

# Indispensable: Twelve Chapters on Western Anthropology

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Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology*. 2nd edition.  
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This second edition of now classical textbook (1st edition, 2000) comes out after the English original was translated into at least 13 languages, including Polish, Albanian, Chinese, Vietnamese and even Kazakh (but not Czech or Russian!). The author, who recently passed away, is an experienced stylist, with decades of teaching anthropology and African studies at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Barnard, Emeritus Professor of the Anthropology of Southern Africa at the University of Edinburgh, was trained both in American cultural anthropology and British social anthropology. His usage of “anthropology” suggests that he mostly discusses Anglo-American anthropology and not so much anthropologies in their global meaning. The book title could also read history of theory as it tackles the development of anthropology in its theoretical dimension. It is comprised of 14 chapters that except for the introductory and concluding ones reflect the stages in the formation of the theoretical precepts.

At the outset in Chapter One he tries, along with a characterisation of these two disciplines, to explain the variety of continental visions of ethnology, Völkerkunde, Volkskunde, etc. but considers this plethora of disciplinary denominations a ‘confusion’ (p. 3). Therefore perhaps, he limits himself to Anglo-American anthropology. His approach is historical, i.e., anthropological theories are presented in time sequence as they emerged, but his ultimate goal is not history as such but an understanding of the changing theories.

Chapter Two deals with the precursors of the anthropological tradition. Barnard admits that while sociology has a clear pedigree, anthropology’s origins are not traceable unambiguously. What is important is to admit that there was

no ethnography while various theories of human origins existed in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The precursors of modern anthropology were people such as Grotius, Hobbes and Locke in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Rousseau in the 18<sup>th</sup>. Barnard first pays special attention to the definitions of humanity including feral children, Orang Outangs and noble savages. The sociological tradition which also emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was brought about by Montesquieu and his *Lettres persanes* and *De l'esprit des lois*. According to Radcliffe-Brown it was Montesquieu who was the founder of the social sciences rather than Rousseau, nominated for this honour by Lévi-Strauss. Barnard stresses that Auguste Comte established sociology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but anthropology and ethnology as denominations of disciplines preceded him. He briefly explains the debates about polygenesis and monogenesis of humanity. Ironically, anthropologists inclined to polygenesis while ethnologists preferred monogenesis.

Chapter Three of the book brings in evolution which dominated both the biology and anthropology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Darwinian approach, beside its refutation of Christian orthodoxy, gave preference to unilinear evolution. That was then followed by nineteenth century anthropologists such as Maine, Lubbock, and Morgan. The latter was an inspiration to the communist theorists such as Engels. Parallel to these were Tylor and Frazer whose fascination was the evolution of religion starting from totemism. Before *Primitive Culture*, Tylor published *Anahuac*, a kind of rudimentary field report from his sojourn in Mexico. His concept of “primitive” was based on a doctrine of survival. Tylor also believed that children were an example of primitiveness. But most important was his sequence from animism to fetishism and totemism. Julian Steward coined the theory of multilineal evolution much later. The author spends some time with Lévi-Strauss's argument that culture begins with incest taboo and with Chris Knight's theory that suggests that women compelled men to hunt for them before they allowed sex.

Chapter Four deals with diffusionism and culture-area theories. Alan Barnard shows a sound erudition of the continental theories of the philological tradition followed by German and Austrian schools of cultural diffusion. He dwells on the importance of Friedrich Ratzel and Leo Frobenius. The British diffusionists such as Elliot Smith and W.J. Perry seem to him as producers of “interesting absurdity” (p. 50). Finally, American anthropology's culture-area and regional approaches add more ingredients into diffusionist thinking. The author mentions Melville Herskovits's culture complex approach before discussing Clark Wissler's contribution to dating cultures (age-area hypothesis). Alfred Kroeber came with numerous culture areas and sub-areas fitting into grand areas. The culture-area approach was followed by regional comparisons. Barnard points out that these should be divided into illustrative, global, and controlled. Dutch Leiden structuralist

regional comparisons (J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong) and southern African Bantu structural comparisons (Adam Kuper) are mentioned at some length.

In Chapter Five Barnard analyses functionalism and structural-functionalism. These two streams have been for long considered the cornerstones of British social anthropology. But it was a Frenchman, Emile Durkheim, whose sociology was inspirational here. Radcliffe-Brown even called social anthropology as synonymous with comparative sociology. Two other French thinkers, Montesquieu and Comte, were crucial for the functional and structure-functional approaches. What is important here is the biological organism analogy and the stress on contemporaneous societies. The author underlines that besides Durkheim's contribution the importance of the work of Marcel Mauss cannot be overestimated. Bronisław Malinowski, a Pole settled in Britain, who, as Boas, a German settled in the United States, did, stressed long-term fieldwork as a gate to the explanation of 'savage' societies. Barnard characterises these two crucial figures as "pompous but liberal intellectuals" (p. 67). Malinowski, perhaps also like Boas, was also very keen to discover an "explicit theory of culture" (*ibid.*) but that called forth rather embarrassed reactions. Alfred Reginald Brown, later Radcliffe-Brown, a Brit by birth, provides our author with an opportunity for a detailed discussion. Although structural-functionalism did not dominate in anthropology for too long, its impact was profound. He rejected the 'science of culture' and rather coined an idea of a 'natural science of society'. He searched for the functions within a social system, studied synchronically. His usage of 'social structure' was linked to the analysis of kinship terminology as reflecting existing social facts. Barnard also mentions that Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown helped through their many disciples to establish institutional anthropology around the world.

Chapter Six is devoted to action and process studies. Concretely it deals with the transactionalism of Fredrik Barth, a British-trained Norwegian, and processual approaches, typical for the 'Manchester School' of Max Gluckman, a South African settled in Britain. Barnard also brings in "structural processualists" such as Edmund Leach and Victor Turner. Eventually interest in structure, process, and history (e.g., Marshall Sahlins or Richard Lee) ousted in the revival of Marxism, conceived by Barnard as "a processual theory based on the social relations of production" (p. 81). Anthropological Marxism is through its evolutionist background also related to diffusionism, functionalism and relativism, even structuralism. Transactionalism had a number of champions, one of them was Ladislav Holy, a Czech-British Africanist, who was also influenced by the sociological tradition of Bourdieu. This chapter is very interesting for its exposé of the Manchester School's analysis of politics and ritual. Peter Worsley, an anthropologist turned sociologist, brought in some Marxist ingredients. Further we read with great

interest the characterisations of famous debates between Friedman and Leach, Wilmsen and Lee as well as Obeyesekere and Sahlins. Barnard concludes this chapter by admitting that the 'social' tradition in anthropology reached its climax here. The rest of the book will mostly deal with other perspectives.

Marxism in anthropology, expounded in Chapter Seven, is an episode that had its roots in France and spread to Britain, South Africa, India, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Canada, and Latin America. Barnard rightly mentions the Marxist orthodoxy in the Soviet anthropology but its impact was hardly felt in the West. The anthropological life of Marxism is connected with the work of the French authors Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillassoux. There was further development in Britain and the United States. The former connects Marxism with structuralism of Lévi-Strauss kind while the latter develops economic anthropology. The author dwells on a discussion of Hindess and Hirst, two British commentators. Unfortunately, he does not mention the importance of Lawrence Krader and the whole issue of the Asiatic Mode of Production, a concept that springs from Marx's Capital. On the other hand, the world system of Immanuel Wallerstein and underdevelopment of Andre Gunder Frank received his attention. Barnard has a point in mentioning anarchism in anthropology. Here, the seminal work of Pierre Clastres and the admiration of Kropotkin by Radcliffe-Brown especially comes forward. The study of stateless societies such as the Nuer (starting with Evans-Pritchard) can be put into this category.

Next Chapter Eight concerns relativism and cognitive sciences in anthropology. Here Barnard starts from Franz Boas, the author of *The Mind of Primitive Man*. He mentions that Boas rejected the racist concept of an inequality of 'races'. He also launched the culture and personality approach perhaps best exemplified by the work of Ruth Benedict, namely in her *Patterns of Culture*. Lévy-Bruhl, a Frenchman, however, asserted that 'primitive mentality' fundamentally differs from logical thought. But Benjamin Whorf countered with his linguistic relativism. Barnard pays extensive attention to the opposition and similarity in their work. Then this leads to structural semantics, cognitive anthropology and ethnoscience, all of which pertain to the modern understanding of pre-modern conceptualising.

Chapter Nine quite logically ousts into the discussion of structuralism. Barnard notes that for structuralism pattern is more important than substance: "for a true structuralist, there is no reality except the relation between things" (p. 125). He characterises the interests of Claude Lévi-Strauss in the internal logic of a culture and structures beyond that culture. But there are different structuralisms in anthropology, for example the Dutch (Leiden) variety. Saussurean linguistics stresses context, the functionalism of the Prague School deals with phonological structures. Barnard points out that Lévi-Strauss and 'Prague' linguists met in New

York during World War II and the post-war work of the former evidently bears the influence of the latter. Barnard spends the whole subchapter 9.2. with Lévi-Strauss and his numerous contributions. He shows in a special figure that Lévi-Strauss was influenced by a plethora of authors including Saussure, Durkheim, Mauss, Boas but also Marx, Freud and even Radcliffe-Brown. I liked the juxtaposition of Lowie's *Primitive Society* with *Structures élémentaires de la parenté*. Where Lowie resigns in front of 'civilization' Lévi-Strauss finds the essence of culture in its structure. Barnard's exposé of structural anthropology as international and interdisciplinary seems to me as very successful, perhaps because it is such a complex matter.

The Tenth Chapter deals not surprisingly with poststructuralists and feminists. Both are critical in style. Again, like with structuralism, French thinkers such as Derrida, Althusser and Lacan are influential here. But these are no anthropologists. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist, exerted strong influence in anthropology. His *habitus* and other constructions were widely cited but Barnard feels that there is some obscure moment here. Another Frenchman widely read, cited, and used is Michel Foucault who was rather a historian of 'systems of thought'. He also concentrated on the link between power and knowledge and that interest influenced a lot of anthropologists. Barnard then tackles gender and feminist studies. He refers to the "magnificent overview" of Dame Henrietta Moore in her book *Feminism and Anthropology*. The book never misses putting the noble title in front of the name when applicable. It is surprising how many British and Commonwealth anthropologists were knighted. He also gets to grips with gender as a symbolic construction. Sherry Ortner's 1974 essay "Is female to male as nature is to culture" serves him to point out the specifics of feminist anthropology. The chapter closes with a discussion of 'embodiment' meaning the body as a source of identity, in the sense of gender/sex distinction.

Chapter Eleven is simply called Mavericks. Although quite a few anthropologists might be called by that name, Alan Barnard chose to concentrate on two British, Gregory Bateson and Mary Douglas, also a Dame. Bateson was a polymath, who conducted pioneering research of the *naven* transvestite ceremony among the Iatmul of New Guinea. He wrote on national character and by comparing cultural behaviour of Germans, British, Americans and Russians concluded that dominance and submission in those cultures are related to parenthood and childhood. Bateson introduced two concepts, *eidōs* and *ethos*, meaning form and structure, both making up culture. This thinking helps in studying conflicts, whether in family or between superpowers. Douglas was a dynamic structuralist who studied purity and pollution among the Lele of then Belgian Congo (today D.R.C.). Her masterpiece *Purity and Danger* describes and classifies cultures and societies along two axes, grid and group. For example, persons may have low grid

and low group or high grid and high group, or high grid and low group and low grid and high group. Although almost everything can be thus compared, Barnard reminds us that Douglas's "method works best when like is compared with like" (p. 164). He mentions that mavericks challenged the ethnographic authority and methods of structuralism and its predecessors.

Interpretive approaches are subjected to Barnard's description in Chapter Twelve. Whereas in Britain interpretism went as far as rejection of anthropology as a science, in America the reaction to structuralism led to 'postmodern' reasoning. Special attention is paid in this chapter to (Sir) Evans-Pritchard's interpretism, which views anthropology as an art while recognizing the crucial role of history. In *Nuer Religion*, published in 1956, Evans-Pritchard attempts to see the spirituality of the Nuer as a Nuer sees it. His approach led to an anthropology of belief (Lienhardt's divinity). It is noteworthy that both Nuer and Dinka have their native anthropologists. While Evans-Pritchard's influence is still shining at Oxford, American Clifford Geertz's interpretism had an impact around the world. Geertz studied cultural features on Bali, Java and in Morocco. He introduced a method he called 'thick description' and claimed that society was a text to be deconstructed by an anthropologist. Geertz was a master in style and managed to construct a widely read paradigm. His work served as a springboard into postmodernism, a fashion which lured in quite a few anthropologists.

Postmodernism and its aftermath make up Chapter Thirteen of the book under review. Here Barnard makes an effort at explaining the extreme reflexivity of postmodernists. He admits that reflexivity has lots to do with feminist anthropology. Reflexivity is itself a kind of ethnography for postmodern anthropologists. Said's *Orientalism* develops the visions of power derived from Foucault. Critics pointed out that colonial peoples have similarly biased and stereotyped visions of the West. Globalization encompasses both the Orient and the Occident and localization might help to understand local and external influences. Postmodernism criticises 'grand theory in anthropology' and its claim to completeness in ethnography. It revives relativism and draws inspiration from the work of Jean-François Lyotard, a recently deceased French philosopher. Barnard states unequivocally that "to a postmodern anthropologist there is no true, complete statement that can be made about a culture" (p. 179). The manifesto volume *Writing Culture* expounds literary methods within anthropological discourse and Barnard describes a number of chapters in this basic text of anthropological postmodernism. He also does not omit David Schneider, "great Chicago interpreter of the divergent symbolism of American and Yapese kinship" (p.182). Critics did not wait to attack postmodernist bias. It was Ernest Gellner whose modernist theory of nationalism turned out to be a tool against postmodernism. The polemic approach of Gellner is best

discernible in his book *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. Further on, Barnard brings in globalization and postcolonialism. Here he underlines the impact of Arjun Appadurai, an Indian-American writer whose *Modernity at Large* explains the globalization phenomenon. Postcolonialism critiques come from the work of women writers like Alcida Ramos from Brazil and a Maori, Tuhiwai Smith. Barnard's discussion does not include Cameroonian Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* that has influenced a plethora of influential authors since 2000. But that is the only major shortcoming of the book because the author did not include developments in anthropological theory after the turn of century. Because the critical thought continues with new mavericks such as David Graeber whose books such as *Debt: The First 5000 Years* struck the imagination of many outside anthropology. Also of note is the history of the anthropology movement within the European Association of Social Anthropologists. And the critical writing of Francis Nyamnjoh, another Cameroonian, whose theory of incompleteness developing the ideas contained in Amos Tutuola's novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* offers a departure from the western bias in anthropology.

Alan Barnard closes his second edition with Conclusions. Here he mentions the world history trends that ramify the developments in anthropology. Japanese scholars turned to the study of primates. The invention of microwave helped the extensive study of the southern African San or Bushmen. A brief postscript on the Black Lives Matter movement testifies that the author followed the impact American politics makes on anthropology. Barnard does not avoid stressing the importance of national traditions, here of course the British and American ones. That he did not discuss Russian or Brazilian anthropology or the entry of social anthropology into East-Central Europe cannot be a point for criticism but of course the emergence of 'anthropologies' has changed the direction somewhat away from the main tree of 'Franglus' (a term coined by Catherine Verdery) anthropology.

The second edition of Barnard's *History and Theory in Anthropology* is complemented by an appendix on the dates of birth and death of major anthropologists as well as very useful and detailed Glossary of terms mentioned in the book. The References and Index are obviously useful parts of the book. The reviewer is convinced that the book under review will be widely read and of benefit for all interested in understanding the historical development of the theories of anthropology.

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