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TOPIC- STRUCTURE AS MODEL

Structure as Model

On the continent, Claude Levi-Strauss envisages the future of social anthropology as a study complete by itself in terms of communication studies. A society is represented as a network of inter-communications between persons and groups. The study of communication of words, and symbols conveying meanings between persons in a society, would constitute the study of linguistics, knowledge, art etc. The study of the communication of spouses (men in a matrilocal society and women in a patrilocal society), between various groups would constitute the study of marriage, kin-groups, and kinship usages, and the communication of goods and services between persons and groups would constitute the scope of the study of economic organization and material culture.

Thus, studies of human societies may be studied, not in terms of culture but in terms of structures which embody culture.

The term "social structure" has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it. This should help one to clarify the difference between two concepts which are so close to each other that they have often been confused, namely, those of social structure and of social relations. Social relations consist of the raw materials out of which the model making-up the social structures

are built, which social structure can be no means, be reduced to the ensemble of the 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. We can say that a structure consists of a model meeting with several requirements:

- (i) The structure exhibits the characteristics of a system. It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without effecting changes in all the other elements,
- (ii) For any given model, there should be a possibility of ordering a series of transformation resulting in a group of models of the same type,
- (iii) The above properties make it possible to predict how the model will react if one or more of its elements are submitted to certain modifications, and finally,
- (iv) The model should be constituted so as to make immediately intelligible all the observed facts.

These being the requirements for any model with structural value, several consequences follow. These, however, do not pertain to the definition of structure but have to do with chief properties exhibited and problems raised by structural analysis when contemplated in the social and other fields. Great care should be taken to distinguish between the observational and the experimental levels. To observe facts and elaborate methodological devices which permit the construction of the models out of these facts is not at all the same thing as to experiment on the models. By 'experimenting on models', we mean the set of procedures aiming at ascertaining how a given model will react when subjected to change and at comparing models of the same or different types. On observation level, the main

rule is that all the facts should be carefully observed and described without allowing any theoretical preconception to decide whether some are more important than others. It is obvious that the best model will always be that which is true, that is, the simplest possible model which, while being derived exclusively from the facts under consideration, also makes it possible to account for all of them. Therefore, the first task is to ascertain what those facts are. A second distinction has to do with the conscious or unconscious character of the models. In the history of structural thought, Boas may be credited with having introduced this distinction. He made clear that a category of fact can more easily yield to structural analysis when the social group in which it is manifested has not elaborated a conscious model to interpret or justify it. Some may be surprised to find the name of Boas quoted in connection with structural theory since he has often been described as one of the main obstacles in its path. But Levi Strauss points out the shortcomings of Boas in matters of structural studies did not lie in his failure to understand their importance and significance which he did, as a matter of fact, in the most prophetic way. They rather resulted from the fact that he imposed on structural studies conditions of validity, some of which will remain forever part of their methodology while some others are so exacting and impossible to meet that they would have withered scientific development in any field.

A structural model may be conscious or unconscious without this difference affecting its nature. It can only be said that when the structure of a certain type of phenomena does not lie at a great depth, it is more likely that some kind of model, standing as a screen to hide it, will exist in the collective consciousness. For conscious models, which are usually known as 'norms' are by definition very poor ones, since they are not intended to explain the phenomena but to perpetuate them. Therefore, the structural analysis is confronted with a strange

paradox well known to the linguist, that is, the more obvious structural organization is, the more difficult it becomes to reach it because of the inaccurate conscious models lying across the path which leads to it.

From the point of the degree of consciousness, the anthropologist is confronted with two kinds of situations. He may have to construct a model from phenomena the systematic character of which has evoked not awareness on the part of culture, this is the kind of simpler situation referred to by Boas as providing the easiest ground for anthropological research.

It is often believed that one of the main interests of the nation of structure is to permit the introduction of measurement in social anthropology. This view has been favoured by the frequent appearance of mathematical or semi-mathematical aids in books or articles dealing with social structure. Structural studies, are in the social sciences, the indirect outcome of modern developments in mathematics which have given increasing importance to the qualitative point of view in contradistinction to the quantitative point of view of traditional mathematics. It has become possible, therefore, in fields such as mathematical logic, set theory, group theory, and typology, to develop a rigorous approach to problems which do not admit of a metrical solution.

A model, the elements of which are on the same scale as the phenomena, will be called a mechanical model; when the elements of the model are on a different scale, we shall be dealing with a statistical model. It should also be kept in mind that what makes social-structure studies valuable is that structures are models, the formal properties of which can be compared independently of their elements. The structuralist's task is thus to recognize and isolate levels of reality which have strategic value from his point of view, namely, which admit of

representation as models. It often happens that the same data may be considered from different perspective embodying equally strategic values, though the resulting models will be in some cases mechanical and in others statistical. This situation is well known in the exact and natural sciences; for situation, the theory of a small number of physical bodies belongs to classical mechanics but if the number of bodies becomes greater, then one should rely on the laws of thermodynamics, that is use of a statistical model instead of a mechanical one, though the nature of the data remains the same in both cases.

The distinction between mechanical and statistical models has also become fundamental in another respect; it makes it possible to clarify the role of the comparative method in structural studies. This method was greatly emphasized by both Radcliffe-Brown and Lowie. The former remarks "Theoretical sociology is commonly regarded as an inductive science, induction being the logical method of inference by which we arrive at general propositions from the consideration of particular instances. Although Prof. Evans-Pritchard.. seems 'to employ in some of his statements that the logic method of induction using comparison classification, and generalization, is not applicable to the phenomena of human social life ... I hold that social anthropology must depend on systematic comparative studies of many societies."

Levi-Strauss's anthropology emphasizes the close relationship between fieldwork and theory, between description of social phenomena and structural analysis, as two phases of the same process. Levi-Strauss's approach is holistic and integrative. In this sense, he has not deviated from the major concerns of Boas, Lowie, Kroeber and other pioneering figures in the field to whom he often refers. He conceives of anthropology in the broadest sense, as the study of men, past and present, in all aspects-physical, linguistic, cultural, conscious and unconscious.

Levi-Strauss defines the aim, scope, methods of anthropology and accepts the complementary role of history in providing a perspective to the study of social life. According to him, anthropology has in the past suffered from a surfeit of empiricism on one hand and culture-bound theorizing on the other. Rejecting the atomistic and mechanistic interpretations of evolutionism and diffusionism, as well as the naturalistic and empirical approach of British functionalism, he has formulated a critic of arbitrary concepts and classifications and exposes fallacious generalizations and truisms that extend in much anthropological theory.