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“World Anthropologies” and Anthropologies in the World: Three Perspectives

A Review Essay

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Every scientific “fulfilment” raises new “questions”: it *asks* to be surpassed and outdated (Weber 1946: 138).

Introduction: The One and the Many

The three volumes under review all deal with the contemporary practice of anthropology and social sciences in a global perspective.¹ Obviously, they differ in focus: from the primarily theoretical evaluation of “Western social theory’s seeming exhaustion or inadequacy when dealing with . . . cross-cultural thinking” (Kurasawa 2004: ix), through critical explorations of four “great traditions” of anthropology (Barth et al.), to the more

general attempt to “explore the diversity of anthropologies being practiced around the world” today (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006: 1).

Kurasawa’s volume explicitly deals with issues of “otherness” (alterity) and difference, while it is present implicitly in Ribeiro and Escobar’s book (but see Krotz in the same volume 2006: 89). It would probably be safe to say that alterity and difference were crucial for the human questioning of different (and potentially threatening) others at least from José de Acosta’s² “*Historia natural y moral de las Indias*” in 1590.³ It would also be safe to say that the quest for understanding others was at the same time defining for the (rarely explicit task of) understanding ourselves, and anthropology has contributed to this since its very beginnings. Naturally, there were different traditions and different theories; there were grueling intellectual debates between advocates of the “monogenetic” and “phylogenetic” theories in the early 19th century, then there was the issue of the “psychic unity of mankind,” so forcefully championed by Bastian and his followers (and Franz Boas was one of them); finally, the issue of the “cultural circles” and the spread of culture and civilization (with Rivers’ 1911 address to the Section H of the British Association for the Advancement of Science as the defining moment⁴), and many more

1 Barth, Fredrik, Andre Gingrich, Robert Parkin, and Sydel Silverman: *One Discipline, Four Ways*. British, German, French, and American Anthropology. With a Foreword by Chris Hann. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 406 pp. ISBN 0-226-03829-7. Price: \$ 21.00.

Kurasawa, Fuyuki: *The Ethnological Imagination. A Cross-Cultural Critique of Modernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. 249 pp. (Contradictions, 21). ISBN 0-8166-4239-7. Price: \$ 70.50.

Ribeiro, Gustavo Lins, and Arturo Escobar (eds.): *World Anthropologies. Disciplinary Transformations within Systems of Power*. Oxford: Berg, 2006. 341 pp. (Wenner-Gren International Symposium Series) ISBN 1-8452-0190-6. Price: \$ 99.95.

2 José de Acosta (1539–1600), Spanish Jesuit and at the time of his death Rector of the University of Salamanca. He spent several years (1571–1576) in South America, then two years in Mexico. As a result, he published “*De natura Novi Orbis et de promulgatione evangelii apud Barbaros*” (Salamanca, 1588–1589), which was subsequently translated into Spanish. His book became an instant bestseller, and it is interesting to note that he assumed that the American Indians came from Asia (Mongolia) via land – and this was more than a century before Beringia was “discovered” by West Europeans!

3 Of course, it could be argued that the interest in explaining “the Other” predates this – going as far back as Herodotus’ “Histories” in the 5th century BCE, Diodorus and Pausanias in ancient Greece (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 37), or Ibn Khaldun’s travel accounts in the 12th century CE. Lévi-Strauss claimed that these accounts were not really “anthropological” (or “ethnological”) because they did not use critical methodology and comparisons between cultures – preferring mostly to describe them.

4 W. H. R. Rivers in his opening address claimed that changes in human societies were a direct consequence of the mixture of peoples and cultures. Here Rivers referred to the works of German ethnologists (Fritz Gräbner and Bernhard Ankermann, both of whom presented their groundbreaking papers in Berlin in 1905, in support of Leo Frobenius’s theory of “cultural circles”), who were establishing a diffusionist model for the development of cultures. This model would provide a crucial tool for Rivers’s monumental “The History of Melanesian Society,” because as Melanesian cultures were “complex” (as they included a mixture of elements

during the 20th century. It has been argued that even some “great” or “central” traditions arose as a direct consequence of the encounter with the other (Brumana 2002; Latour 2004).

But just as anthropology never had a single point of origin, it also never had a single stream of development – and this becomes, perhaps, more pronounced than ever in our “postcolonial” or “postindustrial” times. This makes some projects focusing on particular (imagined) points of view a bit problematic – for example, the distinction between “Western” and “non-Western” anthropologies has already been described as problematic (Madan 1982; Asad 1982). On the other hand, anthropology as a discipline is usually defined in terms of the “centers” or “central” traditions. Cardoso de Oliveira (2000: 13) mentioned the American, British (English), and French traditions, the point picked up in the preface by Ribeiro and Escobar (2006: 7) when they mention “hegemonic anthropologies,” but one might add the German one as well – as it is done in the volume by Barth et al. (2005).

Between Centers and Peripheries

The fact that these three books were conceived in 2002 or 2003 speaks a lot about the recent growing interest in anthropology as a field that transcends national and cultural boundaries – courses on “World Anthropologies” are being offered (especially in the US), and students throughout the world are offered possibilities to inquire about very distant and very different scholarly traditions. This might be one of the consequences of the processes of “globalization” (as Ribeiro and Escobar claim) – although this term should also be put in a particular perspective. What I mean is that terms that we use today frequently imply that particular concepts or situations are very recent inventions – which might not necessarily be the case. For example, there were and there are scholars who point out that what we today call “globalization” might have existed as far back as 2000 years ago, although not necessarily under that name (cf. Mongardini 1992; also Kurasawa 2004: 13). Escobar and Ribeiro are also among the group of (mostly) Latin American

scholars who initiated the World Anthropologies Network (WAN), an umbrella organization that promotes dialogue between different anthropological associations (Restrepo and Escobar 2005).

Of course, many other issues have been dealt with in the last decade – the “colonial other” was presented in an issue of the journal *Terrain* (28.1997; in collaboration with G. Lenclud), as well as in contributions by Centlivres (1997) and myself (2003); global challenges were outlined in a review essay by Clifford (1999); theoretical debates put in a historical perspective by Köpping (2002); and the specific problems of development of a single dominant (“central”) tradition discussed in the volume edited by Segal and Yanagisako (2005). However, the three books presented here attempt to bring all of this (as well as many other points) much further, presenting together an image of a thriving and extremely popular scholarly discipline.

The volume “World Anthropologies” is also the one that tries to put both “central” and “peripheral” traditions in a much larger context. Resulting from the Wenner-Gren Symposium, held in March 2003, it brought together scholars residing in Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, India, Japan, The Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Spain, the UK, and the USA.⁵ The book is divided into a preface and five parts. In the preface, the editors set out the tone of their project, exploring the diversity of world anthropologies, using Wallerstein’s notion of the “world system” as an important tool. Unfortunately, there is no mention of why particular traditions or problems have been selected, and not others. The first part of the book, “Transnationalism and State Power,” contains essays dealing with regional traditions of Japan (by Shinji Yamashita), Siberia (Nikolai Vakhtin), China (Josephine Smart), and Mexico (Esteban Krotz). All of these are clearly written, and present basic historical outlines, along with controversies about the naming of the discipline, institutional development, and the like.

Part 2, “Power and Hegemony in World Anthropologies,” is slightly more ambitious in scope. Although particular chapters are still tied to countries or regions (France by the late Eduardo Archetti; Spain by Susana Narotzky; and Africa by Paul

from a variety of different cultures), their histories could not be studied using evolutionary theories. Cf. also Barth (2005: 16). Rivers also had a frequently overlooked influence on functionalism, as his first student in Cambridge was Radcliffe-Brown, while Malinowski took to the field the edition of “Notes and Queries” prepared by him.

⁵ I put the list of countries here intentionally, as it is interesting to note that almost all of them come from highly developed, (“Western”) industrial countries. Perhaps a “critical Third World perspective” (Cardoso de Oliveira 2000: 11) could still be included in some future volume on this topic?

Nchoji Nkwi), the authors try to problematize certain issues. In the case of France, Archetti (an Argentinian who was in the 1970s hired in Norway in order to teach French anthropology), demonstrated shifting notions of “center” and “periphery” within a single tradition, using as examples works by Griaule, Leiris, and Dumont. Narotzky reacted against what she saw as generalizations in an article by Michael Herzfeld of the “native” (South European, more precisely Spanish) anthropologists, concluding that what we need today is “communication with other anthropologists’ work” (154), leading to an activist and engaged anthropology. Nkwi’s chapter on postcolonial developments in Africa is the most ambitious and perhaps the least successful, since it presents only a sketch (although a very lucid one!) of the developments in the last four decades. In doing so, it largely ignores any reference to the works of scholars from northern African (Arabic-speaking) countries, and makes no distinction between, for example, exceptional contributions in physical and evolutionary anthropology by scholars from Kenya, Ethiopia, or Tanzania. The situation in the whole continent is far too complex to be generalized in a single chapter.

Part 3, “Epistemological, Sociological, and Disciplinary Predicaments,” has chapters dealing with the UK (by Eeva Berglund), Andean region (Marisol de la Cadena), Australia (Sandy Toussaint), and India (Shiv Visvanathan). This is perhaps the most diverse and at the same time exciting part of the book, combining personal experiences (Berglund), new epistemological concepts (de la Cadena), and notions of plurality in unexpected places (in contributions by Toussaint and Visvanathan). Finally, Part 4 contains summary chapters by Otávio Velho and Johannes Fabian. Velho, who also participated in the similar (but less ambitious project) in the journal *Ethnos* in 1982, commented, among other things, on the production of “neo-orientalisms” by Brazilian anthropologists, using as an example a paper published by Paul Rabinow in 1992. While I can understand a senior Brazilian anthropologist’s displeasure with that paper, some of Velho’s comments do seem a bit out of date (I wrote relatively recently on a similar topic, but from a slightly different perspective – cf. Bošković 2005: 224–226, 231), and going towards an “it takes one to know one” attitude. The “finishing touches” for the book were provided by Fabian, with a series of appropriate questions that a project of this magnitude opens.

This volume was conceived extremely broadly and ambitiously. The wealth and the scope of

the issues presented are outstanding, but there are some strange omissions. For example, not even mentioning Adam Kuper and writing about anthropology in the UK is a bit odd (and I am not implying here that one would have to agree with him!). Also, there is a strange absence of references to sources written in French – with the exception of Archetti – and also of texts published in other, less “hegemonic,” traditions. Finally, with the exception of Vakhtin’s chapter on anthropology in Siberia and Smart’s contribution on China, there is a strange omission of anything else coming from former socialist countries. Here it is left for another volume, edited by Hann, Sárkány, and Skalník (2005), to present a truly impressive amount of information, even if it is for only four countries (former Czechoslovakia, former German Democratic Republic, Hungary, and Poland).

The book by Barth, Gingrich, Parkin, and Silverman intentionally takes as its main objective the description of four “central” or “hegemonic” anthropological traditions. It resulted from a series of lectures delivered in Halle in June 2002, when the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology was officially inaugurated. Each of the authors had a considerable space (in the book, it is five chapters each) to develop views and ideas, and that certainly helped the clarity of the outlines. Barth lectured on Britain and the Commonwealth, Gingrich on anthropology in German-speaking countries (including a truly outstanding chapter on “German Anthropology during the Nazi Period”), Parkin on French-speaking countries, and Silverman on the US tradition. While I found the last part of the book perhaps slightly less exciting than the others, that might be attributed simply to a matter of style, which is a bit too dry and strictly chronological. However, there is no question about the quality of this volume as a whole – it is a monumental contribution to understanding some key moments in the shaping of anthropology, as well as points where it might proceed in the future. Also, it is presented here as a series of *stories*, in the best narrative tradition of scholars who know how to address the general public.

Of course, someone might have constructed the arguments slightly differently (perhaps less emphasis on the institutionalization of French anthropology; qualifying statements like the one by Silverman, when she wrote that Geertz and Schneider “moved toward more extreme culturalist positions” during the 1960s), but that would only be a matter of personal choice or style. Taken as a whole, “One Discipline, Four Ways” is a true jewel of

the anthropological scholarship – provocative for practitioners and informative for students.

When it comes to style, Kurasawa's book, conceived as an attempt to present a "critical hermeneutics of the Western social sciences," presents a fresh view on the theories of modernity. It is subdivided into an introduction, conclusion, and six "main" chapters, which present concepts and theories of selected key thinkers from the 18th century onwards. Rousseau, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, and Foucault are put in the context of the development of social sciences in "the West."⁶ If one is to take the notion and the pervasiveness of "globalization" (or *mondialisation* in French), then it is easy to see how these developments became universal. On the surface, the book deals with issues of othering and alterity in "the West," but it actually does so in a refreshingly new way, urging for a decentering and fragmented perspective, a perspective that actually implies multiple modernities, just as there are multiple anthropologies. In the introduction, Kurasawa notes that "theoretical projects can only be enriched by cultivating an ethnological sensibility, that is, an appreciation of humankind's incredible and endlessly varied mosaic of identity and difference, of intimacy and remoteness" (30). "The ethnological imagination" is a tool for understanding "a culturally pluralistic world" (170). "It insists on the importance of enlarging our horizons in order to engage with, to be open to the provocation of, and to learn from other ways of being and thinking in the world" (175).

Concluding Remarks: Towards a Global Anthropology

This insistence on plurality in what might have seemed to be a unitary perspective corresponds well with the book on four major anthropological traditions – "One Discipline, Four Ways." It also fits well growing interests in different ways of thinking about major theoretical issues, regionally outlined in the "World Anthropologies" volume. The titles here can be seen as provocative and as inviting further debate; for example, was anthropology ever "one discipline?" Also, does the term "world anthropologies" really privilege plural perspectives, or just postulates that every-

⁶ Kurasawa is well aware of the awkwardness of the term, as he notes in several places of the book (beginning with p. 2).

thing outside "the centers" should be seen as distant, exotic, and, therefore, "world?" Dangers of "self-orientalization" are sometimes closer than one might think.

These books cannot be viewed in isolation from other discussions of "indigenous" or "non-Western" (Fahim 1982; Asad 1982), "native" or "nativist" (Narayan 1993; Mingming 2002), "central/peripheral" (Gerholm and Hannerz 1982), "anthropologies of the South" (Krotz 1997; Quinlan 2000), or "world anthropologies" (Restrepo and Escobar 2005). Apart from the impressive collection of articles in *Ethnos* (47.1982), and Fahim's book (1982), I must also mention the volume dealing with the European anthropology and ethnology, edited by Vermeulen and Roldán (1995). Last but not least, the leading Russian anthropological journal *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* recently also devoted a special issue (2.2005) to "world anthropologies," edited by Alexei Elfimov. The fact that almost all of these volumes have been out of print for a long time stands at odds with the growing global interest in these issues.

The three books discussed here serve as important points of departure for confirming anthropology's global relevance. On the one hand, they invite discussion of some important terms (like the center/periphery distinction, "world anthropology," "globalization," "modernity," "ethnological imagination," etc.), while on the other they point to the continuing importance of being aware of the discipline's history and cultural context (as becomes obvious in the volume by Barth et al.). Their publication presents an invitation for a continuing dialogue, while at the same time pointing to the relevance of open-mindedness and plural methodologies in social sciences in general and anthropology in particular.

This review essay has benefited from discussions that I had with Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Edward F. Fischer, and William H. Fisher. Of course, the responsibility for its content is only mine.

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Kommunikation und Gesellschaft bei den Wolof

Internationales Symposium

Sascha Kessler

Vom 3. bis zum 6. Juni 2006 fand an der Universität Gaston Berger in Saint-Louis (Senegal) ein internationales Symposium zum Thema “Kommunikation und Gesellschaft bei den Wolof” statt.