Towards a Dialectic Anthropology
— A Comment On Prof. M. Freedman's
Paper, Social And Cultural
Anthropology

by

Riaz Hassan

Department of Sociology
University of Singapore
1974

Author's Note

In May 1973, Professor Sol Tax, the President of the
IXth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnolo-
gical Sciences (held in Chicago from August 28th to September
8th, 1973) invited me to be one of the discussants of
Professor Maurice Freedman's paper entitled "Social and
Cultural Anthropology" prepared for UNESCO as a Chapter in
International Study on the Main Trends of Research in The
Field of Social and Human Sciences, to be published by
UNESCO, in 1973-74.

The paper was described by Professor Sol Tax as: "...
a remarkable cooperative achievement; and its breadth and
high quality make it worthy of the fullest attention; and
its significance for anthropology also requires critical
discussion." Because of its significance to the discipline
one full session was set aside for discussion of this paper.
The session was chaired by Professor Fred Eggan. My comments
were prepared for this session. Besides myself there were
29 other anthropologists (see Appendix A) selected from
different parts of the world who responded with written
comments on Professor Freedman's paper. All comments and
the results of the discussion which took place during the
session devoted to the paper will be published in one volume
by the Congress.

Towards a Dialectic Anthropology - A Comment on Professor
M. Freedman's Paper, Social and Cultural Anthropology,
presented at the IXth International Congress of Anthropo-
logical and Ethnological Sciences, Chicago, U.S.A. August-
September 1973, and to be published in Main Trends of
Research in the Social and Human Sciences, Part Two:
UNESCO/Mouton, 1973-74.

As several persons have been asked to comment on
Professor Freedman's paper, I presume that some of them will
be making specific comments in the particular sections or
fields, styles and methodology. My own comments will be
general in nature and related to some of the main points
made by Professor Freedman regarding Main Trends.

In a survey type of work such as this, one needs to
ask: does it cover new ground? Or does it make a new
convenient package of ideas on associated topics which
elsewhere have been scattered (in other words is it a sort
of general reader)? Or, does it take an innovative per-
spective which emanates from a basically different theoretical
thesis? Or is it simply a general summary-type overview
obtainable elsewhere? In fairness to the author one should
also keep in view the fact that this is a commissioned
piece of work and, therefore, the objectives of the publisher
have to be taken into account. Also, one needs to know who
is the intended public of this monograph: layman, academics,
or intellectuals in general. I shall address myself only to
some of these questions in my comments.

As regards the first set of questions raised above,
this paper is a package of associated ideas and topics
similar to several general surveys of social and cultural
anthropology which normally are read by anthropology under-
graduates. It covers little new ground. It primarily remains
a survey of Anglo-French-American anthropologies. This is
evident in the dichotomies used to identify the main trends;
in the description of the conceptual frameworks and issues
within the specific fields of anthropology, and from the
superficial treatment of topics which, for a combination of
reasons, either do not interest the established Anglo-French-
American anthropologists, or are too complex to fit into
their neat theoretical frameworks.

Take for example the treatment of the topic "Culture and Society" (pp. 16-18). Two pages only are devoted to this topic and this is in, lest we forget, a survey of Social and Cultural Anthropology to be published in a volume entitled "Main Trends of Research in Social and Human Sciences." Even in these two pages the topic is treated in an esoteric way. The distinction between culture and society is of central importance if one is to understand the traditions of cultural anthropology and social anthropology and sociology. The discussion pertaining to this topic is a sort of in-circle bull session of one senior established anthropologist discussing loftily (but not always profoundly) other senior anthropologists. For those outside the exalted and charmed circle it says very little indeed – it is decidedly not informative. Members of the other social and human sciences will remain baffled by the distinction under elaboration. And given the fact that this is an international Study (what else one can call it, after all it is commissioned by the UNESCO) and the author goes out of his way to indicate how widely spread are his contacts and sources, then what do we learn of the East European, the Russian, and the Socialist Chinese ideas of culture, i.e. their definitions and the distinction they make between culture and society. What do the Chinese, the Russians, the East Europeans think of Tylor's definition or for that matter Levi-Strauss' or Firth's definition of culture and other concepts like social structure and function.

Professor Freedman points out, and I think correctly, the narrowing of gaps between social anthropology and cultural anthropology in the last ten years. How does this effect the distinction between Society and Culture? He refers to the distinction between sociology (study of Society) and anthropology (study of culture) and asks: "is it really possible to conceive sociology that did not substantively treat the facts of culture"? No, comes the answer. But then how in the first place did the "old" Sociology and

Anthropology come into existence as academic disciplines.
I think in addition to whatever academic and historical
explanations we may have, we need to take into account one
fundamental factor in the distinction and separation of
these two subjects and that is: the institutionalization
of knowledge and learning in the modern (and bureaucratized)
universities or educational systems of the modern societies.

Turning to the "trends" or "tensions" in contemporary
anthropology, I think the author has very appropriately
(and to my mind objectively) brought together his knowledge,
experience and, most important of all, his intuitions to
identify the main trends and tensions in anthropology today.
But by focusing on the present only in the discussion of these
trends I think we only are left simply with their description,
and mere description does not explain their genesis. Moreover,
in straightforward description of a situation one minimizes
the possibility of offending others as well as oneself (that
is if we are all moral beings).

That anthropology is an ideology which bloomed and
blossomed as an instrument of colonialism is now generally
recognized. Some of the major trends in the discipline
(study of primitive vs. advanced, self vs. others, outside
view of culture vs. inside view of culture and anthropological
methodology etc.) are the results of the changed political
circumstances in the world today. But unfortunately
decolonization of the world has not necessarily changed the
ideological basis of anthropology (or of other social sciences).
I think the importance of some of the main trends are vastly
exaggerated in the discussion. Anthropology was and remains
an ideology with its deep roots in the former colonial powers.
Today it is an instrument more of the economic than the
political domination (if the two can be separated) of the
former colonial powers. It has changed only superficially.

For example, the trend identified as the study of "self"
vs. "others" in anthropology, to a large extent means the
study of socially, culturally and economically deprived

classes of one's own society by the western anthropologists.
One may ask why? I think my American colleagues should be
able to answer this question adequately. I would only add
that the study of these groups is a functional equivalent of
the "exotic" groups studied by the anthropologists in the
past. And like the old colonial days one finds it easier
to get government funds for the study of these poor groups
under the guise of a variety of morally acceptable programmes
initiated by the national Governments. Perhaps I have not
yet made myself clear: let me state more explicitly. The
shift in the study of "one's own society" rather than the
former exotic and colonial societies has not very much changed
the ideological basis of anthropology - instead of being an
instrument of international colonialism as in the past (and
often still is under a different disguise) it is increasingly
becoming an instrument of internal colonialism.

I should also argue that the study of far-off exotic
groups and societies is still very much evident in modern
anthropology. But the reasons for undertaking these studies
have somewhat changed. The study of "exotic" societies in
many cases is a form of protest by the western intellectuals
(and their counterparts elsewhere) against the increasing
impersonality, dehumanization and bureaucratization of their
own societies. It is a form of escapism combined with a sort
of missionary zeal (which one needs to live in many of these
"exotic" places) to save these societies from becoming the
New Yorks or chicagos of tomorrow. In doing so they are
becoming unwittingly the advocates for maintaining the
existing international stratification system. I could go on,
but I hope I have made my own reservations clear about at
least one "trend" identified by the author.

I find Professor Freedman's gloom about the possible
death of international anthropology as a result of growing
nationalism in the world somewhat puzzling. First of all,
it is an unfair indictment of the societies and nations the
world over which continue to extend cooperation to anthro-

pologists from the outside. Undoubtedly in some instances
some countries have refused visas to western anthropologists
but do we care to know the reasons why these visas were denied.
Such cases still remain very insignificant compared to the
number who are extended the permission and hospitality by
the governments and peoples of various countries. Of course,
it is not as easy to go to other countries for field work as
it used to be two decades ago when the world was divided
between a few colonial powers. It is ironic to read that the
emphasis on the inside view of culture is taken as leading to
the death of international anthropology. I hope that no body
is so naive as to believe that if the all sacred conceptual
frameworks of the Anglo-French-American Anthropology are not
applied in the study of local cultures it would lead to the
death of anthropology or that objectivity in anthropological
research is the sole monoply of 'non-native' anthropologists.
Furthermore it also implies that the "native" social scientists
many of whom were trained in the intellectual traditions of
the West are somehow not able to do "valid" and objective
field work in their respective societies. I don't deny the
merits of "outsiders" studying a particular socio-cultural
system, but it does not mean that only they (the outsiders)
are able to arrive at "valid" and objective understanding of
the socio-cultural systems.

I would like to conclude my remarks by acknowledging
the great efforts the author has put into preparing this
survey - which he calls a self-interrogation. But if this
self interrogation has been inadequate it is partly because
of the nature of the assignment. I think the problem of
Anthropology is that it has to shed some of its past, its
psuedo-scientific pride and its blind commitment to discover
universal cultural structures, and start taking very seriously
one of the concluding remarks of Professor Freedman: the need
to approach its subject matter with greater humility. To
this need might be added another, that of periodic self-
interrogation by those inside and outside the exalted and

charmed circle. Professor Freedman himself suggests this in the very beginning of this essay where he states: "Indeed it would be a fascinating exercise to match this survey with one planned and carried out by a quite different set of anthropologists around the world."

Appendix

Names of other commentators on Professor Freedman's paper.

Olga Akhmanora
A. Aiyappau
Bernard Bock
John F. Carrington
W. Peter Carstens
Jules DeRaedt
Tekla Dömötör
Audre Gunder Frank
Helmuth Fuchs
Alexander Gallus
Ulf Haunerz
Anna Hoheuwatt - Gerlachstein
Ioana Lonescu-Milcu
Verena Martinez - Alier
Alfredo Meudez Dominguez
Ashley Montagu
Cto. G. Okojie
I. Hubut Reynolds
B.K. Roy Burman
Yih-fu Ruey
I. Terrades Saborit
Ernest L. Schusky
Minoru Shibata
Peter Skalnik
Olga Skalnikova
Harry Spitzbardt
Axel Steenshug
Milan Stuehlik
Monica Wilson

WORKING PAPERS

Department of Sociology
University of Singapore

The Department of Sociology, University of Singapore, is publishing a series of "Working Papers" under the editorship of Peter S.J. Chen, Chang Chen-Tung and Michael A.H.B. Walter. These papers provide reports of ongoing research by staff members and postgraduate students including data and tables from social surveys carried out in Singapore and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

Correspondence regarding the papers should be addressed to the respective author

> c/o Department of Sociology
> University of Singapore
> Singapore 10
> Republic of Singapore

The following papers have been issued so far:

1. Riaz Hassan and Geoffrey Benjamin, "Ethnic Outmarriage Rates in Singapore: The Influence of Traditional Socio-cultural Organization", 1972, 26p.

2. Hans-Dieter Evers, "Urban Involution: The Social Structure of Southeast Asian Towns." 1972, 19p.

3. Erik Cohen, "Social Ecology - A Multidimensional Approach", 1973, 97p.

4. Noeleen Heyzer and Wee Gek Sim, "Trade Union Leaders in Singapore," 1972, 92p.

5. Peter S.J. Chen, "The Political Course of Singapore" (in English and Chinese), 1972, 23p.

6. Chan Heng Chee and Hans-Dieter Evers, National Identity and Nation Building in S.E. Asia," 1972, 29p.

7. Peter Weldon, "Indonesian and Chinese Status Differences in Urban Java," 1972, 41p.

The following has agreed to distribute Working Papers and enquiries/orders should be made to this address:

> Chopmen Enterprises
> 47, The Arcade
> Singapore 1, Republic of Singapore

A charge of S$2 or S$4 (for papers of 80 pages and over) per copy will be made.

8. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Austroasiatic Subgroupings and
    Prehistory in the Malay Peninsula," 1972, 63p.

9. Aline Wong, "Job Satisfaction Among Higher Non-expatriate
    Civil Servants in Hong Kong," 1972, 64p.

10. Peter S.J. Chen, "Modernization in Singapore: Changing
    Values and the Individual," 1972, 16p.

11. Geoffrey Benjamin, "An Outline of Temiar Grammar," 1972,
    41p.

12. Peter S.J. Chen, "Social Stratification in Singapore,"
    1973, 99p.

13. John S. Western, Peter D. Weldon and Tan Tsu Haung,
    "Housing and Satisfaction with Environment in
    Singapore," 1973, 30p.

14. Mochtar Naim, "Penghulu di Minangkabau (Penghulu as
    Traditional Elite in Minangkabau)," 1973, 31p.

15. Michael A.H.B. Walter, "A Comparative Examination of
    Systems of Kinship and Marriage in Fiji," 1973, 41p.

16. Hans-Dieter Evers and Daniel Regan, "Specialization and
    Involvement: The Modernizing Role of Doctors in
    Malaysia and Indonesia," 1973, 33p.

17. Myrna L. Blake, "Kampong Eurasians in Singapore," 1973, 45p.

18. Mak Lau-Fong, "The Forgotten and the Rejected Community -
    A Sociological Study of Chinese Secret Societies in
    Singapore and West Malaysia," 1973, 150p.

19. Erik Cohen, "Southeast Asian Urban Sociology - A Review
    and a Selected Bibliography," 1973, 53p.

20. Thelma Kay, "Group Cohesion and Productivity among
    Dockworkers - a Study of Stevedores in Singapore,"
    1973, 28p.

21. Eddie Kuo, "Industrialization and the Family Type: An
    Overview," 1974, 45p.

22. Hans-Dieter Evers, "Changing Patterns of Minangkabau Urban
    Landownership," 1974, 45p.

23. Peter S.J. Chen, "Social and Psychological Aspects of
    Fertility: Findings from Family Planning Research in
    Singapore," 1974, 27p.

24. Hans-Dieter Evers, "The Role of Professionals in Social
    and Political Change," 1974, 28p.

25. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Prehistory and Ethnology in Southeast Asia: Some New Ideas," 1974, 32p.

26. Mochtar Naim, "Voluntary Migration in Indonesia," 1974, 41p.

27. Lawrence Babb, "Walking on Flowers in Singapore," - A Hindu Festival Cycle, 1974, 46p.

28. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Indigenous Religious Systems of The Malay Peninsula," 1974, 27p.

29. Aline K. Wong, "Women as a Minority Group in Singapore," 1974, 46p.

30. Michael A.H.B. Walter, "Co-operation in East Fiji: A New Traditionalism?", 1974, 30p.

31. Aline K. Wong, "The Continuous Family Revolution in China--Ideology and Changing Family Patterns," 1974, 39p.

32. Eddie C.Y. Kuo and Riaz Hassan, "Some Social Concomitants of Interethnic Marriage in Singapore," 1974, 28p.

33. Riaz Hassan, "Symptoms and Syndromes of the Developmental Process in Singapore," 1974, 11p.

34. Hans-Dieter Evers and Riaz Hassan, "Studies on Social Stratification in Southeast Asia," 1974, 141p.

35. Pang Eng Fong and Thelma Kay, "Change and Continuity in Singapore's Industrial Relations System, 1974, 27p.

36. Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "Field Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Divorce Study," 1974, 25p.

37. Riaz Hassan, "International Tourism and Intercultural Communication: The Case of Japanese Tourists in Singapore," 1974, 23p.

38. Riaz Hassan, "Towards a Dialectic Anthropology - A Comment On Professor M. Freedman's Paper, Social and Cultural Anthropology," 1974, 7p.