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Engaging with Cultural Difference: Anthropology and its Assumptions, Contradictions, and Paradoxes

Igor Torres de Almeida

Master's in Anthropology

Supervisor:
PhD, José Filipe Pinheiro Chagas Verde, Assistant Professor with Habilitation, ISCTE-IUL

June, 2024

CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
E HUMANAS

Department of Anthropology

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Acknowledgements

To begin with, I would like to thank my parents, Mónica and Rui. To my mom, I am grateful for the unceasing, unwavering support and encouragement; and to my dad, I am thankful for the unrelenting trust placed on me.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the best of companions and my other half, Bárbara, for always electrifying my spirits and continuously encouraging me to be, and do, better; for repeatedly rekindling the blazes of my enthusiasm every time they threatened to falter.

I am also thankful to professor Nélia Dias, whose insightful and always fitting remarks have invariably helped me to stay on track and not lose sight of the overall picture; and I would like to extend my appreciation to the department of Anthropology of ISCTE for brewing and nourishing my passion for the discipline. I am also grateful to Dionísio, Joana, Ana Lúcia, Carlos, Fernanda and Matilde for having accompanied me in this journey.

Finally, I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, professor Filipe Verde, for whom I assert my deepest appreciation for never ceasing to challenging me and pushing me forward, for all the patience across my rambling and disordered drafts, for all the motivation for me to always demand the best of myself, and for having accepted to assist me in tackling these perplexing but stimulating questions I had, whose sources can be traced back to his absorbing, fascinating, and profoundly transformative classes.

Resumo

Neste trabalho, irei tratar os modos pelo quais a diferença cultural é recorrentemente concebida e abordada na antropologia. Irei assinalar as repercussões que a diferença acarreta para os exercícios conceitual-descritivos da disciplina, bem como explicitar a lógica que justifica os sentidos de que é revestida. Aprofundando-me na literatura antropológica, atendendo a contribuições oriundas das tradições filosóficas da hermenêutica, da fenomenologia e do pragmatismo, irei argumentar como três premissas são fundamentais para a maneira como os propósitos da antropologia são definidos, como a produção do seu conhecimento é distinguida, e como é encarada a prática de trabalho de campo no seu âmbito. Como resultado, irei evidenciar as contradições e paradoxos subjacentes a cada uma destas três premissas; respetivamente, no decurso de uma crítica epistemológica, ética e moral. Num desfecho final, irei defender por que razão a adesão teórica, metodológica e deontológica a estas premissas constitui um modo de inautenticidade.

Em contrapartida, irei escrutinar de perto como a diferença pode ser reconsiderada a partir da proficiência dos princípios interpretativos, éticos e morais do antropólogo para a produção de conhecimento na disciplina. Portanto, esta dissertação será uma tentativa de, por um lado, inspecionar as falácias do raciocínio que sustenta a diferença tal como é interpretada em conjunção com um projeto teórico e descritivo; e, por outro lado, evidenciar as ramificações pertinentes a um envolvimento autêntico da antropologia com a diferença.

Palavras-Chave: *História da antropologia; teoria antropológica; diferença; autenticidade; hermenêutica; fenomenologia.*

Abstract

In this work, I will address the manners in which cultural difference is recurrently conceived and approached in anthropology. I will pinpoint the repercussions that difference holds for the conceptual-descriptive exercises of the discipline, as well as expand on the rationale that justifies its particular connotations. Delving on the anthropological literature, while keeping in mind the contributions of the philosophical traditions of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and pragmatism, I will argue how three premises are fundamental to the way that the purposes of anthropology are defined, the production of its knowledge is distinguished, and its practice of fieldwork is envisaged. Consequently, I will reveal the contradictions and paradoxes that these premises entail; respectively, in the course of an epistemological, ethical, and moral critique. I will contend, as an overall assessment, how the theoretical, methodological, and deontological adherence to these premises comprises a mode of inauthenticity.

Alternatively, I will examine closely how difference can be reconsidered in view of the proficiency of the anthropologist's self, judgements, and morals for the production of knowledge in the discipline. As a result, this dissertation will be an attempt to, on the one hand, inspect the flawed reasoning that sustains difference as it is interpreted in conjunction with a theoretical and descriptive project; and, on the other, work over the ramifications for authentically engaging with difference.

Keywords: *History of anthropology; anthropological theory; difference; authenticity; hermeneutics; phenomenology.*

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Introduction

In the face of the unattainability to produce absolute knowledge in correspondence to a timeless and ahistorical truth, João Pina-Cabral alludes to the glooming sentiment that sets in over the epistemological status and value of anthropology. Emphasizing the relativistic, subjectivist, and ultimately nihilistic cadences that knowledge is conceived to inevitably uphold as an alternative, Pina-Cabral diagnoses this stance as an 'all-or-nothing syndrome', “the condition of those who, because they cannot have the whole truth, despair of having any truth at all” (2009: 164). However, what does this entail for the prominence and relevance of anthropological knowledge? Can, and should, a theoretical methodological project and a mode of relativist, individualist knowledge be coordinated? In this vein, how could the value of truth-claims proclaimed under the banner of anthropology be distinguished and praised?

While reading an analysis written by Thomas Csordas (1990) concerning demonic deliverance and divine communication, Jamie Barnes (2019) reports his uneasiness in a perceived gap between their respective interpretations over the same subject matter. Following the premise that reality is splintered into several worlds of divergent and incompatible ontologies[1], Barnes claims that Csordas carries out a twofold misunderstanding. On the one hand, Csordas assumes the prevalence of his own ontological makeup over that of others, and, on the other hand, Csordas fails to imaginatively inhabit the point of view of others. Since Csordas drafts his interpretation without reference to his own ontological framework, Barnes highlights the breach of a "methodological golden rule" (*ibid.*: 29), a prescribed reflexivity to showcase the discrepant ontological precepts between these authors and according to which this ontological conflict (Blaser 2013) could be explained and accounted for. In sum, Barnes harmonizes the epistemological purposes of the discipline and its relativistic knowledge in the characterization of anthropology as a highly charged site, where different interpretations emerge, meet, contest, but which, nonetheless, rightfully co-exist despite different ontological assumptions (Barnes, 2019: 27; *see* Blaser, 2013: 557-558). However, what does this indicates about the value and nature of anthropological knowledge? How can an anthropologist's subjective interpretation and analytical expertise be mediated? To what extent can an individual interpretation be articulated in broader debates?

[1] Barnes expresses his adherence to the specific framework of the ontological turn to develop his line of argumentation. Nonetheless, the questions that Barnes raises and addresses surpass the boundaries of its theoretical movement, and are relevant to review in order to discuss important and puzzling issues permeating contemporary debates in anthropology.

As far as analysis goes, Ghassan Hage (2018) distinguishes between the reasoning made by lay men, driven by practical matters; and the reasoning carried out by professionals, an analysis for analysis's sake. The latter incites what Hage characterizes as "two contradictory fantasies" (2018: 18), that of a social space as an object apprehended through the contextual forces that engender it; and that of an analysed social space made out of people and their respective analysis. Accordingly, the anthropological analysis emerges as the total aggregate of the sum of multiple analyses inwardly done. Underlying this predicament, we can point out the dichotomization that it ensues between a knower and a known, an analyser and an analysed, a speaker and a spoken of, or for (Green 2018). Subsequently, what does this approach tell us about the object of anthropological curiosity? By what means can the epistemic authority of the analyst be balanced with the intentionality of those being analysed? What does this reveal about the nature of the conversations instigated by the discipline?

Addressing the academic debates over the notion of an 'opacity of mind'[2], Patrick McKearney (2021) pronounces the impoliteness and discourtesy in neglecting direct communication with one's interlocutors in order to correspond with them by reference to a third-person angle[3]. This procedure inhibits a mutual reciprocity between agents, as it precludes the chance to know one another *as*, that is, to legitimately perceive people as seen, heard, apprehended, and acknowledged. Alternatively, the assertions of the 'opacity of mind' underline "the first-person perspective as putting one in a position to speak on behalf of, or take responsibility for, one's thoughts. (…) It explicitly disclaims a responsibility for what only another person can rightfully avow" (Keane, 2018: 36). This accountability one has vis-à-vis one's own thoughts, consequently, turns the problematic of the analysed object on its head. To what extent is the preoccupation with the inner world of analytical objects worthwhile? Is it viable to take the incompatibility between precepts of reality as the initial and final fulcrum of our inquiries? What is overlooked in the act of neglecting arguments, in favour of a contextual

[2] By 'opacity of mind', I refer to the degree of legibility of other minds, whether in the vein of an impossibility in discerning the intentionality of different minds (Robbins 2008), or the interpersonal questions that arise from the fact that these can, indeed, be grasped (Keane 2008). Whether an epistemological question or an ethical dilemma, the 'opacity of mind' is here discussed to emphasize the issues entailed by the aspiration for the complete transparency of other minds.

[3] McKearney elaborates his discussion by reference to his work in a British care home for adults with intellectual disabilities, emphasizing the refusal of carers to speak on the behalf of patients. That is, rather than seeking interactional scripts furnished by more experienced carers, e.g. "«What does she [resident] mean?», «Does she speak?», «Is she angry?»" (2021: 4), McKearney emphasizes the encouragement to speak and correspond directly with the residents as a matter of respect.

and reductive exercise, instead of recognizing an argumentative commonality by reference to shared issues in a common world?

Markedly, Tim Ingold (2017, 2018b) highlights the gap between a commitment to sharing a common world and the transposition of an individual into a particularistic world disconnected from the anthropologist's. The former hinges on the contingent nature of the statements corresponding with each other along the unfolding of conversations, starting from argumentative stances in constant transformations. The latter is characterized by a continuous aspiration to fix one's interlocutor in the constructed slot of alterity, as a result of his reduction to an object of research intrinsically charged with ethnographic data discernible by the anthropologist[4]. Accordingly, what are the implications, not only epistemological, but also ethical, moral, and political subjacent to these two approaches? Who is to be this research object meant for studies? And, proportionally, who makes up the audience to whom this object is made known? What does this setting reveal beyond a literary device?

Inquiring into the anthropologist's analytical project, Liana Chua and Nayanika Mathur (2018) question the imagined «we» of the community for whom the anthropologist writes, namely in virtue of which he embodies the locus of analysis and creativity mediating between the familiar and the strange. According to the logic of this configuration, the anthropologist acquires his role at the hand of an adhesion to theory, and a subsequent intellectual discontinuity from previous suppositions and works, in order to grasp the intrinsic properties of the «native», in their factuality. As a result, the native originates in the anthropological imagination as an epistemic anchor, in which the "how, where, and what I must know and write about" (Arif, 2021: 260) is already inherently rooted in his identity[5]. The «native», envisioned in this manner, is someone who fundamentally does not, and cannot, aspire to belong to the anthropologist's community, and in view of this exclusion, must be represented in theory, knowledge, and discourse by the anthropologist. In consonance with this line of reasoning, what kind of knowledge is intended to be extracted? Is it viable to uphold the «native» as a research object, to be categorized and classified? If so, how should it be approached and represented?

[4] This discrimination is meticulously examined and extended by Tim Ingold (2018: 161-163), as he distinguishes between differentiation – as a continuous process of transformation and renewal –, and diversity – as the state of being different in terms of a cultural partition produced out of a universal biological makeup.

[5] Hage (2018: 19), for instance, in view of the identification of a research object as such, emphasizes the exceptional violence that is the reduction of a given subject to an 'it', equating the ensuing analysis to a forensic imaginary.

This act of circumscription and labelling, embedding the object of anthropological study in a categorical map of identity and discontinuity, can be partially traced to a prescriptive adherence to cultural relativism[6] (Ulin 2007). As Michael F. Brown (2008) stresses, cultural relativism as a formalistic and theoretical doctrine, encompassing an unlimited tolerance and a feeble judgmental reasoning, is more accurately befitting of mid-20th century anthropology than necessarily applied to contemporary approaches. Nonetheless, its ongoing sway is held in virtue of its vocational proficiency, as a methodological tool precluding any form of judgments prior to an appropriate accumulation of knowledge. However, what role does this prescription play in perpetuating a dichotomization between analyser and analysed? Is it to be commendable because it enables the analyst to gather data inhering in given objects? To what extent can it be justified for the sole purpose of an opposition to an absolutism of universal standards? To what extent does it not deter an adherence to one's own voice in favour of a suppression behind the voices of others?

If anthropology is to be conceived on the terms of a “fullness of presence” (Ingold, 2019: 188), the experiential openness to which the anthropologist is exposed cannot be subsumed under a framework envisaging the ethnographer as a disinterested and unaffected entity. For instance, Julius Bautista and Peter Bräunlein (2014) point out the consequences underlying this latter setup, in which the anthropologist is tantamount to a human instrument assembled for the collection and examination of empirical facts, and which, in the same fashion of laboratory equipment, is to be subjected to tests in order to verify the limits of its scientific accuracy. Envisioned in this manner, this analytical configuration fails to comprehend ethnographic fieldwork as one pronounced by a continuous transformation, learning, and communion, as the anthropologist goes “navigating into entry processes and learning to inhabit a space, puzzling out how the system works and its forms of discovery, intensely enjoying the experience despite its many frustrations and failures, moving through it all in embodied and affective ways, grappling with unknowns, and eventually setting the experience aside and moving onto something new” (Taylor, 2022: 34). This "radical reciprocity" (*ibid.*: 50) reiterates not only a certain incongruity in devising the anthropologist as a *tabula rasa*, but also in anticipating the ethnographic space as a model of objects bordered, identified, and accessed in terms of distance (*see* Hughes & Walter 2021). As a result, how viable and pertinent is it to define the outcome

[6] Following this line of reasoning, it will suffice here to distinguish between cultural relativism as a descriptive approach – acknowledging the multiplicity of different modes of knowing, acting, and thinking –, and as a prescriptive approach – identified in its moral, normative, cognitive, or epistemological propositions (*see* Figueiredo, 2021: 55).

of fieldwork in terms of ethnographic data collected by way of an analytical agility? Can this involvement with others be subsumed under a standardized body of techniques defined as fieldwork methodology? To what extent is it reasonable to envision the anthropologist as the prevailing determiner of fieldwork parameters, and local interlocutors as subordinate to the empirical strategies of the former?

Highlighting the dilemmas, difficulties, and complications the anthropologist goes through in the course of fieldwork, Kirsten Bell (2019; *see also* Kierans & Bell 2017) inquires into the feasibility of disassociating the ethnographer's moral identity from the analytical role aspired to embody through a form of empathic and reflexive transposition, predicated in one's invisibility (cf. Fassin 2008, 2012). This is because, since fieldwork is inescapably relational and contingently made up of ephemeral conditions (Chua 2015), the anthropologist cannot be severed from his moral being in order to cope and respond to the experiences, challenges, and transformations that unravel along his stay in a community different from his own: "It [fieldwork] will almost certainly give rise to embarrassment, boredom, irritation, and discouragement. (...) It may well also result in insect bites, copious sweating or shivering with cold (maybe both), a diet over which you have little control, and intolerable noise" (Keeler, 2020: 83). The temper and reactions that the anthropologist adopts cannot be held in concurrence to a pre-given repository of imperative principles in order to simulate an ethnographically appropriate and productive response. As a consequence, how should codes of conduct, and their ethical definitions of practices, be envisaged? Considering the interpersonal and particular nature of the relationships that are established on the field, how should notions of responsibility and accountability be contemplated? On what basis should certain acts be identified as ethical violations, not only during fieldwork but afterwards as well? And how should the knowledge produced out of these fleeting circumstances be characterized?

The purpose for grouping these discussions together, and for highlighting the predicaments they raise, was to set up a contemporary overview of the manner in which the production of knowledge is conceived in anthropology. In order to narrow down and specify the scope of this dissertation, I will deal with questions regarding three crucial assumptions. These are an antithesis between the production of knowledge and, respectively, the self, the value judgements, and the morals of the anthropologist. To what extent can anthropological knowledge be attained by way of an emancipation from one's self? And what form of value can it hold after acknowledging the impossibility of this latter aspiration? Why did cultural relativism in its prescriptive stances, even though discredited and deemphasized, had and continues to have adherence in view of a premise foretelling an unviability of judgements to

engender knowledge? How is the social rapport established in the course of fieldwork to be accounted for and fittingly assessed without recourse to a rupture between the moral identity of the ethnographer and his analytical role embodied in the field? And, overall, what kind of anthropological exercise justifies these assumptions; and reciprocally, what is the prominence acquired by these assumptions for the sake of a theoretical, methodological, and deontological adherence to this exercise? These will be the questions that will orient the structure of my dissertation and the development of my arguments.

In the first chapter, I will develop the main argument to which the subsequent chapters refer back to. I will elaborate on how an epistemological and metaphysical project of anthropology was to be linked to the tension emerging from the incompatibility between different cultural forms, emphasizing the purpose of its project in advancing exercises of commensurability in conjunction with increasingly accurate and faithful descriptions of the ethnographic experience. Chartering its intellectual roots to disclose the manner in which difference is envisioned and conceptualized, I will illustrate the significance of its construction for the way in which anthropology is conceived, namely in reference to its theoretical, methodological, and ultimately deontological premises. The use of the term "deontological" in this argumentative context is warranted for its emphasis on the anthropological stances often developed and manifested in view of duties, obligations, and values recurrently claimed for the discipline in terms of its practice of fieldwork, the knowledge it seeks to produce, and its intellectual and ethical vision of itself. Consequently, its conjunction with the two previous designations seems to be appropriate here.

Afterwards, the subsequent chapters will delve, respectively, on an epistemological, ethical, and moral critique of these anthropological assumptions, insofar as the knowledge produced in the discipline is conceived to be antithetical to the self, the value judgments, and the morals of the anthropologist. I will begin by questioning the feasibility and efficiency in erasing one's self, underlying the premises proclaiming for a mode of knowledge transcending the anthropologist’s prejudices. Afterwards, I will interrogate the appropriateness and relevance in suspending one's value judgements in the course of dialogues started vis-à-vis interlocutors. Finally, I will interrogate the viability in fragmenting the anthropologist, as a moral subject, from the analytical role he is to embody at the moment of carrying out fieldwork. In view of the anthropological curiosity, the dialogues instigated, and the solidarity commitments fostered by the discipline, I will argue, respectively, how these assumptions display an implausibility, an ethical disdain, and a morally irresponsible and unsustainable disposition towards cultural diversity.

Although these critiques are made along somewhat distinct arguments, the chapters to which they refer, rather than being autonomous for themselves, intertwine at given times insofar as they deal with common questions concerning the assumptions explored, thusly constituting a narrative as a whole. To note, this is not a generalized critique that aims to address the discipline as a homogenous whole, but rather that intends to focus on the aforementioned particular premises that have recurrently shaped, to a greater or lesser degree, several notable events, works, and theories in the history of the discipline, as I will aim to specify throughout the development of my arguments. To do so, I will rely on exemplary cases taken from the ethnographic literature; which, even though not necessarily absolute representatives of the discipline, reveal insightful tensions and predicaments to instigate the discussions developed in this dissertation. In order to scrutinize these assumptions and their implications, I will significantly draw from the philosophical traditions of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and pragmatism.

Chapter 1. – Anthropology, Difference, and Incompatibility

Elaborating on the requirement of a professional ethnographer, scientifically trained in anthropology, to successfully carry out fieldwork, Bronisław Malinowski justifies his contention on the grounds that:

> "The observer has to read them [ethnological texts] in the context of tribal life. Many of the customs of behaviour, of the sociological data, which are barely mentioned in the texts, have become familiar to the Ethnographer through personal observation and the direct study of the objective manifestation and of data referring to their social constitution. (…) *After all, if natives could furnish us with correct, explicit and consistent accounts of their tribal organization, customs and ideas, there would be no difficulty in ethnographic work.* Unfortunately, the native can neither get outside his tribal atmosphere and see it objectively, nor if he could, would he have intellectual and linguistic means sufficient to express it" (Malinowski, 2014 [1922]: 733-734, my emphasis).

We should thoroughly dissect this statement. The ethnographic problem, according to Malinowski, results from the inability of natives to provide consistent explanations of their cultural facts through a plane of intelligibility mutual to that of the ethnographer. As a result, an access to true ethnographic knowledge is obstructed, insofar as this incompatibility precludes the possibility of an accurate cross-cultural understanding. Hence, the prospect for overcoming this discrepancy can be seen to reside in an adherence to determinate principles that are to enable the collection, comprehension, and analysis of ethnographic data, in its independence from factors extrinsic to the cultural reality of the native.

Particularly, we can review these principles against the backdrop of the discipline's roots, intertwined in both the Enlightenment and the Romanticism movements. Notably, George Stocking Jr. emphasizes the tension exerted not only between the prefixes "anthropos", in reference to the universalizing scope of its subject of study as the human species, and "ethnos", with a particularizing lens concerning the diversitarianism of their different historical moments (1992e: 347); but also the pressure between the suffixes "-ology", connoting its aspirations to fulfil a definition for itself as the science of man, and "-graphy", in reference to the descriptive practices deriving from participant-observation fieldwork (1989: 3-4). Pairing the methods, outlooks, approaches, scientific principles, and epistemic virtues of the former, with the latter's interest in the other, the primitive, the distant, the mythical, and the magic, the scientific agility

of the anthropologist was to be mirrored in the proficiency of "retaining the other's subjectivity objectively (as they see themselves)" (Figueiredo, 2021: 48). Considering this deep-seated duality at the core of the discipline, we can ponder the extent to which it had been influenced, additionally, by the way that cultural difference has been recurrently codified, whether in terms of a metaphysical problem to be scientifically resolved, or in terms of a motif of astonishment outlining the discipline's identity.

Discerning Malinowski's argument in clearer terms, we can distinguish in the ethnographic problem a question of incommensurability. Underlining this line of reasoning, the value and purpose of the anthropologist is to be linked to a transcendence of cultural propositions, with which he becomes familiar in the course of fieldwork, in order to reach the metaphysical foundations of native thought. The success of this enterprise, accordingly, is to be a transposition of the latter's terms into a shared plane of intelligibility with the anthropologist's categorical one. This is what Malinowski described as the "coefficient of reality" (Firth, 1957: 9), or, as Richard Rorty had synthetised more concisely, the "epistemologically ideal situation" (1979: 316), characterized by the uncovering of a maximum of common ground through which incompatible ideas and customs can converge towards one another – can become commensurable –, and consequently be described as realistic, rational, and logic, not because of the ethnographer's standpoint, but rather in virtue of an ur-language of e.g. culture, society, rationality, and so on.

The metaphysical aspiration, fundamental to this theoretical proposition, emphasizes a reliance in what can be seen as a representationalist framework, that is, the expectation of arriving at a transcendental plane, in reference to which beliefs and customs can be satisfactorily evaluated. This anticipation is not only explicit in the objectivist premises endorsing the idea of an universality of the Human, but it also features in the relativistic noncomparability of non-, or trans-, cultural standards: "The only reasoning behind this demand is one that falls under a Cartesian spell, based on the conviction that some beliefs are objective and correspond more closely to a human-independent reality (e.g. physics), whereas others, subjective, pertain simply to human needs and sentiments (e.g. poetry). The underlying assumption is, of course, that reality has an intrinsic nature, which is to be accurately represented through the application of certain criteria (e.g. "Reason") – a representationalist view" (Figueiredo, 2021: 62). It is from this idea that an aspiration for a plane of mutual intelligibility gains traction, foretelling commensurability in the face of an incompatibility between cultures by reference to a transcendental ur-language.

It is at the heart of this representationalist framework that the anthropologist, as an entity with an epistemologically privileged relationship with knowledge, is advanced and justified[7]. Furnished with an appropriate body of theories and methods that empower one to escape from one's being, detach from one's value standards, and be freed from one's moral community, the anthropologist is enabled to get closer to a human-independent reality and to describe it in a way that is precise, correct, and irrefutable:

> "If we think of knowledge in (…) [this] way, we will want to get behind reasons to causes, beyond argument to compulsion from the object known, to a situation in which argument would be not just silly but *impossible*, for anyone gripped by the object in the required way will be *unable to doubt* or to see an alternative. To reach that point is to reach the foundations of knowledge" (Rorty, 1979: 159, my emphasis).

Or, irrefutable except in the terms of the defects and shortcomings of the anthropologist's prejudices, standards, and temper.

In order to clarify this latter statement, we can consider how, as a result of an aspiration to reach the bottom of incommensurability, the attempt to provide correct, precise, and faithful description of the culturally different Other is to be linked, additionally, to the idea of an increasingly particularizing and contextualizing arrangement of ethnographic data[8]. As manifested in recent trends advocating for a shift in the research focus from the culture to the individual (Santos Alexandre 2023, 2024), the former is to be censured for its essentialist and homogenizing effects, while the latter is to be highlighted in order to account for the polyphonic, contested, and fluid character of the profusion of particular and idiosyncratic voices gathered under the heuristic label of culture.

As a case epitomizing these concerns, we can turn to Lila Abu-Lughod's proposal to write against culture:

> "Anthropologists commonly generalize about communities by saying that they are characterized by certain institutions, rules, or ways of doing things. For

[7] This proposition is set up in parallel to Rorty's description of a replacement of the priest for the scientist striving for a "«cognitive status» and «objectivity»" (1991: 39), insofar as they both envision and conceive themselves in their prowess to provide a link between the human and the nonhuman.

[8] Rosas (2019: 463) ironizes this matter in recent trends, as, at the moment of data collection, it is encouraged to be assigned a higher value to audiotapes over note-taking for its capture of oral inflections, the value of videotapes over audiotapes for its capture of tics and visual signs, and so on, justified in terms of a compilation of ethnographic information in more contextualized, detailed, and precise manners.

> example, we can and often do say things like «The Bongo-Bongo are polygynous». Yet one could refuse to generalize in this way, instead asking how a particular set of individuals – for instance, a man and his three wives in a Bedouin community in Egypt whom I have known for a decade – live the «institution» that we call polygyny" (Abu-Lughod, 1991: 153).

Centring one's attention to the particularity of given life stories and of its act of collection for the subsequent act of writing a text – oriented by the interlocutors' disputes, recollections, disagreements, and actions –, the resulting interpretation amounts to a highly selective biography of the author's experience with particular people in a particular time and space, as a result of which ethnographic data does not, and cannot, refer to anything other than what it intends to refer. When Abu-Lughod goes from «the Bongo-Bongo are polygynous» to «a man and his three wives in a Bedouin community in Egypt whom I have known for a decade», her concern lies precisely in providing an account whose matching degree of accuracy to the author's experience is such that any attempt to contest its claims becomes unviable except on the terms of this very correspondence.

In other words, Abu-Lughod assigns to truth a representational function to accurately mirror the world, with its value laying in its capacity to serve as a mediator to the thing that is being depicted, i.e. her object of research. Because undisputable unless on the terms of its own adequacy in serving this end, it must be outlined and understood as a finalized, absolute work. That is, severing itself apart not only from any sort of intellectual tradition and relationships from which it was produced, but as well as from posterior interpretations that may be made after, this mode of description is enclosed upon itself for its accuracy in representing a particular truth localized in the particularity of an ethnographic experience. Its success – that is, its truth-value –, because only evaluated in terms of its adequacy to copy the world, can only be contested or refuted on the grounds of the anthropologist's prejudices, standards, and temper.

To summarize, we can wrap up these points. In view of cultural difference and its incompatibility turned into incommensurability, Malinowski's vindication was to be envisioned within the scope of a theoretical and descriptive exercise with ambivalent roots in the Enlightenment and Romanticism movements. Two implications underlie this project. One of them refers to an exercise of commensurability, on the terms of which mutual intelligibility is devised to be achieved in light of a metaphysical aspiration for a transcendental ur-language. Complementarily, the other can be seen in reference to the progressive atomization of its object

of study[9], in order to provide an increasingly accurate and contextualizing account of its ethnographic data (for a further overview, *see* Santos Alexandre, 2021: 37-47).

And so, following along Malinowski's vindication for the undertaking of fieldwork, I have sketched an outline regarding how anthropology, in virtue of an ambivalence in its disciplinary roots, has legitimized and justified a theoretical, methodological approach towards the analytical production of knowledge in its antithesis to the self, the judgements, and the morals of the anthropologist. However, one can read Malinowski's vindication differently. To recall: "Unfortunately, the native can neither get outside his tribal atmosphere and see it objectively, nor if he could, would he have intellectual and linguistic means sufficient to express it" (Malinowski, 2014: 734). Two implications can be derived from this characterization. On the one hand, the native cannot *not be* who the native is. On the other, the native cannot be who the ethnographer is. As a result, contrary to Malinowski's conclusion, it is incoherent to approach cultural difference starting from the native's point of view in order to go beyond it in terms of an extrinsic, and ultimately alien, plane of comprehension to the natives themselves, through which an equivalence might be effected with the anthropologist's own linguistic means. One could call it a feat of *extropathy*[10]. By acknowledging these implications and their consequences, a pertinent and satisfactory revaluation of the discipline can be carried out, attending to the irreducibility of both the anthropological exercise and the interlocutors with whom one engages with.

Tentatively outlining the consequences of these implications, and slightly anticipating the discussions of the subsequent chapters, we can start by emphasizing certain aspects, with a particular focus on insights drawn from the philosophical traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and pragmatism, which in one way or another shape and inform the arguments advanced in this dissertation.

We can start by emphasizing Martin Heidegger's well-known remark, that "language is the house of being" (1998: 254). This statement stresses the inappropriateness in envisaging language as a tool, in order to be possessed and directed by humans so as to represent something that is conceived to be not only internal to one's mind, but also to exist priorly to its attachment

[9] I insert in this configuration Abu-Lughod's proposal because, despite her aim in severing from the canonical tradition of anthropology, her efforts to objectively retain the other's subjectivity can be understood as an extension of the discipline's previous theoretical descriptive exercises; thusly reproducing its aims under a lexical refurbishment (*see* Brightman 1995).

[10] This designation is meant to emphasize the paradox ensuing from the alienating effects of a norm requiring one to enter into the experiential inner life and subjectivity of others through the erasure of one's own, that is, a demand for "intropathy" (Figueiredo, 2021: 41).

to a word. Language, in the phenomenological treatment of Heidegger, is thus distinguished for its essential character of a «clearing», that is, the opening up of the world in and through which it reveals the meanings of the things around us. Language discloses the world, as it sets up our access to the thingness of the things (Taylor 2005). This does not mean that, as a result, the world and the things are independent of each other and brought together in the process of language. Rather, they are jointly co-penetrative in their emergent synthesis in the process of language taking place, in virtue of which language "*disclosingly appropriates* things into bearing a world; it *disclosingly appropriates* world into the granting of things" (Heidegger, 2001 [1971]: 200). It is in view of this creative role that Heidegger is compelled to refute the misunderstanding that we speak language. Rather, "language speaks" (*ibid.*: 188).

As language speaks, the world is disclosed. Two observations should be singled out. To start with, this does not imply a subjectivist act, in which the world is created out of the volition of an individual. And secondly, its disclosive character is not a controllable process, as it is not in virtue of a subject's deeds that the revelatory quality of the world is directed. Precisely because Heidegger divorces language from its instrumental and representational conditions, we do not stand over language but rather *we are thrown into it*. That is, to the extent that we come up in language as a legacy of tradition, it plays a role in shaping our present situation and guiding our future possibilities. These are the qualitative characteristics that allows us to stress the structure of our openness to the world as defined by historicity and temporality (Rogers 2015), and that Hans-Georg Gadamer goes on to distinguish as our "historically effected consciousness" (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*), emphasizing in the finitude of our human experience that which is simultaneously limited and opened up. This is the reason why language can never be private; because, in view of its precedence to us and our future orientations directed through it, it presupposes a structure of shared intelligibility. And it is as a result of these aspects of historicity and temporality characterizing our contingent situation that Gadamer singles out the notion of horizon, to account for our "verbally constituted experience of the world", expressing "not what is present-at-hand, that which is calculated or measured, but what exists, what man recognizes as existent and significant" (2006 [1960]: 452). In virtue of this, we can never stand outside of meaning, for we can never stand outside of history nor of time.

Having specified these dimensions of our linguistic means, we can reassess the value assigned to translation. We can start by hinting that "all language is inherently translative" (Figueiredo, 2021: 29). To note, as we have already removed language from its instrumental and representational fashions, translation need not be conceived in correspondence to internal

objects of the mind, resulting in a justification for linguistic distance as "ultimately unbridgeable" (Gadamer, 2006: 388), and as a consequence mutually exclusive except on the grounds of a special epistemological agility. Taking into account the manner in which language can be understood after Heidegger, we can stress in it a continuous potential source of novel understandings and meanings drawn out in the course of the interlingual exchanges established, "fundamentally embracing everything in which our insight can be enlarged and deepened" (*ibid.*: 444). In other words, these linguistic exchanges across cultures are not categorically different from those established with one's peers, as language, therefore, is not a prison or a barrier, but sustains the means of interpretation and understanding that continually transform and articulates the disclosive character of our world.

Having examined these implications subjacent to a phenomenological reading of language, we can return to the implications underlying Malinowski's proposal to approach cultural difference in terms of an extrinsic and alien plane to the native. According to this line of reasoning, as Steven Lukes suggests:

> "To what extent, I wonder, are *the very ideas of culturally based 'difference', 'otherness' and diversity themselves* (as the current jargon goes) *'socially constructed'*? To what extent have these notions been promoted and exaggerated for a variety of reasons and in pursuit of a variety of interests including group interests but also liberally minded generosity and compassion, perhaps inspired by post-colonial guilt and imperial self-exculpation?" (Lukes, 2003: 42, my emphasis).

The idea I want to emphasize here is, therefore, to what extent is it accurate and reasonable to transfigure the incompatibility derived from cultural difference into a matter of incommensurability, as underlined in Malinowski's vindication? The first does not entail the second, as Charles Taylor (1982; *see also* Figueiredo, 2021: 54-60) insightfully denotes when indicating that, even though chess sharply differs from football, a player of one can play the other and even excel at both. Incompatibility does not preclude mutual intelligibility. But what kind of assumptions are entailed by this transfiguration; and what role do they play, reciprocally, in upholding this transfiguration for the manner in which anthropology conceives its purposes? These assumptions, I argue, encompass an antithesis between knowledge and, respectively, the self, the judgements, and the morals of the anthropologist. These can be tentatively defined as such: in order to produce knowledge, one must not hold prejudices, one must not judge, and one must not do harm. To leave matters as such is incomplete, and over

the next chapters these assumptions will be carefully fleshed out, scrutinized, and appropriately rethought, in order to contribute to a satisfactory discussion and revaluation of the anthropological conversations established with difference. But for now, it suffices to outline a brief discussion made in parallel to Heidegger's account of «authenticity»[11] (*Eigentlichkeit*).

Describing the mode of *how we are* by way of authenticity, Heidegger stresses the experiential character of living in accordance with the irreducibility of one's own being. In consonance with Heidegger's critique of subjectivism as a product of the metaphysical tradition, the self is not to be understood as a thing latent to one's everyday facade, a *hidden* true self whose "subjective integrity" (Carman, 2005: 289) is to be identified in virtue of one's epistemically privileged proximity vis-à-vis one's own mind; by this means conflating the reflexive first-person standpoint and the observational third-person standpoint in defining the wholeness of one's self as subject. Rather, by envisioning the self as a particular way or style of inhabiting possibilities, authenticity can be understood as "a way of being poised and ready to act that lets the situation show up in a particular light" (Wrathall, 2015: 355). Heidegger singles out two dimensions of authenticity. One of these is «resoluteness», by which one holds up one's self when facing up to the unique concrete situation that one finds oneself in. The other concerns «forerunning», by which one commits to one's self in spite of the essentially fragile, and potentially dissolving, character of one's chosen set of possibilities. These are, respectively, the features of *anxiety* and *responsibility* that characterize our responsive commitments. Highlighting these two dimensions, we can emphasize the mode of being of one's self in view of the contingent embeddedness that characterizes one's actions and practices, as one's self is not only informed by the cultural, social, historical, and linguistic milieu that one inhabits, but which also pre-disposes one to exert oneself flexibly, imaginatively, and adaptively towards the things encountered (*see* Blattner, 2006: 127-167). Authenticity, accordingly, is to be clarified in reference to how one demands from oneself to own up to the being that one is at the moment of responding to the solicitations of a particular situation.

As in opposition to this mode of authenticity, Heidegger lays out «inauthenticity»[12] as living in a way that is not committed to the sort of entity that one is. When this happens, one is

[11] To note, alternatively in some works *Eigentlichkeit* may be translated not as «authenticity», but as «ownedness», as, for instance, William Blattner (2006: 15) prefers the latter to account for the manner in which Heidegger attempts to describe "not a matter of being true to anything, but rather of owning who and how one is".

[12] Or, alternatively, «disownedness». There is a third option, which is the «undifferentiated mode», or «unownedness», in which the existential issues that demand our response have not yet arisen (*see* Blattner, 2006: 130). In view of the purposes of the present discussion, this latter quality will not be dealt with here.

said to be living in abidance to an impersonal, abstract interpretation of human life which, because necessarily given prior to the coming-up of a concrete situation, is inflexible and unresponsive to its solicitations. In other words, one hands over his self so as to take up tasks, rules, standards, and so on, as if these were already fixed and decided, and as a consequence avoiding “the anxiety and responsibility that come from being answerable for [one’s] self (Wrathall, 2014: 263). This results not only in the deterioration of "one's understanding of other's lives and worlds, but [also of] one's understanding of one's own" (Blattner, 2006: 136). To sum, one lives inauthentically when one's own being absconds from being one's own, letting one’s situations be responded in accordance to alien features of the world.

Overall, then, authenticity can be considered in view of the first-person relationship one directly commits to oneself, as one owns up to one's being without assimilating one's existence to a general state of affairs and manifesting an alien standpoint that one can never fully inhabit. It is in light of these considerations that I will address how, as a result of the incompatibility of cultural difference, a theoretical, methodological, and deontological adherence to the three assumptions characterized earlier was to be advanced and justified. Even though somewhat premature in this discussion, as it will be more perspicuously discussed after scrutinizing these three assumptions, I will argue how this adherence is to be described as an issue of inauthenticity, failing to truthfully and genuinely engage in cultural difference as a result of a renunciation to one's being in favour of premises that are paradoxical, fruitless, and ultimately alienating to oneself.

To wrap up, in this chapter I argued how, to the extent that cultural difference was envisioned as a matter of incompatibility turned into incommensurability, this entailed certain implications regarding its knowledge, conceived as antithetical to the self, the judgements, and the morals of the anthropologist. I will explore their contradictions and paradoxes in the following chapters. Alternatively, I tentatively outlined some repercussions derived from a conversational approach based on the recognition of difference not as a metaphysical barrier or identity mark, but as enabling the very possibilities of establishing an enriching, fertile, and cooperative engagement, setting the grounds for a forthcoming deliberation of the manner in which an adherence to these three assumptions entail an issue of inauthenticity.

Chapter 2. – On the Anthropologist's Self

2.1. Prejudice and alternative reality

Describing ceremonial customs performed in the Andaman Islands, Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown states how, among the Northern tribes, in the eventuality of a stranger to the community dying or being killed, the corpse is to be disposed of by dismembering and burning its remains over a fire. Radcliffe-Brown claims this is done for spiritual and cleansing motives, but the observation of this imagery by external observers, as he further argues, can be tied to the speculative depictions of these communities as carrying out cannibalistic practices:

> "It may be worthy of remark that this custom of burning the bodies of slain enemies is perhaps the real origin of the belief that the Andamanese are or were cannibals. We can well imagine that when, as must have often happened, sailors venturing to land on the islands have been killed and the survivors have seen the bodies of their companions cut up and placed on fires, they would readily conclude that they were witnessing a cannibal feast" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1922: 110).

These discrepancies between the observed phenomena and their subsequent descriptions by European sailors, accordingly, were to be elucidated in view of their own prejudiced inclinations. According to this line of thought, these discrepancies could *only* be the result of prejudices, in virtue of which it was inevitable that the former misunderstood the nature of the activities of the latter.

Defining itself on the grounds of an ability to present an interpretative framework to accurately apprehend reality, anthropology came to place itself in direct opposition to an engulfing mixture of victims of ethnocentric biases, e.g. travellers, missionaries, government officers, mine managers (*see* Malinowski, 2014: 41, Firth, 2011 [1936]: 721), among others. Differentiating the accounts of these prejudiced figures from their own specialized rhetoric and techniques – under what Stocking Jr. designates as an "epistemological ideology of cultural immersion" (1992a: 14) –, the value and usefulness of the discipline were to be outlined in its expertise to produce true ethnographic knowledge, to the extent that this resulted from the subservience of its practitioners to a theoretical and methodological body arranging empirical data in the context of native life. Envisioning such an epistemological proficiency, ethnographic studies could be carried out "in a different, more efficient, more reliable, more

"scientific" way" (Stocking Jr., 1992d: 281), enabling one to overcome one's prejudices and apprehend the reality of native life.

Accordingly, we can discern and comment on two relevant implications from this professionalized transition.

Firstly, what type of trained specialists? During the course of his fieldwork in Tikopia, Raymond Firth had continuously called for a "strict neutrality of observation" (2011: 100). At a certain passage, where he is observing a working party cleaning turmeric, Firth singles out a little child, delighting in the sight of the yellow saliva she would dribble out into a cup made from a roll of banana leaf, exhibiting "what even the cold-blooded objective scientist may be allowed to call touches of essential humanity" (*ibid.*: 148). As if it could pose a rupture in the anthropologist's professional investigation, Firth subsequently advocated for a complete cleavage between the anthropologist-as-ethnographer, equipped with a "refined methodology, as objective and as passionless as possible", and the anthropologist-as-human, completely individualized in "his own personal predilections, based on his upbringings and social environment, his temperamental disposition, his aesthetic values" (*ibid.*: 722). As a result, any form of personal admiration, perception, or opinion on the part of the anthropologist-as-human, falling outside of the scope of the empirical reality studied, should be treated as a product of the individual behind the social scientist; and subsequently, because subjectivized in its own idiosyncrasies, discarded from the ethnographic exercise.

Then, secondly, what form of expertise? According to Malinowski, truth would result from the full and clear analysis of cultural reality in itself, on its own terms. Hence, the anthropologist would have to succeed in transposing one's prejudices to approach (relatively) culturally different beliefs and practices, in order to realize (objectively) their significance for the cultural life of the native. Turning to magical rites in Trobriand, Malinowski showcases, on the one hand, the native's point of view, as verbal communication transpires when "magician speaks and objects respond" (1935b: 241), as well as, on the other hand, its corresponding sociological explanation, emphasizing the self-directionality of the utterer's speech towards oneself, as "magic, in its essence, I might almost say in its physiological essence, is the expression of human hope and confidence, of the need of a morally integrated attitude towards the future" (*ibid.*: 244-245). Carrying out this procedure, Malinowski claims to penetrate the native's belief and interpret it at the light of a scientific theory, discerning order from "the apparent chaos of claims by discovery of more fundamental principles underlying them, which correspond both to native ideas and sociological realities" (1966 [1935a]: 338). Anthropological expertise was to be, therefore, distinguished by its ability to determine

relevant rules from the contextual placement of facts and statements in relation to the cultural whole.

These two propositions, accordingly, concedes us to emphasize the idea of epistemological and methodological principles in anthropology, setting up specialists as entities emancipated from any historical or cultural situatedness, and in this manner assured to accomplish an ahistorical and rational viewpoint through which to uphold different ideas and customs in their factuality, independent to the ethnographer. That is, the production of knowledge as antithetical to the self of the anthropologist, as the interpretative process is severed from the culturally inherited prejudices and historically conditioned understanding of the professional.

In the wake of the academicization of the discipline throughout the 1920s, both the British and American schools of modern anthropology would highlight the prevalence of a theory-oriented approach to empirical studies, directly done by a professional, over a speculative theorization done by academics at home about objects acquired in the field by amateurs[13] – what Stocking Jr. (2001: 316) calls the "de-historization of sociocultural anthropology". This meant that ethnographic data did not reside in objects brought e.g. to museums, but had to be extrapolated out from everyday life. This epistemological excision did not only divide professional specialists from the aforementioned blend of ethnocentric laymen. It was also, partially, the yardstick against which theories assessed their value and defined their excellence over other ones – that is, in terms of an apparatus increasingly less ethnocentric and more cognizant of the really real[14]. The focus of this empirical inquiry driven by theory, consequently, was to be the native society, as a "bounded entity to be accurately described and comparatively categorized so that it might contribute to the eventual formulations of universally valid social laws" (Stocking Jr., 1995: 440). In other words, the native society, as an object analytically isolated within itself, was to offer the truth criteria in correspondence to which the epistemological agility of the anthropologist was to be exercised, measured, and evaluated.

[13] Stocking Jr. discusses this transition as a change from a Frazerian "Amongtha" to a "My People" fieldwork (2001: 317), emphasizing the observation-participation in the ethnographic present performed by the anthropologist himself as the correct method towards knowledge, rather than attainable through physical artifacts collected by amateurs on the colonial fringes and inspected at home by scholars.

[14] This tendency, additionally, can be observed throughout the theoretical shifts in the history of anthropology, as newcoming theories outline their value for the overcoming of ethnocentric pitfalls asserted against rival ones, as Edmund Leach (1961a) denounces his functionalist-structuralists predecessors from preventing data of speaking for itself, as David Schneider (1984) deplores the pervasive expectations of kinship, or as Holbraad & Pedersen (2017) charge against the imposition of one's own ontological schemes.

Under this line of reasoning, the production of knowledge was to be understood as a result of the oscillating movement between the parts and the whole, originating from the continual contextualization of native life. "Magic is as magic does" (Malinowski, 1960 [1944]: 26) – through this formula, Malinowski sets the stage for an alternative reality, "imaginary from our point of view, but (…) real to the natives" (1935b: 215), out of which he will interpret the meaning of certain beliefs and practices, in correspondence to the whole of the culture which, in turn, will be understood in light of the beliefs and practices it upholds and sustains. This is what allows him to interpret e.g. practices of cannibalism and flying witches in Trobriand:

> "Another system of training, running side by side with flying, consists in accustoming the child to participation in human flesh. Even before the growing witch will begin to fly on her account, the mother will take her to the ghoulish repasts, where she and other witches sit over a corpse, eating its eyes, tongues, lungs, and entrails. There the little girl receives her first share of corpse flesh, and trains her taste to like this diet" (Malinowski, 2014: 406).

So, Malinowski presents here the Trobriand people's own account of cannibalism and flying witches. It is important to note that Malinowski does not state either the existence of flying witches or the rituals of cannibalism in view of his own outlook, but rather from the perspective of the native's point of view of the real. It is not that Malinowski admits the validity of both or neither, but that his own criteria concerning the subject is not what is relevant for him. For Malinowski, the matter is taking a neutral stance in the face of what other people say or believe in, to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (*ibid.*: 63, my emphasis). Accordingly, it is to be incongruous for the anthropologist to cast his own lenses of incredulity or evaluation towards what is a culturally different custom, to the extent that one is theoretically and methodologically enabled to surpass one's ethnocentric lenses and take the natives seriously.

2.2. Conflicting interpretations

To sum what has been discussed so far, anthropology set itself apart from a far-reaching mixture of ethnocentric laymen, to the extent that it upheld native reality in a more accurate and precise way. It did so, on the one hand, through the erasure of the anthropologist's self for the sake of his trained proficiency, and on the other, through the interplay of parts and whole by the contextual reference of the native's point of view.

However, a discord between different, sometimes contradictory, interpretations raises important questions concerning the veracity and credibility of anthropological knowledge. This clash does not only refer to those occurring at the time of ethnographic fieldwork, in which the collection of information is contested by informants and selectively chosen or omitted by ethnographers, as Malinowski himself had pointed out in the course of his own studies[15]. More precisely, it refers to when interpretations written by different anthropologists working in the same place collide with each other[16]. How should one account for the discrepancies between these conflicting ethnographic depictions? How to distinguish the value of one over the other? To illustrate this discussion, we can turn to the controversy between Derek Freeman and Margaret Mead over their respective experiences in Samoan communities.

Describing her fieldwork experience in Samoa, Mead wrote about the life of her Samoan adolescent informants as one pronounced by sexual freedom and unrestricted rapport. Comparing to the pubescence period in her own country, Mead (1928: 203-206) accounts for the divergencies between both on the basis of the "temperament of the Samoan civilization, which discounts strong feeling", as well as due to the comparatively "lack of conflict" in the face of ethical and existential dilemmas, as a result of the simplicity of Samoan culture. Derek Freeman (1996 [1983]: 131-173), on the other hand, presents Samoan life as one characterized by a strict rank system, an intense emotional ambivalence, fierce competition, and, at moments, sexually violent and viciously punitive. The central point of the controversy[17], as Freeman (*ibid.*: xviii) argued, was that he succeeded in depicting Samoan culture closer to what they truly were, and as a result, proclaiming the dethronization of Mead from the anthropological canon in view of the falsehood with which her work had been demonstrably assessed. In other words, considering a Popperian, logical, and rationalist reasoning (cf. Murray 1990), Freeman's work stood as scientific progress scrapping off Mead's account as a more fitting and accurate representation of Samoan culture.

Margaret Mead's error, according to Derek Freeman, was being who she was (*see* Shankman, 2009: 9). Mead arrived in Samoa, Freeman (1996: 75) argues, as a young adult,

[15] For instance, when inquiring on the reasons and purposes of the first pregnancy ceremony in Trobriand, a woman gave an answer which was denied by other informants, after which Malinowski chooses to dismiss as spurious (1932 [1929]: 190-191).

[16] This conflict is further enhanced by the general feeling that, when different texts do corroborate each other and share an intimate similarity, this affinity is more easily regarded as a proof of plagiarism rather than considered as a confirmation of what a given culture truly is (*see* Louise-Pratt, 1986: 29).

[17] Focusing on the dissonance between the ethnographic portraits written by each of these anthropologists, I leave out the analyses regarding the nature-nurture dichotomization that Freeman, inappropriately and continuously dismissed, attempted to raise around the controversy.

little older than a teenager, with absolutely no scientific training, and with the preconception of aspiring to approach directly the speculative formulations of biological determinism defining the youth problems in her own culture. Opposite to Mead, Freeman positioned himself in a more detached and disinterested stance towards his object of study, and thus, claims to have examined Samoan culture in a more scientific way.

Reversing this inference[18], we can see how Margaret Mead, tirelessly committed to debunking essentialist descriptions of youth behaviour in her society, recognized in the South Seas a society in which teenager's experiences widely differed from her own. As teenagers underwent lower levels of stress, Mead found in Samoa an alternative corollary for the adolescence process which was thought to be subsumed under biological mechanisms. Oppositely, Derek Freeman, a person who was somewhat erratic, unstable, despotic, and tirelessly opposed to the «Mead cult»[19], conceived Samoa as a place of constrained and repressive sexuality. These arguments do not intend to indicate that ethnographic descriptions are fated to be mirrors of anthropologists' respective personalities and purposes. Rather, they emphasize that the interpretive exercise of ethnography cannot be severed from the anthropologist engaging in it. This assertion, by all means, has been acknowledged and discussed within the discipline.

In respect to this controversy, anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1983) and Annette Weiner (1983), from the beginning, were quick to emphasize that the discrepancies between Mead's and Freeman's interpretations were to be tied to the very differences between each one's respective self. As a young woman carrying out fieldwork during the 1920s, contrasting with an elder man starting his study of Samoan culture after the 1940s, both would have had access to different facets of the truth: "Mead was responsive to and wrote about one dimension of Samoan culture – she captured a Samoan truth, (…) but not *the* Samoan truth. Derek Freeman, it appears, had access to another Samoan truth – again, not *the* truth" (Scheper-

[18] As Roberto da Matta emphasizes, each anthropologist can be said to get the native he deserves, that is, "for paranoid anthropologists, there are paranoid tribes; for mystical scholars, society of believers correspond; for sophisticated observers, there are notoriously elegant savages, and, last but not the least, for incompetent ethnographers, natives of equal posture" (da Matta, 1983: 15, my translation; *see also* Verde, 1997: 117).

[19] For a more detailed interpretation of Derek Freeman's personality traits, see Shankman (2009: 47-69), where it is illustrated his psychotic and paranoid behaviour in Sarawak, his belligerent and authoritarian behaviour in respect to academic peers he disagreed with, and his characterizations loaded with psychosexual inflections of Margaret Mead and her motherhood of anthropology, among other incidents.

Hughes, 1983: 90)[20]. Consequently, two implications can be stressed in regard to this partiality of the truth.

Devising the access to truth as partial, the presupposed detachment of an anthropologist collecting and interpreting ethnographic data was to be interrogated, in view of the questionable viability for a culturally constituted person to self-fashion an identity to portray other selves, "authorized to represent, to interpret, even to believe – but always with some irony – the truth of discrepant worlds" (Clifford, 1988: 94). Emphasizing the personal and subjective nature of fieldwork, the ethnographic exercise could be more accurately defined as an invention rather than a representation, considering that it mirrored the penmanship of a historically situated individual listening, dialoguing, and transcribing (Clifford, 1986: 8-13; *see also* Wagner 1975, Fabian 1983). Acknowledging this centrality of the particularity of experiences in the discipline's practices, a transition towards self-reflexivity was to orient the localization of cultural interpretations in the confluence of negotiated, power-laden, multisubjective, and incongruent contexts, displaying its descriptive outcome as "an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (Clifford, 1986: 15). This entailed that the self of the anthropologist could not be severed from the interpretations he drafted about cultural difference.

Which leads us to the second implication. Given the rhetorical pretensions of the anthropologist, adhering to theoretical and methodological principles "for uncovering the masked, the latent, the unconscious" (Crapanzano, 1986: 51), the written narrative could be more accurately defined as one of transcendence, as "the disorder, the violence, unruliness, and meaninglessness" (*ibid.*: 54) of the excised empirical facts are surmounted under the circumstances of credible, coherent portrayals. As a result of this act of transcendence, following the argumentative line of Crapanzano, the self of the anthropologist is surreptitiously concealed at the rear of his authoritative, scientific voice, envisaging what the natives must experience from their own point of view. This blurred identification between the ethnographer's own subjectivity, on the one hand, and the subjectivity and intentionality of those with whom he engages with, on the other, cannot but result in a foil for the former's self-presentation: "There is no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's constructed point of view" (*ibid.*: 74). Likewise, the ethnographic exercise is rendered similar to a theoretical scaffolding of

[20] This partiality of the truth, moreover, was to serve an important basis for the writing culture movement (Clifford & Marcus 1986), chartered in the model of the oath of a certain Cree hunter testifying on court, claiming "«I'm not sure I can tell the truth… I can only tell what I know»" (Clifford, 1986: 8).

concepts and principles, which, even though "may bear little resemblance" to the society studied, are "set up as an aid to our understanding of the social system to which they belong" (Wagner, 1967: 240). It is an external artifice of abstract categories to guide the ethnographer's understanding of how native society really is.

In light of the aforementioned clarifications, we can sum the way in which the tension between Mead's and Freeman's respective accounts were to be considered. If, on the one hand, the discrepancies between their interpretations are to be explained in view of the personal experiences each one had in function of their particular selves, then, on the other hand, and mutually consequential, each of these descriptions had only been a set of heuristic devices deployed to grasp cultural difference. Rather than contradicting or cancelling each other out, both of these interpretations displayed the partiality each anthropologist had in their conditioned access to the Samoan truth.

2.3. Paradox and implausibility

At this stage, we can now emphasize two contradictions at work. One contradiction advances that, while anthropologists are split from an encompassing mixture of ethnocentric entities, their own selves are inescapable to the interpretations created. The other contradiction refers to the assertion that, although beliefs and customs have to be understood in reference to the whole of native life, this whole cannot but be a heuristic projection extraneous to the native.

Consequently, these contradictions sustain a paradox. While the anthropologist strives to understand culturally different phenomena by reference to the natives' own internal criteria, not only is the anthropologist led to proclaim and defend statements that he does not, and cannot, uphold, but furthermore these statements surpass the native's own understanding, insofar as they refer to propositions of reality that are alien to himself. In order to exemplify and clarify this argument, we can turn to a brief discussion of the ontological turn and, particularly, to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's work with an Araweté community[21].

I specifically discuss the ontological turn because, from the outset, its advocates devised their proposal at the confluence of these very contradictions. In view of the problematic character of the anthropologist's self in comprehending culturally different ideas, it devised for its interpretative task the prerequisite of a conceptual agility, orienting its inquiry not in terms

[21] Taking into account the theoretical differences between the ontological turn and perspectivism, this discussion does not intend to conflate their respective arguments, but to highlight and discuss implications pertinent to both.

of "*how one see things*", but "*what there is* to be seen in the first place" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017: 5). Hence, the ethnographic exercise was not to concern itself with the indigenous mode of thinking, recalling the conceptual deviation resulting from the external imposition of categories, but rather to have as its object "the object of that referred mode of thinking" (Viveiros de Castro, 2009: 132, my translation) – that is, focusing on the substantiality of the real as it is projected by native concepts themselves, thus properly "allowing things (…) to dictate their own terms of engagement" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017: 200). For instance, considering apparently unrealistic statements like "«we are ghosts»" (*cit. in ibid.*: 92), or that "powder is power" (Holbraad, 2012: 153-172), the ethnographer would not attempt to apprehend their meanings by reference to already-available concepts; but instead, understand the conceptual revelation invented and displayed by the very usage of e.g. 'human', 'ghost', 'powder', 'power' – in other words, to understand these statements without presuming that they signify, represent, or stand for something other than what they purport to *be*.

Determining in this manner the pre-conceptual ground activating concepts, the critical exercise of the discipline was to be guided towards an act of "destroying, exhausting, 'killing'" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017: 93) the anthropologist's own ontological postulates, subsequently replaced, by means of a constructional reflexivity (*ibid.*: 9-24), for the native's apparently unrealistic claims as these present themselves in their obviation of meaning. Intending to set aside the ambivalent dilemmas regarding the anthropologist's self and the criteria to evaluate native's truths, this reflexive emergence of anthropological concepts was to mirror "a certain relation of intelligibility between two cultures, projecting both cultures as their assumptions" (Viveiros de Castro, 2009: 134, my translation), and thus, in this fashion, emphasizing "the representation, in the diplomatic sense of the term, of the Other within the scope of Self, (…) using the Other's reasoning, weighting its consequences, and verifying its effects on our own concepts" (*ibid.*: 134, 138; *see also* Viveiros de Castro, 2002: 125-129). It is with these ideas in mind that, accordingly, Viveiros de Castro reflects on the meaning and function of Araweté warriors' cannibalism.

Distancing his descriptions from "coloured images in books for tourists, television series, and travelling impressions" (Viveiros de Castro, 1986: 13, my translation), Viveiros de Castro had intended to use Araweté people's cannibalistic ideas as a conducting wire to understand their "becoming-other topology" (*ibid.*: 607). What is eaten, the author stresses, is not an imagined substance of the enemy, but the enemy's position, meaning that alterity itself is a constitutive part of the Araweté notion of personhood. As the authors discloses, he had adopted a twofold approach to his analysis. To begin with, he strived to "insert Araweté facts in a

system", and, consequently, to "set up said system starting from the Araweté people" (*ibid.*: 22). In other words, Viveiros de Castro intends to contextualize the facts in the pre-conceptual ground from which they emerge, and then, identify how said beliefs and practices are displayed and given meaning through their use by Araweté individuals – that is, Araweté culture as the source, articulator, and justifier of this conceptual activity.

Therefore, for the purpose of such, Viveiros de Castro is guided not by his own, but by Araweté people's prejudices, from where he develops his argument in respect to cannibalism: "I can only be fully after being devoured by my enemy – because, qua dead, I am enemy of the celestial Subject, Maï –; or if I devoured (killed) an enemy on earth, what makes me an Enemy, ergo a God. The system is a tense ring, without reverse: the dead is the enemy, the enemy is the god, the god is the dead, the dead is the I. The cannibal cogito" (*ibid.*: 607-608). As alterity is itself a fundamental piece of the Araweté self, the Other is not a mirror but a destiny, "the incorporation of the incorporeal, the becoming-enemy: that is it, cannibalism; the opposite of the narcissistic suction of identification: he who eats is the one who transforms (himself)" (*ibid.*: 669). Codified in this manner, cannibalism is firmly fixed in the honour one has in the anticipation of being killed – thus setting the stage for the retaliation his group will carry out – and devoured – so as not to be left to rot on the ground. In the course of this process, the mutual hatred of enemies is a subtle collaboration in the making of immortality, which is simultaneously granted by, and a producer of, vengeance: "Between the death of the enemy and one's personal immortality, there lied the trajectory of each one, and the destiny of all. Becoming-immortal, that is, the interminability of becoming" (*ibid.*: 678-679). As a result, Viveiros de Castro concludes, "war produced society" (*ibid.*: 690): the Person, the people, the residential group, the village, the territorial bloc of allies, and so on.

Through this argumentative line, Viveiros de Castro accomplishes to do what he set out to do: to contextualize cannibalism in the pre-conceptual network that sustains it and illustrate the disclosive nature of cannibalism in the alternative world of Araweté culture, as it articulates and displays the becoming-other topology from its spiritual and cultural roots. The substantiality of the really real underlying cannibalism is accordingly revealed by reference to the projection effected by the native's own prejudices:

> "Araweté cannibalism was not always imaginary, as it looks like. Their narratives are brimmed with inter-devourers, maintained in between other Tupi people. My data here is sparce and ambiguous. Even those who flatly denied their belonging to a cannibal people – underlying instead its condition of victims of

> cannibalism by *Towaho* (?), *Torá* (?), and other ancient enemies –, recognized, however, that several recent dead were *awi a re* (?), «eaters of enemies». (…) *Fact or fiction, the important is the Araweté traditional belief*" (Viveiros de Castro, 1986: 611, my emphasis).

Following in the vein of Malinowski, Viveiros de Castro sets up an alternative world, realistic untenable[22] from his own perspective but legitimately valid to the natives, as it is constructed along the orientation furnished by the ethnographic material itself, i.e. the conceptual universe of Araweté culture. The outcome is the vindication of truth-claims that the anthropologist does not, and cannot, sustain; as neither can the native, as a result of grounding these claims in an alternative, and ultimately extrinsic, reality assembled by the former for the latter. It is a paradox, and it is derived from an inability to address the previous contradictions which perspectivism and the ontological turn thought to be setting aside.

To wrap up and remind of the purpose of this discussion, we saw how anthropology had come to set itself at the crossroads of two contradictions. On the one hand, although advocating for the epistemic value of anthropology over ethnocentric interpretations, it remarked the inescapability of the self from one's interpretations. On the other hand, even though attempting to understand native reality from its internal point of view, it sanctioned the deceptive projection this entailed. We saw how these lead to a paradox, particularly exemplified in the ontological turn, whose proponents, unable or unwilling to address these issues, conceived their proposal at the confluence of these contradictions. Additionally, while trailing after the pre-conceptual stream of cannibalism through Araweté people's own prejudices rather than his own, Viveiros de Castro asserts to have attained the real nature of these practices. Consequently, the pronouncement of statements such as Araweté cannibalism being a paradigmatic parallel of the Aristotelian friend, or that powder is power, reflects an act of implausibility, because it is derived from an argumentative reasoning that their respective anthropologists do not – and cannot – sustain, as well as neither can the natives placed at the forefront of these claims. This is because, while it is attempted to achieve reality in its factuality, independent from any one's own contingency, it is asserted in its alienness to both the anthropologist's and the native's comprehension.

[22] I use the remark «realistic untenable» instead of «imaginary», as Malinowski did, to account in a more appropriate way for the tension exerted by the incompatibility of cultural difference.

2.4. Interpretation and the hermeneutical circle

Central to the arguments made, throughout the discussions in this chapter, is the key assumption that the anthropologist's self is antithetical to the production of knowledge. This assumption is placed after the idea of a mutually exclusive intelligibility between cultural difference, precluding the transcultural comprehension of the precise nature of beliefs and customs in view of prejudiced inclinations. In view of these conjectures, the anthropologist's prejudices are defined as unviable and unproductive for the understanding of culturally different statements.

The result, consequently, is the divorce of the anthropologist, as an interpretative being, from the interpretative process. This latter, as a feature of anthropology since its modern inception, can be recalled as being characterized by the interpretation of given parts of a culture – e.g. statements, ideas, customs – in relation to its contextual whole, and vice versa. In virtue of this depiction, it can be seen as analogous to the hermeneutic circle[23]. Nonetheless, this circle has been either ignored or criticized throughout the discipline, most notoriously and recently by the ontological turn, as the latter's proponents rebuke it for being "viciously circular" (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017: 93; *see* Figueiredo, 2021: 32-38). Their accusations rely on the idea that, to the extent that certain practices are validated in view of the cultural context in which they are inserted, this context, in turn, is validated by the same practices. However, this viciousness can only occur if one upholds a form of mutual unintelligibility across cultures, obliging for the complete erasure of one's self in order to be refilled with the native's own point of view. Only through this divorce of the anthropologist's self from the interpretative process is the latter turned back on itself.

On the contrary, this ambition to remove any form of ontological content from ourselves is not only unfeasible, but undesirable, because it is only as a result of our previous constitution, in and through our fore understandings, that we are able to correctly enter and participate in the interpretative process set up by the hermeneutic circle. That is, recognizing in the circle a course of movement more appropriately described as that of a spiral, it is because we already understand given things in a determinate way that, at the time of ethnographic fieldwork, certain unusual and startling features – e.g. "an ethnographic «golden event»" (Vigh & Sausdal,

[23] By hermeneutic circle, I mean to emphasize the interpretative process through which "we can only understand the parts of a text, or any body of meaning, out of a general idea of its whole, yet we can only gain this understanding of the whole by understanding its parts" (Grondin, 2016: 299), requiring for its exercise the very idea of assumptions prior to its event – what Heidegger designates as "anticipatory structure" (*Vorstruktur*) of understanding, or Gadamer as prejudices.

2014: 62) – can vigorously demand our attention and, in so doing, test and potentially transform our previous comprehensions:

> "The process that Heidegger describes is that every revision of the fore-projection is capable of projecting before itself a new projection of meaning; rival projects can emerge side by side until it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is; interpretation begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones. This constant process of new projection constitutes the movement of understanding and interpretation. A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed «by the things» themselves, is the constant task of understanding" (Gadamer, 2006 [1960]: 269-270).

Our fore understandings, through which we correspond to cultural difference, is what enables us to be genuinely confronted with different modes of reality, and consequently evaluate or transform who we already are and our web of beliefs. The very distance afforded by these prejudices, which the assumption of an antithesis between knowledge and self had invariably attempted to leap over or to dissolve, is what heightens and enriches our intercultural comprehensions.

To clarify these arguments, it is necessary to comprehend how exactly the self of the anthropologist is not only inescapable, but such an escape undesirable as well, along with illustrating how prejudices display a positive and productive character, in contrast to the pejorative connotations that the Enlightenment attempted to attach to the term.

Acknowledging the contingent embeddedness of our experience in the world, the hermeneutic notion of «horizon» allows us to emphasize that which simultaneously delimits and opens up our predisposition for perceiving and interpreting, as everyday life things show up as the kind of things they are in virtue of their suitability for our purposes, or values they have for us (*see* Nenon, 2016: 250). This disclosive quality of our surroundings, accordingly, is an effect of the prejudices we already hold and through which we are able to regard such things as the things that they are, and without which we would not be capable to do so: "The historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us" (Bernstein, 2013 [1983]: 127). Identifying three temporal

characteristics entailed in the notion of prejudice, we can discern, as Bernstein further argues, (1) how they are transmitted through tradition – as a historically constituted feature on which we are thrown, rather than an inert, immutable, deterministically transmitted convention –, (2) how they constitute who we are at the moment, and (3) how they are invested with an openness towards future tests and transformations.

Subsequently, and as we have previously described our being as encompassed by a "historically effected consciousness", we can single out the historicity of truth, as a central expression of this finitude (*see* Verde, 2009: 94-95). This synthesis, evidently, stands in a stark opposition to the metaphysical tradition and its radical scepticism of one's historicity to produce real knowledge, claiming for a mode of transcendent truth independent of any historical contingency and attainable through a submission to epistemological and methodological mechanisms. By all means, it is against these misleading inferences that Gadamer strives to revitalize the interpretative process, against "the false ideal of a presupposition-less type of knowledge which would have been imposed upon the humanities by the objectivity requirement of exact science. His [Gadamer's] aim in highlighting the hermeneutical circle is to liberate the humanities from this alienating model" (Grondin, 2016: 300). It is an alienating model because anthropological curiosity itself – as the effect of the prejudices and historicity of its practitioners, orienting the ethnographic inquiry and enabling the disclosive character of the world – is extinguished and superseded by endeavours at grasping the native's internal point of view in order to understand how given practices truly are, in their complete independence from the way anthropologists, and ultimately even natives themselves, perceive them.

As Rorty phrases it, to say that truth is not out there is to say "that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations"[24] (1989: 5). In other words, quite opposite to what representational viewpoints claim, native utterances do not have meaning, nor are they translatable by us, in virtue of referring to something really real (*ibid.*: 1991: 151-161). They disclose meaning because they are capable of saying something to ourselves and our own present predicaments. Speaking in a way which is differentiated from statements about the nature of cultural otherness, to paraphrase Gadamer (2006: 290), these linguistic means directly

[24] To clarify, this does not mean that truth, because a matter of sentences, is to be conflated to propositional sentences. Although truth is an aspect of propositional articulations – drawing out and accentuating a state of affairs –, the latter does not exhaust the disclosive quality of truth, as truth happens in a richer and more primordial givenness of the world (Wrathall, 2010: 18-21).

assert something particular to our historical and cultural predicament, as if it was said specifically to it. Hence, the interpretative process evades any methodological arrangement, without this entailing a subjective act, as it showcases a participation in an event of tradition in which past and present are constantly mediated.

Precisely in virtue of this mediation, as Gadamer clarifies, this horizon is far from presenting itself as a finalized product, because it is continuously undergoing transformations in the course of our interpretative encounters with the world. As prejudices constitute our interpretative being, they are continually tested, evaluated, and modified throughout our encounters with works of art, written texts, cultures, among others. This disciplining process, without a goal extrinsic to itself, is what Gadamer emphasizes as *Bildung*, accounting for the participation of an agent in one's own inherited language, culture, customs, and so on, vis-à-vis one's exposure and openness to viewpoints different from one's own (Fairfield 2014). And so, on account of this humanistic education continuously edifying and sharpening our prejudice-laden character – which is never a matter of an arbitrary or subjective volition in virtue of Gadamer's revitalization of «tradition» –, the interpretative processes that we enter in, rather than requiring a methodological instruction, transpire in light of our humanistic faculties. These are, for example, taste, tact, and common sense, as not only aesthetic, but also historical, moral, and social competences, enabling us to distinguish and evaluate what makes certain interpretations good or bad (Verde, 2009: 87-96). In virtue of our prejudiced character and humanistic disciplining, it is indispensable that we "recognize the relevance and possible truth-value of what we hear from those with whom we engage in such a way" (Verde, 2022: 17, my translation). To note, not in terms of a truth evaluated for its adequacy between the native's point of view and an extrinsic reality, but in terms of being acknowledged and accepted by us as something realistic, instructive, and true, integrable in our understanding of the world to the extent of being something efficient to guide our projects and actions, and to inform our practices, choices, and principles.

Consequently, in view of *Bildung*, we can complete the hermeneutical triad that Gadamer strives to reinvigorate, that of prejudice, tradition, and in addition, authority. In respect to authority, Gadamer criticizes its conflation to power, as the Enlightenment intended, as well as the subsequent demand to produce knowledge autonomously without subverting one's thought to anyone (Dostal 2016). In contrast, this mode of authority emphasizes our humility in engaging with interlocutors not on the terms of the latter's dominion over their intentionality, but on the terms of their competence to orient our interpretations in the comprehension of a subject matter, or "matter at hand" (*die Sache*). As a result, the event of interpretation does not

unfold as an operation of confirmation or falsification of given truths, without entailing that it occurs in a subjectively arbitrary or nihilistic way. As Robert Barnes contends, in view of the works concerning Omaha culture and the diverse contradictions that came to shape its academic quarrels[25]: "They would today remain rather lifeless books had they not been extensively supplemented by further writings" (Barnes, 1984: 234-235). This vitality accentuates the incongruity in praising the anthropologist for effectively disconnecting himself from any interpretative background, opposite to his insertion amidst ongoing conversations delving into specific issues common to a myriad of other works, authors, traditions, and so on[26]. Rather than final truths intended to be overthrown or deconstructed according to an adequacy to represent the native reality, these numerous interpretations add to the multiplicity of truths resulting from diverse meaningful experiences with cultural difference, set up against each other in the course of discussions created in favour of wanting to understand something, and really understand it well[27].

In virtue of a resignation of the metaphysical aspirations to discover one and only one single truth, it becomes trivial to attempt to, e.g., reflexively dissect one's conditioned partiality, or consign individualized interpretations to heuristic fancies, in order to account for the multiple, and at times contradictory, nature of the interpretations made. This is because the problematic tension arising from the multiple interpretations that anthropology is capable of offering is, precisely, what makes possible the cultivation of disputes and, ultimately, is what sustains the discipline.

To wrap up, the vicious character of the hermeneutic circle, within the scope of the discipline, is to be tied precisely to an aspiration to divorce the anthropologist's self from the interpretative process. However, considering the historically effected consciousness of the anthropologist, and, therefore, the historicity of truth, this erasure of one's self is not only

[25] This controversy pertains to, even though is not restricted to, the comments made by Edward Sapir (1938) to the work of J. O. Dorsey (1885) on Omaha society, who, when at the stage of confirming the ethnological data collected, would often underline that widely accepted pieces of information had been recurrently denied by Two Crows.

[26] Particularly, LiPuma brushes on this issue in anthropology when discussing the disassociation of anthropologists from ethnocentric laymen, emphasizing the supremacy of the ethnographer as an "autonomous commodity producer" (2000: 15), as if disengaged from any social relationships, influences, sources, or other body of works. In his paper, Rosas (2011) criticizes the value that is assigned to ethnographies made in view of this intellectual discontinuity, instead of valuing the acknowledgment of certain invisible genealogies from which interpretations resume discussions on topics from previous ones.

[27] This does not entail that any interpretation validates itself on terms of its particularity, but rather that this validity can only be defined in view of the challenges exerted by the confluence of interpretations to which it is drawn, and from where it can be appropriately evaluated, praised, or discarded.

unfeasible, but undesirable, as it is in virtue of one's prejudices that given things acquire the disclosive meanings that they possess. Rather than a corrupting attribute, as the Enlightenment tradition had conceived, the transformative nature of our prejudices sets up the very viability of the hermeneutic circle, and, consequently, it is what allows for the anthropological curiosity, the plurality of interpretations, and the cultivation of its knowledge.

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In a closing remark, we can bear in mind Rorty's advice: "We will be epistemological where we understand perfectly well what is happening but want to codify it in order to extend, or strengthen, or teach, or «ground» it. We must be hermeneutical where we do not understand what is happening but are *honest enough to admit it*" (Rorty, 1979: 321, my emphasis). That is, to be hermeneutical in order to avoid sacrificing the anthropological curiosity for cultural difference in the name of a transcendental reference that has little to offer other than, at best, a metaphysical comfort, and at worst, a paradoxical implausibility.

In this chapter, I argued how the scientific inception of the discipline, with its epistemological and methodological principles to undertake a theoretical and descriptive exercise, was to require an expunction of the anthropologist's self in order to embrace the native's perspective on reality. Subsequently, in the face of antagonistic, and at times contradictory, interpretations made by distinct anthropologists after working in similar sites, we chased its repercussions to the way the discipline reconsidered one's self in one's material and one's understanding projected onto the native. The aftermath led, I argued, to two contradictions. On the one hand, while splitting itself from an encompassing mixture of ethnocentric entities, the anthropologist's own self was recognized as inescapable to the interpretations done. On the other hand, although native ideas had to be understood in reference to the whole of cultural life, this context could not but be a heuristic projection extraneous to the native. These contradictions went on to entail a paradox. While aspiring to apprehend culturally different realities, the validity of its accounts was to be perceived and evaluated in virtue of an alienating reasoning, beyond both the anthropologist's and the native's comprehension.

Subsequently, as I argued, these contradictions are to be understood against the backdrop of a cleavage between the anthropologist's self and the interpretative process. However, acknowledging the precondition and indispensability of one's prejudices, I argued how these were crucial for recognizing, in the hermeneutic circle, the process through which to understand

the plurality of interpretations and its viability for the cultivation of knowledge, as well as, ultimately, to invigorate the anthropological curiosity rather than extinguishing it on behalf of an implausibility.

Chapter 3. – On the Anthropologist's Judgements

3.1. Tikopia, infanticide, and reasoning

In the course of his fieldwork in Tikopia, Raymond Firth witnessed occasions of infanticide, as "an unwanted child is turned down at birth and it is allowed to smother" (2011: 509), recording the explanations given to him as referring to the degree of food availability, bastardy, and potential conflicts following the childbirth of too many male babies. Accordingly, Firth emphasizes infanticide as "a method of population control alternative to *coitus interruptus*", revealing Tikopia notions of human life as "correlated with their ideas of family life and (…) their economic situation", in terms of which they have adopted a "realistic point of view" (*ibid.*: 644) in their achievement of a societal adjustment to their environment. Subsequent to European contact and its governmental administration, infanticide was declared forbidden in virtue of "the moral preconceptions of the interpreters of the Christian religion" (*ibid.*: 512), and so, Firth condemns these interferences on the grounds of causing a disruption of Tikopia's equilibrium for the sake of an enforcement of European moral attitudes on communities who "before our arrival had worked out a satisfactory adjustment to the population problem":

> "It might be thought then, that here, if anywhere, was a case for *minimum interference*, for allowing the community to maintain its adjustment to its peculiar specialized environment. It might be thought that the so-called sanctity of human life is not an end in itself, but the means to an end, *to the preservation of society*. And just as in a civilized community in time of war, civil disturbance or action against crime, life is taken to preserve life, so in Tikopia infants just born might be allowed to have their faces turned down, and to be debarred from the world which they have merely glimpsed, in order that the economic equilibrium might be preserved, and *the society maintain its balanced existence*" (Firth, 2011 [1936]: 512, my emphasis).

Accordingly, Firth advocates for the moral viability of infanticide in Tikopia in view of its usefulness in economic and social functions, and therefore, this practice should be respected and preserved for the balance it furnishes Tikopia society, regardless of its evaluations by Western value judgements.

In order to unravel the implications subjacent to this reasoning, we can turn to a discussion of the relationship between knowledge and judgements at the professional inception of the discipline, referring in particular to the ideas of Malinowski, and of Ruth Benedict and Melville Herskovits[28].

According to Malinowski's theoretical framework, cultures were to be individually envisioned as cohesive and integrated totalities, whose idiosyncratic variations would reveal an underlying correspondence to universal requirements, a "coherent whole (…) owing its completeness and self-sufficiency to the fact that it satisfies the whole range of basic, instrumental and integrative needs" (Malinowski, 1960: 38-40). Therefore, by evaluating culturally different beliefs and practices against the standards of value of one's own culture, as missionaries and colonial administrators could not help but do, was to "cut the taproot of his [native's] vitality" (2014: 751). Overall, no matter how immoral certain practices may appear to be, one could not typify them as vicious or invalid, because this form of criticism, derived as is was from an evaluation by values external to the culture, could not but misunderstand the moral viability such practices held[29].

So, in view of this incompatibility between culturally different values, how should a moral disagreement be approached vis-à-vis one's judgements?

Particularly, Herskovits had asserted that engaging in cultural alterity obliges the anthropologist to embrace a disinterested and resigned attitude, because of the inevitable fact that "there is no way to play this game of making judgements across cultures except with a *loaded dice*" (1972: 52, my emphasis; *see also* Benedict, 1960 [1934]: 17-32). That is, because one's judgements are anchored in one's culture rather than mirroring universal and absolute values, they are expressed by reference to one's own historically and culturally constituted experience; as a result, they cannot but be ethnocentric vindications, distorting and mischaracterizing the ulterior significance that a culturally different belief or practice holds,

[28] As the former is a major figure of early British anthropology, while the latter pair refers to the foundations of the American tradition of the discipline, I do not intend to conflate each respective historical roots, nor the retrospective developments that these lines of thought had come to respectively develop (*see* Darnell 2021, Stocking Jr. 1992c). However, as Hatch (1983: 70) argues, despite their significant differences, they nonetheless share similar points, and it is in accordance with their affinity that I will develop the arguments of this discussion.

[29] Taking into account this vindication, it is logical that Firth, opening his ethnography, expresses his wishes that the knowledge presented in his book shall only be used by *taŋata poto* (persons of wisdom), entrusting "that nothing which they find herein will be used to the discomfiture of the people or as a lever to disturb their mode of life, whatever be the motive. If this is observed I will have made no breach of faith" (Firth, 2011: 49).

e.g. for the satisfaction of needs, or for one's self-fulfilment within a cultural milieu. As to offer an example, Herskovits exemplifies with the comments of his Surinamese guide:

> "When the Suriname Bush Negro, shown a flashlight, admires it and then quotes the proverb: «White man's magic isn't black magic», he is merely reaffirming his faith in his own culture. He is pointing out that the stranger, for all his mechanical devices, would be lost in the Guiana jungle without the aid of his Bush Negro friends" (Herskovits, 1972: 21).

A Guyana jungle is not, let us say, an American forest, and likewise, American ways of orientation are to meet certain shortcomings if deployed to navigate Guyanese lands. But additionally, as Herskovits argues, to judge the former's mode of orientation in light of the latter's domain, or vice versa, is not only inadequate, but ultimately pointless, because both are constituted as disparate guiding resources consigned to each one's own cultural space[30]. One cannot and should not be judged in terms of the other. These loaded dices, or evaluations ethnocentrically conditioned, are to emphasize the incommensurability between the values of culturally different beliefs and practices, as these can only be thoroughly assessed by reference to the context of their respective culture.

In view of this, the anthropologist was to advance himself under an ethically absent involvement at the moment of coming across what he perceived to be a morally abhorrent custom. He was to commit himself to the conversation insofar as to apprehend the contextual conditions that substantiated and corroborated the validity that these practices held. The objective of this premise at the inception of a professionalized discipline, overall, was that the anthropologist's impartiality could be a methodological technique to solve these moral discords between his and the native's moral standards[31].

However, this mode of involvement entails a contradiction. On the one hand, it is sustained under a suspension of judgements, on the grounds that these can only be expressed after an adequate and appropriate understanding of the cultural patterns that orient such apparently

[30] To clarify with another argument, Ruth Benedict exemplifies with a comparation between Greek and Byzantine art, arguing that the "achievement in one cannot be judged in terms of the other, because each was attempting to achieve quite different needs" (Benedict, 1960: 56; *see also* Reichard 1930).

[31] This configuration, accordingly, was justified and legitimized to settle pressing issues concerning transcultural interrelationships, whether in view of administrative affairs in overseas colonies in the case of British anthropology (Lamont 2014, Campbell 2014), or regarding cultural integration in a multiethnic nation and the handling of native reservations in the case of the American discipline (Stocking 1992c, Liss 2015). The objective was to be, ultimately, the accomplishment of scientific objectivity (*see* Herskovits, 1972: 90, 152), to the extent that reason and rational cogitation would prevail over the immediacy of ethnocentric, emotional reactions.

immoral practices. On the other hand, the moral viability of these practices is antecedently affirmed to any external evaluations, despite not seeming to be due to ethnocentric value precepts. In this manner, as the attainment of true ethnographic knowledge is conceived to occur through the suspension of judgments, culturally different practices are aprioristically inferred as reinforcing the vitality of a whole that sustains them, despite the anthropologist not recognizing it yet.

Seen in this way, in view of the futility of one's own values to judge different customs, the aspiration to understand their viability from the internal viewpoint of a given culture shares a fundamental premise with a subordination to universal values to terminate discords. It is that of achieving a reductionist substratum in terms of which two arguments can be rationally weighed against each other, in terms of a sphere of transcultural standards – and consequentially ahistorical and atemporal –, around which a relative set of values is locally chartered and organized. In both of these situations – whether in terms of an absolute nature of universal values inhering in human nature, or in terms of variable values relative to cultures –, the incompatibility of moralities is to be understood in reference to a range of value criteria shared by virtue of a common humanity, in its autonomous factuality and independent from the moral discord at hand; the bulk of which the anthropologist aspires to apprehend in order to justly understand the validity of local customs.

Consequently, we can return to Firth's assertions about infanticide in Tikopia. Firth suspends his value judgements to understand the viability of infanticide that, unfit to be measured by his own standards, must be assessed from the native's perspective. And so, Firth advances infanticide in an argumentative reasoning from which he severs himself, under an ethically absent involvement. The outcome is the championing of a utilitarian conduct stipulated for Tikopia, favouring the sacrifice of some individuals for the overall well-being of society, contradictorily postulated in terms of a reductionist reasoning extraneous, and ultimately alien, to the islanders themselves.

3.2. Transcultural judgements and double standards

We have seen how the possibility of settling moral disagreements, in the face of culturally incompatible values, was to be tied to the anthropologist's ability to discern the contextual conditions informing the moral viability of apparently immoral practices. Consequently, the anthropologist was to conform to an ethically absent involvement, resulting in the contradiction

previously discussed. Nonetheless, an additional, and partially complementary, contradiction can be drawn out in reference to this antithesis.

The preclusion of value judgements for the attainment of knowledge can be interrogated in view of the astute and penetrating critiques that, in the course of fieldwork, the anthropologist's own cultural ideals and motifs were exposed to, bearing in mind the way that Samoa people criticized with contempt *Romeo and Juliet* (Mead, 1928: 155), or the manner in which Zuñi people mocked accounts of suicide (Benedict, 1960: 109), or how a group of Yanomami critically discussed the film *Jaws* (Chagnon, 2013 [1968]: 259). It is hasty to hypothesize that these evaluations amount to parochial adherences to one's own precepts, rather than distinguishing in these comments a genuine inclination to address perplexing values and behaviours that, even though conflicting with one's own, engender an opportunity to set up edifying conversations pertaining common topics. Considering these aforementioned dispositions in the face of irreconcilable ideals, reversing the scenario, how should Margaret Mead (1977 [1935]: 163-233) have reasoned when she was confronted with the manners of a Mundugumor community, whose aggressiveness and hostility of its individuals in interpersonal relations was reminiscent of the masculinity traits she was deeply invested in denouncing within her own society? Or how should Ruth Underhill (1985 [1979]: 92; *see also* Lavender, 2006: 117-137) have responded when confronted with assertions, from a Papago matriarch, that the source and strength of the feminine power derives from women's biological abilities, when she was trying to dispel these same arguments of biological essentialism to demonstrate that gender was a social construct shaped by cultural norms?

Before expanding to a discussion on these questions, we can consider an ethnography of Vincent Crapanzano, as well as how a synthesis between knowledge and judgement, although tentatively sought at the turn of the writing culture movement, emphasized an additional contradiction in its antithesis.

In his fieldwork with white nationalists during the apartheid period in South Africa, Crapanzano argues how, rather than seeking to account for and justify the claims of his informants from their own point of view, he had come to South Africa "morally and politically outraged at the brute, unmediated legislation of human inferiority" (1985b: 23). From the inception of the project, he had intended to carry out not only a scientific and intellectual endeavour, but a moral one as well. Predisposed to address what he himself called a continuous current of ridiculous statements, Crapanzano describes the bewildering claims his informants made, in respect to a self-proclaimed racial superiority as the justification for "keeping Black man in his own place" (*ibid.*: 185), about Illuminati operating behind the scenes through their

secret church of Satan in the region (*ibid.*: 212), or about how the world needed a Hitler in every country (*ibid.*: 251). Rather than coherently justifying a rational articulation for these moral positions, Crapanzano invariably outlines these allegations to deconstruct, identify, and refute their arguments, illusions, stereotypes, and "bits of knowledge passed on like folklore" (*ibid.*: 271). Instead of distilling the contextual conditions that formed these arguments, Crapanzano does not feel inhibited in vehemently criticizing what he perceives to be nonsensical contentions.

As Crapanzano was working at the corner of the writing culture movement and its crisis of representation, the kinds of knowledge sought and the uses to which it was to be put were being called into question, denouncing the moral bankruptcy of an ethically neutral disposition in view of the political consequences underlying the very practice of the discipline (Berreman 1972, Wolff 1972). Yearning to address the controversial role of the West in disrupting local livelihoods and moralities, anthropologists were to be encouraged to undertake fieldwork within the confines, or at the margins, of their own society, deemphasizing the study of exotic others in lieu of a transition "beyond the liberal posture of relativistic tolerance, toward one of radical engagement in the struggles of the powerless against the holders of power" (Stocking Jr., 2001: 321). For instance, wanting to focus on the power discrepancies between the colonial centre of French administration and the marginalized periphery of Berber rural communities, Paul Rabinow justifies his choice to undertake fieldwork in Morocco along these lines:

> "I have chosen to study a group of elite French administrators, colonial officers as well as social reformers, all concerned with urban planning in the 1920s. By "studying up" I find myself in a more comfortable position than I would be were I "giving voice" on behalf of dominated or marginal groups. I have chosen a powerful group of men concerned with issues of politics and form: neither heroes nor villains, they seem to afford me the necessary anthropological distance, being separate enough to prevent an easy identification, yet *close enough* to afford a charitable, if *critical*, understanding" (Rabinow, 1986: 258-259, my emphasis).

In other words, were a set of values perceived to be closer, a higher degree of criticism could be allowed and accounted for. Distinguishing the anthropologist's own home from the native's remote site, judgements were to be plausible in a more familiar context to the anthropologist, to the extent that his understanding of commonplace beliefs would be sufficient to properly address and denounce moral lapses.

Working in a society predicated in the power of a white minority over black people, derived from a particular history of expansionism, racism, and colonialism, Crapanzano states he cannot help but be actively involved in criticizing these ideas of the superiority of white nationalism, of racial segregation, and of overall inequality. However, rather than a disruption with the previous anthropological tradition[32], this (illusory) transition (Darnell, 2001: 296-301) reveals a parallel, complementary dimension to the contradiction of an ethically absent involvement, to the extent that it reinforces an exclusive validity of ethical judgments within the boundaries of one's own culture.

To clarify, we can take into account Edward LiPuma's criticism of the overlooking of particularities shaping moral disagreements between indigenous communities and "missionaries, colonial officials, medical personnel, and agricultural extension workers", despite the amount of "statements urging anthropologists to be sensitive to context" (LiPuma, 2000: 28; cf. Taussig 1980). This is because an active posture is mirrored in efforts to scrutinize the alleged validity of Western values to contest local moralities, outlining the effects of Western expansionist movements in their corruptive interference of native traditions. These ethical stances, consequently, materialize in a dichotomization between an «us» and a «them», where the former is questioned for its validity to contest different values, and the latter is self-validated in its genuineness. It is a contradiction tied to a double standard of cultural evaluation that Stocking Jr. had harked back all the way to Franz Boas himself, as Boas upheld "a universalistic one in terms of which he criticized the society in which he lived and a relativistic one in terms of which he defended the cultural alternative" (Stocking Jr., 1992b: 112; *see also* Verde 2010). In other words, as the society of the anthropologist is conceived as a contingent convention criticisable in terms of universalistic values, the society of the native is legitimized as naturally valid in terms of relativistic values. The result is that an ethically absent involvement is tied to the devaluation of Western values in view of the natural legitimacy of the other's morality.

Therefore, we can see the implications of these two mutually correlative contradictions. By justifying the genuine character of a given community in virtue of a cultural distance, the preclusion of external judgements is reasoned under an inferred moral viability from the internal perspective of such culture. As a result, this antithesis holds that difference enacts a

[32] Franz Boas was notoriously acclaimed for his active engagement in the pressing issues of his society, in respect to anti-war efforts, racialism and racism, social justice, and so on (*see* Stocking Jr. 1992b, Harkin 2017). Furthermore, this commitment to bring anthropological knowledge into public discussions had not been impoverished among the subsequent generation of his students (for a comprehensive overview, *see* King 2019).

sharp division segregating cultures from each other, as hermetically sealed units across which judgements are doomed to be misapplied, and hence, unfit to contest arguments pertaining to different values. It is the defence of a moral isolationism (Midgley 1981), as values can only be held as valid within the boundaries of one's society.

However, certain shortcomings arise to address concisely the way in which moral disagreements were challenged, remodelled, and responded to locally, often in concurrence to tensions provoked by the anthropologist himself. For instance, when discussing superincision in Tikopia, Firth emphasizes the recent adoption of a razor blade, alternatively to using a sharp shell of a bivalve, hence justifying its operation at a much earlier age than before in opposition to postponing it until a later period; "as otherwise he would not be able to bear the pain" (Firth, 2011: 520). Colin Turnbull, on the other hand, illustrates how the *molimo*, a sacred horn-like trumpet used by his Mbuti fellows, were currently sculpted from the metal of stolen water drainpipes in roadside construction sites, as it does not rot like wood, it is easier to make, and still makes a great sound (Turnbull, 1961: 76). Or, additionally, as Walter Goldschmidt remarks that Nomlaki mythological narratives are "highly colored by the influence of Christianity and knowledge of the modern world in its detail and imagery" (Goldschmidt, 1951: 349), as Nomlaki cultural themes had been reinterpreted and incorporated in their own understanding of their selves. To regard these transformations as homogenous exertions of a Western morality is to fail to account for the reasoning diverse people attested to when evaluating and reinterpreting conflicting ideas and practices against the backdrop of their own values.

To note, I do not discuss the work of Crapanzano during the apartheid period of South Africa to question its legitimacy or relevance, but rather to interrogate its underlying connotations that value judgements can only be articulated in correspondence to a greater degree of familiarity, affirming that an ethically active involvement can only occur towards the peers of one's society. Justifying the pronouncement of counter-arguments in the midst of familiarity, what is demonstrated is not its compelling credibility, but rather a restriction of its validity on the basis of distance. An active engagement in correlation to the values of one's own society contends that it is only possible to produce a fruitful conversation with one's rational peers; hence, rather than a synthesis between knowledge and judgements, as it was to be intended, it emphasized the contradiction of a double standard of cultural evaluation in its antithesis.

3.3. Astonishment and morality

To sum, we have discussed how an antithesis between judgements and knowledge comprises two contradictions. On the one hand, it holds the contradiction of an ethically absent involvement, where the suspension of judgements is performed under a judgement of the validity of culturally different practices from the internal point of view of their respective cultures. On the other hand, it sustains the contradiction of a double standard of cultural evaluation, where one's own society is contingently outlined under universalistic values, while that of the native is naturally legitimated under relativistic values. As a result, we can highlight a paradox. To do so, we can turn to a discussion of contributions made by Clifford Geertz and Richard Shweder to rethink this relationship between anthropology and morality.

As Geertz affirms, in a vindication for a preservation of the unsettling spirit of the works of Boas and Benedict (*see* Darnell, 2001: 289-296, Shweder, 2005: 1-9), the incompatibility of values leads us to emphasize the incongruity of assigning a prevalence to a given set of values over another one, precluding the possibility of reaching any form of moral consensus in the occurrence of a discord: "Everyone – Sikhs, Socialists, Positivists, Irishmen – is not going to come around to a common opinion concerning what is decent and what is not, what is just and what is not, what is beautiful and what is not; not soon, perhaps not ever" (Geertz, 1986: 109). In the face of these conflicting moralities, the anthropologist's task and professional value revolves around his ability to prevent a comfortable condescension in being ourselves, of cultivating a lack of interest towards the different values that conflict with one's own. Hence, this is achieved by providing de-familiarized contrastive contexts for reading audiences without the cross-cultural experience that anthropologists have in the course of fieldwork, thereby destabilizing the balance of that which is taken for granted: "It has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle. (…) We hawk the anomalous, peddle the strange. Merchants of astonishment" (2000b: 64). In this manner, the anthropologist is to be extolled for his ability to dispel any adherence to the proficiency of one's values to resolve moral disagreements. The antithesis between knowledge and judgments, rather than being a means through which to achieve some form of resolution amidst moral conflicts, becomes thusly an end in itself, highlighting the ultimate purpose of the discipline.

We can turn, for example, to the way Shweder approaches and considers the case of Roop Kanwar, a Rajput woman who immolated herself in front of a large crowd, with the head of her dead husband resting on her lap. Shweder discusses what might have been Kanwar's

conceptions of things and her feelings towards the act, as a conceivable speculation that she "herself understood and experienced her immolation as an astonishing moment when her body and its senses, profane things, became fully sacred, and hence invulnerable to pain, through an act of sacrifice by a goddess seeking eternal union with her god-man" (Shweder, 1991: 17). Presenting this conjecture of *suttee*, Shweder further claims Roop Kanwar to be rationally justified in her conception of things, as we are also rationally justified in our conception of things. Things are kept apart by contextualization, the author claims, as they are "arguments in different worlds" (*ibid.*: 18). This case is used to support Shweder's premises concerning moral conflicts, as he advocates for a permission to diversity on the grounds of the coequality, or noncomparability, of divergent forms. This noncomparability, accordingly, refers to the non-existence of transcultural standards by which we can judge or evaluate these different practices. There is no way to resolve a moral conflict other than recognizing that there is no way to resolve a moral conflict, to paraphrase Shweder (1993: 279).

In this vein[33], intending to remove the objective foundations informing the reality of cultural practices, Shweder claims that the ensuing subjectivity is not to be devalued as local fantasies: "The fact that there is no uniform reality (God, foundation, truth) does not mean that there are no realities (gods, foundations, truths) at all" (1991: 69). The real trick and noble challenge, accomplished by the anthropologist, is to view the world from the many points of view, transcending the shackles of one's own tradition to be "constantly moving from one objective world to the next, inside and then out, outside and then in, all the while standing back and trying to make sense of the whole journey. (…) To be the student and beneficiary of all traditions, and the slave to none" (*ibid.*: 68). Affirming an ethical apology for this «manywhere» standpoint, the anthropologist is to set himself apart from the horror, outrage, and uninterestedness of non-anthropologists, to the extent that the professional practitioner rather feels astonished in the face of difference, flipping into a world-revising mood, bracketing out "our own initial (and automatic) emotional/visceral reactions" (2003a: 177) in order to realize how different arguments in different worlds are valid from the point of view of their internal morality. This nonjudgemental ability of the anthropologist, to represent the Other from the standpoint of the Other to validate the arguments of the Other, is what sets out, and is to give purpose to, anthropology in its differentiation from "late-twentieth-century version of cognitive and moral imperialism" (Menon & Shweder, 1998: 185).

[33] To clarify, Shweder (1991: 56-72) sets out to formulate a post-Nietzschean approach to anthropology. Drawing from a Nietzschean notion of tradition and its prejudgements as imaginary phantoms of the mind, Shweder claims that these, even though social constructs, are nevertheless real.

As a distinctive feature of both authors' proposals to access knowledge, anthropologists do not judge[34]. This methodological principle enables Geertz to celebrate the ethnographer in a parallel to "a eunuch in a harem" (2000a: 38), that is, applauding the stolidity of the anthropologist, as a laboriously achieved and precariously maintained success in overruling any moral reaction for the sake of carrying out a scientific observation. Accordingly, this involves the contradictions mentioned before. Without necessarily dealing with an ambiguity between a call of tolerance for others so intolerantly made (cf. Geertz, 2000b: 45; Shweder, 2003b: 350), we can rather consider these author's advocations for an ethically absent involvement under the premise that an active engagement is only manageable with one's rational peers. Consequently, these contradictions entail a paradox.

To clarify, we can be reminded of the story that Herodotus tells of Darius, the king of Persia. Darius summoned the subjects of his empire, asking the Greeks if they were capable of eating the bodies of their dead parents. His Greek informants, accustomed to burning their dead, answered with disgust they would never eat them for any money in the world. Then, Darius turned to his Callatiae subjects, asking them if they would burn the bodies of their dead parents. His Callatiae subordinates retorted exasperatedly that they would never do such a dreadful thing, as they were indeed accustomed to eating them. Amused by the clash of these moralities, Darius then stood back, rejoicing on the eccentricity not only of these different customs, but also of the reactions each one has of the other's practices. Darius, after all, knows that both of these customs are no more than mere tribal idiosyncrasies:

> "The Persian King appears there in the role of the detached, sophisticated, neutral observer above the dispute who understands other people's difficulties. He is the one who can see through the superficial symbols to the reality behind them. The Persians, after all, neither burned their own dead nor ate them. They knew very well that they had solved the problem of disposal in the only *right* way, namely by putting corpses on high towers and letting the vultures eat them" (Midgley, 1991: 85; *see also* Lukes, 2008: 27-28).

As Herodotus showcases, this story reflects the value of a nonjudgemental stance as a guiding principle in ruling over a number of different communities. Darius was a ruler and conqueror who maintained an orderly submission and peaceful domination under his command. As Darius

[34] To note, this is not to say that, as individuals, they contend that they should be inhibited from judgements; but rather that their primary task as anthropologists requires them "to look at how the people we study judge judgement" (Rosen, 2005: 13). Once knowledge is accomplished, judgements may eventuate from their standpoint as individuals.

perceives the inferiority of his subjects, he does not feel contested or challenged when other ways, e.g. of disposing of dead bodies, differ from his own. As he does not recognize any authority over the truths presented by these different practices, he indulges in the conversation with a disinterested stance, rejoicing on the contrast between one another while dismissing any confrontation against his own practices[35].

Accordingly, in regarding beliefs and practices as local idiosyncrasies justified in their own conceptions of things, a moral gap is created and sustained, on the grounds that the former can only have significance, and in this manner be consequential, among one's ethical peers. As a result of this moral unevenness, as Elvin Hatch argues, one avoids judging what one perceives to be an inconsequential statement. As we refrain from judging what we perceive to be a primitive culture by the same standards through which we would judge what we regard as a higher civilization, e.g. Russia or the United States, we showcase to "have lower moral expectations" for them, "hence we are less critical of them" (Hatch, 1983: 108). We would not condemn Trobriand people for slavery and repression, Hatch goes on, the same way we would condemn France.

By suspending judgments as an expression of faith that these practices are morally viable, the result is not a stance of compassionate detachment, or dispassionate respect. On the contrary, it is an advocation for an abstention from the conversation itself, on the grounds of a moral commitment towards the exclusive validity of beliefs within the spaces that inform and sustain them. In view of this, different practices are envisioned as valuable only for a faculty in illustrating what their practitioners are identified to be, and which, reciprocally, demonstrate the validity of what they practice. Within the discipline, it is as if, on meeting others face-to-face, the anthropologist had one's back already turned to them (Ingold, 2014: 386). It results in the reduction of the ethnographic exercise to a collection of idiosyncrasies and an arrangement similar to that of butterfly colours, whereby arguments in the likes of "the stones are alive" are stimulating insofar as they can be arranged e.g. within a moral system of animism the others abide to, "attending to what they say *for what it says about them*" (2018a: 26).

Consequently, as one fosters silence and disinterest in the face of arguments which clash with one's own moral stances, one fails to critically engage with the truth-claims that these arguments could confront one with. It is to dismiss their value as genuine perspectives to

[35] One may just as well be reminded of Hugo Malan, an interlocutor of Crapanzano in South Africa, described as a white supremacist with a cold, harsh, chauvinistic, and racialist view of human nature, relentlessly rational with his equals, but "paradoxically, warm and sympathetic, given to trivializing his conversation with women and men whose intelligence he finds inferior to his own" (Crapanzano, 1985b: 65-66).

influence, test, or evaluate our own. As Bernard Williams argues, commenting on the encounter between the genuinely horrified Spanish *bravos* and the Aztecs' sacrificial temples, "it would surely be absurd to regard this reaction as merely parochial or self-righteous. It rather indicated something which their conduct did not always indicate: that they regarded the Indians as men rather than as wild animals" (Williams, 2012 [1972]: 24). An abstention from judgements in order to produce knowledge dilutes, in this manner, not only the very possibility for a meaningful conversation across cultural difference, but furthermore stipulates a radical alienness between incompatible forms of morality, to the extent that it precludes the very occurrence of a disagreement (*see* Moody-Adams, 2002 [1997]: 29-43). This is because not only the conflict between arguments is considered as pointless, but inevitably as absurd, because judgements cannot even mirror a shared plane of contestation – hence, even any resemblance of a conflict is but an appearance.

At best, it is a case of anorexia curiosa (Spiro 1986)[36]. At worst, it reveals an ethical disregard, as anthropologists "enter into genuine human contact with their subjects of study when all the while they are (…) not disclosing their true feelings about what they are observing and hence in their silence not only lying but also being condescending. They are assuming that their host people cannot, like adults, take adverse reaction" (Jarvie, 2016 [1984]: 86). Consequently, it results in a paradox, because while people are accorded with a shared and common ability to reason, to rationally justify oneself – "the merest decency" (Geertz, 1983: 16) –, an exemption from any moral responsibility mirrors the lower level to which their ideas and practices are displaced.

3.4. Moral challenges and the dialogical ethic

Up until this point, we considered the contradictions and the paradox that an antithesis between the production of knowledge and the anthropologist's judgements entailed for the practice of the discipline. Alternatively, we can envision how, rather than an opposition between them, an active disposition of judgements is viable and ethically indispensable for our cross-cultural understandings. To adjust Benedict's earlier remarks about the incompatibility between different artistic styles, Greek and Byzantine art do differ, along the lines of their respective

[36] In other words, boredom, as intellectual curiosity is limited to, and nourished by, strange customs of exotic peoples, and therefore becoming trivial in its aspirations and accomplishments: "Having already documented the entire range of cultural differences, we no longer astonish" (Spiro, 1986: 276).

production, presentation, and aesthetic appreciation, but they can – and inevitably do – confront each other, provoking a clash as their producers and admirers observe, contemplate, and learn from the other mode of art. Particularly in anthropology, we can state how this mutually reinforcing character between knowledge and judgements have shaped the cross-cultural conversations facilitated by the discipline.

In his ethnography, Evans-Pritchard defends his statement that "witches, as the Azande conceive them, clearly cannot exist" (1976 [1937]: 18), describing his judgemental stance throughout his fieldwork as he would always argue back to Azande fellows, criticizing e.g. statements concerning the concurrence of two disparate events, as utterly nonsensical accounts of misfortunes which had very apparent causal explanations. However, it is through this argumentative disposition that Evans-Pritchard comes to understand, describe, and even sometimes unintentionally adopt, an Azande reasoning of witchcraft, as it provides a rich and meaningful correlation between seemingly disparate events whose only relation, to the ethnographer, was to be their coincidence in time and space, and poorly diluted under the concept of luck. Against the backdrop of his scientific-practical reasoning, which dismisses any sort of correlation beside a trivial coincidence, Evans-Pritchard, nonetheless, comes to understand, and experiment with, new inventive ways of interpreting and addressing these events in valuable, meaningful, and compelling manners.

Additionally, Dorothy Lee laments the poor understanding of maternity within her own society, as it encourages “me to see myself as *having*, possessing, a baby” (Lee, 1986 [1976]: 77), as if the child was a production springing from an enclosed, self-sufficient ‘I’. What Lee wishes to express, she says, is not that she is a mother to two children, but rather that she is a mother two times, her maternity arising twofold as two different, distinct relations binding two specific, idiosyncratic persons. Wintu people, she argues, surpass this deficiency, who never say ‘I have a son’, or even ‘a son’ or ‘a mother’, but say ‘a-her-son’ and ‘a-his-mother’, revealing both ends of the relatedness: “I like the way a Wintu in reference to his mother will say, «she-whom-I-made-into-mother», even though he is the fourth child. I like it because it gives recognition to the fact that this is not a repetition of the same event. A new mother has been born, mother-to-*this*-child, and a new relationship of motherness has come into being” (*ibid.*: 79). Hence, these considerations don’t depart from ahistorical considerations of alternative worlds, but spring from a critical reflection of what Lee considers as a more genuine way to perceive and describe the relations she experiences, in opposition to her own mathematical and classificatory way.

What both cases drawn here intend to emphasize is that, at the occurrence of a conflict between arguments, the incompatibility of values is not a deterrent to the advancement of conversations. By complying to be involved and participate in a discord, one not only shows a willingness to understand the different principles being argued, but also a commitment to address common issues as well. Hence, Evans-Pritchard contests Azande magic in reference to his Western scientific reasoning, and Lee evaluates Wintu motherhood in light of her own maternal experience. When standing before discords like these ones, we do not just have to stubbornly impose our values on our interlocutors, or emphasize an inescapable disagreement and run off: "We can argue, and, if we are seriously interested, we shall do so" (Midgley, 1991: 76). It is, then, not a matter of seeking to converge towards a common single answer, or agreeing to disagree, but to engage in a conversation from where we can produce penetrating understandings regarding our own selves and our predicaments. Understood in this manner, judgements are not antithetical to knowledge, but are a prerequisite for dialogues to be fostered and refined.

In order to better understand this statement, it must be avoided envisioning dialogue as a process overseen by a knowing subject, deciphering the contextual reasoning carried out by one's conversational partner. It is under this characterization that it is justified that an access to true knowledge can only transpire with the reduction of one's interlocutors to representatives – or objects – of their e.g. culture, race, gender, class, nation, profession, age, and so on. In line with this framework, the purpose for engaging with others is subordinated to the rationale of an extrinsic plane to the conversation itself. This is so because intelligibility, amidst dialogical exchanges, is envisaged to be a matter of a transcendence beyond what the native is capable of articulating in his linguistic means. Therefore, as one dismisses to regard one's interlocutors as intelligible, one renounces the sharing of meaning as if they were not equal co-subjects:

> "Understanding the other is not a cognitive act that captures a self-sustained object in its pre-existing determination. *To understand the other is rather the renewal of our social co-existence* in which I am held to address and react to what another agent, as a rational and equal co-subject, expresses linguistically vis-à-vis a shared subject matter. To understand the other epistemically is thus to recognize the other as a rational partner in dialogue, and thus to also recognize the other ethically equal" (Kögler, 2014: 316, my emphasis).

The difference in moving from the former to the latter is, as Kogler contends, the respect that is expressed vis-à-vis the other's voice, recognizing the other's truth-claims as significant and

challenging outlooks, endowed with an authority to contest one's own. It is the moral core of the dialogical ethic.

It is in view of this respect that dialogues, rather than conducted in terms of an aspiration to account for the moral validity of different outlooks, are to be nourished under the anticipation of reaching a significant plan of understanding in view of the subject matter at hand. Overlooking the virtue of a reductionist approach, what is to be emphasized is "the art of conducting a real dialogue":

> "To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. (…) [It] consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weaker one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter)" (Gadamer, 2006 [1960]: 360-361).

Yet, as Gadamer warns, this does not mean that one conducts a dialogue. Rather, one is conducted in it. That is, "we fall into the conversation" (2006: 385), as the subject matter binds both of the conversational partners in an oriented articulation of intelligibility and, as a consequence, of a shared world (Risser 2014). For this reason, judgements are fundamental in order to reveal lapses and attune the planes of agreement anticipated.

Therefore, in recognizing namely with Geertz (2000b: 65; *see* Lukes, 2003: 8-26) that "morality [cannot be placed] beyond culture and knowledge beyond both", one is not required to advocate for a reductionist reasoning or a radical moral alienness. Precisely because different sets of values and moralities are historically and culturally constituted, they do not sustain a definitive, immobile, and unalterable form, but are continuously evaluated and transformed. Instead of holistically organized in a viable and autonomous fashion, their open and potentially transformative character exposes their inevitability of initiating a moral disagreement, to the extent of providing the very starting point of action and argumentation, from where a resort to evasion or abstention is not ethically possible[37] (*see* Midgley, 1991: 168-169, Lukes, 2008: 113-117).

[37] As Sandel (2009) showcases, there are innumerable standpoints from which to examine a determinate subject matter, but to do so emptied of any substantive engagement is to make it an impoverished argumentation. We can consider Santos Alexandre (2023) remarks about Greek tragedies, recognizing that their importance does not lie in the contention of unique and ultimate final answers,

This is the ethical commitment that Bernard Williams (2006 [1985]: 160-167) raises when distinguishing between «notional» and «real» confrontations. That is, at the core of a conflict between two divergent outlooks, a distinction arises when it occurs between a group of people for whom each of the outlooks advances a genuine option – a real confrontation –, from when one of the outlooks cannot sustain a serious option – a notional confrontation. For the former to occur, accordingly, one cannot endorse an argumentative viewpoint from nowhere, from where values can be described untendentiously and indifferently, but rather start from one's own experience and possibilities, "because the theory being sought is one of ethical life for us, and the point is not that the intuitions should be in some ultimate sense correct, but that they should be ours" (*ibid.*: 102). This entails that one is required to acknowledge in one's own contingency the key to setting up fertile dialogues, to the extent that it is in virtue of one's own values that determinate questions and arguments acquire relevance, that it is attainable to evaluate and integrate divergent arguments in a deeper contemplation of common topics, and that it is conceivable to contribute to a greater mutual clarification (Verde 2003). To do otherwise is to turn these conversations into pointless, notional confrontations.

Returning to the initial case with which I opened this chapter, and in order to complete this line of thought, we can reconsider Firth's reasoning about infanticide in Tikopia. In the face of this apparently immoral practice, Firth's suspension of judgments was to enable him to recognize the moral validity of infanticide in accordance with the contextual values of Tikopia islanders, self-validated in the naturalized legitimacy of its autonomous culture. Consequently, Firth defends the validity of infanticide for Tikopia islanders along a utilitarian outlook, in accordance with a reductionist reasoning extraneous to the islanders. This contention entails a paradox, to the extent that, as Tikopia people are to be regarded with an equivalent ability to reason as Firth, the former's exemption from an argumentative dispute illustrates the moral gap between them and the anthropologist. The result is that Firth does not envision infanticide as a serious feat, that is, as upholding challenging meanings and truth-claims capable of contesting his own notions of personhood, parenthood, social responsibility, among others. Infanticide is rendered as a local idiosyncrasy, and as a result, this ethically absent involvement mirrors an ethical disregard for culturally different ideas and practices, constraining the transcultural conversation established with his interlocutors.

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but rather in their very unsolvable nature and hence the very engagement that it compels us to undergo in view of their complex but common predicaments.

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In this chapter, I argued that, insofar that anthropology was to be tied to an antithesis between knowledge and judgments, its exercise was predicated in a contradiction, advancing the suspension of judgments to understand the validity of apparently immoral practices from the internal viewpoint of their respective culture. Subsequently, I argued how a second, complimentary contradiction was implicated concerning the scope of the validity of one's values, insofar as one's own society was to be evaluated under universalistic values while the native's naturally legitimated society was to be regarded under relativistic ones. From these two contradictions, concerning an ethically absent involvement and a double standard of cultural evaluation, I argued how this antithesis entailed a paradox, because while interlocutors were to be engaged under an equivalent ability to reason, their exemption from any moral responsibility mirrored the lower level to which they were displaced.

Alternatively, I considered how, instead of antithetical, judgements were viable and indispensable for the production of knowledge. This is because, as they develop in the course of conversations, their purpose is not to enforce a convergence or corroborate a divergence. Rather, judgements afford the very starting point and the possibility for making dialogues fertile, as antagonistic arguments are contested in reference to common topics for which a deeper reflection is aspired. In this framework, I argued that a disinterestedness for adverse arguments, as local idiosyncrasies whose contextual conditions are to be reconstructed, reveals an ethical disregard for the challenge that these truth-claims can exert on our owns, resulting in the impoverishment of the cross-cultural dialogues fomented by anthropology.

Chapter 4. – On the Anthropologist's Morals

4.1. Henrietta Schmerler and the ethics of fieldwork

On 19th July 1931, Henrietta Schmerler was raped and murdered by Golney Seymour, a member of the Apache reservation she had come to spend the summer working in[38]. H. Schmerler was a graduate student at Columbia University, working under the supervision of both Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, as she travelled to Whiteriver in the Fort Apache reservation to complete her doctoral studies. Even though she was a prominent and hectic student of the department, politically conscious and socially engaged, with a rebellious character which earned her playful parallels with Mead, her image would be heavily tainted in the years subsequent to her death, as she came to serve as the prime illustration of how one should not conduct fieldwork.

Discussing the tragedy of H. Schmerler almost fifty years later[39], Nathalie Woodbury (1986a) asserts that H. Schmerler must have romanticized the ethnographic collection of empirical data, behaving as if she was on an adventure. Woodbury makes a correlation between the tragedy and the seeds of destruction H. Schmerler had brought within her to the field, as her ignorance, or stubbornness, came to reflect, and as the assault itself came to confirm.

Subsequently to the discovery of the body and to the trial, anthropologists would go on to formulate and voice a double, complementary, reaction. If, on the one hand, an Apache Indian, in view of his fierce nature, could not be judged by the anthropologists' own standards, then, on the other, H. Schmerler was the sole responsible for what had happened to her. Boas and Benedict, professors of H. Schmerler who had attested to her brilliance, and who went to some lengths to secure her a research opportunity and funds, would go on, after her death, to criticize her inexperience, ineptitude, and immature character. Mead, who for long had been H. Schmerler's inspiration and, jokingly among the department, her senior counterpart, would go

[38] For a more exhaustive depiction of the events, see Gil Schmerler (2017), where H. Schmerler's nephew, after thirty years of research, coherently reorganizes her experience, starting from the assignment of her cultural site, through her fieldwork and murder, until the end of the trial. See also Megan Steffen (2017, G. Schmerler & Steffen 2018), for additional anthropological commentaries, and Megan Steffen (2021) for a chronology of H. Schmerler's portrayals throughout the discipline. For supplementary viewings, see site: https://henriettaschmerler.com;

[39] The killing of Henrietta Schmerler was a subject of debate in the *Anthropology Newsletter* during the late-eighties (*see* Opler 1987, Tannen 1986, Woodbury 1986a, 1986b, 1987a, 1987b), to which the siblings Eva Kamanitz and Gil Schmerler (1987) contributed as well; albeit ignored, as reflected in a general wrap-up of the discussion presented in Howell (1990).

on to repudiate any comparison between them both: "«it had never entered my head that you [Benedict] would make that identification of me and Henrietta… maybe it's because I disliked Henrietta so that I never identified myself with her»" (*cit. in* Steffen, 2021: 7). Ruth Underhill, who was her classmate during graduate studies, would go on to write in her memoirs, posthumously published (2014), an eight-page chapter solely devoted to H. Schmerler, where she describes her as loud, irritating (*ibid.*: 151), immature, inexperienced, unskilled (*ibid.*: 153), reckless, opportunist (*ibid.*: 154), impatient, ignorant (*ibid.*: 156), irresponsible (*ibid.*: 157), stupid (*ibid.*: 158), an air-headed woman merely searching for cheap thrills and adventure (*ibid.*: 157) who was favoured by Boas not because she had any potential, but because she was both a Jew and a woman (*ibid.*: 153), socially low-rated classes towards which "Boas would tip the scale a little".

H. Schmerler was accused of not having correctly followed the set of directions provided by her mentors, albeit these were made up of few, loose, and vague indications. And she was accused of having ignored the advice she was given, albeit these were not always applicable or feasible in the course of her research. Overall, the tragedy to which H. Schmerler succumbed was interpreted in terms of a failure in abiding to an appropriate arrangement of ethical and methodological principles in her approach to fieldwork.

But, firstly, how is fieldwork characterized in this conjecture? Fieldwork, following this line of reasoning, is conceived to be a tradeoff between data and ethics, played out between an analyst, driven by an aspiration to advance knowledge and a career, and an analysed, as the passive object of research (Bell 2014, 2019). The latter, in virtue of being spatial entities localized in time and space, sustain the idea of fieldwork as an analytical and methodological stage, whereby the former devises and enacts strategic performances "for entering, leaving, and being in those locations in order to do the gathering of fieldwork data" (Castañeda, 2006b: 97). Against the backdrop of this setting, ethical and methodological principles appear as the fitting way for the ethnographer to perform such role.

Then, secondly, how can these principles be described? To the extent that they intend to serve a patterned charter for resolving conflicting decisions and shaping the action of the ethnographer, these principles unite the individual in the field to the impersonal standards of his professional community. They are revealed, therefore, in the dilution of the ethnographer as a moral subject, so that his own presence be effected by reference to the object of study, whether "taking native categories as a starting point of ethnographic methods" or taking "the reflexive scrutiny of Western classifications of others into a necessary condition of research"

(Pels, 2014: 212), enabling the researcher to accomplish his epistemic and ethical role in accordance with the terms of engagement dictated by his interlocutors.

This analytical configuration displays, then, what Peter Pels (1999) characterizes as an ethical duplicity and a double identity in anthropology. Ethical duplicity because it upholds an adherence to transcendentally granted values and duties, exempting the individual on the field from any personal deliberation, while the same values can only be pondered and exerted contingently, hinging on the contextual position of the ethnographer. And double identity because it separates the moral being of the researcher from the character he aspires to personify through an immersion in the studied culture.

The outcome is a disjunction between a situational ethics of fieldwork and a consequentialist morals of anthropology (Castañeda 2006a). The former is no longer defined and evaluated in terms of the latter, because the moral being of the anthropologist is fragmented in favour of a role as a researcher, bounded with its own norms and modes of behavior. As a result of such, the ethnographer's task is codified and oriented in terms of an external criteria of good outlined by, e.g., Science or those who are represented[40]. The act of research is thus defined by the subordination of the ethnographer to the object of study in light of transcendental objectives. As a consequence, this multiplex relationship is compressed into a "dyadic reduction" (Pels, 2014: 211), with an ethical reflection enclosed within itself in view of criteria external to the encounter. It is a contradiction, because while the moral action of an individual cannot be severed from the context in which it unfolds, his mode of conduct must adhere to the extrinsic standards and purposes of his professional association.

It is from this perspective that the conduct of H. Schmerler in the Apache reservation came to be discussed and evaluated.

As G. Schmerler emphasizes, William Donner – the superintendent of the reservation – was, overall, "in the most complex, and often conflicted, position" (2017: 236), as exemplified in his continuous ambiguity throughout the investigations and the trial[41]. Overall, while Donner

[40] In his article, Quetzil Castañeda (2006a) traces a brief historiography of the criteria of value assigned to knowledge, from the sponsors of fieldwork throughout the 19th century (government, Church, colonial administrations), to Science in the first half of the 20th century (universities, scientific associations), and finally to the objects of research since around the 1960's (the clients of ethnography, those studied and represented).

[41] Donner had, simultaneously, cherished H. Schmerler, as if a daughter left at his care on the reservation, while reproaching her for her willingness to associate closely with Apache people. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Donner had argued that Seymour should definitely be punished, as a way to set an example and show that this type of behavior was not acceptable; while, at the same time, asking for leniency, as Seymour's actions had been incited by a provocative woman.

was seeking to steer away any agitation that could be externally exerted, he was also attempting to prove he had a tight grip in the affairs of the reservation. Accordingly, Donner argued that there had been no conflict, but merely that "Henrietta Schmerler had accepted a horse ride from a young Apache man without realizing it was tantamount to consenting to sex" (G. Schmerler and Steffen, 2018: 2). This is particularly evident in the hypothetical scenario written by Underhill, describing Seymour as a grieving young boy crying over the body of H. Schmerler, asking her «"Why did you make me do this?"» (Underhill, 2014: 158). Consequently, in other words, H. Schmerler had just failed to act in accordance with Apache cultural precepts[42]. There was not a conflict, but only the appearance of it, as a result of the anthropologist's failure in erasing her own moral presence in the field. Her lack of success in fieldwork came to be represented precisely in terms of her inability to dispel her identity in order to act with Apache people as if she were one of the natives.

In sum, the seeds of destruction that H. Schmerler brought to the field were her own moral presence. H. Schmerler came to be criticized for her insufficiency in presenting herself under the ethical and methodological role of a researcher, failing in this fashion to perform the act of immersion, as shaped by the objects of study, in view of the extrinsic purpose of knowledge.

4.2. The ethics of absence and empathy

This contradiction emphasizes the disjunction between the consequentialist morals of anthropology and a situational ethics of ethnography, in view of which the latter, then, rests on a dyadic reduction of fieldwork to a self-absorbed tension between the ethnographer's intellectual efforts, as performing the ethical and methodological role of an analyser, and the terms of engagement dictated by the native, reduced to an analysed object.

Disjointed from its entailments regarding a comprehensive morality, the outcome of fieldwork amounts to an assemblage of knowledge conceived as antithetical to the anthropologist's morals. That is, an access to truth is made possible insofar as the anthropologist's ways of thinking and acting derive not from the individual he is, but from the

[42] Rather than a vacuous comment, this was what Donner had informed Gladys Reichard when she came to the reservation during the investigation, as well as what Ruth Underhill came to hear from Donner during the trials. Reichard and Underhill were acting as Columbia representatives in both instances, and as this information came to be transmitted to Boas and Benedict, the subsequent discussions came to embrace and rely on these conjectures (*see* G. Schmerler & Steffen 2018). To note, G. Schmerler & Kamanitz (1984) could not find anywhere, whether in ethnographic literature or through interviews with Apache members of the community, a proof that accepting a horse ride was tantamount to sexual advances.

role he is playing in the field. This antagonistic relationship therefore leads to an "objective ethics of the absence of the observer" (Pels, 2014: 217), whereby the possibility of achieving true ethnographic knowledge depends on the minimization of the effects derived from the ethnographer. Along these lines, truth is postulated as pre-existent and wholly independent to the ethnographer's presence, and, consequently, prior to the very act of fieldwork.

Consequently, the performance of fieldwork becomes akin to a mimetic endeavour, upholding empathy almost as a methodological guarantee of intersubjective understanding and social communion (Bubandt & Willerslev 2015). The prospect of accessing truth resides in the anthropologist's ability to remain unnoticed, to become one of the natives themselves, to put on the shoes of alterity and taking them off at will. Accordingly, the accomplishment of the ethnographer's ethical role derives not only from his epistemic advances, but also from his success in leaving the object of study unaltered and unaffected.

The anthropologist becomes, hence, absolved from any personal responsibility or moral obligation, regardless of whatever circumstances he is faced with in the field (Borofsky, 2019: 41-121). As a case for discussion, we can turn to Colin Turnbull's work with an Ik community[43]. After his fieldwork experience, Turnbull made the famous and controversial proposal to disperse Ik people and reintegrate them in more thriving cultural communities, whereby:

> "…they would have to be taken to parts of Uganda sufficiently remote for them not to be able to return to northern Karimoja, for as long as they were within reach they would always try to return. (…) Men, women, and children could be rounded up at random and should be dispersed throughout the country, in its mountainous regions, in small units of about ten. Age, sex, or kinship was immaterial. Such random grouping would do no violence to the family structure, but would, if anything, be beneficial, for it would complete the fragmentation already complete in all but their continued localization, and would compel their

[43] Characterizing the Ik community in which he lived as a society on the brink of collapse due to the extreme lack of food and impoverished means of subsistence, Turnbull described how the feelings, behaviours, and patterns of its members had continuously failed to reach any standards of humanity common even to all societies (1987 [1972]: 11), writing about shocking and nauseating episodes of cruelty, malice, self-interest, and greed. For instance, how a couple tightly closed the *asak* (residential compound) and left for ten days, preventing their infant daughter from leaving in order to let her starve to death (*ibid.*: 132), or how a girl had come to steal the tea and mug of her brother who was bleeding profusely and on the verge of dying, making off with the beverage proudly, joyful, and laughing (*ibid.*: 153), or how a man kept stealing the food from the tin of a crying, sick, blind elderly man, too weak to pull the can away (*ibid.*: 204). *See also* Grinker (2000: 155-170).

integration into the life of the communities to which they would be allocated" (Turnbull, 1987 [1972]: 283-284).

As an interpretative evaluation, it reveals the moral alignment that Turnbull came to sustain in the course of his stay in the community. However, as a prescriptive procedure, it reveals a discrepancy between the epistemic search for knowledge, considered as the researcher's domain, and an exemption from any mode of active engagement. Willerslev & Meinert, after conversating with Ik individuals who knew Turnbull or who were alive at the time of his stay, quote a speaker claiming that: "«We thought Colin would bring us some good knowledge, but he never gave us the book or feedback»" (2016: 14). Turnbull did not address his informants about his moral assessments, dismissing the opportunity to do so even though he ended up returning to the community after drafting his proposal for the Ugandan government.

Nonetheless, the controversies over the book have mainly focused on the negative and unfavourable representations of the Ik community (*see* Barth 1974, Heine 1985), questioning whether it would even have any value as a portrait, at best, or whether it would boast a serious ethical breach, at worst. This is a particularly important issue, given the enthusiastic responses that an earlier ethnography by Turnbull (1961) had, and continues to have, on the part of anthropologists as a classic text of the discipline (Stocking Jr. 2000), considering he had an identical approach[44] to his stay in a Mbuti community although resulting in a totally different experience. Part of the reason can be pinpointed to a premise postulating the avoidance of causing harm through the writing of defamatory texts, but also, and consequently, it can be further illustrated by a notion of ethnographic success linked to the sympathetic illustration of one's object of research.

The appeal for doing no harm, along these lines, emerges as an ethical and methodological principle to which knowledge is subordinated, insofar as it prioritizes the display of the positive features of its object of study and dismisses the negative ones as an intended form of aid and benefaction (Borofsky, 2005: 80-87). Yet, as it precludes moral charges on the basis of an empathetic operation, it entails that the anthropologist is not only exempted from any form of active engagement, but is further inhibited from doing so, given that any form of external intercession is conceived to be pervasively intrusive and harmful. Accordingly, it prompts a

[44] Stirred by a mantra professed to him by an Indian guru – "*Satyam*, *sivam*, *sundarm*" (truth, goodness, beauty) – Turnbull believed that, anywhere, "those qualities could be found if he looked hard enough" (Grinker, 2000: 4). Approaching the ethnographic fieldworks throughout his career with this mantra resonating in his mind, Colin Turnbull writes in *The Forest People* (1961) about the sympathy, curiosity, and wonder he fostered for the way of life he came to experience, delving on the various long-lasting friendships he made during his stay in the Mbuti community.

conformity to an apology for non-interference, which Borofsky (2019: 27-29) denounces as a neglect of others, under self-centred concerns for anthropologists as ethical professionals and for the continuity of social and institutional arrangements; and whose ramifications, oscillating between forgetfulness and "acts of public contrition", LiPuma (2000: 87) partly traces to the inextricability of the development of the discipline with the outwards movements of the West. The insistence on doing no harm, hence, is carried out as a detraction to any form of moral activity foreign to the native's universe.

Along these lines, ethnographic portraits show up under rose-tainted glasses, written as sympathetic outlooks signalling the success of the anthropologist in having stepped into the native's own shoes. However, as "empathy strives towards identification, [it] does so while (re-)producing radical alterity" (Bubandt & Willerslev, 2015: 29). That is, at the heart of the empathic imagination lies the insistence on otherness, as the other is constituted as such diametrically opposed to the anthropologist's self. It is a paradox, and it is the result of the two contradictions that have been discussed so far. On the one hand, as the anthropologist is required to personify the analytical role of a professional, he cannot sever his own moral action from the contextual conditions of fieldwork. On the other, while knowledge is subordinated to ethics, it simultaneously transcends ethics as the analytical domain of the anthropologist. Conceived in this way, we can pinpoint a paradox, as ethnographic knowledge engenders an alienation of the native from himself and an increasing segregation[45] from the anthropologist.

[45] In order to clarify this assertion, I use the term 'alienation' because true ethnographic knowledge, in its independence from the anthropologist's morals, subordinates the native to a category outlined along differences contrasted to the anthropologist. Offering an example, Audrey Richards reports how Nangoshye, an older woman who was extremely anxious to keep alive the days of her past glory, felt instigated by the anthropologist's venture into the field as so to promote a performance to be done in a more elaborate way than usual: "I think the chisungu ceremony would have been performed for this particular girl, and a companion from a neighbouring village, if I had not been there, but it would probably have taken place at a later date and on a smaller scale and possibly the scene would have been shift to a more remote village. It is certainly true that my presence attracted more women from the surrounding village than would otherwise have attended and that an effort was made to carry out the rites as nearly according to tradition as possible" (Richards, 1995 [1956]: 61) – much to the nuisance of the younger girls performing the ceremony; who, feeling no connections and increasingly bored and distressed, came to resent the anthropologist for having made them go through it.
Additionally, I use the term 'segregation' because this knowledge conjures for the native a speculative structure disconnected from the moral community of the anthropologist. To offer another example, as issues in a reservation of Sioux communities came to be problematized in terms of a failure of the government to abide by the Sioux culture's ethos, characterized as "warriors without weapons", a Sioux member, "in a tongue-in-cheek manner for which Indians are justly famous, suggested that a subsidized wagon train be run through the reservation each morning at 9 A.M. and the reservation people paid a minimum wage for attacking it" (Deloria Jr., 1988 [1969]: 91).

Staying as an ethnographer at a society on the brink of collapse, Turnbull indicated the general despair and decadence of the egotistical relationships maintained in the hunger-stricken and misery-ridden Ik community. It plays out as the outcome of a genuine experience. However, conceived of as the analytical domain of the ethnographer, it demonstrates an exemption from any mode of engagement. In view of a disjunction between a situational ethics of ethnography and a consequentialist morals of anthropology, therefore, we can emphasize a contradictory relationship between the one's domain over knowledge and one's ethical principles. These contradictions instigate the paradox of solidarity aprioristically given to the other, engendering the native's self-alienation and segregation from the anthropologist's moral community.

4.3. Temper and virtue

Being that the anthropologist's morals are envisaged as antithetic to ethnographic knowledge, the two contradictions on which it is sustained entail, consequently, a paradox. As the task of the anthropologist is one of uncovering the solidarity aprioristically given to the other, the outcome is the alienation of the native from himself and his segregation from the anthropologist. This is because solidarity is preconceived to be already-present in the other, in view of a categorical foundation of universal humanity, albeit prior to one's acknowledgement of it due to the disparity between each one's moral universe. The anthropological exercise is conjured, precisely, as one of finding the basis for social communion underlying alterity, for the sake of which the ethnographer is led to transcend his own moral identity in order to be reshaped in the image of, or in counterbalance to, the native. The success of his task is evaluated in terms of having excised his own moral presence for the collection of true ethnographic knowledge. It is based, consequently, on a dichotomy between «us» and «them», with the native being assigned to the latter insofar that his practices are identified as part of an otherness, perpetuating alterity by not expressing or forming in an «us» remnants of a «them», and vice-versa.

However, rather than devising fieldwork as effecting a discontinuity between the moral identity and the analytical role of the anthropologist, we can regard it as depending on the anthropologist's own narrative unity. The anthropologist, by virtue of who he is and in function of the period he spends in a context different from his own, undergoes a transformation. Comprehending this transformation involves acknowledging one's life as a dramatic narrative,

through which "she has found a way to describe that past which the past never knew, and thereby found a self to be which her precursors never knew was possible", expressed by "the impulse to think, to inquire, to reweave oneself ever more thoroughly" (Rorty, 1989: 29). As a historically contingent being, the anthropologist not only necessarily departs from a moral and social particularity, but is also himself immersed in a narrative quest, illustrating the unity of one's life rather than its fragmentation in a specific role designed for fieldwork.

We can turn, to the effect, to a discussion of Napoleon Chagnon's ethnographic fieldwork in a Yanomami community. To be more precise[46], a turn to the controversial episodes regarding his temperament in the field. For instance, at one point, Chagnon writes about how he and his group of Yanomami companions were welcomed upon arriving at the grounds of a community he had not met before:

> "We were on the trail that linked their village to Mishimishimaböwei-teri. We signalled our presence by whistling, alerting them that they had visitors. Silence followed, and then we heard their short return whistle, acknowledging ours. We then each knew approximately where the other was located, and began moving toward each other cautiously, nervously, and silently.
>
> We had our weapons ready, and we knew they did also. I recall how difficult it is to be ready to shoot, but yet try to look friendly and nonchalant, pretending that your weapons were not really ready to shoot them" (Chagnon, 2013 [1968]: 223).

In this passage, Chagnon asserts that, if the outcome of the circumstances had not been so fortunate, he would be prepared to shoot someone, in the course of fieldwork. Additionally, one can recall how Chagnon, when asked to share a bit of his peanut butter during a long and exhausting walk, slyly replied that the brownish mixture he was eating were "the feces of babies or «cattle»" (*ibid.*: 15), to discourage his companions from their incessant requests. Or, furthermore, how Chagnon pulled out his hunting knife, amidst his angry protests, at the sight of Yanomami individuals trying to dismantle and steal the wood from the dugout canoe that he had taken all morning to build (*ibid.*: 18-19). Overall, Chagnon showcases how his proficiency in interpersonal and diplomatic skills went hand in hand with an increase in his ability to bluff and in his fierceness.

[46] In this work, I review the interpersonal relations that Chagnon extensively described in his book, and which have come to be criticized for the lack of sympathetic attitudes. I exclude the controversies regarding the collection of blood samples, as well as the theoretical arguments he offered to explain Yanomami warfare.

Chagnon depicts and justifies his disposition and temper in terms of an alteration he had undergone, in order to acquire certain intersubjective styles with which to navigate his exchanges with Yanomami individuals in a more successful, experienced, and well-versed way, "to be able to get along with them on their own terms: somewhat sly, aggressive, intimidating and pushy" (*ibid.*: 17). Notably, the aforementioned passage, where Chagnon and his entourage reach the grounds of another community, parallels one from the very beginning of his research, when he, accompanied by a priest, had first entered the Yanomami village he would go on to spend the next fifteen months in. Chagnon describes how, while duck-waddling through the low passage into the village clearing, "I looked up and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, sweaty, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows" (*ibid.*: 12). Nonetheless, Chagnon concludes how, even though having nearly been killed by Yanomami people several times throughout the thirty-two years that his research spanned, "most of the yet-living Yanomamo men who threatened to or tried to kill me in the past are now friends of mine – and we even joke, albeit gingerly, about those long-ago situations, (…) for the Yanomamo have come to know, accept, respect, and consider me as a welcome friend" (*ibid.*: 265). This transformation did not occur as an outcome of a role, but in function of the individual that Chagnon necessarily was.

The transformation ensuing from fieldwork, therefore, signals a certain contradiction in the attempt to split the moral identity of the anthropologist from the analytical role personified in the field. The awareness of such had somewhat been evidenced during the writing culture movement (Clifford & Marcus 1986), to the extent that the neutrality of the ethnographer's own presence in the field was questioned, whether under appeals for the scrutinization of its ethical and political implications to minimize the power discrepancies present in the anthropological exercise (Crapanzano, 1985a [1980]: 7-11), or whether under noticeable incongruities between the anthropologist as "preserver-of-the-culture" and as an "interventionist corrupter-of-the-culture", e.g. regarding the relationships of transactions established with ethnographic informants and based on Western commodities (Louise-Pratt, 1986: 39-45). One can furthermore point out the release of Malinowski's diaries, which had also been a catalyst for the writing culture movement (Malinowski 1967; *see* Stocking Jr. 1983).

In his review of the *Diaries*, Clifford Geertz (1967) accounted for the disparages, between Malinowski's personal diaries and his academic works, on his prevailing efforts to work as an ethnographer rather than acting as himself. Discouraging the sentimental views that "enfold the anthropologist and informant into a single moral, emotional, and intellectual universe", the

rapport established between Malinowski and his informants was to be praised not due to the former's temperament, as a disagreeable man who failed at human contact, but in his ability to work industriously as an ethnographer. However, as Stocking Jr. highlights, Malinowski brought with him "not only his own unique personality, but much of the psychic and cultural baggage of a 19th century European" (1968: 191). Malinowski's display of tolerance, sympathy, empathy, and identification with the people he spent time with is, then, not an attribute of special ethical and methodological principles – which would have enabled him to step out of his own world and into Trobriand daily life (cf. Geertz 1967) –, but is both concurrent and simultaneous to the animosity he professed. As the antipathy of *Diaries* show to complement the sympathy of *Argonauts*, all of these sentiments are part of a relation unfolding in the very confront of cultural difference. Throughout the writing culture movement, however questioned the viability of a dichotomization between the moral identity of the ethnographer and the performance of his epistemic role, the significance of the former for the accomplishment of the latter was not given due consideration as the very condition of an intercultural partnership between different people in a specific time and place.

Acknowledging such continuity of a given ethnographer's life allows us to regard its narrative unity, which in turn allows us to account for the transformation brought about by fieldwork as a movement along a spectrum of habit and inquiry, to and from which the anthropologist continuously shifts as his familiarity and proficiency increases, regarding e.g. interpersonal relationships with others, the handling of peculiar tools, or the sensitivity to unusual artistic styles. The carrying out of fieldwork, along these lines, reveals an immersion of the anthropologist in a context different from his own without implying a discontinuity with his moral being, therefore resembling the frame of experience which Hans-Georg Gadamer offers with the concept of «play», rather than a procedural exercise subverted to ethical and methodological principles. By play, what Gadamer (2006: 102-103) emphasizes is the mode of experience itself, rather than focusing on the orientation or state of mind of a purported object or those experiencing the object, without implying a resort to the freedom of a subjectivity engaged in play. The focus, hence, is on how the experience itself *is*, as it prevents the person who engages in it from remaining unaltered and unaffected. Framing fieldwork in the concept of play, we can regard the anthropologist as inserted in the midst of a narrative quest, departing from a social and moral particularity.

The discussion and evaluation of the ethnographer in the field, then, does not need to be subsumed under ethical and methodological principles which aprioristically define determinate actions as good or wrong by reference to an object of study. This does not entail that ethical

conduct is left to be arbitrary, but rather that the virtue of ethnography refers to the experience of fieldwork as a practice[47] carried out by individuals on a narrative quest departing from a moral and social particularity: "To perform his or her task better rather than worse will be to do both what is better for him or her *qua* individual and *qua* parent or child or *qua* citizen or member of a profession, or perhaps *qua* some or all of these" (MacIntyre, 2007 [1984]: 224). The discipline's ethics, then, instead of being conceived to "reside in the «shoulds» or «should nots» of the association's formal written code", can be taken up as displayed "in all of our actions" (Borofsky 2005: 102), as these are understood against the backdrop of our conversational commitments and educational responsibilities towards cultural diversity.

We can, accordingly, regard Chagnon's temperament and disposition in view of fieldwork as an experience seizing and transforming oneself in and through cultural difference, recognizing the ethnographer as necessarily belonging to a moral tradition that informs him but which is potentially and retrospectively transformed through his storied action. The assessment of the ethnographer's presence in the field, instead of referring to an analytical role subsumed under a set of ethical and methodological principles and values, therefore involves the acknowledgement of the practice of fieldwork as contingent on the ethnographer's irreducible unity and the narrative accomplishments towards which he is directed.

4.4. Fieldwork and the experience of encountering

Assessing one's presence in the field, without disjoining it from one's own moral identity, permits us then, as aforementioned, to highlight the undertaking of fieldwork as resembling a «play» (Gadamer 2006; *see* Nielsen 2021), that is, a dynamic, communicative, and communal event occurring in the to-and-fro movement of an intercultural encounter. As a consequence, this idea discredits the configuration of fieldwork as an analytical effort to comprehend an object in its pre-existing and self-sustaining autonomy, without entailing that the ethnographic experience boils down to a heuristic metaphorization assembled by the anthropologist to understand alterity (cf. Wagner 1975). Employing the frame of play, we can sustain that

[47] Practice, in the context of this argument, refers to MacIntyre's usage of the word, as "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systemically extended" (MacIntyre, 2007: 187). For instance, kicking a ball with skill or bricklaying are not a practice, but football and architecture are, as well as ethnographic fieldwork, one might add.

fieldwork acquires its mode of being in the experience it upholds through, and for, the participants it draws together. Given its disclosive and continuously inventive nature, rather than a series of repetitions, fieldwork unravels as an act of bringing forth, of raising up to sharper focus an untransformed reality into its truth. Accordingly, the moral presence of the ethnographer does not only conditions the experience, but also directs it, as an integral part of that toward which the experience is elevated. As Gadamer asserts, "openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play" (Gadamer, 2006: 109), meaning that the ethnographer himself is crucial for the dialogical event of fieldwork.

As Gadamer further states, play is first and foremost self-presentation, signifying that there is a suspension of any extrinsically purposive relationships. Severed from any final goal that would fulfil its existence, play realizes itself in its own presentation, "has its telos within itself" (*ibid.*: 112), to the extent that it renews itself as the fulcrum of our experience of it, and as it invites our own attention and participation. Its coming-to-existence, consequently, "cannot simply be isolated from the «contingency» of the chance conditions in which it appears. (…) It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself. (…) It is a part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belongs essentially to play as play" (*ibid.*: 115). The content of experience, thusly, does not exist in itself, but achieves its proper being in being mediated. In other words, meaning originates not as the result of an epistemic determination, but as "a product of successful, charitable interaction between participating, acting, transforming and self-transforming subjects in a shared world" (Ramberg, 2014: 228). Therefore, because ethnographic fieldwork enable said incidental feature of meaning, solidarity is not something to be found in terms of an "ahistorical fact" (Rorty, 1989: 195), but rather something created through the very act of dialogical understanding and social communion.

To sum, the production of knowledge cannot hinge on the concealing of the moral identity of the ethnographer, because its very feasibility depends, precisely, on the latter's presence, participation, and co-existence in the event of fieldwork.

We can illustrate this line of reasoning with a concrete example from the discipline. For instance, we can turn to the controversy, between Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere, concerning the analogy between Captain Cook and the god Lono, fashioned by Hawaiian people during the former's stay at the islands in the late 18th century[48].

[48] To offer a brief recap, Sahlins had asserted that Captain Cook had been killed in the sequence of his characterization as the god Lono, by which the natives were infusing "traditional cultural categories" and giving them "new values out of a pragmatic context" (1995: 71), a reinterpretation of a previous cultural baggage in order to make sense of current, unusual, and bizarre events, as it would be the arrival of Europeans in a ship to the shore. Obeyesekere, on the other hand, casts doubt on the very

Both Obeyesekere and Sahlins, as Borofsky points out, aspire to interpret said equivalence in terms of a conviction that "Hawaiians possessed some consistent, collective «group mentality» regarding Cook" (2000: 434). This group mentality was to be outlined and evaluated in accordance with an independent criteria – in this case, rationality. Obeyesekere, on his turn, argued that the comprehension of these apparently irrational actions should depart from the acknowledgement of a shared, common metaphysical structure, whose recognition could be frustrated as a result of exoticism. Sahlins, however, defended that such understanding should be based on a differentiation between rationalities, suspending one's own reasoning in order to understand native belief by reference to its own moral, emotional, and practical universe, rather than through an extension of our own (for an overview of these arguments, *see* Lukes, 2003: 46-62). In sum, the dispute centred on elucidating the cultural mechanisms antecedent to the encounter and which came to dictate its course.

Subsequently, Sahlins reproduces the idea of alterity, demarcating the exclusivity of Hawaiian culture from the European one on the grounds of different rationalities. And Obeyesekere attempts to dispel the very idea of difference through the unearthing of a communal metaphysical criterion that would suture both cultures. Both authors share, however, an important premise, albeit unexamined.

Both authors dismiss the idea that Captain Cook, in fact, could be a god. They knew that, reduced to his physiological properties, he was as equally human as everyone else not only on that island, but among the rest of humankind as well. It must be remembered that his death, in 1779, took place in the same period as the Declaration of Independence in America and the French Revolution, both of which came to assert on the equality and fraternity between all men, rather than a divinized portion some would have to the detriment of others. Upholding such physiological evenness, however, fails to consider the preeminence that Cook indeed had, not only over his own crew, but also as he stood at the top of the British social hierarchy of his time:

validity of the reports written by captains, sailors, and missionaries, whose accounts served as the apotheosis of Cook because of European biases – of self-grandeur and vanity – being projected onto the natives (1997 [1992]: 87, 122; *see also* Obeyesekere & Arens 2003). Sahlins defends "different cultures, different rationalities" (1995, 14), arguing against the symbolic violence occurring when it is imposed a Western commonsense bourgeois realism on others (2003a), as well as denouncing Obeyesekere as "an archival elimination caper" taking out authors by character assassination (2003b: 22). Obeyesekere asserts that the so-called savage mind is as "logical and rational" as "the thinking of modern man" (1997: 15), hence that, if Hawaiians had indeed labelled Cook as Lono, was because of utilitarian and political purposes in acquiring an advantage over their enemies.

> "The British *did have a part to play in this Hawaiian drama*. They selected who – among the British – received deference from Hawaiians. When a Hawaiian chief came on board the *Discovery* looking for «our Arrona», he, unbeknownst to himself, got the wrong ship. Cook captained the *Resolution*. (…) One might also note the British use of outward mobility – movement to the colonial fringe – as a means for upward mobility. Cook's exploration, [Bernard] Smith notes, «provided the material… [for] a new kind of hero… Cook is the self-made man. While hidden among the obscurity of the vulgar, he… raised himself above his station in life by assiduous application» (1992: 225, 228). The British, in brief, were involved in a play of their own – regarding deference, technology and social mobility" (Borofsky, 2000: 436, my emphasis).

The correlation between Captain Cook and the god Lono is sought to be apprehended in terms of the underlying logic that shaped Hawaiian's mode of thinking and acting. That is, isolating the natives from the contingency of the encounter in order to search for an independent procedure that could account for their beliefs and conduct, both Sahlins and Obeyesekere attempted to elucidate how the natives arrived at such an impression. This is done at the expense of understanding, rather, how the encounter between the European crew and the Hawaiians islanders told something about Cook that the former's Enlightenment sensibilities could not have had, otherwise, recognize.

We can also return to the earlier discussion on the tragedy of Henrietta Schmerler at the Apache reservation.

When her ravished body was found, William Donner – the superintendent of the reservation – quickly felt the importance of the event: "Stunned as they were, the significance of the scene was not lost on any of the men. Donner, in particular, felt *the full weight of the moment*. A white woman visitor to the White Mountain Apache Reservation had been brutally murdered. The wrath of the outside world would descend. Life on the reservation would never be the same" (G. Schmerler, 2017: 87, my emphasis). From the outset, Donner feared that the tragedy of H. Schmerler would rekindle a conflict between Euro-American people and native-American communities[49]. Aside from a few incidents, the overall tranquility in the reservation

[49] With Geronimo's surrender only forty years prior to the discovery of H. Schmerler's body, the Apache Wars (1870-1880) still held a strong influence on current relationships, with Apache people still overrepresented and labelled as brave, aggressive, and fierce (*see* Hilpert 1996). These characterizations were also highlighted during the evaluation of H. Schmerler's fieldwork, as when Ruth Benedict lamented to Franz Boas for the fact that such an unprepared student had gone to study "a rather untamed tribe" (*cit. in* Modell, 1983: 181).

was considered as a successful domestication of the once aggressive tribe that had resisted to the Euro-American's encroachment.

Despite seemingly peaceful, however, one cannot ignore "the crushing impact of military defeat and the harsh indignity of confinement to a reservation" (Basso, 1973: 240), as it bore the scar of humiliation, disrupted Apache cultural identity, riddled its people with anxiety, gave rise to the peyote cult, and, overall, fostered a period of social misery, with increasing rates of alcoholism, self-directed aggression, social factionalism, apathy, and domestic violence (Shepardson 1971, Everett 1971, Stewart 1981). Nonetheless, features of these social anguishes, although surfacing often in ethnographic research[50], came to be largely shunned off from anthropological reflection, insofar that these concentrated on the cultural dimension of native communities prior to the contact with the ethnographer's own, as well as the ways in which both were to be contrasted (*see* Babcock & Parezo 1986, Lavender 2006).

But if H. Schmerler did not have a chance to tackle the sexual abuse Apache women were subjected to, unfortunately she had the misfortune of being a victim of it. Her rape and murder disclosed something not only regarding the social conditions within the reservation, but also concerning the nature of the relationships maintained between Euro-American administrations and Apache communities, that, otherwise, could not have been made possible to recognize. However, by detaching H. Schmerler's moral presence from her analytical role, the circumstances of the fieldwork were discerned in accordance with the ethical and methodological principles that H. Schmerler must have not followed in function of the fierce community she lived in, rather than acknowledging the significance that the encounter produced and upheld.

Overlooking the contingency of an intercultural experience, for instance, between a European crew and Hawaiian islanders in the late 18th century, or between a white Euro-American woman and members of an Apache reservation in the early 20th century, the content of these encounters is inferred to be interpreted in terms of determined characteristics prior and independent to the event itself, e.g. the kinds of rationality or the degree of ferocity of each's respective latter. Along these lines, the mode of being of the fieldwork experience is reduced

[50] As to offer an example, both Ruth Underhill (1985: 56, 85) and Gladys Reichard (1971 [1939]: 87) identified and described as 'wild women' those women who acted boyish, only cared about partying, and had no respect for traditional modes of femininity, joining their elder informants in slandering and belittling these 'wild women' as the product of an ethnic pollution after contacts with European morality. When women labelled as such turned up dead, sometimes under suspicious and violent circumstances, their tragedy was derided as inevitable in view of their disloyalty to traditional ways of femininity.

to a dissecting exercise revolving around predetermined meanings, rather than presenting itself as creating and sustaining its own incidental meaning, and, consequently, offering the very possibilities for solidarity.

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In conclusion, in this chapter I argued how ethical and methodological principles, as they are based on a disjunction between a situational ethics of ethnography and a consequentialist morals of anthropology, depend on a contradiction between the moral identity tied to the contextual conditions of fieldwork and the analytical role embodied in view of a professionalized conduct. Next, I argued how this involved a further contradiction, as a result of upholding knowledge as subordinated to, while also transcending, ethics. These contradictions, therefore, ensued a paradox, insofar as, while regarding solidarity as aprioristically present in the other, it effected an alienation of the native from himself and a segregation from the moral community of the anthropologist.

However, as I subsequently argued, we can consider the transformation subjacent to fieldwork as relying on the anthropologist's narrative unity, as immersed in a narrative quest and departing from a moral tradition. As a consequence, fieldwork comes forth as an experience with a disclosive and continuously inventive nature, contingent on the subjects it draws together and through which it itself emerges. Lastly, I argued how fieldwork, conceived this away, presents itself as creating and sustaining its own incidental meaning, and thusly offering the very grounds for solidarity. In sum, my arguments followed an outline opposite to the presumption that the production of knowledge is antithetic to the morals of the anthropologist, as this idea entails a morally irresponsible and unsustainable disposition towards cultural diversity.

Final Remarks

In her acclaimed *Patterns of Cultures*, released in 1934, Ruth Benedict outlines and compares the style of certain cultural traits – e.g. marital relations, senses of self-fulfilment, social bonds, ceremonial customs – in reference to their unique articulations to the historical and local configurations of three different cultures. These are Zuñi, in the American Southwest, Kwakiutl, on the American Northwest coast, and Dobu, in Melanesia. In respect to Zuñi, Benedict highlights the detailed conformity with which their traditional ceremonies are carried out, identifying the inclination towards the virtues of moderation and inoffensiveness under an Apollonian character. It is the preference for "the known map, the middle road" (1960: 80) of measure and of sobriety. In contrast to this Apollonian character, Benedict singles out the Dionysian personality of the Kwakiutl, emphasizing in their ceremonies the ecstasy one strives for in one's individual path to "rapt into another state of existence" (*ibid.*: 158), leaning over megalomania and self-glorification in the midst of competitive rivalries dominated "by the need to demonstrate the greatness of the individual and the inferiority of his rivals" (*ibid.*: 189). Concerning the Dobu, Benedict stresses the lawless and duplicitous nature of their relationships, consumed by constant envy, suspicion, and resentment over ruthless clashes, as one's achievements can only occur at the expense of another's demise: "The good man, the successful man, is he who has cheated another of his place" (*ibid.*: 130). Accentuating one's reliance on one's own distrust and cruelty, Benedict distinguishes in Dobu culture the features of paranoia: "Behind a show of friendship, behind the evidences of co-operation, in every field of life, the Dobuan believes that he has only treachery to expect" (*ibid.*: 153).

Having briefly presented the main layout and arguments of her work, two clarifications should be made. Firstly, as Benedict (*ibid.*: 206) points out, she does not set out to demonstrate the manner in which the individual, and one's mode of conduct, is fixedly determined by the culture into which one is born. And, secondly, her intention is not to diagnose, classify, and organize cultures along scientific grids or explanatory models, "to impose a set of cast-iron types upon all cultures or to see all cultures as expressions of one or another pathology" (Mead, 2017 [1959]: 207).

As Benedict (2017 [1959]: 261) indicates, the labels she lays out are the result of "a descriptive statement". We can quickly unravel what Benedict means by this, and clarify its relevance for the arguments that have been presented in this dissertation.

In order to do so, we can pay particular attention to Edward Sapir's paper "Culture, genuine and spurious" (1924), as the author distinguishes between the unfolding of culture as a genuine event from a spurious one (for a more in-depth and extended reconsideration of Sapir's paper, *see* Santos de Alexandre 2024). As Sapir affirms, it is not in his interest to lay a metaphysical basis for the object of anthropological study, nor to circumscribe a scientific method to approach it, but to ask the «how?» of it, i.e. how culture is "modulated in accordance with the needs of the spirit of each, a spirit that is free to glorify, to transform, and to reject" (Sapir, 1924: 423). As Santos de Alexandre (2024: 103-110) simplifies, the purpose of Sapir lies precisely in shunning off any reification of the idea of culture in order to reflect instead on its mode of being, on the how of culture: *how culture is*.

The ramifications underlying this shift are evident. The focus is not to concern oneself with the boundaries and mechanisms of "culture", on the one hand, and "individual", on the other, as if these were two categories existing in themselves and independent from each other. Rather, the aim is emphasized in the interdependence of both in their coming forth: "A (…) culture is never a passively accepted heritage from the past, but implies the creative participation of the members of the community; implies, in other words, the presence of cultured individuals" (Sapir, 1924: 417-418). This is the central point that Benedict intends to depart from, as she strives to showcase how "culture provides the raw material of which the individual makes his life" (Benedict, 1960: 218). The descriptive statements that Benedict drafts in her book, accordingly, can be made sense of in view of how culture provides the grounding for the intelligibility and significance with which individuals orient themselves towards the openness of the world and its things.

As a consequence, we can now return to and proceed from the earlier remarks made in parallel to the phenomenological inquiries of Heidegger. Endeavouring to detach truth (*Aletheia*) from its undertones of a correspondence to reality through the defining properties of things – the X-hood of X –, Heidegger concerns himself rather with the *happening* of truth, in virtue of the familiarity with which we are embedded in the world. In view of this meaningfulness and intelligibility through which things – assertions, entities, human beings, understandings of being, worlds – are available to us in our dealings in the world, Heidegger translates and characterizes *Aletheia* as «unconcealment», as that which sets "us forth into that illuminated realm in which every being stands for us and from which it withdraws" (Heidegger, 2002: 27). However, it is incomplete to leave matters this way. Precisely in view of this uncoveredness of entities, unconcealment involves comportment, as "a very broad term that is meant to include every instance in which we experience something, and everything that we do"

(Wrathall, 2010: 22). This quality lets us emphasize the structure of meaning in which we are involved in the thick of certain relationships towards things. Because unconcealed, one can nourish a responsiveness to the meaning of certain situations. Alternately, a thing is concealed when one cannot comport oneself in relation to it.

However, once again, to leave matters this way is still incomplete. Because this background disposition to the world is to be emphasized, it entails that the «clearing» in which we encounter the ready-availability of things must, by necessity, conceal the historical character with which it occurs. That is, for the flexibility and efficiency of our dealings, our understanding of beings is upheld as the prime and only authoritative space of possibilities: "The clearing does not only keep back other possibilities, but it keeps back that it is keeping back other possibilities" (Wrathall, 2010: 34). It withholds the possibilities that are incompatible to the ones guiding our unconcealment of truth.

As a consequence, we can stress in it the historicity of truth. As to offer an example, we can single out how the Greeks were envisaged as pagans in despair by Christians, while the Modern came to understand the Classical Greeks as already being rational subjects dealing with objects (Dreyfus, 2005: 407-409). Considering the value that Greeks placed on heroes, antithetical to slaves, for Christians these could not but be proud sinners intending to take on the role of God. As in regard to the Middle Ages and the praising of saints, antithetical to sinners, for Classical Greeks these could not but be weak and submissive slaves under the will of others (*ibid.*: 415-418). To say that both modes of truth misunderstand the real nature of each respective understanding of being, however, is a mistake; for "truth is not present in itself beforehand...":

> "… somewhere among the stars, so as then, later on, to find accommodation among beings. This is impossible since it is the openness of beings which first affords the possibility of a somewhere and a place filled by the things that presence. Clearing of the opening and establishment in the open belong together. They are the same thing, an essence of the happening of the truth. This happening is, in many different ways, historical" (Heidegger, 2002: 36-37).

These understandings, consequently, rather than representations of a pre-existing state of affairs, can be singled out as the results of a shared understanding historically produced.

Having briefly delved into these considerations, we can now see how the descriptive statements of Benedict are not the result of a mere projection, as a subjective action first depicting everything and then inculcating itself into what would be the empirical material.

Benedict describes the unravelling of the manners in which situationally embedded individuals deal with the world and its things, in reference to the structure of significance and intelligibility which grounds and discloses things as what they are. That is, the modes in which values are praised or belittled, how meanings are interpreted or dismissed, in virtue of the historicity of being particular to each of the culture that Benedict draws together[51]. To have characterized the Zuñi culture as Apollonian, the Kwakiutl as Dyonisiac, and the Dobu as paranoid, was not the unearthing of properties inhering in a culture and transposed to a metaphysical scheme. Rather, it was the historical and temporal understanding of cultures in view of one's prejudices, judgements, and morals.

In the context of this dissertation, these cannot be more than hasty remarks. Nonetheless, they are crucial for wrapping up the argumentative line that was attempted to develop.

Throughout this dissertation, I discussed how three fundamental premises underlined the way in which the incompatibility of cultural difference was to be envisioned from the viewpoint of an epistemological project of anthropology, as well as, reciprocally, how this project was to be sustained in virtue of an adherence to these three premises. Because of the contradictions and paradoxes entailed in these assumptions, I attempted to untangle their ambivalent roots in the Enlightenment and the Romanticism, from which it upheld, on the one side, an attempt to achieve commensurability on the terms of a transcendental ur-language, and on the other, an increasingly atomistic understanding of its object of study.

In view of an assumption regarding the antithesis between the production of knowledge and the self of the anthropologist, I argued how it comprised two contradictions. While setting its analytical expertise apart from an engulfing mixture of ethnocentric entities, one's own self could not be expunged from the interpretations written. And, while endeavouring to contextualize ideas and beliefs by reference of the native's perspective of reality, this could not but be a heuristic device. These two contradictions entailed what I characterized as a paradox of an unreliability of the interpretative process, because insofar as the anthropologist aspires to grasp planes of truth in their autonomous factuality, these are apprehended in reference to an extrinsic, and consequently alien, plane to both himself and the native.

[51] In view of these comments, we can also realize its implications for Benedict's subsequent work of comparative hermeneutics, "one of the finest examples of cross-cultural comparison in the entire anthropological literature" (Handler, 2009: 634). In *The Chrysantemum and the Sword* (1946), Benedict attempts to understand and cope with Japanese behavior and ideas, acknowledging she can only do so at the light of her own understandings and evaluations as they are oriented by her American behavior and ideas.

Two contradictions also were to be singled out, I argued, as a consequence of conceiving the value judgements of the anthropologist to be antithetical to the production of knowledge. One concerned an ethically absent involvement, because as a suspension of judgements was required to understand the viability of apparently immoral beliefs, these were aprioristically judged to be viable on their own terms. The other, complementary contradiction involved a double standard of cultural evaluation, as a result of regarding one's society as a contingent convention to be assessed in view of universalistic values, while simultaneously envisaging the native's society as legitimately natural in view of relativistic values. The paradox deriving from these contradictions was to be noted in the ethical disdain subjacent to a moral unevenness, because while one's interlocutors were to be accorded with an equivalent capability to reason, they were simultaneously exempted from any form of moral responsibility for their beliefs and practices.

As a consequence of envisioning the morals of the anthropologist and the production of knowledge as antithetical, I emphasized the disjunction between the situational ethics of fieldwork and the consequentialist morals of anthropology in order to argue for a contradiction in the adherence to an analytical role, while at the same time the anthropologist could not abscond from the fieldwork situations he found himself in in function of the person he was. This was elaborated in addition to another contradiction, because even though ethics was to be subordinated to knowledge, it transcended it as well. The result, I argued, was a paradox implicating a morally irresponsible and unsustainable disposition towards cultural difference, because while solidarity was conceived to be found already-present in the other, the knowledge produced alienated the native from himself and segregated him from the moral community of the anthropologist.

The purpose for having discussed this particular work by Benedict in the final remarks of this dissertation was precisely to illustrate and address the bulk of arguments developed so far. Following in a vein opposite to the sceptical tradition of the Enlightenment, in view of the culturally constituted conditionedness of our being and of truth, I argued how the self of the anthropologist was inescapable and indispensable to orient and expand one's curiosity and critical inquiry into cultural phenomena different from one's own, interrogating over a common reference to a subject matter at hand in terms of which the multiplicity of interpretations are to be pitted and evaluated against each other. Contrarily to the assumption that value judgements are unviable in accessing knowledge, I argued how their expression is not only ethically necessary, but also fundamental for the articulation of conversations in respect to common and shared topics. And, instead of envisioning the presence of the anthropologist in the field as

fragmented into an analytical role, in view of one's narrative quest and the social and moral particularity from which one departs, one's whole continuity is essential for the unfolding of the ethnographic experience and the subsequent creation of solidarity and of a moral partnership.

Insofar as it opposed this line of reasoning, I explored the manner in which the incompatibility occurring in and through cultural difference was to be conceived as incommensurability, under the prism of an epistemological project in anthropology, and accordingly be tackled through an exercise of commensurability at the hand of a conceptual-descriptive approach. In other words, emphasizing a mutually exclusive intelligibility between cultures, anthropology was to unearth the maximum of common ground as possible by means of a correct, precise, and faithful description of its object of study, irrefutable except in terms of the defects and shortcomings of the anthropologist's prejudices, standards, and temper. In view of this, cultural difference, rather than hinting at an evidence of variability that is produced in the manifold relationships effected across different individuals and groups – and thusly far from being restricted to occur between cultural groups, as well as far from precluding similarities across them –, would go on to become an axis of identification and exclusion, dividing and separating cultures along lines of incommensurate realities, rationalities, epistemologies, structures, ontologies, and so on; but whose barriers could be overcome in virtue of the epistemological agility of a professionalized anthropologist.

After having stressed the disclosive quality of language for the contingent embeddedness of our being in the world, it becomes incongruous, if not frivolous, to take as a starting point the transcendence of native's ideas and beliefs into a plane of explanation extraneous to himself – from where incompatible beliefs and customs can be rendered commensurable –, and thusly articulated by linguistic means alienated from the native. It was in line with this clarification that I distinguished in the fundamental assumptions, entangled in the epistemological project of anthropology, an implausibility, an ethical disregard, and a morally irresponsible and unsustainable disposition towards cultural diversity. Given the historical and temporal features of being and truth, drawn together under the term of "horizon", the central role of language and its inherently translative aspect allows us to envision anthropology, in midst of the incompatibility of difference, as "*the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves*" (Gadamer, 2006: 305). What this means is not that the horizon of the anthropologist is to be subsumed under the native's, or vice versa, but rather that a new common, shared horizon is originated as a result of an authentic anthropological conversation.

Consequently, and as a way to take up from Lukes' earlier predicament concerning the manner in which cultural difference is envisaged (*see* citation in page 15), it may be useful to start with Rorty's assessment:

> "(…) when the natives' and our behavior in response to certain situations is pretty much the same, we think of both of us as recognizing the plain facts of how things are – the noncontroversial objects of common sense. But when these patterns of behavior differ wildly, we shall say that we have different *Weltanschauungen*, or cultures, or theories, or that «we carve up the world differently». But it would create fewer philosophical problems just to say that when these patterns differ, communication becomes harder and translation less helpful. Translation may become so awkwardly periphrastic, indeed, that it will save time simply to go bilingual" (Rorty, 1991: 104).

To envisage the incompatibility of cultural difference in this matter is to realize that the fusion of horizons "*is actually the achievement of language*" (Gadamer, 2006: 370). In virtue of the creative, always-original, and transformative quality of language, the openness to which it exposes the individual in and through dialogue requires that, inevitably and necessarily, the conversation takes as starting point the very incompatibility in which it emerges (*see* Taylor, 1995: 61-69). The anthropologist is just as interlocutor as the interlocutors engaged with, and as a result the importance and significance of what one confronts and creates can only occur as a function of one's prejudices, judgements, and morals[52].

It is here we return to the initial comments on authenticity. If the unconcealment of truth involves nourishing a responsiveness to the unique concrete situations one is in, while withholding incompatible understandings, then authenticity emphasizes the mode of how one faces these situations while owning up to the being that one is. To do so authentically demands from one to prevent committing oneself to comportments for the sole reason of being judged to be adequate by a generic blanket understanding, expressing in one's response only what others think one should be or do; in this case, effecting an evasion of prejudices, judgements, and morals, as deontologically defined and established modes of being and acting vis-à-vis the

[52] Accordingly, these comments can be seen to parallel a commitment to an ethnocentric pragmatism, in virtue of which one "is able to fully realize that the anthropologist is one more human in a human conversation – a human with beliefs, desires, prejudices, and values, to which [one] must always refer back to when encountering new and strange beliefs, (…) [recognizing] the ever contingent and always cultural *situatedness* as necessary to decide between claims (…) as the only justification one would need for any claims" (Figueiredo, 2021: 71-72; *see also ibid.*: 61-75).

unique concrete situations one finds oneself in. To do so is to shun off a commitment to the particular way that things and worlds are disclosed and acted towards in virtue of the being one is. It is in view of the paradoxical, fruitless, and ultimately alienating character of these three assumptions, that to label as inauthentic their adherence means that they preclude the anxiety and responsibility one is to commit to in the thick of the interpretations made, the dialogues fostered, and the solidarity commitments nourished. It is to conceal the features of the self from oneself as a way of avoiding the burden of owning up to the being one is, and consequently concealing the features of cultural difference at the moment of its engagement with one's mode of being.

Disentangling anthropology from a conceptual-descriptive exercise striving to render different cultures commensurable, through an adherence to the three assumptions identified and reassessed in the course of this dissertation, its disciplinary aim does not need to be signalled in the wrapping-up of conversations by reference to a plane of language extrinsic to itself. Instead, it can be a matter of carrying on conversations. That is, acknowledging the manner in which cultural difference instigates one's inquisitive fulcrum, prompts the cultivation of fertile arguments, and contributes to the formation of a moral community. The question should not rely on the manners through which to transcend the conversation, but of entering into them authentically, acknowledging in anthropology the curiosity, respect, and solidarity commitments fostered towards difference. As a result, the discipline becomes less of an enterprise aspiring to speak *about* – or to speak *for* – those with whom one engages, materializing these latter within the scope of theory and discourse that the anthropologist represents, and subsequently reproducing the dichotomization between an «us» and a «them». It rather turns to be a matter of speaking *with*. As difference is envisioned not so much as a metaphysical problem or as a motif of astonishment, but as yet another characteristic manifesting itself in the course of human affairs, one recognizes the indispensability and efficiency of one's self, judgements, and morals to produce knowledge.

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