

# ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE AND THEORY IN FRANCE

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## **Introduction**

Rather like the nations they represent, there is a sense in which what pass as the British and French schools of anthropology really are each other's Other: on both sides of the Channel, there is a wary awareness of the other's alleged achievements and failings, perpetually shaped by a strong feeling of, and for, difference and distinctiveness. Perhaps this sense of respectful rivalry was first expressed aptly back in the late sixteenth century when, in a passage from *Astrophel and Stella* describing what appears to be a joust, a minor but very English Elizabethan poet, Sir Philip Sidney, referred to 'that sweet enemy, France'. Be that as it may, it is clear that British anthropologists have a long history of being influenced by their French colleagues in a whole series of disciplines, often despite themselves, and often in reaction to them rather than accepting their teachings wholesale. The list is long: even a partial one would have to include at least Durkheim, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Althusser, Ricoeur, Dumont, Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu, Foucault, Lacan, Baudrillard, Derrida, and more recently de Certeau and Latour.

However, as this collection is intended to demonstrate, some powerful but often distorting stereotypes have been at work here. This gaze from across the English Channel has given rise to two common linked impressions about French anthropology among the British.<sup>1</sup> The

first is that it is dominated by theory based mainly on rationality and deductive reasoning. Secondly, and conversely, it is commonly said not to be very concerned to derive general principles inductively from ethnographic facts. The latter, of course, is often thought to be the strength of the British tradition in particular, which also likes to think of itself as cultivating a healthy scepticism of theory. Indeed, it is hard to think of a major British contributor to theory who has not been, at some time or other, a fieldworker too.

This is far less true of the French school, notwithstanding, for example, Lévi-Strauss's travels around the Amazon. However, this is less because the French are all theorists than because, *au contraire*, a good many of them are ethnographers obsessed with the facts and dismissive of theory, to the extent that they might be described as 'ethnographic essentialists'. Accordingly, we argue that there is a sharper distinction, and disjunction, between theory and ethnographic practice in France than in Britain, where, as just noted, many anthropologists have seen it as their task to contribute to both simultaneously.

The British editor of this volume still remembers being struck by the novelty of this discovery, which came as a revelation after years of his viewing French anthropology as excessively theoretical and almost anti-empirical, in accordance with the prevailing British stereotype.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, so-called 'British empiricism' is frequently trumped by the ethnographic essentialism purveyed by many of the figures treated in this collection. Is not the conventional British view of French anthropology therefore seriously distorted? Are not the grand theorists, who are mostly anyway associated with other disciplines, falsely and perversely seen as being more representative of French anthropology than those who have pursued their profession in the field as much as in the study, if not more so? These are the main questions we are asking in this volume.

We fully acknowledge that this situation has nothing to do with any lack of theoretical awareness or competence generally among French ethnographers, as Lucien Bernot showed in his brief but pungent dismissal of structuralism (discussed below). Moreover, the quality of their ethnographic work is undoubtedly as high as in other traditions. Nor do we wish to exaggerate this tendency in France, far less claim that it has been the only approach to fieldwork there, nor indeed suggest that it is entirely absent outside the country. Dumont, as well as the French Marxist anthropologists – both those who were influenced mainly by Althusser, such as Emmanuel Terray, Claude Meillassoux and Pierre Philippe Rey, as well as Maurice Godelier, famous for his attempts to combine Marxism with structuralism – all did fieldwork and had a clear

theoretical framework within which to do so (which, however, was often seen by others as directing, rather than reflecting, the search for facts). Similarly, the research team set up by Louis Dumont and later taken over by Daniel de Coppet brought together a number of French and international anthropologists who had done fieldwork in different parts of the world and asked them to frame their work in relation to Dumont's theoretical notions of hierarchy, value and hierarchical opposition. Yet even Dumont, who perhaps comes closest to what we see as typical British practice, liked to present himself first and foremost as a craftsman or technician (Delacampagne 1981: 4). We therefore argue that ethnographic essentialism represents a distinct but not exclusive trend in French anthropology, one based not just on a simple disinterest in theoretical positions but a positive rejection of them. In fact, this tendency seems every bit as characteristic of the French school as the theory-heavy ruminations of those thinkers we have all learned to know and, sometimes, even love so well.

What are the reasons for this? Any assessment has to be based on the history of fieldwork and of field enquiries generally in French anthropology. In the rest of this introduction, we provide a brief survey of this history, starting with the early nineteenth century and proceeding to the heyday of structuralism.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, one trajectory of significance here is a series of shifts from learned societies to museums to research and training institutes, only finally reaching the universities at a relatively late stage. We then proceed to provide a brief overview of each chapter before considering what commonalities and differences can be discerned in the lives, careers and works of these subjects.

### **Fieldwork in French anthropology: a brief history**

An interest in field enquiries in France can be traced back to around 1800, when the short-lived Société des Observateurs de l'Homme promoted the use of anthropological questionnaires by travellers to other parts of the world and issued guidelines for anthropological enquiries. This was the era of antiquarian and other learned societies in France, as elsewhere in Europe, that is, of amateur intellectuals and collectors working in an intellectual environment that was only then beginning to institutionalise itself. At this early stage, French universities were hardly involved directly at all in either teaching or research in anthropology, and it was a museum, the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle, that established the first chair in anthropology in 1855, in cultural as well as physical anthropology (Gaillard 2004: 85). Later in the nineteenth century, however, in 1878, the first anthropological museum was

founded in France, namely the Musée d'Ethnographie, housed in the Trocadéro, by which name it was commonly known.<sup>4</sup> Although initially focused on pre-Columbian New World artefacts – the chief interest of its first curator, Ernest-Théodore Hamy – the expansion of the French Empire soon encouraged collection elsewhere and, along with it, basic fieldwork yielding highly factual ethnographic monographs. This promoted rather than initiated such activities, which were already going on, for example, in Senegal in the 1850s, where General Faidherbe was already busy producing anthropological and linguistic studies of its indigenous peoples (Gaillard 2004: 86). In addition, many missionaries were also active in this period in various parts of the world, such as Jean Kemlin, who went out to the Bahnar in Vietnam in the same decade, long before French rule had been established there. Apart from a crude colonial-style evolutionism, none of this work can be considered theoretically informed. However, methodologically attempts were already being made to supplement earlier, purely biological approaches to the study of humankind with a specific perspective on culture (promoted, among others, by Hamy and his colleague in setting up the Trocadéro museum, Armand de Quatrefages), as well as to treat the collection and display of anthropological objects as scientific, not artistic, in character. Even at this early stage, therefore, a certain separation between ethnography and theory can be discerned in France.

Other currents in the nineteenth century can be linked to France itself, or at any rate Europe, rather than growing overseas empires. In early sociology of the mid-nineteenth century, Frédéric Le Play's surveys, made as part of his roving work as a mines inspector, produced insights into, or at least theories concerning, the nature, evolution and sustainability of family forms. Perhaps of greater influence were studies into the folklore of France in this period and later. Though dating back well into the nineteenth century, like early anthropology, folklore studies were also stimulated subsequently by the founding of a museum, this time the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, by Georges-Henri Rivière and André Leroi-Gourhan in 1937. A good example is Louis Dumont's study *La Tarasque*, a festival in southern France (Dumont was at one time an employee of the aforesaid museum). The main figure here, though, is Arnold van Gennep, a highly active fieldworker whose major work in sheer scale was his multivolume *Manuel de folklore française contemporaine* (1938–1958). However, as can be seen from Giordana Charuty's chapter in this volume, van Gennep is really a transitional figure who attempted to transform the folklore of France from a concern with origins and survivals to synchronic studies that were more in tune with post-evolutionist trends in anthropology more generally. In doing so, he

resisted the attempts of the French political right to enlist folklore for its own nationalist agenda, as well as becoming almost a structuralist *avant la lettre* in his most famous work, *Les rites de passage* (1909; on ritual forms in the world in general). For Susan Rogers, this fusion of folklore and anthropology still informs the anthropology of France itself, partly because of a desire to challenge sociological studies of the death of rural France by stressing the uniqueness and continued viability of such communities (2001: 490–91). Indeed, some of the figures treated in this volume took part in studies of French communities before moving on to fieldwork in other parts of the world (Bastide, Bernot, Dampierre, Dumont). But also, writers like Françoise Zonabend and Martine Segalen used a combination (variously) of material culture, historical documents, oral histories and literatures, and anthropological fieldwork in their histories of the family in different parts of France – an interest that can be traced back to Le Play’s surveys. Yet even in *Les rites de passage*, what we have just called van Gennep’s structuralism was adventitious rather than programmatic, and facts predominate over grand theory in the bulk of his work, apart from an interest in the experience of fieldwork itself.

This practice of separating fieldwork and theory persisted into the twentieth century in France, where anthropology as a distinct discipline developed differently than it did in Britain and America, especially in turning to professional fieldwork rather later. In the early twentieth century, however, fieldwork by amateur missionary and administrator ethnographers still continued. One representative figure is Léopold Sabatier, active in producing legalistic *coutumiers*, or compendia of tribal custom, in the highlands of Vietnam. Work in this part of the French Empire was supported by the École Française d’Extrême-Orient, set up in Hanoi in 1898 as a research institute. Perhaps the most famous figure here, however, is Maurice Leenhardt (see MacClancy, this volume), though he is not entirely typical: in returning to France and teaching anthropology as part of Mauss’s circle between the wars – after living in and writing on New Caledonia for many years – he, at least, can be said to have made the transition from amateur to professional status in his career.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, in the main, fieldwork by professional academics came to France later than in Britain or America. One factor here was obviously the dominance of Durkheimian sociology, which for a long time was deeply suspicious of the term ‘anthropology’ and anyone or anything to do with it. First, it was seen as having been discredited by the speculations of the nineteenth-century British intellectualists-cum-evolutionists – for Durkheimians, one of the main examples of wrong-headedness in the social sciences of the time. Secondly, it was too closely

connected with amateur, antiquarian folklore. This attitude is reflected in the group's hostility to van Gennep, who sullied his reputation still further in their eyes by using ethnography to criticise Durkheim's views on totemism (van Gennep 1920). It may also be found in the criticism that Robert Hertz, a leading Durkheimian scholar, faced from his own colleagues after conducting a brief period of fieldwork on the cult of St Besse in northern Italy in 1911 (Parkin 1996: 12, MacClancy and Parkin 1997). Consistently, even in the case of what had already long been a central anthropological topic like religion, the *Année sociologique* group saw their work as sociology, not anthropology, despite their increasing use of ethnography.

After his uncle's death, though, Mauss eventually overcame these scruples, at least in part. Conscious that French anthropology was falling behind British in this regard, he encouraged others to do long-term fieldwork in the 1930s without participating in any himself.<sup>6</sup> This was reflected in, and perhaps also reinforced by, Mauss's and others' activities in teaching the virtues of ethnography to French colonial officers and trainees for administrative positions. Such activity, one assumes, would not give emphasis to theory. Mauss taught these courses at the Institut d'Ethnologie, which had been set up for the purpose by his friend Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and with which a whole range of key figures in the history of French anthropology were involved, including Leroi-Gourhan, Paul Rivet and Maurice Delafosse.

Mauss's *Manuel d'ethnographie* (1947), which has recently been translated (2007), was also linked to these activities (having been used for lecturing prior to publication). In fact, a scrutiny of some of his more programmatic statements indicates that he, more than anyone else except perhaps Marcel Griaule, was the probable source of the widespread focus on the facts and on ethnography in much French anthropology after the First World War. In the *Manuel*, Mauss calls ethnology 'a science of facts and statistics', its aim being 'the knowledge of social facts' (2007 [1947]: 7). Further, 'comparative ethnography' should be 'based on comparison between facts, not between cultures' (ibid.: 8). Earlier too, in an 'Intellectual self-portrait' evidently written to support his candidature to the Collège de France in 1930 (Mauss 1998), he states repeatedly that 'the facts', or alternatively 'description', have enjoyed the priority in his work over theory. Thus right at the start of this self-evaluation, he describes himself as 'a positivist, believing only in facts', and asserts that 'descriptive sciences attain greater certainty than theoretical sciences' (1998: 29). Similarly, in contrast to some of his other activities, at the Institut d'Ethnologie, 'I have always confined my teaching to the purely descriptive' (ibid.: 32). The main aim of himself and his collaborators over the past four years has

been 'to promulgate and often to establish the facts deriving from unclassified civilizations' with a view to classifying them (*ibid.*: 34).<sup>7</sup> Finally, 'the only objective of the discipline to which I have devoted myself' has been to show 'the place of social life ... in the life of humanity' through 'sensitive contact with the facts' (*ibid.*: 42). Perhaps the admission that 'discoveries and novelties were a constant delight' (*ibid.*: 36), with the hint that processing them further through classification and theory were less exciting, had something to do with the development of this attitude. Certainly, in reading these formulations from Mauss's pen, one acquires a distinct feeling that theory is secondary in his view of his own work and its aims – a surprising realisation, in the light of his long and intimate association with one of the supreme sociological theorists, his uncle Durkheim.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from Mauss's teaching, another stimulus to anthropology in this period was the Colonial Exhibition, organised by Marshal Lyautey, a key French Empire-builder, and held at Vincennes outside Paris in 1931. A celebration as much as exhibition of the French Empire and its cultural variety, it attracted millions of visitors and stimulated both an interest in anthropology in the general public and a desire to do more fieldwork among a growing class of professional ethnographers (see L'Estoile 2003, 2007). Yet, this was also the period of expeditions and ethnographic travel at least as much as fieldwork in the Malinowskian sense, the former method sometimes being allied with diffusionism, as had been the case about a quarter of a century earlier with, for example, the Torres Straits expedition in Britain. Thus the famous Dakar-Djibouti expedition of the early 1930s, led by Marcel Griaule, was soon followed by Lévi-Strauss's travels around the Amazon later in the decade, though the latter, of course, were put to the service of structuralism. As for Griaule, he did much to popularise anthropology in France, both before and after the Second World War, partly through his own charisma as a teacher and partly through the quite large cohort of his colleagues and students he gathered around him. Many of these were significant figures in their own right, such as Michel Leiris (who soon broke with him), but also Marcel Delafosse, Germaine Dieterlen, Denise Paulme and Jean Rouch (on the latter, see Paul Henley, this volume). Although Griaule himself has been accused of exploiting informants in questionable ways and of indulging in cultural reproduction rather than ethnographic reporting by deliberately staging ritual events, he abandoned his early diffusionism in favour of a focus on the field and a theorising of field methods.<sup>9</sup> And under Griaule's influence, members of this group at least spoke up for the validity of indigenous ideas and ways of life, often comparing them favourably with 'Western civilisation'.

Although Griaule's influence persisted after the Second World War, there was certainly a change of emphasis with the arrival of structuralism. This was a method rather than a theory in Lévi-Strauss's own view, though not one specifically directed towards fieldwork. Nonetheless it rapidly came to be treated as a theoretical tendency, if not a school. Lévi-Strauss's influences were many and varied, and were not conspicuously dominated exclusively by previous periods of anthropology in France. Of course, the *Année sociologique* school, especially Mauss, was a key influence, but so were the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. In addition, the cultural anthropology, if not entirely the cultural relativism, of the Boas school influenced Lévi-Strauss, who had been exposed to it during his wartime exile from France at the New School of Social Research in New York. In his critiques too, his target was British structural-functionalism more than anything else in anthropology. Above all, his aim of creating a science of culture on the model of structural linguistics was explicitly a break with the past. This was also a period in which anthropology became more rooted in the universities in France, together with research groups in, for example, ORSTOM (Organisation pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique de l'Outre-Mer)<sup>10</sup> and, perhaps most importantly, CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique).

Lévi-Strauss himself was, of course, at the opposite extreme to ethnographic essentialism, using structuralist theory to explain ethnographic facts rather than vice versa (he is perhaps the most explicitly deductive of all major international anthropologists). His influence was such that the fieldwork of others and the facts they collected began to be shaped and organised in relation to his theoretical ideas. Key figures here, who all did proper fieldwork in relation to various theoretical agendas, include Luc de Heusch, Françoise Héritier and Philippe Descola. As already noted above, in tandem and, through Maurice Godelier, even overlapping with structuralism was the work of mostly Althusser-inspired Marxists like Terray, Meillassoux and Rey, chiefly on West Africa. Here too, theory (Marxist this time) was used to explain ethnographic facts rather than vice versa. With structuralism and Marxism, therefore, French anthropology converged more with practice in other national traditions of anthropology in intimately uniting theory and practice, and even in subordinating the latter to the former.

However, we should not forget that both structuralism and Marxism co-existed with other intellectual currents: the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan; the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre; the historical sociology and philosophy of Michel Foucault; the contemporary sociologies of Georges Gurwitsch and Pierre Bourdieu; postmodernism; archaeology and material culture; the alternative, non-structuralist anthropologies



of Georges Balandier or Eric de Dampierre; the cognitive anthropology of Dan Sperber and the continuance of ethnographic essentialism in such figures as Rouch, Lucien Bernot, André-Georges Haudricourt (all treated in this volume) and Georges Condominas.

### **French studies of fieldwork in French anthropology**

To what extent have these issues – namely the part fieldwork has played in the history of French anthropology and its relationship to theory – been addressed in France itself? In fact, several important publications have recently tackled these issues from various points of view. Thus Claude Blanckaert has produced a historical perspective on the transformation of the status of the observer in the course of the past three centuries in a collection of studies of texts, basically French, which enact research directives and codify the empirical work of travellers and, after them, researchers (Blanckaert 1996). Daniel Céfai has brought together fourteen classic British and American texts, translated into French, on the subject of the field, participant observation and ethnographic description, with an important postface devoted especially to French works on these questions (Céfai 2003). Four manuals directed at students on methods of enquiry have also appeared.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the last ten years have seen a revival of studies on the social sciences in colonial situations which take the view that colonialism was ‘constitutive’ of these disciplines rather than ‘disqualifying’ them as legitimate modes of intellectual enquiry. Thus four recent studies deal with the research actors, colonial administrators, indigenous scholars, official and unofficial researchers, and institutions involved in colonial research.<sup>12</sup> In plunging actors into the heart of colonial realities, the field appears as a crucial experience to be taken into account in reconstructing the history of the social sciences.

Benoît de L’Estoile in particular (see notes 4 and 12) has focused on the links in France between anthropological museums, anthropology as a ‘scientific’ discipline and the politics of empire and, more recently, on global multiculturalism and the place of France within it. His period therefore begins with the Colonial Exhibition of 1932 and the creation of the Musée de l’Homme six years later, and ends with the transfer of the latter’s collections to the new Musée du Quai Branly in 2005. He is especially critical of claims that such museums are all about displays of alterity, pointing out how, instead, they really represent western ideas of the Other rather than the Other itself, and also seeing continuity, not a break, in the transition from the Trocadéro to the Quai Branly. This, of course, is a dilemma for anthropology generally, and it is especially significant in fieldwork, where not only are facts and impressions

collected, but also the Other is confronted on a human level of mutual comprehension and incomprehension. For L'Estoile, therefore, museums should be sites for the display of *relations* between collectors and collected, and avoid either an explicit focus on the Other or a concealed focus on western perspectives of the Other.

These works have done something to make good the lack of any French histories of French anthropology, a lack highlighted, for example, by Jean Jamin in the introduction to a collection (Copans and Jamin 1994 [1978]) of very early texts produced under the auspices of the Société des Observateurs de l'Homme of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mention should also be made of the series *Terre Humaine*, published in Paris by Plon over many years, the focus of which was precisely the publication of ethnographies in French.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, all this is still something of a closed book to the world outside France. While we do not engage directly with these texts here, we do seek to supplement them with a wholly English-language perspective on the particularities of the relationship between ethnographic practice and theory in French anthropology.

### **The present collection**

The approach adopted in addressing this question was to ask French and British anthropologists to compose intellectual biographies of French anthropologists, some of them little known, if at all, to the Anglo-Saxon public, yet who offer particular potential in exploring the relationship between ethnography and theory. We chose to focus on actual practitioners of anthropology rather than on movements or schools, meaning that, in relation to his or her subject, each contributor has had to make more complex a picture that the 'international commerce of ideas' (Cusset 2008 [2003]) tends to simplify, even to caricature. Hence the eclectic character of this gallery of portraits when compared to either a manual of ethnographic practice or a history of the discipline. Also, despite Rivet's involvement with the Trocadéro and the interests of some of those featured here in material objects (especially Bernot and Haudricourt), this is not a volume about French museology.

Thus the present collection is selective rather than comprehensive. It is unfortunate that there is no chapter on a female French anthropologist. This partly reflects the principle we chose to adopt of not featuring any living anthropologists in this collection, which restricted us in large measure to the middle and early histories of French ethnography – and these periods in France appear to have had even fewer women fieldworkers than the British and American schools. Many

French women ethnographers, now deceased, such as Germaine Dieterlen and Denise Paulme, were linked to Griaule, a circle represented here by Jean Rouch. Outside this circle was Germaine Tillion, a much discussed figure in France itself in recent years for her fieldwork in the Aurès area of Algeria and her political activism as a supporter of and mediator for the resistance movement against French rule, as well as having been a resistance fighter earlier against the Germans in the Second World War (see Todorov and Bromberger 2002, Todorov 2007).

A main thrust of these chapters is therefore historical. Is the ethnographic essentialism of many of the figures dealt with in this volume now similarly historical? In fact, given what has been identified as the general tendency for anthropologists to refrain from large-scale comparisons and theoretical statements today (Gingrich and Fox 2002), with a concomitant concentration on the facts of specific ethnographic situations, ethnographic essentialism appears rather to be alive and kicking in at least some quarters. In addition, of course, it cannot be said that the fundamental problems of doing fieldwork have gone away, nor that the basic process itself has changed markedly since the time those discussed in this collection were themselves in the field, despite the distinctive attitudes of many of them to fieldwork. The time therefore seems right to draw attention to this tendency once more in the context of the past practices of some though not all adherents of the French tradition, in the belief that, in a more general way too, their experiences and their own telling of them remain very relevant to contemporary anthropology. A review of the chapters follows, which are arranged broadly according to the ethnographic areas in which their subjects mainly or wholly worked.

The first chapter in the collection focuses on a key figure in the transition from folklore to a recognisable anthropology of symbolism and ritual, Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957). Charuty shows that van Gennep did not accept his dismissal by the Durkheim school as a 'mere folklorist' lying down. Indeed, it produced a reaction in him which conceded nothing to the theoretical peculiarities of his rivals, while outperforming them in relation to his greater 'feel' for ethnographic realities and the problems involved in both eliciting and reporting these problems in the field. Being almost entirely armchair anthropologists, his rivals were especially vulnerable to attacks of this kind. Much of this reaction was formulated in the *Chroniques* pages of the *Mercure de France*, but these pages were not only critical of others, they also put forward a prescription for how fieldwork in a literate or semi-literate society should be carried out. Thus neutral observation should be coupled with informants' memories and life histories; as a fieldworker, one should maintain an intellectual distance, while also being exposed fully to the

exotic world one is examining; and such experiences should be embodied in one's own self, in a manner that almost suggests a form of phenomenology. Also, van Gennep addressed the often problematic status of fieldwork questions, answers and other methods. For example, in talking about 'fake rituals' – that is, performances in the form of festivals put on to support conservative nationalist agendas in rural France – he came close to the idea of the 'invention of tradition' (for van Gennep, only the rituals the people put on for themselves were 'authentic').

Charuty points out the centrality of the rite in van Gennep's approach to the whole ethnographic project. For him ritual is, among other things, a manifestation of universal structure, marked not only by the famous three stages, but also by transition and by the marginality of the central, liminal stage. It is hard, therefore, to avoid remarking on the double irony that van Gennep himself represents not only intellectual transition in his work, but also marginality in respect of his own institutional destinies.

In his chapter, Peter Parkes examines the contribution of two colonial functionaries, Adolphe Hanoteau and Aristide Letourneux, to the early ethnography of the Kabyle Berbers of Algeria and to the distinctive genre of what Parkes calls 'canonical ethnography' (indigenous juridical documentation and its analytical interpretation). This was based on legal 'canons' or *qawanin*, a neglected but valuable form of early ethnographic documentation, and the prototype of later administrative ethnographies in sub-Saharan Africa. The work of these two officials, comprising a gazetteer of general information about the area and its people, together with their legal customs and social systems, was collected through a peculiarly intensive kind of 'dialogical' fieldwork in the 1860s and published in the early 1870s. Significant here was their key informant, Si Mula, a Sayyid '*alim*' or religious scholar and Hanoteau's *khoja* or interpreter-cum-secretary at Fort-Napoléon in Kabyle. Si Mula became, in Parkes's words, 'at least an equal co-author' with the two Frenchmen, though they do not openly credit him as such.

Parkes describes the 'canonical ethnography' of Hanoteau and Letourneux as severely factual or documentary, largely eschewing historical contextualisation. Nonetheless Hanoteau, the main author, was well aware of the extent to which French conquest and military rule had already disrupted Kabyle society, an account of whose traditional social organisation he was therefore keen to draw up. In effect, therefore, while historical or reconstructive in intent, the treatment is paradoxically synchronic in presentation, describing an independent Kabyle society on the eve of its conquest.

Although the two authors' juridical approach would be displaced by Maussian transactional ethnographies of the inter-war period, not even

Bourdieu was able to escape their influence entirely, despite his surface criticism of their 'legalistic' prejudice. Indeed, as Parkes finally notes, there is reason to believe that some, at least, of Bourdieu's fundamental ideas as perhaps the most famous ethnographer of the Kabyles were originally forged in reactive opposition to the rule-based 'canonical ethnography' of Hanoteau and Letourneux – a 'theory of practice' that both complements and contrastively highlights the significance of the juridical fieldwork they pioneered.

Paul Henley's chapter deals with a figure who is probably the most famous ethnographic film-maker of them all, Jean Rouch (1917–2004). Seen already as somewhat *passé* in France by the 1980s, it was precisely at this time that 'Anglo-Saxon' anthropology began to discover Rouch as a precursor of post-modernism. As Henley makes clear, however, this is not entirely what it seems, and in many respects Rouch actually belongs to a specifically French tradition of ethnography dating back to the surrealists as much as to Mauss, but also reflecting the strong though not overwhelming influence of his doctoral supervisor, Marcel Griaule.

Henley discusses the ways in which the experience of working with Griaule did and did not influence Rouch. While Rouch refrained from deliberately antagonising informants in the way that Griaule frequently did, and stressed their co-authorship with him in what he saw as a genuinely collaborative effort (the source of his later being claimed as a prophet of 'dialogical anthropology'), he also relied on provocation in the ethnographic encounter – but only by the camera itself. For Rouch, the fact of it not being possible to hide the camera's presence was creative, not disadvantageous, since what it provoked in the informant was a reaction different from, but at the same time deeper than, normal behaviour, uncovering the truth underlying the superficiality of the everyday world.

Henley also shows, though, that Rouch took his ideas about the impact of the camera a great deal further than the simple claim that it is provocative to the subjects. Filming also allows the film-maker to immerse him- or herself in the culture. If film can provoke trance in the natives, as Rouch claimed it actually did in at least one case, the film-maker him- or herself can also be provoked by the act of filming to enter a trance. Hence Rouch's famous *ciné-trance*, conceived as a metaphor for the film-maker's own cultural creativity. At the very least, just as, for the Songhay, spirit possession changes the medium's experience of the world, so for Rouch the film-maker is changed by filming it. In other words, in Rouch's conception, these processes of collaboration between author and subjects involved a performative element that goes beyond the merely verbal exchange implicit in the conventional Anglo-Saxon conception of 'dialogical' anthropology.

Margaret Buckner's chapter on Eric de Dampierre (1928–1997) is one of a minority in this collection in which the pupil discusses the work and career of the master (also Toffin on Bernot). Like Bernot, Bastide and Dumont, Dampierre began his career with a study of a French rural community, in his case as part of a multi-disciplinary social-science research team. His life-long fieldwork, from 1954 to the late 1980s, was among the Nzakara, in what is now the Central African Republic. As a French aristocrat, he was clearly comfortable living in a highly stratified and class-conscious African society, while recognising that they seemed less able to cope with the consequences of colonialism and modernity than their close neighbours the Zande, otherwise a very similar society, made famous through Evans-Pritchard's earlier work among them. Dampierre's work therefore provides us with a little-known but very valuable French counterpart to Evans-Pritchard's famous monograph (1937).

Dampierre identified what he called 'thinking in the singular' as a key aspect of Nzakara thought, this being perhaps the most original of his findings, which he saw as pervading all domains of Nzakara life, from politics to music. It stresses the unique, the incommensurability of any two beings, so that, for example, one cannot count people, nor classify them, for fear of treating them all the same. Although, in his sophisticated attempt to define this mode of thought, he may have turned to Greek philosophy, it was still his experiences among the Nzakara, his observations of their practices, discourse and material culture, that had launched his research in the first place.

The Lévi-Straussian flavour of the title of his last work, *Une esthétique perdue* (Dampierre 1995), links Dampierre with that generation of anthropologists who had the feeling that they were living at the end of an era, the traces of which they wanted to preserve as lucidly and faithfully as possible. Not the least of Dampierre's legacies, however, is his founding and support of the Department of Ethnology and Prehistory in the University of Paris-X at Nanterre, to the west of the city, perhaps the major university department dedicated to anthropology and to training anthropologists in the whole of France, where one of the present editors received her own training and with which she continues to be associated.

Laura Rival's chapter on Paul Rivet (1876–1958) discusses a now neglected figure who was one of the key figures institutionally in the anthropology of France in the inter-war period. His work with the Institut d'Ethnologie and later at the Trocadéro (including the Musée de l'Homme) gave him a pivotal role in the organisation of anthropology in France between the two world wars, not far behind those of Mauss and Lévy-Bruhl, with both of whom he cooperated closely and shared many aims for the promotion of French anthropology.

A pupil of literature and philosophy at school who then trained as a doctor, Rivet spent five years in the early twentieth century conducting polymathic fieldwork and collecting as part of a French geodesic expedition to Ecuador, with which, together with Colombia, he was to be associated for the rest of his life. Rivet can hardly be described as an exemplary fieldworker from the point of view of post-Malinowskian anthropology. This was basically because he had no direct contact with the native population, but used what Rival calls 'indirect' methods of enquiry, interviewing intermediaries who were in the happy but self-deceptive position of 'knowing' the natives without having to question them about anything. In many respects, Rivet seems to have been mainly an observer, 'collecting, classifying and comparing', in Rival's words. He rarely if ever asked questions about native meanings or ideas – he had little interest in religion, for instance, except to see in it an example of the ignorance that was holding the natives back. Here we have the Third-Republic scientific mind finding fault with Amerindian society – especially for its ignorance born of religious mysticism and superstition – while at the same time rejecting race as an explanation for difference in favour of a humanism that unites us all as equal and equivalent. In view of what has been said about the links between modern French identity and a generalised humanity (e.g. Dumont 1986), it is perhaps not surprising that we also find a focus in Rivet's work on the generic human condition rather than the specifics of different cultures.

Although Alfred Métraux (1902–1963) was born in Switzerland, brought up largely in Argentina and later became an American citizen, he belongs to the French tradition of anthropology primarily by virtue of the institutional side of his training: taught by Mauss and Rivet in the 1920s, his theses on the Tupí-Guaraní of Brazil were submitted in Paris. However, as Peter Rivière notes in his chapter on him, he was hardly influenced intellectually by Mauss, nor even by Rivet, who supported him in his career early on. Instead Métraux fell under the spell of the Swedish ethnologist Nils Erland Nordenskiöld, adopting especially the latter's tracing of trait distributions across one or more ethnographic regions and his theoretically uncontextualised treatment of ethnographic data. Rivière argues that Métraux saw himself primarily as a collector of facts, retaining a strict and almost nineteenth-century demarcation between this activity and the wider comparison or theorising done by others in the library or study. As a result, there is little or no contextualisation or analysis in his own writings, which are rather of the nature of compilations.

This apparent hostility to theory indicates a mind that is not prepared to speculate over what cannot be known concretely. Yet

Métraux's attitude to fieldwork and the collection of data through it was not entirely straightforward. On the one hand, he doubted whether the collection of ethnographic facts could ever be truly scientific, mainly because he felt that the civilised mind cannot readily grasp them. At the same time, not only did he frequently complain about local conditions in the field, he felt that ethnographers – including himself implicitly – were essentially misfits in their own societies. He was clearly somewhat prone to romanticising the people he studied, in a manner which seems to have been fashionable in French anthropology for a time (Rivière mentions Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques*, and some of Pierre Clastres' work is in a similar vein; cf. Colchester 1982). Like Lévi-Strauss, Métraux praised what he saw as the neolithic in the native South American, which he also considered as in some sense the end point of human happiness in human evolution, not least because he saw it as being on the verge of disappearing. Perhaps it was this feeling of witnessing the disappearance of a way of life he much admired, as much as the sense of his having received little recognition for his life's work, that led him apparently to take his own life in 1963.

Like some other figures dealt with in this book (Dumont, Bernot, Dampierre), Roger Bastide (1898–1974) took part in an early study in France itself, this time on Armenian immigrants in the town of Valence. However, being already interested in mysticism, and in 1938 finding himself a professor at the University of São Paulo in Brazil in succession to Lévi-Strauss, he embarked on a long-term though intermittent study of *candomblé* in the northeast of the country. This brought him into contact with Pierre Verger, who became a life-long friend and collaborator. Bastide and Verger shared a belief in the importance of experience in fieldwork, including the idea that one could not understand something like possession without going through it oneself. In addition, they both rejected the standard view of northeast Brazilian culture being an original form born of acculturation and religious syncretism: Verger's life-long concern in particular was to prove to Afro-Brazilians the Africanness of their cultic practices. Although it was mysticism that was the focus of Bastide's interest, it was ironically the sceptic Verger who went furthest into the *candomblé* as a religious experience: Bastide stopped halfway out of fear for his own sanity if he were to allow his grip on reality to be loosened by continuing. Nonetheless Bastide felt able to proclaim 'Africanus sum', and, as with Griaule's defence of African religion as represented by the Dogon, he developed a view of Afro-Brazilian religion as being comparable in its sophistication to any of the religions of 'civilisation'. Moreover, there is something similar here to the Rouchian *ciné-trance* described by Henley (this volume): in both cases, the trance state affects the ethnographer as



much as the people he is studying. Bastide's subsequent return to Paris in 1954 to work with Georges Gurvitch exposed him to yet more influences, though academic this time, including Marxism, a renewed view of Mauss, and Gurvitch's own 'depth sociology'. Between them, they became a sort of 'opposition' to Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, which was just then taking off in France.

Despite the support given to him at key points in his career by Lévi-Strauss, Lucien Bernot (1919–1993) was no structuralist. Indeed, he once remarked that, while ethnographic monographs could always be treated structurally, structuralism was quite incapable on its own of reconstructing the original ethnography. He was also of the view that, in always being available to later generations of anthropologists, the ethnographic monograph invariably outlasts theory, which is subject to changes in intellectual fashion. His main influence was therefore the anti-structuralism and ethnographic essentialism of Leroi-Gourhan and some of his own more exact contemporaries among French Southeast Asianists, in particular André-Georges Haudricourt, but also Georges Condominas.

Toffin describes Bernot as an acute fieldworker when it came to meticulous observation of what people do. Bernot advocated a focus on small-scale communities of 200–300 people, since he felt that in these cases the ethnographer could come to know everyone within them. His main focus was on technology and its relation to society, and later on ethnobotany (reflecting Haudricourt's influence). This factual concentration in his work recalls Rivet and is similarly diffusionist in its methods, if not explicit theoretical orientation. This aspect is perhaps reflected mainly in the ethnolinguistic atlases Bernot created, which traced the distribution of key words across vast swathes of Southeast Asia, but also in his use of written sources for purposes of historical reconstruction and his frequent citation of diffusionist geographers. Fundamentally, though, he was what Toffin describes as a 'ruralist' by both upbringing and professional interest, that is, a specialist in rural, agricultural communities, which, the world over, had similarities that link them and distinguish them from urban society: thus the people of Nouville (northeast France) have more in common with Burmese peasants than with Parisians – one respect in which he disagreed with his friend Haudricourt's stress on the differences among rural communities in the world at large.

André-Georges Haudricourt (1911–1996) was nonetheless another 'ruralist', a country-born child who, because of ill health, was educated first by his mother and subsequently by himself. Based on observational habits learned during his upbringing, combined with the experience of early fieldwork in Vietnam, Haudricourt developed not only an extreme focus on the facts, but what Bensa calls a 'hyperrealist' view of facts as

being restricted to what can be known through the senses alone. He accordingly accepted no psychological, sociological or intellectual interference with our own direct exposure to the world and experience of it, and he rejected notions such as the autonomy of representations and ideas (Durkheim), the social being projected on to nature (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]) or the symbolic transformation of nature by culture (Lévi-Strauss). The structuralist's dualism of nature and culture is replaced by a close symbiosis between them in which they often imitate each other, though the latter is always rooted in the former, not vice versa.

Haudricourt's extended comparison between the Middle East and Far East in part relies on a distinction between the cultural predominance given respectively to plant and animal breeding, but nonetheless it is the different plant and animal ecologies of both areas that are ultimately the bases of the distinction. Thus in the Middle East, animal herds and wheat both originated outside human environments and had to be subdued and controlled by humans, whereas in the Far East (actually in this example Melanesia) there was a situation in which humans, plants and animals started out living symbiotically in the same environment. From this distinction, Haudricourt derives different ideas of religion, social authority and hierarchy: thus in the Middle East the gods are remote, but in Melanesia they are all around one. Bensa uses the term 'functional historicism' to characterise Haudricourt's focus on origins and history, by which is meant both the biological history of particular species and the histories of distinct human populations in distinct environments. And, as with some other ethnographers discussed in this introduction, such as Bernot and Rivet, the focus on the facts stresses the particular over the general, the ethnographically specific over the universal.

In contrast to many of the other anthropologists featured in this volume, Louis Dumont (1911–1998), an exact contemporary of Haudricourt, discussed here by Robert Parkin, is known for his theoretical contributions and more literature-based writings at least as much as for his fieldwork. Nonetheless his fieldwork in south India formed a significant part of his own intellectual development and led to one of the classic ethnographies of the region. Dumont's subsequent sojourn in Oxford under Evans-Pritchard influenced his anthropology quite profoundly, and in many ways he is the most 'Anglo-Saxon' of the figures treated in this collection. Yet the earlier influence of Mauss remained strong, while the Tamils, whom he regarded as 'born sociologists', influenced him in developing his view that a form of structuralism was the key to understanding Indian society and culture. His use of pure/impure as a key 'hierarchical' opposition in the values

of the caste system ultimately replaced the simple binary oppositions of Lévi-Strauss, being focused on values as more important than symbolism, and recognising the significance of social action while still subordinating it to ideology and structure. These ideas were enshrined especially in his most famous work, *Homo hierarchicus*, on the Indian caste system (Dumont 1966, 1980).

After India and Oxford, Dumont returned to Paris to pursue comparisons between India and the West, which also involved contrasts between hierarchy and egalitarianism, holism and individualism, and indeed two sorts of individual, the individual-outside-the-world and the individual-within-the-world. This move was also a shift from fieldwork to writings, from observation to ideas, and in its approach it reflected the influence of Mauss in the latter's writings on such themes as the gift and the person, where world history was the framework within which both the topic and the related arguments were set. Finally, in his last major work on German 'ideology' (Dumont 1994 [1991]) or, as we might say today, 'identity', he demonstrated that even in the West individualism was not all of a type: in particular, the German stress on personal self-development being subordinated to a holistic state is opposed to the 'individual-against-the-state' model of Anglo-Saxon and French libertarian philosophies.

Jeremy MacClancy's chapter on Maurice Leenhardt (1878–1954) is a little different from some of the others in this volume, since it discusses this quasi-iconic, early, pre-Malinowskian fieldworker through the eyes of his later commentators. Born at Montauban in 1878 into a French Protestant family – the latter circumstance he shares with Roger Bastide – Leenhardt wrote an early thesis on the 'Ethiopian' church movement in southern Africa. However, he spent most of his career until well into the 1920s as a Protestant missionary in New Caledonia.

Leenhardt's interests were many, but they included especially Melanesian languages in and around New Caledonia and – what he is most famous for – his very striking and imaginative analyses of personhood and myth. As MacClancy shows, he has been claimed successively as a post-structuralist in the manner of Clifford and Marcus, a Jungian phenomenologist, a Heideggerian existentialist and a Strathernian advocate of the decentred nature of personhood in Melanesia – the first and last, at least, very much 'before his time'. More likely though, as MacClancy himself suggests, he was basically just a man of his own time. One can argue that his patent sympathy for the indigenes was romantically inclined towards his primitivist vision of their way of life, rather than concerned with their progress as such (cf. Métraux or Clastres), while his intellectual perspective was fundamentally

evolutionist, despite his awareness of Maussian holism. If he seems anti-structuralist, therefore, it is because of his already outmoded intellectual position.<sup>14</sup>

### **Unity in diversity?**

What common features emerge from a comparative reading of the chapters in this collection? First, as already noted, it is striking how many of these figures can be considered anti-theoretical fact-gatherers and compilers, at least in their own view of their activities. Certainly Hanoteau, Rouch, Rivet, Métraux, Bernot and Haudricourt, in their very different ways, exemplify this tendency. Yet theory is not necessarily so very far away, even in these cases. For example, given their interests in the distribution of words in particular, Rivet and Bernot can be seen as being informed by diffusionist methods and assumptions in their handling of the facts they collected. Moreover, the very emphasis on ethnographic essentialism can be regarded as a theoretical or at least philosophical position in itself, as it clearly was for Haudricourt. As we have remarked already, van Gennep, with his project of converting folklore into anthropology; Dampierre, whose non-structuralist approach was informed at least in part by his background in sociology; and Dumont, with his revisionist structuralism, all had their own particular theoretical focuses.

It is also remarkable how many of these fact-gatherers seem to have had rather limited abilities as fieldworkers: thus Hanoteau, Rouch, Rivet, Métraux, Bastide and Bernot had to rely largely on interpreters, Rivet and Bastide on local intellectuals and other sorts of intermediary too, while Métraux seemed to spend a lot of time complaining about actual fieldwork conditions. Nonetheless most of the figures treated here spent long periods of their lives in the field, though Dumont and Bastide perhaps least of all. Moreover, arising out of this dedication to the collection of facts are also a number of real commitments on the part of many of these figures to the peoples they encountered, to the latter's contemporary circumstances and conditions, and to their relations with them. There is a whole range of attitudes here, from the relatively passive and neutral to genuine if selective political activism. At one end of the scale is Dumont, whose commitment was fundamentally restricted to achieving ethnographic understanding with the aid of particular theoretical frameworks within an overall ethos of intellectual neutrality. For example, in defending this principle in relation to phenomena that may shock western sensibilities in field situations elsewhere in the world, Dumont frequently argued that to

seek to understand, say, the caste system in India or female circumcision in parts of Africa did not necessarily mean that one approved of them (e.g. Dumont 1979). Although Bernot and Rouch clearly developed close and mutually supportive personal relationships with their principal subjects and greatly admired their cultural traditions, neither evinced any deep political commitment to their respective peoples. Métraux hardly goes beyond a nostalgia for the neolithic, which Amerindians represented for him, though as Peter Rivière points out (personal communication), later in life he became somewhat more sympathetic to the peoples he encountered through his activities in assessing war damage in Germany and his involvement with UNESCO. Conversely, while Dampierre merely seems to record the changes associated with colonialism among the Nzakara, albeit with a tinge of nostalgia, others – like Hanoteau among the Kabyle and Leenhardt in New Caledonia – tried to protect the native population from the worst consequences of colonialism.

At the other end of the scale is Rivet, the only figure here actually to become a politician – not in South America against colonialism, but in France in the 1930s, against fascism. Otherwise his self-appointed role was to affirm the positive in the practice and status of *métissage* and to record and discuss the conditions of the Amerindians he encountered from the ‘scientific’ perspective of a social scientist of the Third Republic, even though his direct personal contact with them, because of his habitual use of intermediaries, was minimal. Finally, both Rouch and Bastide hailed the experience of the (*ciné*-)trance as a fulfilment of the ethnographic experience that was almost mystical for them; yet the fulfilment they sought was strictly their own, rather than intended to be of any use to those whose cults they were taking part in and recording. Exposure to the field, and even one’s personal bodily experience of it, was also important to van Gennep, though as a tool of ethnographic enquiry rather than a means of personal discovery.

Nonetheless it was perhaps this more personal and/or political commitments that replaced theory as a goal of fieldwork in the minds of some of these figures. At all events, we argue that, while some French ethnographers are scarcely any different from their colleagues elsewhere when it comes to relating facts to theory, very many others have dedicated themselves to the former to the exclusion, in whole or in part, of the latter. There can be no question, of course, of the tremendous contribution of French intellectuals in many disciplines to the enrichment of anthropological theory and model-building worldwide. Yet ethnographic practice informs anthropology in France too, often overshadowed by the theorists or neglected entirely, especially abroad, but involving a variety of genuine commitments to data

collection, exotic cultures, ethnographic subjects as fellow human beings, one's relations with them or just the personal experience of fieldwork. Amongst other things, this makes the study of fieldwork a perfectly valid and highly productive way of approaching the history of French anthropology generally. That is because France is distinct not just for its theories and model-building but because, in explicit opposition to them, many a practical fieldworker has theorised away theory itself so that the facts of the ethnography can shine forth in all their splendour.

## Notes

1. See also Cusset (2008 [2003]) on the invention of 'French theory' in America.
2. His epiphany has already been hinted at in print (Parkin 2005), where an attempt at a potted history of the whole of French anthropology can also be found. These originated in lectures given at the official opening of the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, in June 2002.
3. For a more extended account of these events, see Parkin (2005), in which key references can also be found. More recently, see also Sibeud (2008).
4. In 1938 the Trocadéro was transformed into the Musée de l'Homme by Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivièrè. Its collections have since been transferred to the new Musée du Quai Branly (see L'Estoile 2003, 2007).
5. Jacques Dournes, sometimes known under his Sre name of Dam Bo, made a similar shift somewhat later (the Sre are located in the Vietnamese highlands).
6. We stress the long-term: Mauss did undertake one brief field trip to witness dances in Morocco.
7. Allen describes this as 'a longstanding preoccupation that originated in part with the question of how to organise the *Année sociologique*' (2007: 2), the house journal of the Durkheim group, in terms of the rubrics into which it should be divided.
8. It is hard to be sure whether, in talking about the facts, Mauss necessarily has in mind his uncle's idea of the 'social fact' as defined quite narrowly (though also discussed at some length) in Chapter 1 of the *Rules of sociological method* (Durkheim 1982 [1895]). Nor is it clear to what extent Mauss was concerned with the construction of 'facts' in the epistemological sense. Mauss's usage often seems to be purely normative in these passages.
9. The more questionable aspects of Griaule's methods were the main reason for Leiris breaking with him; see Leiris (1934). A good account of Griaule in the field is Clifford (1983).
10. Now l'Institut pour la Recherche et le Développement (IRD).
11. In order of appearance, these include Laplantine (1996), Beaud and Weber (1997), Copans (1998) and Berger (2004).
12. In *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences humaines*, No. 10, 2004. For an innovative analysis, from a similar perspective, of the genesis of different 'national anthropologies' in Europe, the Americas and South Africa, and the linkage between them, see L'Estoile et al. (2005).
13. The second book in this series, which was founded by Jean Malaurie in 1955, was Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques* (1955) – not a conventional ethnography, any more than its author was an ethnographic essentialist, let alone a willing ethnographer;

more typical, perhaps, of the genre is Georges Condominas's *L'exotique est quotidien: Sar Luk, Vietnam* (1965). On this important series, see Aurégan (2001).

14. Laura Rival adds the information that 'post-structuralist Amazonianist anthropology makes much of Leenhardt, especially the oft-quoted anecdote about the missionaries bringing to the Canaques not the soul but the body' (personal communication).

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