970) and Morgan ([1877] 1969).

intuition or divination.” (Freud [1933a] 1964: 158-159).

In short, Mauss and Freud really believed that they were doing science. Therefore, they strongly thought that they were describing and explaining social realities in an objective and systematic way. In consequence, they made generalizations that they considered valid either for a particular historical moment or for the whole spectrum of human beings. Let me explain this last point in the next section.

Exposing human nature: between the particular and the universal

I had examined how Mauss and Freud reproduced an important aspect of the common sense of science of their time. However, they had important differences. In fact, they had strong differences between their units of analysis, approaches, and methodologies. Mauss was an academic located in something that one could call “comparative sociology”, his unit of analysis was the “total social fact”, and his methodology entailed comparison across societies. In contrast, Freud was a psychoanalyst. His unit of analysis was the human psyche, and his methodology was based primarily in clinical observations. From these observations he formulated a set of premises intended to apply to “normal” human beings and, further, to the reconstruction of development of the human species. My second hypothesis deals with these differences: although both Mauss and Freud claim universal significance and value for their respective theories, they understand these significance and value in a different way.

Marcel Mauss: the particular historical condition of human nature

Mauss’ approach was based on the “method of exact comparison” ([1950] 1990: 4-5). The deep structure of that comparison supposed a premise: one can draw a distinction between the two entities “they” and “we”. From that premise, the whole spectrum of societies is located in an axis of time and space in which “they” and “we” appear as discrete entities. In Mauss’ perspective, however, this does not mean an absolute rupture, but implies the existence of particular historical conditions into human societies. The pertinence of particular historical conditions among societies is very clear when he described the existence of two modalities of property, transfer and exchange:

“We live in societies that draw a strict distinction [...] between real rights and personal rights, things and persons. Such a separation is basic: it constitutes the essential condition for a part of our system of property, transfer, and exchange. Now, this is foreign to the system of law we have been studying. Likewise our civilization, ever since the Semitic, Greek, and Roman civilizations, draw a strong distinction between obligations and services that are not given free, on the one hand, and gifts, on the other.” (Mauss [1950] 1990: 47).

Likewise, the pertinence of particular historical conditions is evident when Mauss historicized and critiqued the mainstream conception of the omnipresent existence in “our western societies” of the *Homo oeconomicus*:

“It is our western societies who have recently made man an ‘economic animal’. But we are not yet all creatures of this genus. Among the masses and the elites in our society purely irrational expenditure is commonly practiced. It is still characteristic of a few of the fossilized remnants of our aristocracy. *Homo oeconomicus* is not behind us, but lies ahead, as does the man of morality and duty, the man of science and reason. For a very long time man was something different, and has not been a machine for very long, made complicate by a calculating machine.” (Mauss [1950] 1990: 76).

Thus, Mauss developed a model in which he contrasted the particular historical conditions of human societies. However, at the same time, Mauss' model was made complex because he took into account the presence of specific issues across time and different societies. The form-gift and the notion of interest were his examples. On the one hand, the form-gift proved for him the presence of social modalities that are expressed in every time and human society: "Thus, from one extreme of human evolution to the other, there are no two kinds of wisdom. Therefore let us adopt as the principle of our life what has always been a principle of action and will always be so: to emerge from self, to give, freely and obligatory." (Mauss [1950] 1990: 71). Obviously, as he showed, the form-gift has connotations and articulations depending on the particular society, but even in "our" society it operates likewise. On the other hand, he developed an analogous argument for the notion of interest:

"Let us now put the test the other notion that we have just opposed to that of gift and disinterestedness: the notion of interest, of the individual search after what is useful. This does not present itself either as it functions in our own minds. If some equivalent reason animates the Trobriand or American Indian chiefs, the Andaman clans, etc., or one motivated generous Hindus, and Germanic or Celtic nobles, as regards their gifts and expediture, it is not the cold reasoning of the merchant, the banker, and the capitalist. In those civilization they are concerned with their own interest, but in a different way from our own age. They hoard, but in order to spend, to place under an obligation, to have their own 'liege men' [...] There is self-interest, but this self-interest is only analogous to what allegedly sways us." (Mauss [1950] 1990: 75).

Based on these suppositions, he used the data and interpretations of archaic societies (a particular historical condition) "[...] to extend these observation to our own societies (other specific historical condition)." (Mauss [1950] 1990: 65). Indeed, he was very clear on the "sociological and historical value" of these data and interpretations of the archaic societies. These facts not only permitted him understood a particular "stage in social evolution", but also they were pertinent to "explain historically our own societies" (Mauss [1950] 1990: 47).

In short, Mauss claimed the existence of particular historical conditions of human societies. He established his statements based on contrasting these conditions. However, he did not conceptualize these particular conditions without connections and continuities. For that reason, from his perspective, it was pertinent to study archaic societies to draw conclusions for his own society.

Sigmund Freud: the universal condition of human nature

To understand Freud's statements about human nature in *Civilization and its Discontents*, it is useful to explain why someone from psychoanalysis wrote about culture or history of mankind.⁴ Freud's psychoanalytic approach was initially developed in the sphere of therapy. In fact, at the turn of twentieth-century he produced a new type of psychotherapy to deal with neurotic and hysterical symptoms. At the beginning, psychoanalysis was only a specific clinical technique. Psychoanalysis' initial theories deal with the psychopathologies such as neurosis and hysteries that neither the conventional medicine or other psychotherapies could explain. It is this context in which the seminal idea of the unconscious and the mechanism of repression emerged as the core pieces of the explication of the origin of neurotic and hysteric symptoms.

However, Freud concluded that there is not difference in the psyche mechanism between normal and pathological individuals. They only have different fixations in the total

⁴ For an overview of the development psychoanalysis see Freud ([1913a] 1964).

amount of their psyche energy. Freud used two facts to prove his supposition: dreams, *lapses*, and jokes. He examined in detail the dreams in 1900 in his famous book: *The Interpretation of dreams*. Then, in 1901 and 1905, he wrote about *lapses* and jokes in: *The psychopathology of everyday life* and *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. Thus, at that time, Freud elaborated a theory that could be applied to “normal” individuals.

Freud took the next step toward the interpretation of culture and history of mankind based, on the one hand, on the analogy between neurotic acts and religious rituals, and, on the other hand, in the assumption very spread in his time that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. This analogy was presented in his essay: *Obsessive acts and religious practices*. The analogy and assumption were developed in his well-known book *Totem and taboo*.⁵ It is also based in this analogy and assumption that Freud explored in further works like *The future of an illusion*, *Civilization and its discontents*, and *Moses and monotheism*.

In these set of texts about the culture and history of mankind, the assumption that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny is applied by Freud in the following way: (1) if one can reconstruct, through observations in the clinic, the development and structure of human psyche not only in pathological cases, but also in normal individuals; and (2) if the individual reproduces briefly the evolution of the species; then (3) one can correctly reconstruct important contents of the history of mankind and culture using psychoanalytic theories about the development and structure of individual human psyche. It is in this sense that he said: “[...] the development of civilization is a special process, comparable to the normal maturation of the individual [...]” (Freud [1930] 1961: 49-50). In another place, he said: “In the last few years psycho-analytic writers have become aware that the principle that ‘ontogeny is a repetition of phylogeny’ must be applicable to mental life; and this has led to a fresh extension of psycho-analytic interest.” (Freud [1913b] 1964: 184). Therefore, psychoanalysis is not a pertinent way to understand the past of the individual, but the past of human species. Perhaps, this is a method more precisely than archeology because: “[...] what is past in mental life *may* be preserved and is not *necessarily* destroyed.” (Freud [1930] 1961: 20).

Behind these assumptions, Freud strongly believed in the existence of universal condition of human nature. For Freud human nature is always the same, independently of the particular conditions. Even in the most remote past or in the distant future, human nature is identical. The *kultur*⁶ is built based on and against this human nature. One important component of human nature is expressed through the instinct of aggression:⁷ “[...] men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked: they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness [...] *Homo homini lupus*.” (Freud [1930] 1961: 65).

For Freud, the instinct of death is one side of human nature. The other side is *Eros*, or instinct of life.⁸ The articulations and contradictions between *Eros* and *Thanatos* explain the whole process of human *kultur*.

⁵ Freud’s aim is evident with this text in the first version of title: *Some points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics*.

⁶ I prefer use Freud’s original notion of *kultur* that James Strachey translate as “civilization” because, according to Elias (1978), it has a particular connotation in German academic tradition that is pertinent to keep in mind.

⁷ In the English translation of Freud the category “instinct” is used to translate two German notions that Freud clearly differentiates: *instinct* and *trieb*. In Spanish, both translations are conserved, implying this important theoretical difference: *instinto* and *pulsión*.

⁸ Freud ([1933b] 1964) explained in detail this thesis in a famous letter to Einstein.

“[...] civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind [...] But man’s natural aggressive instinct, the hostility of each against all and of all against each, opposes this programme of civilization [...] I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilization is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species.” (Freud [1930] 1961: 77).

The different phases of *kultur* imply a relative and progressive control over this human nature through various mechanisms. On the one hand, there is the alliance of the majority against the unrestricted power of one individual, namely, the social law (in a wide sense) as the key stone of the *kultur*.⁹ Here, Freud introduces his model of the primitive horde and the parricide as foundational acts of law and, therefore, of *kultur*.¹⁰ In more general terms, the will of community becomes the right against the illimitable power of one individual:

“Human life in common is only made possible when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains untied against all separate individuals. The power of this community is then set up as ‘right’ in opposition to the power of the individual, which is condemned as ‘brute force’. This replacement of the power of the individual by the power of a community constitutes the decisive step of civilization. The essence of it lies in the fact that the members of the community restrict themselves in their possibilities of satisfactions, whereas the individual knew no such restrictions. The first requisite of civilization, therefore, is that of justice –that is, the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual.” (Freud [1930] 1961: 45-46).

On the other hand, Freud considered the emergence of the superego as the other mechanism in the process of *kultur*. It implies the introjection into the individual of his own aggressiveness, and locates the claims of morality inside him/her. These two mechanisms to control human nature restrict individual liberty: “The liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization [...] The development of civilization imposes restrictions on it, and justice demands that no one shall escape those restrictions” (Freud [1930] 1961: 46).

Freud analyzed the whole process of *kultur* based on his representation of what he supposed to be human nature. However, Freud introduced different phases in his model. The primordial one is the “primitive family”, and from this developed the “totemic culture”. Both “primitive family” (or horde, as he used to call it in *Totem and taboo* [1913b]) and “totemic culture” constituted the “primal period of civilization”. The “civilized man” and currently “primitive peoples” are other possible conditions in his model. It is interesting to keep in mind that Freud explicitly considered “primitive people” not the simple expression of primordial times. Two quotations from Freud support my statements about his model:

“In this primitive family one essential feature of civilization is still lacking. The arbitrary will of its head, the father, was unrestricted [...] In overpowering their father, the sons had made the discovery that a combination can be stronger than a single individual. The totemic culture is based on the restrictions which the sons had to impose on one another in order to keep this new state of affairs in being. The taboo-observances were the first ‘right’ or

⁹ This idea is clearly related with the Rousseau’s well-known model of the “social contract”.

¹⁰ For a detailed exposition of his model, see Freud ([1913b] 1964).

‘law’.” (Freud [1930] 1961: 53; my emphasis).

“If civilization imposes such great sacrifices not only on man’s sexuality but on his aggressivity, we can understand better why it is hard for him to be happy in that civilization. In fact, primitive man was better off in knowing no restrictions of instinct. To counterbalance this, his prospects of enjoying this happiness for any length of time were very slender. Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security. We must not forget, however, that in the primal family only the head of it enjoyed this instinctual freedom; the rest lived in slavish suppression. In that primal period of civilization, the contrast between a minority who enjoyed the advantages of civilization and a majority who were robbed of those advantages was, therefore, carried to extremes. As regards the primitive peoples who exist to-day, careful researches have shown that their instinctual life is by no means to be envied for its freedom. It is subject of restrictions of a different kind but perhaps of grater severity than those attaching to modern civilized man.” (Freud [1930] 1961: 69; my emphasis).

Although Freud distinguished particular conditions in the process of *kultur*, it is clear that he was not thinking in specific historical conditions and societies, but in a *theoretical* model to explain what human *kultur* had become and what consequences it has had. His standpoint was universal human nature and he did not intend to explain any particular society or real historic moment.

Conclusions

Mauss and Freud’s discourses were produced by similar obligations of truth; by the model of science that represents itself as objective, and by the “correct” description and explication of “reality”. Indeed, their narrative have been considered just the medium through they presented their results of their researches. Thus, they considered that their statements had “universal significance and value” because, by definition, this is the aim of any science. They recognized themselves as scientists, and in name of science they located their statements. In fact, although there are many differences between Mauss and Freud, their standpoint was the scientific knowledge, namely, the common sense of science in the first half of twentieth-century.

There are many differences between Mauss and Freud. They had different questions, approaches and methodologies. Mauss’ unit of analysis is the gift as total social fact, he is working in a comparative framework, and he is talking about concrete historical societies. In contrast, Freud asked how human psyche develop and work. He was a psychoanalyst and elaborated his categories based primarily on clinical experience, and his argument about *kultur* is support in the assumption that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Thus, Freud’s statements were about the universal human nature and how this nature explains some aspects of human *kultur* in a theoretical perspective. In short, while Mauss was dealing with total social facts in particular historical condition; Freud was analyzing the universal human psyche.

Reference cited

- Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 1992. *Ethnography and the historical imagination*. Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford: Westview Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1964. *The rules of sociological method*. New York-London: The Free Press-Collier McMillan Publishers.

- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *The history of manners. The civilizing process. Volume I*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, Michael. 1980. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews & Other Writings*. New York: Pantheon
- Guha, Ranajit. 1997. *Domination without hegemony. History and power on colonial India*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund. [1933a] 1964. *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*. The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXII, pp. 3-184. Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Freud, Sigmund. [1933b] 1964. *Why the war?* The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXII, pp. 197-219. Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Freud, Sigmund. [1930] 1961. *Civilization and its discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. New York-London: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Freud, Sigmund. [1913a] 1964. *The claims of psycho-analysis to scientific interest*. The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIII, pp. 165-192. Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Freud, Sigmund. [1913b] 1964. *Totem and taboo*. The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIII, pp. 1-161. Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Marx, Karl. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Rober C. Turker (ed.). New York-London: W. w> Norton & Company
- Mauss, Marcel. [1950] 1990. *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*. Translated by W.D. Halls. New York- London: W. W. Norton.
- Morgan, Lewis Henry. [1877] 1963. *Ancient society*. New York: The Wold Publishing Company.
- Tylor, Edward. [1871] 1970. *The origins of culture*. Gloucester: Peter Smith.

**Without mountains of things:
Notes to a critique of Sahlins' concept of "original affluence"¹¹**

"Consume more than you need
This is the dream
Make you pauper
Or make you queen
I won't die lonely
I'll have it all prearranged
A grave that's deep and wide enough
For me and all my mountains o' things"

Tracy Chapman

"We are inclined to think of hunters and gatherers as *poor* because they don't have anything; perhaps better to think of them for that reason *free*" (Sahlins, 1972: 14).

Introduction

Concepts are the crystallization of their time. Like others social representations, either they do not drop out of the sky ready-formed or grow wildly up in the forest. As Elias (1978) remains us, their "life" is the complex and polyphonic trajectory of their meanness for determined generation of people that are interpellated through these concepts in their experiences and values. Indeed, it is not random that Sahlins' notion of "original affluence" had emerged in a social context of social and political discontent (Kelly, 1995: 15).

This notion implied a shift in the mainstream conception about "modern" and "paleolithic" hunter-gathers. Indirectly, it also might be read as a critique to the "materialism" of Western society. Rather than kingdoms of fames, tragedies and poverty, Sahlins argues that hunter-gatherers must be thinking as affluent societies. They are affluent societies because their material wants are plentiful satisfied. Unlike western societies, they follow the "Zen road" to affluence, that is, their "[...] material wants are finite and few, and [their] technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate" (Sahlins, 1972: 2).

Some authors have noted the strong legacy to anthropologist of Sahlins' notion of original affluence society (Bodley, 1988: 15; Kelly, 1995: 16). However, it is odd that this notion has not been object of systematic critique, while even cardinal notions as culture or fieldwork have been subject of intense debates among anthropologists in the last three decades (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992). Perhaps, this relatively untouchable idea of "original affluence society" is expression of deep modalities of anthropological knowledge that still are important part of the unconscious establishment and, for different reasons, they have been escaped to the order of thinkable until nowadays.

¹¹ Ecology/Evolution (Anthropology 203). Fall 2000.

In this paper, I plant to critique Sahlins' notion of "original affluence society". First, I will begin with an internal and empirical critique of his notion. Then, I will move to an external and theoretical critique arguing that his notion belongs to a typological thinking. In these two levels, I will mainly follow Kelly's data and arguments against the simplistic and stereotyped conceptions of hunter-gathers societies. Finally, I will explore the Sahlins' own critique to his notion of "original affluent society". In this sense, I will stress his critique to incorporate Gudeman's argument about economic as culture.

Empirical and internal critique

Two kinds of critiques could be made from an empirical and internal perspective to Sahlins' notion of original affluence. The first one is about the quantitative data that he had when he elaborated his idea. Were these data sufficient and relevant to support his statements? He used quantitative data from two resources. On the one hand, Sahlins based his quantitative information on McCarthy and McArthur temporal study about nutritional income in western Arnhem Land. On the other hand, he cited Lee's quantitative dates of daily work among the Dobe.

However, both researches were so narrow in time (only a few weeks)¹² and the information so provisional to make the general and strong conclusions that Sahlins did. Methodologically speaking, he could not generalized these data for two kinds of reasons. The first one, it is that they were so punctual in time and place; hence they had more the character of provisional results to be confirmed even in the same societies in which these data came from. In consequence, any absolute statement about hunter-gather as whole (or even for these two societies in particular) could be done based on these punctual results.¹³

The second one, these data did not inevitably imply that those two societies were affluent societies. Let us take the time of work as example and the case of Arnhem Land that Sahlins focused (1972: 17-19). Less hours of work per day not mean necessarily less work. The relative and absolute amount of work is something that he did not account.¹⁴ In these sense, they could work hard even if they worked less hours. This possible conclusion is contrary to Sahlins' statement: "The most obvious, immediate conclusion is that the people do not work hard." (1972: 17).¹⁵ In the same way, the intermittence of work (his second conclusion) does not mean invariably that their work is qualitatively better than a continuous time of work, even if the total amount is less between the former and the later. Furthermore, this intermittence of work among these societies not necessarily implied an underused of the objective economic possibilities (Sahlins' third conclusion) because the limit of the their production is not the simple function of the total amount of possible work per day of these individuals that can do it.

For the reasons above explain, one not necessarily must follow Sahlins argument (and fourthly implication) that "[...] the economy was not physically demanding" (1972: 18). Finally, Sahlins assumed that the time of non-work has to be interpreted through the homology leisure time/ relief from economic cares: "[...] what does the Arnhem Land study say about the famous question of leisure? It seems that hunting and gathering can afford extraordinary relief from

¹² McCarthy and McArthur study was with two groups, 14 days in Fish Creek group and 7 days in Hemple Bay group; while Lee data come from the registers of a month (actually, two weeks).

¹³ I will stress this argument latter.

¹⁴ In contrast, Marx showed how important it could be to understand the capitalist mode of production through that distinction in his theory of the relative and absolute surplus-value.

¹⁵ Kelly notes one of the implications of these arguments: "By centering attention on Sahlins' claim that hunter-gatherers do not work a lot, anthropology replaces one facile stereotype with another" (1995: 17).

economic cares” (Sahlins, 1972: 19). In the last part of this paper I will come back over the theoretical implication of this assumption. For now it is sufficient to say that non-working time could not necessarily read as “free” time as we tend to do based on our representations of “work”.

A second set of critiques to Sahlins model of “original affluence society” could be possible from the current data on hunter-gathers societies. For do that, Kelly’s book is a useful source. This critique could be an extensive one, but due the limits of this paper I cannot stop in it. To show how this critique could be done, I just chose a paragraph to contrast with the Kelly’s elaboration. Doing this, I want only illustrate the gap existing between the current information and Sahlins’ statement.

Indeed, Sahlins argues:

“Almost the same thing can be said of the demographic constraints of hunting-gathering. The same policy of *debarassment* is in play on the level of people, describable in similar terms and ascribable to similar causes. The terms are, cold-bloodedly: diminishing returns at margin of portability, minimum necessary equipment, elimination of duplicates, and so forth --that is to say, infanticide, senilicide, sexual contingence for the duration of nursing period, etc., practices for which many food-collecting people are well known.” (1972: 33-34).

Kelly (1995: 232-259) carefully analyzes this supposition of conscious controls on fertility among hunter-gathers. However, his conclusion is, on the one hand, that there is not evidence that probe the efficacy of some of these mechanisms such as sexual contingence for the duration of nursing period and, on the other hand, the wide spread existence of others such as the infanticide. On the contrary, Kelly states the importance of non-conscious controls in the size of population. In fact, for him there is more important in terms of the dynamics of population the relationship between breastfeed and fertility or the impact in the diminution of mobility (and its consequences through changes in patterns of activity and diet) in the decrease of birth-spacing rate.

In short, Sahlins’ model of affluent society had purposed using a body of data that, on the one hand, was insufficient to support from a quantitative point of view his model and, on the other hand, this body also implies assumptions that have considered obsolete from a nowadays perspective.

Against oversimplifying hunter-gatherer: toward a theoretical critique

“Anthropology is a continual process of constructing and deconstructing analytical categories. Indeed, typological thinking may be an inescapable part of being human. But a category is useful only if it helps point to the processes at work that create the human diversity that is temporarily pigeonholed (and ultimately only modestly described) by that category.” (Kelly, 1995: 34-35).

In first place, one might critique the Sahlins’ notion of original affluent society because it could become in an essentialized category. This essentialization has two levels. The first one is the oversimplification that Sahlins did when he thought in hunter-gather society. In fact, as Kelly noted (1995:17-18), Sahlins’ conception of hunter-gathers had a clear referent in a particular groups as Ju/’honsi and, therefore, exclude other groups as those of North America’s Northwest Coast that are sedentary, territorial, warring, ranked societies, and so forth. Thus, Sahlins idea of hunter-gather society generalized a set of aspects that evidently leave out some other societies that in fact must be include as hunter-gathers.

The second level is that Sahlins' model of original affluent society implied a typological approach. He made emphasis in the construction of type that grounded the essence of hunter-gathers. In consequence, he was awake on the sameness of an ideal hunter-gather rather than the variation among the hunter-gathers societies. For that reason, as Bodley notes: "It is also clear that not all hunter-gather societies fit this model" (1988: 15).

Typological thinking is essentialist because trying to reduce the variability of phenomena to an essence that underlying them.¹⁶ Sahlins' notion of affluence society pretend to defined the deep and common reality that underlying the apparent variability of all those societies that he considered hunter-gathers. Furthermore, he elaborated his model in a contrast between two discrete types that are expression of two incommensurable essences: hunter-gather societies versus agricultural societies; mobility versus sedentary; (little) desires versus (many) things; paleolithic versus neolithic; zen economy versus market economies; less amount and intermittent work versus more and continuous work; more leisure versus less leisure; free versus poor; they versus us, and so forth. Thus, he explains hunter-gather societies highlighting a suppose identicalness. In this sense, Sahlins shares this pretension with many others anthropologist: "In the past, anthropologists have felt the need to search for what is common among hunter-gathers in contrast to these other categories, that is, to seek what is essential to the hunter-gather lifeway" (Kelly, 1995: 34).

In second place, Sahlins' model of original affluent society supposes an analogy between modern hunter-gathers and paleolithic societies. In fact, Sahlins' argument runs in the following way: (1) if the modern hunter-gathers are affluent societies despite that they live in marginal and inferior environments than the paleolithic hunter-gathers¹⁷; hence (2) the paleolithic hunter-gathers must be also (even more) affluent societies and, in consequence, (3) it is necessary re-thinking the conventional idea of evolution of culture¹⁸ and the representations about hunter-gather lifeway that are based on a deep "neolithic ethnocentrism".¹⁹

This analogy between modern and paleolithic hunter-gathers introduces an interesting theoretical problem, that is, the pertinence of ethnography to archeology.²⁰ In others words, how far could one stress the ethnographical observations to understand the archeological register? How much can living societies tell us to understand these societies that exited hundreds or thousands of years ago? From Sahlins perspective, it is clear that he could draw conclusion about

¹⁶ This modality of thinking has her roots in Plato's metaphysical philosophy. In fact, For Plato, *eidōs* meant those real essences that underlie the changing world of appearances. These essences are discrete and discontinuous as ideal types. In this sense, the observed phenomena are a variable continuum that reflects a limited number of those constant essences —*eidōs*. Thus, "real" knowledge belongs to the sphere of *eidōs*, while "observed" phenomena and perceptions are just illusions (Rose 1998: 30). It is in this dichotomical epistemology between essences and phenomena on which typological thinking grounded. It is not strange, then, that Popper called this kind of thinking essentialism (Mayr 1972: 983).

¹⁷ This is another assumption in the Sahlins' model. To contrast whit the current data and elaborations, see Kelly (1995).

¹⁸ In Sahlins' words the process of culture evolution is not a story of continuum improvement. On the contrary: "[...] the amount of work (per capita) [and of hunger as well] increases with the evolution of culture, and the amount of leisure decreases." (Sahlins, 1972: 35). In this sense, Bodlye conclude: "Sahlins reverses conventional wisdom and proposes that evolution has been downhill in terms of human welfare" (1988:15).

¹⁹ "Having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance." (Sahlins, 1972: 4).

²⁰ The examination of the problem of analogy in scientific knowledge and the possible articulations between ethnography and archeology escape to the limits of this paper. Hence, I only pretend highlight here that Sahlins' model of affluence society must be problematized in that direction using Kelly's insights.

the past societies using ethnographical examples. However, as Kelly's remain us: "[...] the extension of analogies from living foragers to our ancient ancestors is certainly inappropriate, and even the simple extensions of the theoretical premises based on modern foraging may be inaccurate" (1995: 336).

If "we cannot extrapolate from imagines, descriptions, or statistical generalizations about modern hunter-gatherers to the past" (Kelly, 1995: 441), Sahlins' notion of original affluent society is, in the best case, a working hypothesis that requires be contrast through the archeological register. Thus, rather than a point of start, Sahlins' notion of affluent society could be a point of arrive after its systematic contrast with the archeology data. Nevertheless, as far as I know the contrast of this model in archeological register implies the reconstruction of many variables to get an image of was going on with the total amount of work required under specific ecosystems, group size, division of labor and particular technologies.

Economy as culture: stressing Sahlins own critique

"No solution is in sight, no ground for the happy academic conclusion that 'answer lies somewhere in between' " (Sahlins, 1972: xii).

In the introduction of his book, Marshall Sahlins made his own critique to his notion of 'original affluence'. In his words: " 'The Original Affluent Society' does not challenge the common understanding of 'economy' as a relation between means and ends; it only denies that hunters find any great disparity between two" (Sahlins, 1972: xii). Sahlins' own critique is located in the unfinished debate between substantivists and formalists. His arguments belong explicitly to the formers. He argues: "Embodying the wisdom of native bourgeois categories, formal economics flourishes as ideology at home and ethnocentrism abroad" (Sahlins, 1972: xiii-xiv).

Although this debate between formalist and substantivist have not been resolved, I consider that is pertinent the question about whether or no is conceptually relevant used Western models to explain or understand non-Western practices, relationships or representations. On my view, the core of the anthropological project is involved in that theoretical and political dilemma. In relation with the "economic sphere", this dilemma could be formulated in the following simple way: "[...] What constructs or models are appropriate for analyzing the economic patterns of other societies? Should we employ our Western categories of knowledge or must other ways of knowing and understanding be used? " (Gudeman, 1986: vii).

From Gudeman (1986) perspective, there is not a sphere of instrumental practical action detach from cultural constructions that one could denominate economy. Even in the over-capitalists societies, economy is not something beyond culture. Contrary to the mainstream economical discourses, economy is culturally shaped and it is not reducible to any universal a priori or human nature in abstract. If, as Geertz noted "[...] there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (1973: 49), any practice or relationship that one consider "economy" has to be inscribed in a particular historical and cultural location. Otherwise, a representation of economy (as well as human nature) detach from its cultural and historical embodies is an academic fiction without any possibility of interpellation on the real world.

Furthermore, behind the models of economic analysis (substantivist, formalist or neoMarxist) lies the same anthropological project, that is, dissolve the polyphony of ethnographic phenomena into the tautology and circularity of the model:

"Each model defines the anthropological project similarly. It is the anthropologist's task to show how the ethnographic data can be reduced to or derived from one of the initial positions. Whether substantivist, formalist or neoMarxist, each model employs a Western category as the axiomatic core for

reconstructing the data offered by other economies. Such models are reflexive, for the reconstructed data can only point back to the axioms at the core of the model. Thus, anthropologists using neoclassical economics usually find that rational or irrational choice is being exercised; substantivists discover one or another form of exchange as it is aligned with land and labor; Marxists uncover patterns of exploitation or equality in the distribution of labor's product as well as mystification in the realm of religion. *The three models continuously reproduce and rediscover their own assumptions in the exotic materials*" (Gudeman, 1986: 34; emphasis added).

In short, economy as culture means that both economies and economics analysis are social constructions (Gudeman, 1986: vii). Indeed, non-Western "economical local models" cannot be explain or understood from an "economical universal or derivational model"; which is, in last analysis, just a Western economical local model. Thus, Sahlins' notion of original affluent society could be re-thinking precisely from this perspective. On the one hand, it implies a cultural detach conception of economy in a formalistic formulation. On the other hand, rather than try to figure eight if the model is correct or not to describe the hunter-gather societies, this model of original affluent society must be read as an "invert image" or a "negative projection" of the an particular historical and political discussion in the academic establishment.

References cited

- Bodley, John. 1988. *Tribal Peoples and Development Issues. A Global Overview*. Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Comaroff, Jean and John Commaroff. 1992. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Boulder-San Francisco-Oxford: Westview Press.
- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *The History of Manners. The Civilizing Process. Volume I*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man" In: *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 33-54. New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Gudeman, Stephen. 1986. *Economics as Culture. Models and metaphors of livelihood*. London-Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kelly, Robert. 1995. *The Foraging Spectrum. Diversity in Hunter-Gather Lifeways*. Washington-London: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Mayr, Ernst. 1972. "The Nature of the Darwinian Revolution" *Science*. Vol. 176. June. pp. 981-989.
- Sahlins, Marshal. 1972. *Stone Age Economics*. Chicago-New York: Aldine-Atherton, Inc.
- Rose, Michael. 1998. *Darwin's Spectre. Evolutionary Biology in the Modern World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

**Explanation, ecology and culture in anthropology:
Julian H. Steward and Roy A. Rappaport¹**

“There is a wide difference of opinion, however, concerning what properly constitutes an ‘explanation’ of culture. There many ways in which explanation are conceptualized involve fundamentally different points of view concerning the nature of culture development, and these in turn entail different ways of regarding culture facts.” (Steward 1955: 4)

Introduction

Indeed, different national traditions can be identified in institutional anthropologies throughout the world. Even a graduate student can recognize that American anthropology has been distinct in fundamental features from other academic traditions such as British or French anthropologies. In recent decades, associated with the novel—but still incomplete—emergence and visualization of academics from the so-called Third World, some scholars have begun to talk about “Anthropologies of the South” as other kinds of anthropologies—even as other kinds of epistemologies—with their own specificities.

However, it is mistaken to consider that the differences are only reproduced among national traditions. In fact, deep discontinuities could be easily found internally in any of such traditions. Debates and differences have been a constitutive part of these academic industries and narratives. Thus, for example, in the last two decades American anthropologists have engaged in an intense debate about many of the principles, objectives and suppositions of their discipline (D’Andrade 1995; Lewis 1999; O’Meara 1989). Even seemingly elemental questions regarding what anthropology means or what it does have become object of intense dispute (Abu-Lughod 1991; Rabinow 1986). In fact, since the seventies such heated debates have become almost a common place, framing this situation as an expression of a deep “crisis” in the anthropological discipline (Hymes 1974; Hoebel, Currier and Kaiser 1982).

Although it would be a mistake to underestimate the novel dimensions and effects of this “crisis”, it is also pertinent to keep in mind that ever since Boas, anthropologists have engaged in discussions about the nature of their work as well as more specific debates about a particular theory, methodology or body of data. Moreover, one could note that some of the early concerns are often revisited in current discussions. Perhaps two of the most evident concern the nature of anthropological explanation/interpretation and the definition of culture as anthropologies object by antonomasia.

In a polemic article, Lewis (1999) argues that some of the critiques of “traditional” anthropology that are currently taken for granted by new generations of radical anthropologists lie in various basic but significant misconceptions of the history of the discipline. Although the object of this paper is not to examine the consistency of Lewis’ claims, I agree with the fact that current polemics should be in dialogue with a rigorous historical sense of what anthropologists have done during past generations. A productive debate must go beyond commonplaces and caricatured epithets that only promote sterile dialogues.

¹ Ecology/Evolution (Anthropology 203). Spring 2001.

In this paper I plan to focus on a crucial moment in American anthropology. I will analyze the explanation models and concepts of culture in both Steward and Rappaport's work. As it is well known, their names are associated with the emergence of two kinds of ecological approaches in anthropology toward the second half of the twentieth century. Although they have relevant differences pertaining their respective theoretical frameworks and methodological emphasis, both developed an explanation that could be considered *functionalist*. Therefore, the first part of this paper refers to a broad presentation of the different types of explanations, making particular emphasis in the functionalist aspects of their respective models. In the second and third parts, I will turn my attention towards a brief comparison between the authors. My interest is to explore contrasts and similarities in their conceptions of anthropology as science as well as their theory of culture, focusing particularly in cultural ecology and ecological anthropology.

Functional explanations

The idea of understanding or explanation could be considered one of the most intense epistemological controversies in the social sciences of the last century. In anthropology, understanding has been associated mainly with hermeneutical traditions, while explanation has generally been identified with scientific ones. Although these tendencies have been extremely dichotomized by some authors (Lynch 1982; Tylor 1986), there are analyses that have showed the complexity of the discussion, the incommensurability of some aspects and the possibility of the articulation of others (Apel 1984; Sil 2000).

Generally speaking, the debates in anthropology concerning understanding or explanation have been expressed in the discussion of three major interrelated issues. First, if anthropological phenomena are (or not) qualitatively the same as natural phenomena. Second, if the methods of the natural sciences could be applied to anthropology in a meaningful manner. Finally, if the purpose of anthropology is (or not) to develop nomothetic or probabilistic generalizations pertaining human behavior.

For anthropologists that belong to the philosophical tradition of Comte, Mill, Hempel, and Popper, natural sciences constitute the paradigm of anthropology. For them, progress in anthropological knowledge necessarily requires the adoption of methods and standards of the natural sciences. O'Meara (1989), for example, considers anthropology as an empirical science, arguing that it is both desirable and possible to apply the scientific method to explanations of human affairs. Therefore, according to this standpoint, anthropologists must try to aim towards advancing nomothetic or probabilistic explanations of human behavior based on scientific practices such as systematic examinations of their hypothesis and theories through evidence. In consequence, from their perspective, anthropological phenomena is somehow specific, but not qualitatively different from the natural world. For this reason, they advocate for a unified science, in which social and natural sciences not only share the scientific method, but also strive to increase knowledge pertaining objective reality.

In a different vein, anthropologists that identify with the philosophical tradition of Kant, Nietzsche, Khun, Wittgenstein, Feyerabend, Gadamer, Rorty and Foucault argue that due to the particularity of the object and the matter of anthropological knowledge, anthropology must focus on either a hermeneutical or a critical perspective. Simply speaking, in a broad sense, they consider that a scientific approach to anthropology is not only problematic, but meaningless in the quest for understanding cultural practices. For the purposes of this paper is not pertinent to go into the details of recurrent debates between this line of thought and scientific-oriented anthropology. It is enough to keep in mind the general academic landscape in which the claims for scientific explanations are generally inserted in anthropology and the nature of functionalist explanation in particular.

Nevertheless, as Sil (2000: 162-164) argues, rather than a clear dichotomy between explanation and understanding there is an “epistemological spectrum” in which at least eighth clear positions can be identified. From logical positivists to postmodern deconstructionists, there are various epistemological locations according to the way in which a set of criteria are approached —i.e. the place of the subject in the production of knowledge, the level of distinction between social fact and value, as well as the conception of scientific knowledge and social reality (See table).

For authors that focus their attention in models of scientific explanation, there is a broad agreement that states that there is not only one kind of explanation. On the contrary, they have identified different types of explanations. However, these authors disagree in their classification. In fact, one could find various labels to refer to a specific type of explanation, or different criteria to define a kind of explanation that could be labeled under the same name. Thus, for example, according to Beattie, four types of explanation could usefully be distinguished for practical purposes: “These are (i) explanation in terms of antecedent events, or efficient causes; (ii) explanation in terms or mediating factors; (iii) explanation in terms of ends, or purposes, teleological explanation, and (iv) explanation in terms of general laws or principles.” (1968: 118). However, Elster (1983) examines under other categories the types of explanation: causal, functional and intentional. Analogous distinction between causal and functional explanations in social science has made by Spiro (1968).

Although our focus is mainly in functionalism and the explanations attached to it, it is relevant see how some authors have understood this particular explanation in contrast and in relationship with others. Thus, I will make a brief reference to other types of explanations in order to illustrate what the notion of functional explanation implies for these authors.

Perhaps a point to begin this enterprise is with one of founding figures of both sociology and anthropology, Emile Durkheim. In Turner and Maryanski’s genealogy of functionalism it is clear that Durkheim was aware of the distinction between causal and functionalist explanation:

“To show how a fact is useful is not to explain how it originated or why it is what it is ... The need we have of things cannot give them existence, nor can it confer their specific nature upon them [...] When, then, the explanation of a social phenomenon is undertaken, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produce it and the function it fulfills. We use the word ‘function’ in preference to ‘end’ or ‘purpose’ precisely because social phenomena do not generally exist for the useful result they produce.” (Cited by Turner and Maryanski 1979: 17-18).

From Beattie’s point of view, historical explanation refers to the first kind of explanation that he identified. In his words, “Explanation in terms of antecedent events is what we commonly call historical explanation. A certain existing state of affair is supposed to be better understood if it can be shown to have followed from some pre-existing state of affairs, in accordance with certain principles of efficient causation already familiar from other contexts.” (Beattie 1968: 118).

epistemological locations	social reality	method	purpose	distinction facts/values	figures
logical positivism	objective and independent of subjective experiences	the same that in natural sciences	causally explain social phenomena (hypothetical- deductive)	imperative	Comte Parsons
kantian positivism	acknowledge subjectivity of human experience as problematic for the exercise of pure logic in real of social phenomena	critical use of the natural sciences	causally explain social phenomena	not always tenable	Kant Hegel Marx Habermas
empiricist version of positive social science	social reality can be objectively study despite the subjectivity of experience	completely different from natural science	causally explain social phenomena (inductive- empirical testing)	possible and desirable	Hume Mill Popper Postwar behaviorism Historical-structuralism
soft empiricist epistemology	constructed/ intersubjective realities	observation/ inductive logics	explanatory understandings	difficult to establish	Weber
comparative-interpretative epistemology	subjective-contextual	interpretation	critical theory	difficult to establish	Beeger Geertz
phenomenological and hermeneutics approaches	subjective-experiences and practices	narrate actions and sequences	understanding of facts bound by time and space (empirical validation is pointless)	inseparable	Heidegger Gadamer Ricoueur
contextualist variant of postmodernist	Historical and culturally configured	archaeological and genealogical methods	problematized what is taken for granted and evidence how it reproduce power relationships	inseparable	Foucault
postmodern deconstructionists	completely subjective	deconstruction	critique to modern narrative (myths of rationality and progress through knowledge claims)	inseparable	Derrida Lyotard

Based on data and interpretations of Sil (2000).

In contrast, the explanation of mediating factors is based on the demonstration of relevant connections between phenomena that at first glance could appear quite separate. (Beattie 1968: 119). One could say, then, that from Beattie's perspective the distinction between these first sorts of explanations lays in a clear reference to a casuistical connection through the time dimension for the former, while this dimension or causality is not evident in the later.

Nevertheless, although this distinction is somehow slippery, his definition of teleological explanation is clearer in various aspects (Beattie 1968: 119). The first aspect is that a teleological explanation is symmetrically opposed to a historical one. The second aspect refers to attachments of value, efficiency or utility into the set cause-effect. In other words, for Beattie, a teleological explanation is a particular case of causal explanation as well as is the historical explanation. Finally, one important aspect is that a teleological explanation evidences how this value or utility contributes to the maintenance of the system. This last aspect is stressed by Beattie to characterize this kind of explanation: "[...] in the case of teleological explanation efficient causation [...] the factor to be explained is understood to be as it is *because* it achieves the consequences it does achieve [...] The end is thought of as somehow foreseen (by somebody or something), and the thing to be explained is understood when it is seen to be adapted (by somebody or something) to that end." (1968: 119).

The last type of explanation identified by Beattie subsumes a specific phenomena as a general law or principle: "As a rule all that this kind of explanation does is to assert that the datum to be explained falls into a particular class of category, and so either possesses the characters by which that class is defined [...] or else possesses some character or characters with which members of that class have been found invariably associated [...]" (Beattie 1968: 121). However, he does not describe how these principles or laws have been discovered or inferred. Likewise, Beattie does not clarify if his last type of explanation is what other authors have denominated nomothetic. I will further elaborate on this issue later on.

From Beattie's perspective, functionalist approaches combine the second and third kinds of explanations identified by him. It not only refers to evidencing causal connections among events or phenomena, but also framing these connections in a teleological sense. In his words:

"The pointing out necessary but not always obvious interdependencies between things is an integral part of functionalist approach, as this has been variously understood in social anthropology. But it is not the whole of this approach. For functionalism always implies two different kinds of explanation. The second [...] involves reference to an end or purpose, which is seen to be achieved by the causal interdependencies which have been discovered." (Beattie 1968:119).

In a useful article, Spiro (1968) states the main formal differences between causal and functionalist explanations. On the one hand, he stresses that causal explanations attempt to account for a certain variable by paying attention to particular antecedent conditions that have produced such variable. Thus, in this kind of explanation a relationship between the antecedent condition x (the variable that provides the explanation or *explanans*) and the consequent one y (the variable to be explained or *explanandum*) is established. However, this relationship must satisfy one (and only one) of three "logical paradigms": (1) x is necessary, (2) sufficient, or (3) necessary and sufficient for y (Spiro 1968: 106).

In the first case: "[...] x is a necessary, but not sufficient cause of y , if, and only if, x is a condition without which y would not have occurred. It does not tell us that x is a condition in whose presence y always occurs." (Spiro 1968: 107). The second possibility is when "[...] x is a sufficient, but not necessary cause of y if, and only if, x is a condition in whose presence y always occurs. It is not a condition without which y would not have occurred." (Spiro 1968: 107).

Finally, “[...] x is a necessary and sufficient cause of y if, and only if, x is a condition without which y would not have occurred, and moreover, whenever x is present y occurs. This is ‘causation’ in the classical sense, in which x is not merely a determinant of y ; it determines y .” (Spiro 1968: 107).

On the other hand, the functionalist differs from the causal explanation because while the later attempts to account for a specific variable y by referencing an *antecedent* condition x , the former tries to account for variable y by referencing a *consequent* condition z . In this sense, causal and functional explanations are symmetrically opposed. As Spiro (1968: 108) notes: “In both causal and functional explanations y is the *explanandum*; but in the causal case an antecedent condition, x , is the *explanans*, while in the functional case, a consequent condition, z , is the *explanans*.” In a functionalist explanation there is another aspect. In fact, in these kind of explanation is necessary also that this consequent condition z refers to the maintenance of some kind of system. Thus, the form of functional explanations is: “[...] if y then z , in which y (a structural unit) is a sufficient condition for the satisfaction of z —the satisfaction of z is the function of y — and z is a functional requirement of some system.” (Spiro 1968: 108).

In a similar manner, Jon Elster (1983) explores the differences between causal and functional explanations. He introduces other aspects that might be pertinent for our analysis of Steward and Rappaport’s explanation models. In fact, Elster (1983: 25-26) states that a causal relation must be understood as the regular conjunction of events that generally obey the principles of determinisms, locality and temporal asymmetry. The determinist principle claims that “[...] any event has a cause: a determinate set of causal antecedents that are jointly sufficient and individually necessary for its occurrence” (Elster 1983: 27). The notion that there is “a continuous chain from cause to effect” it defined by Elster (1983: 28) as local causality. This local causality, that constitutes the second principle noted above, implies that it is incorrect to argue a discontinuity in time and space between the cause-effect chain. The last principle, temporal asymmetry, postulates that “[...] a cause must precede its effect; or at least not succeed it” Elster (1983: 29).

Based on Merton and Stinchcombe, Elster argues that the formal expression of a valid functional explanation in sociology has a set of requirements:

- “An institution or a behavioral pattern X is explained by its function Y for group Z if and only if:
- (1) Y is an effect of X ;
 - (2) Y is beneficial for Z ;
 - (3) Y is unintended by the actors producing X ;
 - (4) Y —or at least the casual relation between X and Y — is unrecognized by the actors in Z ;
 - (5) Y maintains X by a casual feedback loop passing through Z .” (1983: 57).

If we compare the formal definition elaborated by these three authors, there are interesting differences. I believe that they are of particular relevance for this paper because if its working hypothesis is that both Steward and Rappaport’s models could be considered functionalist, what one means by a functional explanation is a matter of definition. The main differences among the characterization of functional explanation presented above lays in the points 3, 4 and 5 identified by Elster. For Beattie and Spiro these criteria of non-intentionally by the actors of a particular social group are something that is not accounted for. In addition, the causal feedback between Y and X is subsumed to a general conception of contribution in the maintenance of the general system.

Finally, it is pertinent keep in mind that what Turner and Maryanski (1979) refer to as illegitimate teleology is the confusion between z as function of y and z as the original cause of the existence y . In other words, illegitimate teleology appears when the analyst assumes that the end result is considered the causes of the event, this is, the function as the cause of the event.

Anthropology as science: between logical positivism and empirical orientation

Julian Steward's well-known book *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* first appeared in 1955. Steward is the founding figure of cultural ecology and multilinear evolution. As Murphy (1977) argued, Steward's work is understandable in the context of the predominance of a Boasian historical particularism and, more concretely, the vogue of culture and personality studies.

For Steward, anthropology is a scientific enterprise. However, his notions of science and anthropology as science have meanings that differ from other relevant authors such as Boas, Tylor, and Morgan, among others. The first aspect that one might highlight is that his approaches are grounded on empirical evidence. However, for Steward, the relationship between empirical evidence and theory is neither a radical empiricism nor solipsist. On the contrary, as Murphy (1977: 8) has noted: "His [Steward] favourite aphorism was that 'there are not theories unless based upon fact, but fact exist only within the context of a theory.'" As consequence, Steward's mode of inquiry is hypothetical-deductive rather than an empirical-inductive.

In this line of thought, Murphy (1977) states how different Steward's approach to ethnography during the first half of century was, especially the dominant agenda were written ethnographies of a particular group with the purpose of saving the most possible amount of data for future scientific analysis and comparisons. In fact, Steward "[...] was one of the first anthropologists to undertake fieldwork with a firm sense of problem, formulated in advance, rather than to simply obtain a general description of a culture." (Murphy 1977: 20).

Steward (1955: 3) established the distinction between scientific and historical explanations. Whereas a scientific is a generalizing approach, a historical is a particularizing approach. From his point of view, the scientific approach implies (1) the identification consistent interrelationship between phenomena, (2) establish laws of regularities and (3) make predictions with predictive value (Steward 1955: 3). On the contrary, the historical approach "[...] is more concerned with the occurrence of phenomena in time and place, the uniqueness of each constellation, and the ethos or value system characterize culture areas" (Steward 1955: 3).

For Murphy (1977: 16) Steward's model of anthropology as science is derived from the natural sciences. In particular, according to Murphy's interpretation, Steward:

"[...] dealt with a mechanical world in which there was cause and effect and in which the nature and locus of reality were never much of a question. Like most of the anthropologist of his time, Steward paid attention to epistemological problems, adopting the positivism that was current both in sociology and anthropology. In this kind of cosmos the facts of society were seen as having an autonomous existence and could be apprehended in their essences by the human mind, just as could the objects of the natural world. Social institutions, customary practices, and the like were treated as part of an objective universe, as positive entities that could be counted and measured, as part of an irreducible reality. More important, these components of the social and cultural universe had a natural order: the parts were related one to another, and the work of science was to discover these relations as they existed in both space and time. One of Steward's fundamental premises was drawn directly from the natural sciences: in a natural order anything that happen can happen again, and, given the same conditions, it probably will. This was the rationality for his study of causality and his use of the comparative method, and it was an unstated part of his entire approach in anthropology." (Murphy 1977: 16-17)

Roy Rappaport is an anthropologist that despite taking empirical evidence for the formulation of his models seriously into account, is not a follower of naïve empiricism—which argues that one must go to fieldwork without a guiding hypothesis and theoretical framework to contrast. In fact, his most famous book *Pigs for the Ancestors: Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People* not only constitutes an elegant demonstration of a particular hypothesis (the *kaiko* ritual as a homeostatic mechanism through “negative feedback”), but is also the sustentation of his theoretical and methodological assumptions. Thus, if *kaiko* mechanisms are the result of empirical data collected during research, the questions and methodology that enabled the visualization of these mechanisms constitute the background that the researcher brings to fieldwork. In Rappaport words: “The selection of variables is a product of hypotheses concerning possible interrelations among the phenomena under investigation, and these, in turn, flow from the interests and theoretical conceptions of the analyst.” (1984: 5).

Therefore, both Steward and Rappaport are aware of the theoretical and methodological implications of empirical research. Also, both agree with the idea that anthropology has to be grounded in empirical evidence and that scientific explanations deal with objective reality. In this line of thought, Rappaport established the distinction between operational and cognitive models. In fact, the operational models are the constructions that anthropologists build to account for the physical world. This model is the result of anthropologist’s systematic observations and measurement of entities, events and material relationships. From Rappaport, then, “The operational model is an observer’s description of selected aspects of the material world. It has a purpose only for the anthropologist” (1984: 238). As he noted in his relevant epilogue published in 1984, “[...] the label *operational model* tacitly recognizes that the model is not of nature itself.” (Rappaport 1984: 342).

In contrast, the cognitive model refers to environmental constructions from the “native’s point of view.” In this model, material and nonmaterial entities and relationships are taken into account. Not only the physical world, but also spiritual forces and beings are components of this model. Moreover, the distinction could not be relevant from the people’s point of view. Rappaport explicitly argues that both environmental models are relevant for ecological studies and that the cognitive model is not a “[...] less adequate representation of reality than the operational mode.” (1984: 238). However, he disagrees with extreme relativistic critiques that argue that operational models are similar to Western ideas of cognitive models:

“The procedure is open to a cultural relativistic critique, of course: operation stipulated by scientific method and undertaken in accordance with a scientific theory are simply following the folk understanding of Western society and do not represent nature any more accurately than does any tribe’s understanding of its environment. I regard such an extreme relativism wrong-headed but will not argue it here. I will simply note that the operational model is an attempt to represent nature in the terms of Western science.” (Rappaport 1984: 342).

According to Sil’s “epistemological spectrum”, both Steward and Rappaport would be located somewhat in-between logical positivism and the empiricist version of social sciences. In fact, both consider that social reality is an objective fact—as is clear in Rappaport’s rejection of relativistic critiques. They also state the existence of a scientific method and its application to anthropology by *antonomasia*. For instance, Rappaport combines quantitative and qualitative data, deploying conventional techniques from the natural sciences -to measure for example the size of gardens, rainfall or the carrying capacity of the ecosystem- to ethnographically account for nuances in spiritual systems or rituals.

In relation to purpose, both Steward and Rappaport argue in favor of the hypothetical-deductive model as a way to arrive to generalizations regarding social phenomena. However, in Rappaport’s case, these generalizations follow functionalist explanations while for Steward this is only an aspect of his approach. They state the possibility of differentiating facts from values. For

them, the anthropological project is inherently objective and based on facts. But, as Rappaport noted, the cognitive model—that is constituted by values and representations pertaining the environment in a particular society—is part of the anthropological universe of data.

Theory of culture and functional explanations in cultural ecology and ecological anthropology

Steward establishes a conceptual distinction between cultural and biological phenomena. In fact, he defined culture as a set of features that could be analytically opposed to the organic or biological domain. Whereas the former belongs to the order of the differences and particularities, the latter is associated with universals: “[...] particular patterns must be conceptualized differently than universals. The first constitute culture in its proper sense. The second constitute inherent human biological and psychological characteristics. The former are determined by history and by special local adaptations. They are super-organic. The latter are reducible to biochemical and psychological processes” (Steward 1955: 8).

In this way, Steward claims that culture is a specific order that must be object of particular concepts and methods: “If, therefore, the nature of human communities is the objective of analysis, explanations will be found through use of cultural historical concepts and methods rather than biological concepts [...]” (Steward 1955: 32). Although, he adds, these historical methods alone are insufficient. It is evident that from Steward’s perspective, culture is an entity that responds to its own logic and, therefore, the analysis must account for this specificity inscribed in its historical and geographical variation. However, he also notes that human beings are simultaneously, but in different ways, biological and psychological beings. Furthermore, Steward stresses the methodological pertinence of culture to explain the “nature of human society”. In his own words: “Human beings do not react to the web of life solely through their genetically-derived organic equipment. Culture, rather than genetic potential for adaptation, accommodation, and survival, explains the nature of human societies” (Steward 1955: 32).

The concept of culture is quite differently treated in Rappaport’s work. Rather than a radical differentiation, Rappaport argues that cultures must be understood as part of the “distinctive means” of human populations in their interactions with other kinds of populations in particular ecosystems. In fact, he critiques the tendency to inscribe culture in an ontology of sorts that contrasts with other ontological discrete levels such as organic or inorganic. In this point it is important to acknowledge that Rappaport is indirectly questioning Steward’s theory of culture:

“[...] phenomena falling into classes that have frequently been assigned to several ontological ‘levels’ (inorganic, organic, superorganic). Some social scientist have argued strongly that events or processes occurring in each level are essentially autonomous in respect to events and processes occurring on other levels, and that explanations that cut across levels are either reductionistic or the opposite.” (Rappaport 1984: 231).

In general terms, Rappaport’s contribution to anthropological theory of culture lies in his emphasis on the constitutive relationship with natural environments. Against hyper culturalism and historicism that claim for an understanding of culture in its own terms and only in reference to cultural aspects, Rappaport highlights the methodological and theoretical relevance of a broader analysis—that includes ecosystems and other populations—to explain aspects of human experience such as ritual or war. Thus, he stresses: “[...] societies or cultures do not shape and reshape themselves in vacuums, nor are they the only source or the world’s or their own forms. Adaptation to environment does have a place in the ways in which cultures and societies organize themselves.” (Rappaport 1984: 334).

References cited

- Apel, Karl-Otto
1984 Understanding and Explanation. A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Bettie, John H. M.
1968 Understanding and Explanation in Social Anthropology. *In* Theory in Anthropology. A Sourcebook. Robert Manners and David Kaplan, eds. Pp. 115-123. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- D'Andrade, Roy
1995 Moral Models in Anthropology. *Current Anthropology*. 36(3): 399-440.
- Elster, Jon
1983 Explaining Technical Change. A Case Study in the Philosophy of Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jones, Todd
1995 Interpretative Social Science and the "Native's Point of View" A Closer Look. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 28(1): 32-68.
- Hoebel, Adamson; Richard Currier and Susan Kaiser (eds.)
1982 Crisis in Anthropology. View from Spring Hill, 1980. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Hymes, Dell (ed.)
[1969] 1974 Reinventing Anthropology. New York: Vintage Books.
- Lewis, Herbert S.
1999 The Misrepresentation of Anthropology and Its Consequences. *American Anthropologist* 100(3): 716-731.
- Lynch, Joseph
1982 Crisis in anthropology? *In*: Crisis in Anthropology. E. Adamson Hoebel, Richard Currier and Susan Kaiser, eds. Pp. 65-90. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Murphy, Robert F.
1977. Introduction: The Anthropological Theories of Julian H. Steward. *In* Evolution and Ecology. Essays on Social Transformation by Julian H. Steward. Jane Steward and Robert Murphy, eds. Pp 1-38. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- O'Meara, Tim J.
1989 Anthropology as Empirical Science. *American Anthropologist*. 91: 354-369.
- O'Meara, Tim.
1997 Causation and the Struggle for a Science of Culture. *Current Anthropology*. 38(3): 399-413.
- Sil, Rudra
2000 Against Epistemological Absolutism: Toward a "Pragmatic" center? *In* Beyond Boundaries. Rudra Sil and Eileen M. Doherty, eds. Pp. 145-176. New York: SUNY.
- Spiro, Melford

1968 Causes, Functions, and Cross-Cousin Marriage: An Essay in Anthropological Explanation. *In* Theory in Anthropology. A Sourcebook. Robert Manners and David Kaplan, eds. Pp. 105-115. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Sholte, Bob

[1969] 1974 Toward a Reflexive and Critical Anthropology. *In* Reinventing Anthropology. Dell Hymes, ed. Pp 430-457. New York: Vintage Books.

Steward, Julian H.

1955 Theory of Culture Change. The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Rappaport, Roy A.

[1968] 1984 Pigs for Ancestors. Ritual in the Ecology of a New Guinea People. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Turner, Jonathan H. and Alexandra Maryanski

1979 Functionalism. London: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company

Tyler, Stephen A.

1986 Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document. *In* Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. Pp 122-140. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Collecting butterflies, making bricoleur: Notes for a comparison between Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss¹

“[...] the concepts live as long as this crystallization of past experiences and situations retains an existential value, a function in the actual being society –that is, as long as succeeding generations can hear their own experiences in the meaning of the words. The terms gradually die when the functions and experiences in the actual life of society cease to be bound up with them. At times, too, they only sleep, or sleep in certain respects, and acquire a new existential value from a new social situation. They are recalled then because something in the present state of society finds expression in the crystallization of past embodied in the words.” (Eliás, 1978: 7).

Introduction

Jesus Ibañez, a Spanish sociologist, states that knowledge (*saber*) is not the result of consensus, but is the consequence of disagreements.² In contrast, he argues that truth (*verdad*) is an issue of consensus or of power, might be thought of as the same.³ If he were right, anthropology would be one of the most fecund fields of knowledge throughout the world. However, more than a hundred years of anthropology and some thousands of anthropologists in both sides of the ocean have demonstrated that Ibañez’ statement could be wrong, at least in the anthropological case. In fact, although disagreement is a “natural condition” among anthropologists and ‘truths’ are also quite rare, they have not accumulated very much ‘anthropological knowledge’...

For better or worse, almost each anthropologist has his/her own definition of what anthropology or culture means (Llobera, 1982). Rather than a formal and standardized science, anthropology consists more in a set of practices, narratives and relationships historically embodied in different academic bureaucracies and institutions that have configured the so-called “national traditions.” Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss have been relevant figures in their respective “national traditions”. Although they wrote practically at the same time and they belonged of European context, their anthropological projects were quite different.

I plan to examine some specific aspects of their anthropological project. I am particularly interested in contrasting their perspectives on anthropology as science, as well their conception regarding the object of anthropology and their notion of structure. In the final part of the paper, I will considerer Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss’ anthropological projects in articulation with the so-called British and French academic tradition.

¹ Sociocultural Theory and Ethnography (Anthropology 201). Spring 2001.

² “[...] el saber no se produce por consenso, sino por disenso. No es una suma de lo mismo, sino un producto de lo diferente” (Ibañez, 1985: 79).

³ “[...] la verdad es cosa de consenso, o, lo que es lo mismo, de poder” (Ibañez, 1985: 71).

Anthropology as science

“[...] the scientist never carries on a dialogue with nature pure and simple but rather with a particular relationship between nature and culture definable in terms of his particular period and civilization and the material means at his disposal.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1970: 19).

Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss consider themselves as scientists. They suppose that their respective project belong to the sphere of science. Therefore, in their texts they not ascribe themselves as artists, politician or philosophers. From their perspective, by definition, science is not politics, art or philosophy.⁴ However, it is clear that they have different conceptions about what science in general and anthropology as a science in particular mean.

In fact, for Radcliffe-Brown anthropology is a natural science. From his perspective, anthropology uses “the scientific method” to understand a particular kind of natural phenomena. Like chemistry or biology, anthropology is a natural science because it applies “the scientific method” to inquire a specific aspect of reality: “I conceive of social anthropology as the theoretical natural science of human society, that is, the investigation of social phenomena by methods essentially similar to those used in the physical and biological sciences” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 189).

Thus, equally than molecules or living beings, human societies are part of natural phenomena. Analytically, these phenomena can be understood in their own terms and constitute the real support on which the different sciences are found. Therefore, anthropology deals with a specific kind of natural phenomena, namely, the social phenomena: “Social phenomena constitute a distinct class of natural phenomena” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 190). From his perspective, the way to understand any kind of natural phenomena is through systematic observation. He argues for an empirical conception of science: “My view of natural science is that it is the systematic investigation of the structure of universe as it is revealed to us through our senses.” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 190).

To him, however, empirical approach is just an aspect of the ‘scientific method’. Science is a project based on empirical facts; nevertheless, one that could formulate laws and generalize grounded on them. The scientific projects’ target is hence to find laws that rule the natural phenomena. It is in this context that Radcliffe-Brown argues that science is a nomothetic enquiry: “I suggest, place for a branch of natural science which will have for its task the discovery of the general characteristics of those social structures of which the component units are human beings.” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 190). In short, for Radcliffe-Brown anthropology is an empirical oriented science, whose object of analysis belongs to the natural phenomena, and whose propose is to discover their general characteristics.

In contrast, for Lévi-Strauss anthropology is a human/social science. In fact, he states that ethnography “[...] is indisputably a human science and devote itself of the study of these [primitive] societies.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1970: 248). Nevertheless, from his point of view, anthropology as a human science does not imply a humanistic conception at all. In a very famous statement, Lévi-Strauss indicates his difference in relation to the traditional humanistic perspective: “[...] I believe the ultimate goal for the human sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man.” (1970: 247). In a previous book (Lévi-Strauss, 1963), he spends a whole chapter defining the place of anthropology in the social sciences. Thus, Lévi-Strauss used both the notion of the human and social to locate the anthropological discipline.

⁴ In this aspect, they disagree with the Marxist tradition. From a Marxist point of view, philosophy (or more specifically historical materialism) and politics cannot be separated.

For Lévi-Strauss (1970), human or social sciences belong to the ‘modern sciences’. ‘Modern science’ is a modality of scientific thought. The other modality is neolithic or ‘prior’ science. The differences between modern and neolithic science are of ‘style’, rather than in the stage or the development of the human mind. Engineering and ‘bricoleur’ are the categories used by Lévi-Strauss to establish the respective differences between modern and neolithic science.

Although anthropology as ‘modern science’ shares with natural sciences a general approach (what he called ‘engineer’), anthropology is a human or social science because its object is different from natural facts. Unlike natural phenomena, a cultural fact is arbitrary in the same way that is a linguistic sign. In Lévi-Strauss words:

“The social sciences are not doubt comparable to the physical and natural sciences in the sense that neither achieves direct apprehension of reality, but only of the symbols in terms of which the mind perceives reality in accordance with the constraints and thresholds of our sensory system. However, there is a fundamental difference between them, arising from the twofold fact, firstly, that the physical and natural sciences operate on the symbols of phenomena which are themselves symbols in the first place, and, secondly, that, in the former instance, the adequate approximation of the symbol to the referent is demonstrated by the ‘grip’ exercised by scientific knowledge on the world around us, whereas the practical ineffectiveness of the social sciences [...] does not allow us, at least for the time being, to assume any adequate correspondence between the representative symbols and the represented symbols.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1981: 642).

He could draw a methodological distinction between nature and culture.⁵ Indeed, in this distinction he located the anthropology as human or social science. From Lévi-Strauss’ perspective, anthropology is not just an empirical science. In fact, although anthropology uses the “data” “collected” in ethnographic fieldwork, its goal is to arrive to invariants of the human mind that underlying the empirical diversity of specific societies (Lévi-Strauss, 1970: 247). Nevertheless, the formal claim of structural anthropology is not just a simple homology with the natural sciences because they differ in the “nature” or their respective objects.⁶

Between society and human mind

In relation to the object of anthropology, there are relevant differences between Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss. For Radcliffe-Brown the object of anthropology is the human society, while for Lévi-Strauss it is the human mind. These differences are indeed not trivial ones; they cannot only be reduced to a simple disagreement in terminology. As Radcliffe-Brown noted:

“While I defined social anthropology as the study of human society, there are some who define it as the study of culture. It might perhaps be thought that this difference of definition is of minor importance. Actually it leads to two different kinds of study, between which it is hardly possible to obtain agreement in the formulation of problems” (1952: 189).

⁵ Lévi-Strauss developed this methodological distinction between nature and culture in the introduction to his book: *The elementary structures of the kinship*.

⁶ “[...] the social sciences can claim only a formal, not a substantial, homology with the study of physical world an living nature. It is precisely when they try to come closer to the ideal of scientific knowledge that it becomes most obvious that they offer no more than a prefiguration, on the wall of the cave, of operations that will have to be validated later by other sciences, which will deal with the real objects of which we are examining the reflections.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1981: 643).

Two different projects are involved in the conception of the object as human society or human mind. From Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 190) perspective, culture (as well as the human mind) does not imply a concrete reality and, therefore, cannot be observed. In consequence, culture or the human mind constitute “vague abstractions”.⁷ In contrast, for him, human societies are constituted by a set of relationships among individuals that can will be observed. Human societies are, then, empirical realities and an authentic object to the scientific enquiry because they constitute the only acceptable way to arrive to acceptable generalizations.

Moreover, Radcliffe-Brown (1952:3) stress that social anthropology is a branch of comparative sociology. The particular location of social anthropology in relation to comparative sociology is the consequence of a division of labor rather than a theoretical one: “My conception of social anthropology is as the comparative theoretical study of forms of social life amongst primitive peoples” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 3). For him, social anthropology belongs to the comparative sociology and its focus is primitive societies. In these order of ideas, he defined himself in opposition with ethnology and psychology: “[...] I am working, not as ethnologist or psychologist, but as a social anthropologist” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 190).

Specifically, for Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 180-181) social life as the object of social anthropology implies three sets of problems. First, the social morphology, that consists in the identification of different kinds of structures and how they can be classified. Second, social physiology, the function of social structures. Finally, the change in social structures, that is, their transformation from one type to another.

In contrast, for Lévi-Strauss the goal of anthropology is to grasp the unconscious invariants of the human mind that shape the surface variability of practices, relations and representations:

“In anthropology as in linguistics, therefore, it is not comparison that supports generalizations, but the other way around. If, as we believe to be the case, the unconscious activity of the mind consist in imposing forms upon content, and if these forms are fundamentally the same for all minds –ancient and modern, primitive and civilized (as the study of the symbolic function, expressed in language, so strikingly indicates)– it is necessary and sufficient to grasp the unconscious structure underlying each institution and each custom, in order to obtain a principle of interpretation valid for other institutions and other customs, provide of course that he analysis is carried far enough.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 21).

His conception of society is based on the communication theory. Specifically, he argues for three different levels of communication, which operate in each society. In fact, these three levels are (1) communication of women; (2) communication of goods and services, and (3) communication of messages (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 296). In other words, kinship, economy and language refer to different forms of communication. Related to this communication theory, he also states a notion of culture: “[...] Therefore, it should be kept in mind that culture does not consist exclusively of forms of communication of its own, like language, but also (and perhaps mostly) of *rules* stating how the ‘games of communication’ should be played both on the natural and cultural levels.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 296).

In addition, he considers society as constituted by a network of different types of orders. On the one hand, he stresses the existence of “lived-in” orders that correspond to objective

⁷ In relation with Radcliffe-Brown’s rejection of use the notion of culture, Lévi-Strauss states: “His is a philosophy of continuity, not of discontinuity; this accounts for his hostility toward the notion of culture, already alluded to, and his avoidance of the teachings of structural linguistics and of modern mathematics.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 304).

mechanisms (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 312). The live-in orders are (1) kinship systems, (2) social organization, and (3) social stratification. On the other hand, he argues the presence of “thought-off” orders that are embodied in experiences such as myth and religion (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 312-313). Dependent of the type of articulations and scale among these orders, he distinguishes two kinds of analytical models: “mechanical” and “statistical” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 283). According with the time and spatial axes, he also establishes the difference in scale between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 290). In general terms, he associates ‘primitive societies’ with the former elements of the dichotomy, while ‘modern societies’ are linked with the later.⁸

Sea shells or cultural grammar: the notion of structure

“As you [Lévi-Strauss] have recognized, I use the term ‘social structure’ in a sense so different from yours as to make discussion so difficult as to be unlikely to be profitable.” (Radcliffe-Brown, [1953] 1977: 42).

As we have seen, Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss have significant differences in their conceptions on anthropology as science and in the object of anthropology as well. These differences also shape their notion of structure. Thus, for them structure implies two dissimilar notions and a set of connotations. Although they used the same word, they were talking about different categories and analytical orientations. As a gross characterization, while Radcliffe-Brown elaborates on the notion of structure within an empirical and naturalist framework, Lévi-Strauss considers it from a non-empirical and formalistic approach.

For Radcliffe-Brown, structure is an empirical fact, a concrete reality. Structure is something that one can observe, describe and compare. He claims that social structure is a real fact that the ethnographer can register through his/her observation. Furthermore, for him the reality of social structures shares the same nature with individual organisms: “Social structures are just as real as are individual organisms” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 190). In short, the first aspect of his conception of structure is its empirical reality.⁹ However, Radcliffe-Brown purposes two specific levels of structure in relation with its grade of abstraction. Actually, he establishes a difference between ‘social structure’ as a concrete reality that can be observed and the ‘structural form’, which refers to what the ethnographer describes and, in last term, what is utilized in the comparison among societies (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 192).¹⁰

A second aspect in Radcliffe-Brown’s approach is that a web of relationships among human beings constitutes a social structure. Like other kinds of structures in the natural world, a social structure is defined as a set of relations between entities. In the case of human societies, these entities are persons: “When we use the term structure we are referring to some sort of ordered arrangement of parts or components [...] The components or units of a social structure are *persons*, and a person is a human being considered not as an organism but as occupying position in a social structure.” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 10).

⁸ He argues other famous dichotomies as ‘cold’/‘hot’ societies or ‘savage’/‘domesticate’ mind (Lévi-Strauss, 1970).

⁹ In his letter to Lévi-Strauss quoted above, Radcliffe-Brown is very clear in of his notion of structure as a reality fact: “While for you, social structure has nothing to do with reality but with models that are built up, I regard the social structure as reality. When I pick up a particular sea shell on the beach, I recognize it as having a particular structure. I may find other shells of the same species which have a similar structure, so that I can say there is a form of structure characteristic of the species.” ([1953] 1977: 42).

¹⁰ Here it is important to keep in mind a pertinent clarification: “His notion of ‘structural form’, however, does not correspond to Lévi-Strauss’s ‘social structure’, although it is close to being a blanket term for what Lévi-Strauss distinguished as ‘mechanical models’ and ‘statistical models’ [...]” (Kuper, 1977:5).

In consequence, a third aspect in Radcliffe-Brown's notion of structure is his idea of whole. In fact, for him structure implies more than the simple addition of individuals. Moreover, these individuals are in constant change without necessarily affecting the structure itself. This means that the continuity of the social structure as whole is a more fundamental entity than the existence of particular individuals. Finally, his notion of structure is elaborated under the premise of the functional unity: "We may define it [functional unity] as a condition in which all parts of the social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency, i.e. without producing persistent conflicts which can neither be resolved nor regulated." (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 181).

Lévi-Strauss, in contrast, elaborates a notion of structure that explicitly rejects the empirical level: "The term 'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it." (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 279). Furthermore, his notion of structure is related with the idea of formal models. This is the reason why Lévi-Strauss (1963: 279) distinguishes between the social relations that could be observed and the social structure that is a model in which the formal proprieties are abstract and independent from the existence of its elements. Thus, Lévi-Strauss critiques "[...] Radcliffe-Brown's empirical approach [because it] makes him very reluctant to distinguish between *social structure* and *social relations*. As a matter of fact, social structure appears in his work to be nothing else than the whole network of social relation" (1963: 303).

Lévi-Strauss (1963: 303) also critiques Radcliffe-Brown's notion of structure for his "naturalistic approach" that links it with the biological analogy. In contrast, Lévi-Strauss considers himself as someone who proposes a notion of structure based on structural linguistics and communication theory. Indeed, Lévi-Strauss references Fortes to establish the difference between Radcliffe-Brown and himself in the level of 'reality' versus 'model,' or spoken word versus grammar or syntax: "'Structure is not immediately visible in the 'concrete reality.' ... When we describe structure ... we are, as it were, in the realm of grammar and syntax, not of the spoken word'" (Fortes, quoted by Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 303-304).¹¹

An important aspect in Lévi-Strauss' notion of model is the difference between conscious and unconscious: "A structural model may be conscious or unconscious without this difference affecting its nature" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 281).¹² A model cannot necessarily be unconscious in the sense that there are "culture's 'home-made' models". However, it is only the anthropologist who can elaborate through his/her analysis the unconscious models as it is only the linguist is who can deduct the grammar.

Finally, the formal conception of structure in Lévi-Strauss implies four requirements: (1) it is a system; (2) it has rules of transformations; (3) it is possible predict how the "[...] model react if one or more elements submitted to certain modifications" (1963: 279); and (4) "[...] the model should be constituted so as to make immediately intelligible all the observed facts" (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 279).

In a pertinent contrast between Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss' notions of structure, Kuper concludes:

¹¹ It is in relation with this idea of structure as syntax that Sherry Ortner argues that Lévi-Strauss clams to establish " [...] the universal grammar of culture, the ways in which units of cultural discourse are created (by the principle of binary opposition), and the rules according to which the units (pair of opposed terms) are arranged and combined to produce the actual cultural productions (myths, marriage rules, totemic clan arrangements, and the like) that anthropologists record" (1994: 380).

¹² This aspect introduces an interesting problem: the relation between subject and structure or, in current jargon, between agency and system. However, we can follow here this problem because it implies a so long excursion that should be the object of the other essay. For Lévi-Strauss explicit engage with this problem see his last chapter in *Savage Mind* and his Finale in *The Naked Man*.

“ [...] Radcliffe-Brown differs decisively from the later French Durkheimians. Their ‘structures’ are creation of the anthropologist, not systematized observations, and if they correspond to an external reality it is to a hidden reality, not to the immediately observable empirical facts. This reality may lie at the level of a ‘collective unconscious’; but not at the level of what is conventionally understood by Durkheim’s notion of the ‘collective consciousness’.” (Kuper, 1977: 5).

In short, the differences between Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss in their notion of structure might be briefly presented through a set of oppositions: observed reality/ hidden reality; inductive/ deductive; net of beings/ system of terms-relations; real/ formal; organic/ linguistic; and conscious/unconscious.

Conclusions

Indeed, Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss inscribe different theoretical and methodological horizons. The question is, however, are these differences shaped by their respective ‘national traditions’? Are Radcliffe-Brown and Lévi-Strauss expressions of their academic location in something that one can denominate British or French tradition? Rather than thinking in a monolithic ‘national tradition’ with the essentialist statement that it implies, I prefer analyze it in terms of ‘local academic contexts’. A local academic context is defined by historical boundaries delimited by the institutional practices of production, circulation and consumption of academic discourses. From this perspective, a specific local academic context is historically configured and the rhythm, extension, and voices of the conversation shift.

To answer these questions one has to define what British or French academic local context could mean. On one hand, Stocking helps us to elaborate an approximation to British anthropology:

“[...] British anthropology was characterized by an orientation that may be called, broadly, ‘positivistic.’ It was staunchly empirical, assuming that anthropological phenomena, like butterflies and other phenomena of the natural world, can be collected and subjected to comparative inductive study in an objective manner, which will eventually produce deterministic laws or the same sort as those of the natural sciences. It remained, in a broad sense, utilitarian, if not at the level of the rationally motivated pragmatic individual, then at the level of the adaptive functional requirements of the society as an entity.” (Stocking, 1987).

According to Stocking’s description of British anthropology, Radcliffe-Brown is a clear ‘specimen’ of this academic context. As we have seen, Radcliffe-Brown considers anthropology as a natural science. Additionally, his model of science is clearly inductive arriving towards generalizations in the different levels of analysis (morphology, physiology and change of social structure). In these aspects, he is explicitly following biology as his paradigm. Likewise, he ascribes an empirical notion of structure and his notion of whole is a functional one.

From Lévi-Strauss’ point of view, Radcliffe-Brown belongs to that kind of academic context described above by Stocking. In fact, the former makes a radical statement about the later: “One sees, then, that [...] Radcliffe-Brown’s [approach is a] empirical and naturalistic one” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963: 306). In sum, Radcliffe-Brown might be considered as the leading exponent of what Kuper (1977: 2) denominates “structural positivism”. According to Kuper (1977:3), rather than a simple “empiricist butterfly-collecting”, Radcliffe-Brown’s anthropological project might be understood contextually in his intent to establish a “scientific comparative sociology” against ethnology (diffusionism) and social evolutionism. Thus, Kuper concludes that even

Radcliffe-Brown can be considered a positivist, a “structural positivist”, however it is pertinent to keep in mind the particularity of his academic location and project. In that sense, Radcliffe-Brown’s theoretical model and categories “[...] are not a crude approximation to the notions of those who have come to be known as ‘structuralists’ [...]” (Kuper, 1977: 6).

The association of Lévi-Strauss with the so-called ‘structuralism’ it is a matter of common sense. For some authors “if Lévi-Strauss is not the founder of structuralism per se, he is the undoubted founder of structural anthropology as we know it today” (Adams, 1998: 357). Scholte (1970) contrasts the French and Anglo-American ‘paradigms’. He believes that Lévi-Strauss might be associated with the ‘rationalist philosophy,’ which emphasizes “[...] that logic and reality follow the same dialectical process and that both ideas and actions derive from fundamental categories of human mind [...]” (Scholte, 1970: 110). It appears coherent with the Lévi-Strauss’ own claims about his epistemological approach:

“[...] structuralism offers the social sciences an epistemological model incomparably more powerful than those they previously had at their disposal. It reveals, behind phenomena, a unity and coherence that could not be brought out by a simple description of the facts, ‘laid out flat’, so to speak, and presented in random order to the enquiring mind. By changing the level of observation and looking beyond the empirical facts to the relation between them, it reveals and confirms that these relations are simpler and more intelligible than the things they interconnect, and whose ultimate nature may remain unfathomable, without this provisional or definitive opacity being, as hitherto, an obstacle to their interpretation [...]

Secondly, structuralism reintegrates man into nature and, while making it possible to disregard the subject [...] In fact, structural analysis [...] can only appear in the mind because its model is already present in the body.” (Lévi-Strauss, 1981: 687-692).

In this sense, it is possible link Lévi-Strauss’ claims with the ‘rationalist’ approach and, through it, with a ‘French’ academic context that contrast with the more empirically oriented and positivist ‘British’ one. As we have seen, one can conclude that between Lévi-Strauss and Radcliffe-Brown there are significant differences that could be thought of terms of rationalism/positivism, formalism/ empirism, structuralism/ functionalism, and so on. Thus, it is clear that they were shaped by their local academic contexts from which they engaged in manifold conversations with different academic locations.

References cited

- Adams, William. 1998. *The Philosophical Roots of Anthropology*. Stanford: CSLI Publications
- Elias, Norbert. 1978. *The History of Manners. The Civilization Process. Volume I*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Ibañez, Jesús. 1985. *Del Algoritmo al Sujeto. Perspectivas de la Investigación Social*. Barcelona: Siglo XXI Editores.
- Kuper, Adam (ed.). 1977. *The Social Anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Llobera, A. 1982. *La Antropología como ciencia*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Naked Man. Introduction to a Science of Mythology: 4*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1970. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1963. *Structural Anthropology*. New York-London: Basic Books.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1952. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. London: Cohen & West Ltd.

- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. [1953] 1977. "Letter to Lévi-Strauss" In: Adam Kuper (ed.), *The Social Anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown*, pp. 42. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Sholte, Bob. 1970. "Epistemic Paradigms: Some Problems in Cross-Cultural Research on Social Anthropological History and Theory" In: E. Nelson Hayes and Tanya Hayes (eds.), *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero*, pp. 108-122. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.
- Stocking, George. 1987. *Victorian Anthropology*. New York-London: The Free Press-Collier MacMillan Publishers.