

ARGUMENTS CONCERNING SOME STRATEGIC CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

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Social anthropology and sociology are still in their infancy. As a result of this we find that:

(i) The tools for the interpretation of facts are in conflict among each other.

(ii) The concept (and to an extent the ideas as well) concerning both subjects are not sufficiently clear in the minds of the authors or the people. This is due to the infancy of both sciences, "beside the fact that (sociological) terms are largely those of everyday speech, unlike many terms in the physical sciences, there is further reason why we must exercise particular care over our definitions".⁽¹⁾

The following are definitions of some fundamental concepts which are widely used by many sociologists and anthropologists.

Social Structure

Professor Robert Redfield suggests that in peasant and primitive communities generally a lot of knowledge can be gained by making "Social structure the central, organizing idea with which to examine all aspects of the life of the community".² And thus:

"Much of the economy and the religious and magical practices are expressions of social structure. An important part of morality lies in the conception of rightness attaching to the claims and obligations of kin and others kinds of people and to the kinds of roles that make up social structure".³

In this way professor Redfield thinks in the same terms of Professor Meyer Fortes. Both consider social structure as a holistic concept. Fortes says that:

"Social structure is ... the entire culture of a given people handled in a special frame of theory".⁴

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In point of fact, the concept of social structure is widely used by the anthropologists notably the British in their studies on African Communities. Meyer Fortes, Raymond Firth, Radcliffe-Brown, Nadel and Evans-Pritchard are good examples in this regard.

While Meyer Fortes considers social structure as a holistic concept, Raymond Firth considers it within social alignment.⁵ And thus social structure is that much of the social relations which are of important significance for "the behaviour of the members of the society, so that if such relations were not in operation, the society could not be said to exist in that form".⁶ This means also that social structure is a social system. The people in this system must be considered as personnel, *or performers of functions and occupiers of roles*. On the other hand Firth stresses the fact that the elements of this social system are interconnected and not existed independently of one another. Firth says that in this social system we are to be concerned with "*the ordered relations of parts to a whole, with the arrangement in which the elements of the social life are linked together*".⁷ That is why also Meyer Fortes prefers to use the concept of social structure rather than 'social organization' because it 'draws attention to the interconnection and interdependence, within a single system, of all the different relations found within a given society'.⁸

Radcliffe-Brown gives a definition to the concept of social structure which is widely used nowadays by the majority of anthropologists. The following lines of his clarify what he means by social structure:

"...direct observation does reveal to us that... human beings are connected by a complex network of social relations. I use the term "social structure" to denote this network of actually existing relations. It is this that I regard it as my business to study if I am working, not as an ethnologist, or psychologist, but as a social anthropologist. I do not mean that the study of social structure is the whole of social anthropology, but I regard it as being in a very important sense the most fundamental part of the science."⁹

If a primary conclusion can be drawn from the foregoing statement it will be that the term social structure is equivalent to "actually existing relations" which should be the social anthropologist's most fundamental part of his science.

Again in his famous 'Introduction' to African Systems of Kinship and Marriage he treats this concept throughly as an expert in social anthropology when he gives his own views about the kinship system. He writes as follows:

"...to understand any kinship system it is necessary to carry out an analysis in terms of social structure and social function. The components of social structures are human beings, and a structure is an arrangement of persons in relationships institutionally defined and regulated. The social function of any

feature of a system is its relation to the structure and its continuance and stability not its relation to the biological needs of individuals".¹⁰

Social structure, then, is a total network of social relations. As Radcliffe-Brown himself puts it when he defines the meaning of the kinship system.

"A kinship system is therefore a network of social relations which constitutes part of that total network which is the social structure".¹¹

Nadel gives more or less a similar definition for social structure as that suggested by Radcliffe-Brown. He concludes that:

"We arrive at the structure of a society through abstracting from the concrete population and its behaviour the patterns or network (or 'system') of relationships 'obtaining between actors in their capacity of playing roles relative to one another.'¹²

Evans - Pritchard restricts the definition of social structure to the interrelations of groups; thus excluding inter-personal relations. This idea was expressed explicitly in his book about the Nuer.¹³

The latest edition of 'Notes and Queries on Anthropology' gives the following definition to social structure which comes across Professor Radcliffe - Brown's definition. Social structure is the 'whole network of social relations in which are involved the members of a given community at a particular time.'¹⁴

At the end we have to point out that most anthropologists include in this concept such dyadic relations as between father and son, or mother's brother and his sister's son, and also the differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role. By adopting this method, we obtain a complete picture of social integration as well as observe the various patterns of behaviour. This method is quite clear in the studies of social anthropologists on kinship.

To conclude, the anthropologist means by social structure the following:

1. The whole network of social relations in which are involved the members of a given community at a particular time.
2. The dyadic relations as between father and son or mother's brother and his sister's son.
3. The differentiation of individuals and of classes by their social role.

This is the social structure concept as formulated by Radcliffe - Brown.

Social Group and Ethnic Group

A social group may be defined as 'a collection of individuals who stand in regular and relatively permanent relations, that is, who act towards and in respect of each other, or towards and in respect of individuals outside the group, regularly in a specific, predictable, and expected fashion,'¹⁵ Therefore a group may be said to be 'conscious of itself in that each actor is aware that he 'belongs' and that, in virtue of his belonging, he is entitled or required to act in a given way.'¹⁶

An ethnic group refers to a racial group, i.e. a biological category. "It refers to human stocks that are genetically distinguished, to major human types that owe their differences from one another, especially their physical differences, to a remote separation of ancestry."

However, the sociologist does not deal with races but with race-conscious groups.¹⁷ That is to say he deals with ethnic group as a type of social group. Consequently 'an ethnic group is generally conceived to be one whose members share a distinctive social and cultural tradition, maintained within the group from generation to generation, whether as a part of a more complex society or in isolation.'¹⁸

It appears from the previous definition that the main characteristics of the ethnic group are as follows:

1. The ethnic group is an in-group "maintaining cleavages between the "they" and the "we" in social life,"¹⁹ i.e., between in-group and out-group.
2. The ethnic group is a non voluntary interest-conscious unity.
3. The members of an ethnic group are liable to a sort of prejudice or antithesis by the other groups. This antithesis is a reflection of a group loyalty and unity.

CULTURE

It seems both unfortunate and strange, "Cowell said, that the meaning of what is clearly a key-word in the discussion of a great number of contemporary questions and problems should be left so vague."²⁰ Cowell also said that "Scarcely two people can be found to have the same ideas on the subject or to be willing to say precisely what they mean by culture."²¹ This indicates how it is very ridiculous to define culture in a way which will be accepted by the majority of scholars. However the anthropologists were the first pioneers who give more or less an exact definition to culture which at least is still reliable in many works.²² The

central definition in anthropological studies is that of the well known anthropologist E.B. Tylor who gave a scientific definition of what we mean by culture. Tylor published his two volumes on "primitire Culture" in 1871. His work is generally regarded as the first important contribution to the field of cultural anthropology. Culture or civilization,²³ he said, " is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."²⁴

Anthropologists after Tylor do not add too much to the definition of culture. The main work after Tylor is that of Professor kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn in 1952. To start with their work, they examined Six hundred works on anthropology, sociology, Social and clinical psychology from 1900 onwards with special concentration upon the twenty years 1930 - 1950. In their exhaustive study of the word they have listed 161 definitions and concluded that "in more than half of the books 'Culture' was not even mentioned."²⁵ Anthropology, then does not offer very much to those who want to find out what 'culture' means.²⁶ Kroeber and Kluckhohn tried to excuse anthropology as in its infancy as a science "preoccupied with gathering, ordering, and classifying data",²⁷ and, consequently, anthropologists have "only very recently become conscious of problems of theory and of the logic of science."²⁸ Heine Goldern in an International social Science Bulletin' has also accpet kroeber and kluckhohn's views about excusing anthropology. He writes as follows:

"Like other human activities, Anthropology too, has been subject to fashions, probably more so than and other comparable field. This may be due to its relative youth. It is still groping to explore new ways of approach. This is particularly true of Anthropology, in United States, where the various current fashions originated, and from where they spread to Western Europe."²⁹

These important remarks below are again a quote from kroeber and kluckhohn:

The master idea about culture they say, "is now formulated by most social scientists approximately as follow: culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action."³⁰

2. The Universal patterning of Culture.

Classifications of the components of culture appeared in early books and bibliographies. Important, here for example, is the scheme of Wissler which was viewed as a pioneering classification in this respect. He classified culture elements into nine categories as follows:³¹

1. Speech: Language, writing system, and the like.
2. Material traits: (a) food habits; (b) shelter; (c) transport and travel; (d) dress; (e) utensils, tools etc. (f) weapons; (g) occupation and industries.
3. Art: carving, painting, dancing, music etc.
4. Mythology and scientific knowledge.
5. Religions practices: (a) ritualistic forms, (b) treatment of the sick; (c) treatment of the dead.
6. Family and social systems: (a) the forms of marriage; (b) methods of reckoning relationships; (c) inheritance; (d) social control; (e) sports and games.
7. Property: (a) real and personal; (b) standards of value exchange; (c) trade.
8. Government: (a) political forms; (b) Judicial and legal procedures.
9. War.

But how far do Wissler's categories indicate universal elements and integration of any way of life. He replied that these features of culture must be on the one hand present in any culture, and on the other hand common to general cultures.

Criticisms have been raised of Wissler's classification of universal aspects of culture. For instance, it lacks first a concentration on economic organization and cultural transmission and, also as Professor Keesing has pointed out, "Wissler's placement of war as a universal category became particularly a centre for controversy."³² However Professor Nordskog has cited that:

"War has been institutionalised and is deeply rooted in our culture, while peace remains essentially an idealised hope."³³

War, then, one might say in terms of keesing is "not only a universal factor, but (also) a biologically determined factor arising out of human nature."³⁴

Peasant Society and Its Culture: The Folk Society (Kroeber and Redfield Definitions)³⁵

It was basically the European peasantry of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth that was in Kroeber's mind when he wrote. Nevertheless, it was Kroeber's stress on the cultural elements of the peasant community that paved the way to this popular field of investigation.

He defined the peasants as:

1. They are rural.
2. They live in relation to market towns.
3. They lack complete isolation as in the case of tribal society.
4. They lack political autonomy and self-sufficiency comparing with tribal communities.
5. They retain much of their old identity especially their attachment to soil and folk art.

These characteristics managed actually to establish a fundamental issue which is quite clear now in most modern anthropological studies on peasant communities namely that they constitute "part societies with part cultures".

Of the most prominent pioneers par excellence in studying peasant communities is Rober Redfield. His studies reveal the social and economic changes made in these emergent peasant to communities facing the problem of the impact of civilization and the decline of their old religious faith and traditional values. Redfield gives us the characteristics of the folk society after his studies on various peasant communities. These general characteristics of the folk society are follows:

1. The folk society is usually a small one.
2. The folk society is rather an isolated society.
3. The people who make up the folk society are much alike.
4. The members of the folk society have a strong sense of belonging together. Consequently, one of the most distinctive features of the folk society is that it has a strong sense of group solidarity and identity.
5. There is not much division of labour in the folk society: what one person does is what another does.
6. The conventional behaviour in the folk society is strongly patterned. This means that social behaviour in the folk society tends to conform to a type or a norm. In other words, behaviour in the folk society is traditional, spontaneous and uncritical.
7. The folk society is a familial society. The individual is responsible for all his kin as they are responsible for him.
8. The man in the folk soceity tends to make mental associations which are personal and emotional, rather than defined in terms of cause nd effect.

References

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3. *Vide*, R. Redfield, *The Little Community*, op. cit., p. 50.
4. *Vide*, Meyer Fortes, "The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups," *American Anthropologist*, LV, No. 1 (January - March, 1953), p. 21.
5. *Vide*, Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, London, Watts & Co., 1951, p. 42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
7. Raymond Firth, *Elements of Social Organization*, p.30.
8. Meyer Fortes, "*The structure of Unilineal Descent Group*", op. cit., p. 22. Cf. Rivers who considers the concept of social structure as equivalent to social organization. *Vide*, W.H.R. Rivers, *Social Organization*, London, 1926, pp. 3-4.
9. *Vide*, A.R. Radcliffe - Brown, 'On Social Structure, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. IXX, Part 1, 1940, p. 2.
10. *Vide*, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde (eds.), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London, Oxford University Press, 3rd Imperssion, 1956, p. 82.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Against this view, Levi - Strauss, the french anthropologist holds that social structure 'can by no means be reduced to the ensemble of social relations to be described in a given society. Therefore, social structure cannot claim a field of its own among others in the social studies. It is rather a method to be applied to any kind of social studies, similar to the structural analysis current in other disciplines.'
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16. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
17. R.M. MacIver and C.H. Page, *op. cit.*, p. 386.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 386 — 387.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 387.
20. F.R. Cowell, *Culture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1959, preface, p. ix.
21. *Ibid.*, p. ix.
22. See for example, Clark Kerr et al., *Industrialism and Industrial Man*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 77.
23. It was from Klemm that Tylor borrowed the word and first gave it the meaning which it has for English-speaking anthropologists today. See, Philip Bagby, *Culture and History*, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1958, p. 74. Tylor himself used "civilization" at first in the same meaning of culture. (Bagby, p. 75). In other words, he applied the term culture to our civilization; and this is wrong. "Acivilization is a culture of people who live in cities. "See, Richard Kluckhohn (ed.) *Culture and Behaviour*, Collected Essays of Clyde Kluckhohn, N.Y., The Free Press of Glencoe, 1952, p. 20.
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26. Cowell, *op. Cit.*, p.333.
27. & 4. A.L. Kroeber & Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

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