

THE TRIP TO THE DIALOGUE. THE LABYRINTH OF THE POSTMODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

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Resumen: Este breve trabajo es un primer acercamiento, siempre provisional, al controvertido tema de la postmodernidad en la Antropología Social actual. Marcado por una serie de autores en torno a lo que en su día fue el llamado Seminario de Santa Fe (Nuevo México) y tras analizar a las principales figuras que lo componen, a través de sus principales trabajos, me introduzco en lo que ha significado el llamado giro lingüístico (o “la semiótica al poder”). La principal finalidad es hacer una crítica a sus problemas, propuestas y métodos, no sin otra intención que poner de relieve el significado ideológico de sus, aparentemente, radicales y críticas proposiciones.

Abstract: This short work is a first approximation, always provisional, to the controverted topic of the postmodernism in the current Social Anthropology. Labelled by a series of authors in connection with what in its day was call the Seminar of Santa Fe (New Mexico) and after analysing to the principal figures that compose it, I introduce me in what has meant the semiotic revolution. The principal purpose is to make a critique to its problems, proposals and methods, not without other intention that to put in relief the ideological meaning in their, apparently, radical and critical propositions.

Palabras clave: History of Anthropology. Postmodernism. Critic Teoria. Ideologic. Dialogic. Linguistic.

I.

In this brief work I seek to go into for those “labyrinths” that the Social Anthropology has shown with regard to the postmodern critic. Where I will obviate its origins, for, this way, to profile those thoroughly why and those for what reason of what has happened in this discipline in the last two decades. This way, because, we have that the mediation of the language has constituted the spine of the traditional anthropological epistemology, from, at least, Malinowski, Boas and Mauss –proponent this way a global panorama of the Anthropology previous to the Second World War–. For them the “method” it was based, in certain measure, in the structural mediation that was given with the learning of the language of the exotic group that –y was still studied today many manuals “current” they continue recommending it–. From this point of view, the participant observation has had in the talkative, oral processes or not, but based on models linguistic, great part of its angular stone. However, this model had never up to now been so intensely criticised, product of the “rotate linguistic” postmodern, even her capacity to monopolise the attention in a hidden incessant way, without a doubt. The fear of some anthropologists to that he is outside of the “control” of the discipline her works, basic attitude that can be in the current post-structuralism (that are already legion in United States and France. See, in this respect, Thomas, 1991: 20-31), acting doesn’t eat it is known, but like it is. This feature so accused of the current Anthropology of being aimed to the analysis semiotics and parietals, even when the formation and belief is another very different one, at the same time that to have the view put in the academic critic. It is a point to keep in mind in the context that formed the call postmodernity, where the “juvenilización”, or that young view, rebel and unconformity, are average currency almost without exception.

At the same time, Occident it has advanced modifying the same notion of “to be” outside of the “existence” (like it happens in a radical way with the folklorist and certain ethnology positivist, for example), where the questions on the language make emerge new thought forms. The humanities, in short, and the social sciences, in general, in this sense, they have offered a lamentable show, “clawing from it was” the linguistic –in short: the semiotic–¹. Being based for example on a theoretical body that we can say politically of left, what has got complicated also with the appearance of other critical fronts the applied Anthropology (Johannsen, 1992: 71-81. Marcus, 1999) or the feminist Anthropology (Piron, 1992: 63-82). Those have put of relief, also, him “ideological” and “sexist” of the linguistic appreciation (in this sense see Couldry, 1996: 315-333). This way, because, “clawing from it was” it is not only a metaphor, since the humanities, as soon as it disciplines, they have tried to find ways to negotiate and to make comfortable, when not trying to be equaled, with the linguistics (the more ones “mathematical” of those “humanities”).

The current speech of Anthropology is marked with the signs of this encounter (among other, I consider very interesting for a first approach Calkowski, 1991: 538-552. Delgado, 1993: 94-111. Denzin, 1989: 9-27. Pool, 1991: 309-331. Stoller, 1991: 101-110. Ulin, 1991: 63-89. Yeatman, 1991a: 3-9, 1991b: 116-130). In this sense one of the most provocative anthropologists and supersets of the current panorama, Stephen Tyler, spreads in its works (among other see 1978, 1984: 328-336, 1987, 1991) to distract its readers. Because what he tries not is really the postmodern world for him, if not rather the imaginary of the contemporary condition of the anthropological speech. Indeed, to Tyler it interests him so much “the unspeakable thing”, as the speeches, as soon as theories of a new method and a way, also new, of representation for and of the Anthropology and here the linguistics yes it is, consequently, it leaves central of the position. In fact, the problems that it tries are probably very familiar for many anthropologists (and, obviously, also to the linguists), beginning, certainly, with the central matter for many of them: the language like representation. Tyler attempts, therefore, to offer

¹ Expression used for the postmodern Paul Smith (1988). That not few they have preferred to use in the sense of the representation systems, or the “violence” of the Anthropology theoretical in front of the ethnography observed. See in this respect Whitaker (1996: 1-13).

as solution, certainly rolling, that that Marcus and Fischer (1986), driving the insecurity of many of its colleagues (as it is it, also Clifford; Marcus, 1991), they have called “a representation crisis in the human sciences.” But it is a position and a solution that many reject or, on the contrary, they admit without reservations. And whose dangers, in principle, come of the temptation that supposes to have an easy security (coming from the semiotic) for the complexity supposed epistemological in that it is the current Anthropology.

The arguments epistemological and the methodological problems that Tyler outlines, jointly with other anthropologists, they are making that the discipline takes note more and more of “these” proposals (a work, for example, as that of Clifford, 1995 seem that it is no longer of obligatory reading, it is, simply, indispensable). This way, Fischer and Marcus’s proposal of establishing an opinion current, and to denominate it as the “crisis of the representation”, it would be between two the result of the restless games projects different from the Anthropology. First, that of the systematic ethnography, expert as the description of some certain cultural and social units. And, second, that of the synchronous Anthropology, that dream –it destroyed lately– have to discover and to understand the entirety, the holistic processes (for that which you/they are so interesting the works of Taussing, 1980, 1986, 1980, 1992). On the other hand, the simultaneity of these two ends, seemingly disparate, seems that it doesn’t constitute a problem for many of those that continue speaking of the Anthropology like Science (and of themselves as “scientific”).

This way, those that are devoted to carry out empirical focuses are more and more sure of their capacity to share the theory and the evidence. Therefore, to consent to the entirety, proposing that it is the same thing the description and the conclusion (this is especially certain in other areas of the Social Sciences, such as the statistic or the psychology, although not exclusive, like Marvin Harris attempts). But, for the anthropologists, the relationship between the “it leaves” and the “entirety” it becomes especially problematic (Giobelina, 1990: 14-15), simply for the nature of the own anthropological object (the anthropological). Because the anthropologists spread, with more frequency than other types of social observers, to recognize that the conception of, be what is, the entirety it is the observer’s constructs, and that, therefore, the part (or the parts) it is not easily assimilable to that that builds the everything. Therefore, it is evident that the ideology spreads to separate to the fellow’s object (Taylor, 1991: 2-6. Valjavec, 1992: 489-509. Williams, 1993: 67-75), making even more complicated the union between part and entirety.

II.

All this is not, obviously, a new problem (without going farther, for example, Lévi-Strauss already makes it his in a constant way. see Pérez, 1991: 71-79). But rather it indicates the rising difficulty of the Anthropology to be assigned to itself the science condition (what has put of relief, in another context epistemological, Llobera, 1975: 377-378). But it is not less certain than the nature of these dilemmas he loses temper depending of how it is described, how the linguistic turn is used (García Canclini, 1991: 58-64). Clifford Geertz, for example, proposes the “combination” of the own point of view –subject– and that of the “other” –object– (see, Tilde, 1991: 179-193. To have a critical vision of Geertz can be consulted Keesing, 1987: 161-176. Llobera, 1990. Nivón; Rosas, 1991: 40-49. Schneider, 1987: 809-839. Shankman, 1984: 261-279), burying in a way very particular years of humanist tradition –that I obviously don’t enter to value–:

“Is the problem partly in knowing on what they consist those big ideals exactly (against what is it supposed that it protects us the «objectivity»? The passion? the relativism?, the intuitions?, the prejudice? What is what recommends the «rightness»? Precision? fidelity?, authenticity?). But in a more critical way, the problem resides in the operation of speeches that you/they are prescribed to work [...] is the question: from where does the style that we use for bean-field

on it proceed? Again, the favourites answer is that it comes from that that, with our very open eyes, our remote interests and our methods in the middle of operation, we find in front of us” (Geertz, 1996 p. 27).

We observe that here that James Clifford (1991b p. 42), follower without mufflers of Geertz, calls the “the experience interpretative” and that it has driven to the literature of the anthropological text and to care for the discipline the basic budgets of the western hermeneutics (Sangren, 1988: 405-435). But now the problem is not this, but solving, that mediation that Geertz stops supposes the fundamental difficulty of assimilating the point of view from the native one to the anthropologist’s look (Geertz, 1994a: 73-90). That without a doubt ends in a species very peculiar of paranoia that is expressed as a “perplexity” in its texts (Doody, 1991: 285-303). In fact it is simply another way that the humanism claims a reality that doesn’t possess and it will never possess. But, also, Geertz, although he hides after an innovative writing and impacting, it is part of that liberal world of palace (the academy in their maximum protocol prides), the last haven from where to fight for a liberal ideology, and where “the sense common to the power” it could be perfectly their motto. Has everything allowed him to it to be gone up to a pedestal –what are it if not the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, where he works?–, From where shamelessly, in a cruel and radical way, it has finished for relatives to right and to the lefts.

The strategy of the interpretative Anthropology who’s epistemological resides in re-affirming another one empirical (the native one) like substantial object of the Anthropology. At the same time that revindicar the observer’s innocence –than a pure being that is simply an onlooker–. It is similar to the classic position of paranoiac’s illusions, where a process of fictionalisations of the external world is given. Designing this way a strategy to protect the topic (I hold and object like “a native point of view”) from any alteration or influence that he can threaten him to betray him (Winch, 1994: 82-101). This way, because, for Geertz (1994a: 89-90; and in a wide way for all the humanist ones liberal) the defences before such threats leads to a negotiation potentially endless, or him what a Geertz calls a process of “approach” of the cultural meanings that circulate and they are exchanged between the own thing and the other people’s thing. For the paranoiac most of the knowledge is hidden, for what the cosmos is the construction of its desire that is always whole and healthy, for what is fundamental its “capacity” to interpret everybody, whichever it is its point of view. From this position type, the construction is a “general knowledge”, or knowledge that significant and it preconceives an entirety. In the modernist Anthropology the tension on this endless dialectical –entry him what a he calls himself “empirical” in the reality of the other one and the defensive coherence and it interns of the topic that is– it is maybe a symptom of the conception of a general knowledge.

However, the interpretative Anthropology is view like a way of reconstructing the entirety, in the form of a general relativism that has brought, although not in a simple way, after the collapse of the modernity, the possibility to think a new theory. Those of a complete world (global) in that all the parts somehow are adjusted to each other and where the own thing and the other people’s thing unite (Sperber, 1985). But it is not less true than the collapse of that modernity he has brought, also, the emergency of a certain world postcolonial (Scott, 1992: 371-394) that although potentially autonomous for certain concessions, their reclaims is painful. Clifford Geertz (1990) and their interpretative Anthropology, together with many of their followers, they have gotten him to be suspected of him and, consequently that is accused of distorting the reality when supposing that the load hermeneutics that uses is a way to defend of the political post colonialist. But Geertz has had, always, the undeniable virtue of being ahead to its critics (generally proposing “traps” in its works: distractions for the critic) and this way, in a given moment, he made its –apparent– retreat of the circle of the hermeneutic. Causing, already in the decade of the 60, but mainly in the 70, its new plays in the battle that they had the hermeneutic, on one hand, and those then emergent semiotic and sociology. For other, he stops this way to carry out its you swim innocent political readings of all them (Goldstein, 1991: 21-30). But the structuralism and the average post-estructuralists put great

part of their emphasis in wondering on the “representation”, what supposed an enormous challenge to differ of the circuits of the hermeneutic and to insist on the language mediation, so much in their sense durkheimian of “unconscious social”, as of ideology. On the contrary, Geertz affirms that wants to avoid everything that that the hermeneutic had provided him, ignoring those circuits, as well as the fact that supposed this of change. For him the meaning is here the merchandise, what Marx called those “you relate juridical”, commonplace where the plots of the power settle down.

III.

The last book of Tyler (1987. On the reactions that it has risen see Kirby, 1989: 36-45) it confirms in great way all this. And the most effective critics to the interpretative Anthropology arise from the works of the followers of Geertz (or those that more they have read it, revered and bolstered), like it is the case of James Clifford (1991a: 151-182). The central work of Clifford (1995) it consists on a series of articles that inspect, one after other, the genesis of the ethnography, writing from a posture that deliberately leaves of side the perspectives post-estructuralists. That he shows off the separation of the modernist visions and their problems (in fact, the French anthropology is for the floors). For he pays it attention to different theories, to the forms and the genesis of the representation systems, and how everything is it a way “paranoiac” of making Anthropology. Always present in the modernist ethnography and in the ways, of that that the flame of “imperialistic direct” in that the most traditional anthropologists act (Clifford, 1995 p. 122). The work of Clifford appears, without place to doubts, among the most important ideology exercises (Hutnyk, 1998: 339-378), of what in principle Tyler will come to call “ethnography and postmodern anthropology” (Tyler, 1991: 188-189).

But the postmodern Anthropology, besides other collateral facts that for the time being doesn't interest me too much to highlight (for sees it you, for example, the “presentation” of the compilation of Reynoso, 1991: 11-60), it proposes a “new” look. The Anthropology for them conceived two lines and that for them they appear as especially important. One that is known as of the “I dialogue” (dialogic), and one seconds that it is the way “collaborator” (without a doubt there is other, as the way “surrealist” that comes of the French ethnography). In the way of the “I dialogue”, for example, they are books like *Moroccan Dialogues* of Kevin Dwyer (1982), where it is given a classic representation of the Other one and a constant dialectical process among the observer and the one observed. Where they offer in form of lightly published copies the conversations and interviews characteristic of the work field (see Dwyer, 1977: 143-151 to have, also, an ideology this postmodern way of making Anthropology). On the other hand, in the way “collaborator”, the intent is to give the voice to the native one, in a situation of similar to similar with the anthropologist. The book of Crapanzano (1980)², *Tuhami: Portrait of a Maroon*, it is maybe the most radical example. In this work, the native informant, Tuhami, supplies the text³, while the anthropologist supplies the challenges and the questions for his western auditory (I eat he had already made, in a different way but with the same intention, Geertz, 1994b. Also, Morocco, like object is behind this whole Anthropology, what could be only a coincidence, or maybe not). In both cases what is demonstrated belongs the pretence absence from the anthropologist to a general knowledge, even an abandonment of the own relativism. Ultimately, it is an anthropological encounter that offers highly provisional, specific and not global.

The immediate danger that these visions run, instead of excusing the aspiration to the general knowledge, is that the desire moves to produce a general relativism. But there is something more. In

² To see, also, Crapanzano (1977: 69-73) and their first intent in this line, (Crapanzano, 1972) that “accidentally” he resembles the work of Briggs (1970). What is not of missing, because if something has the postmodern ones it is their capacity to assimilate the ideas of the other ones. Ultimately they don't look for the originality in the investigation, but the continuity of the speech, generally, written.

³ This name is a fiction more. Like it allows to see, with foreword to María Catedra's Spanish version, Rabinow (1992) before being foucaultian; and also Betteille; Madan, (1975). Middleton (1984). Powdermaker (1966). Spindeler (1970).

fact, these types of experimental ethnography even when their purpose can be to prevent the voice of the native ones. He doesn't stop to be a "voice" to the service of the "authority" of an ethnographer that he only speaks to a western auditory besides that he cannot forget that is the own anthropologist who orchestrates all this and in who has origin. That at least he makes suspicious to the anthropologist in that intent of "to dialogue" or "to collaborate" with the native ones just like that. And this yes it is a typical and already classic problem, of the post structuralism, where the long shade of the deconstruction is noticed. Also, there are few answers easy to the problem. Richard Jenkin (1996: 807-822), for example, it takes the discussion farther, when intending that the look be not already on those "you sew" (ideologies have more than enough theories epistemological) proposed by Geertz or Barh (unmarked that the North American postmodern followers). But rather they are always part of anthropological points of view. Belonging to what he calls those of the Anthropology and that it corresponds to what the anthropologists give for fact and said (and the fieldwork is a good example. In this respect, Lambek, 1991: 3-27), what would not suppose a problem, beyond the reasonably "scientific" (see Kuznar, 1997. Saraswati, 2001), if it was not because the Anthropology also lives off giving classes to some students that are not ethnographers, neither they know the Anthropology and their a priori.

This way, because, a solution to the problems outlined by the "to dialogue" or "to collaborate", for example, it could be of the type proposed by Derrida (1978. 1987: 109-143) that however. It grants as many firms' points as sometimes renouncement to them, mean continually their origin: the metaphor like representation of the metaphor (the classic fears of the *Vorstellung* of Heidegger). A solution with this strategy is that it is always potentially available to its author's whim, like he makes Derrida in its works, reaffirming constantly everything and, at the same time, only what supposes an advantage to its thought. Another similar solution, to give another example, it could be the one offered by Meaghan Morris to the men (in masculine-plural) that want to treat the topic of the feminism: she invites them, strategically, to retire in the silence (Gordon, 1993: 109-117). Seen as an apolitical option, this suggestion maintains a certain degree of difficulty. He could have the advantage of liberating to the "other" (in this case the "woman") of a certain interference type. And, at the same time, she could have the disadvantage of allowing to the aggressor (in this case the "man") to be distanced and to lose historical conscience of its responsibility, at the same time that it dismantles the useful alliances socially and its rising articulations.

Anyway it is evident that the postmodern Anthropology proposes solutions that are, in its form, more complex than the problems and this way. Continuing with the feminist example⁴, it is obvious that so much the postmodern Anthropology that thinks the relationships of I generate, as the feminist Anthropology that thinks the postmodern conceptions. They spread to complex and radicalise their own realities, without the solutions are simplex, but, rather, you structure *rizomatics* of a complex knowledge and, because not to say it, complex.

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⁴ The bibliography, more keeping in mind that it is a topic of "fashion", it is immense, I find even this way they useful the following works: Badcock (1993: 59-66). Boddy (1991: 125-133). Di-Leonardo (1993: 76-80). Downs (1993: 141-437). Kirby (1993: 127-133). Mascia-Lees; Sharpe; Cohen (1987: 251-282). Rothfield (1991: 54-67). Sharpe; Mascia-Lees (1993: 87-98).

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