

## CONFLUENCES OF CULTURE IN ANTHROPOLOGY

Every scientific discipline, in order to determine with the greatest possible exactitude the phenomena that come within the scope of its particular domain, creates a vocabulary of technical terms with specific significances which it uses as indispensable tools in its research work.\* On many occasions, when one and the same phenomenon is considered according to the fundamental concepts of related disciplines, various designations are used, giving different meanings and nuances in the development of the analysis. This leads most frequently to an enrichment of the given interpretation, but sometimes also obscures it.

To avoid the danger inherent in this eventuality, it is useful to establish from the start the significances that we intend to give to words, by way of avoiding confusion arising from the different meanings attributed to them. This discussion bears on the topic, "spontaneity and adaptation in the evolution of

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civilization." In anthropological terms it would be expressed thus, "originality and borrowing in the evolution of cultures." The question in sum is to define the role and the importance assumed within the process of cultural exchanges by two categories of perfectly definable phenomena, namely: 1) the changes resulting from innovations that occur within the framework of a given society—which within the general theme proposed is called *spontaneity*; and 2) changes prompted by influences operating from without on this same society, that is, by means of borrowing—a phenomenon which is designated as *adaptation*, and which anthropology understands by the term cultural loan.

Anthropology, on the other hand, reserves the term development—as well as its direct derivation, underdevelopment—for certain specific aspects of the general domain of culture, in particular technology and economics, and prefers to apply the term "evolution" to the generic process of modification of a civilization in the course of time. In the same way that anthropology since the last century uses the concept of culture as distinct from that of race, it understands by this the whole of the ways of life of human societies, and it prefers to use this term rather than the term civilization. This for the simple reason that the latter term implies data to some extent ethnocentric—which gives rise to serious misunderstandings since it excludes the ways of life of peoples commonly called primitives or savages. Once these precise meanings are established, we may now tackle the subject of our discussion on clearer ground, from the point of view of anthropology.

One of the rare invariants of the life of humanity is the change of given cultural data. No culture that is truly alive is static, whatever its degree of isolation, the simplicity of its people or the primitive character of its technological equipment. The changes in question may be brought about extremely slowly, and they may be so minor in the end that viewed from an historical perspective they appear nearly nonexistent, giving the impression of immobility. And yet there is evolution from one generation to the next, and the study in depth of the norms of behavior of the cultural groups in question will invariably show a surprising number of modifications, which had occurred

without being apparent from the outside. The simplest cultures, the most markedly conservative of the continent, which since the discovery of America seem to have continued without the least change, are undoubtedly those constituted by the way of life typical of groups of forest bands roaming the hostile tropical jungle. Yet ethnographic observations have been able to demonstrate without any possible argument that there had been a considerable accumulation of unsuspected cultural borrowings which had brought about modifications of the most diverse kinds in these same cultures.

On the other hand, of course, other cultures are subject to rapid changes, undergoing modifications from one generation to the next to such an extent that the adaptation to innovations requires them to have a psychological attitude eminently favorable to new things, and even predisposes this attitude. The modern culture of highly developed countries in this regard offers a striking example of modifications achieved at an accelerated pace. It should be noted however that the changes do not encompass all aspects of a culture, but that they are frequently limited to such fields as technology, in which the various inventions and discoveries contribute continuously to perfecting the means these cultures have at their disposal for mastering the forces that surround them. In other spheres, on the other hand, such as the social and political structures, or again the ideological or moral foundations, changes appear comparatively—and often deplorably—slow to accomplish.

The pace at which changes are effected within the cultural domain has taken on unusual importance in our time, as a result of the growing distance separating the technological and economic development of highly industrialized countries from that of the so-called colonial or semi-colonial peoples. In a world which is rapidly shrinking due to the advance and improvement in communications, such differences in the rhythm of development cause ruptures and provoke such disequilibrium within the whole of human society that it is impossible to ignore them. Prodded by the pressures and by the responsibilities which they entail, the social sciences find themselves obligated to dedicate themselves with extra diligence to the examination of these forces, which on the one hand favor progress and on the other

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retard it. The study of cultural modifications has thus become one of the primary practical tasks of anthropology.

Observation of the state in which the pre-alphabetic peoples existed before European culture achieved its present level of technical evolution, combined with the discovery of human communities—such as the American—which, notwithstanding the isolated situation in which they had remained during a considerable part of their evolution, nonetheless succeeded in establishing very elaborate modes of life as well as in making progress in the sciences, arts and in political and social organization of such a character as to entitle them to the designation of “high cultures” (we think here of the Mayas, the Toltecs, the Incas and others)—this observation, we say, gave rise to the belief for a certain time that in the birth and flowering of human societies the changes that came from within represented the most important element of the general evolution of their cultures. For this reason, in the last century, the theory of evolution was based on the principle of the psychic uniformity of the human being in order to explain the resemblances in beliefs and institutions observed among geographically separated peoples, while attributing unmistakable differences between these peoples to the stages of cultural development through which the less advanced societies had to pass in order to attain a higher level of civilization.

Whatever criticism may be put forward with regard to the evolutionist theories which enjoyed vogue during the last century, there can be no doubt that they at least served to point out such phenomena as the continuity of culture, the constancy of changes which the latter underwent, as well as the existence of mechanisms which guided their internal development. These mechanisms in fact originated primarily out of the spirit of invention which is so deeply rooted in human nature. The term “invention” for anthropology does not mean only the deliberate creation of a machine, of any type of mechanism, or of any other material achievement of a culture, an achievement in the nature of a radical innovation, but also new ideas, new concepts or patterns in social, political or religious organization, as well as new economic systems which play such an important role in the entire historical evolution. Man’s inventive mind and the

cultural process which ensues from it do not act exclusively upon elements of culture that are in some way tangible, but certainly also upon its universal life.

Once the basic methods leading to the perfecting of a whole system of inventive activities are discovered, human societies without distinction may project a continuous flow of inventions which contribute to making the culture more and more complex. Most of the time the inventions otherwise do not bring about dramatic modifications in the life of a people. The evolution of culture occurs through the intermediary of small-scale changes, which happen haphazardly every day and which are the fruit of the joint collaboration of a great number of people. Thus having made the distinction between great and small changes, we can understand better the essential function that the spirit of invention performs in every cultural evolution: this spirit sometimes inspires innovations in depth and sometimes prompts only changes of details in the accepted practices and customs. The sum of all these changes, great and small, gives exact dimensions to the whole of the inventions achieved and makes it possible to specify within the "mass" of any culture the part that is due to changes originating from within by comparison with what it has borrowed elsewhere.

The inventive process, acting as we have said through accumulation, makes us understand how peoples living under a tribal order and with a rudimentary economy—and among them those of Central America—could have in a relatively short lapse of time achieved a cultural level which is, at the least, surprising, creating a system of numeration based on the position of values based on the idea and practice of the mathematical value of zero, catching up in little less than a thousand years with the peoples of Hindustan, and even in two thousand years with those of the European West, which were served by a much more advanced technology and economy.

It is evident that in order to achieve such notable progress the peoples of Central America did not rely exclusively on the inventive abilities of any one among them, but that in the course of their evolution toward more refined forms of culture, they exchanged discoveries and inventions among themselves, borrowing from each other a considerable number of cultural

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elements. It would otherwise be impossible to understand the almost sudden ascendancy of the Aztec people—whom the Europeans encountered as the dominant human group in Central America during the conquest—and the fact that this people could have progressed in the space of just a few centuries from the primitive state of a semi-nomadic band to the rank of the leading element of a powerful confederation of peoples, endowed with an extraordinarily elaborate culture and very sure of itself in most respects. The astonishing rise of the Aztec people could be explained only by supposing that they borrowed elements of culture from peoples who had preceded them in the pre-eminent role and with whom they had been in contact. Hence the simple inventive process, despite its immense importance, does not seem sufficient in this case to explain by itself the evolution of culture.

Cultural loans of this type, when they are carried out among culturally related peoples, never achieve the notoriety that they acquire when they occur among peoples whose ways of life differ considerably. The study of the mechanism for the transmission of cultural elements was at first generally limited to research on the diffusion from one to the other of the characteristics or customs peculiar to neighboring tribes, occupying well-defined territories. These investigations established as their objective the reconstitution of the cultural history of these tribes, a reconstitution which, due to the lack of written testimony, could only be based on documentation furnished by the observation of their way of life.

It was soon ascertained that the analysis of the process of cultural transmission, undertaken within the scope of studies on phenomena of diffusion between neighboring tribes was less important than studies that endeavored to discover by what mechanism Western culture, with its already acquired technical and economic development, transmitted its own cultural elements, when it came into contact with peoples living under a still simple culture, and was subjected in turn to the influence and even intromission of external cultural elements. This process of reciprocal modification of cultural "patterns" between cultures in contact was called *acculturation*.

We have defined this *acculturation* elsewhere as the change taking place after contact is made between human groups

belonging to distinctive cultures; it may be characterized by the notion of a continual conflict of forces between ways of life that are opposed but that tend to identify completely with each other. This conflict is objectively manifest, appearing at various levels of contradiction. The examination of contacts between the Spanish cultures of Western Europe and the indigenous cultures of America, represented by the Aztec variety, has made it possible for us to confront the past with the present, while taking into account the forced or voluntary character of the borrowing that took place, the part played by the group or the individual in the exchanges, the continuity of the alternation of the contacts, and finally the deliberate introduction or the spontaneity of the change. These are opposed forces which have given birth to what may well be called the Mexican variety of western culture, and even, by extension, the Indo-Latin variety, which in the different American countries of mixed race appears at various levels of contradiction.

This is not the moment to attempt to characterize the distinctive aspects of the Indo-Latin culture of the racially-mixed countries of America, but one may take advantage of the occasion to point out that the process of exchange of cultural elements continues, while acting vigorously in favor of preserving certain nuclei of the population who regard themselves as direct heirs of the original groups who made the first contacts—the Indians and the Latins—, and this despite the fact that biological cross-breeding and the collocation of cultures in conflict have produced a population which is in the majority mixed and which, on the basis of the interpenetration of its antagonistic component factors as well as the reinterpretation of its opposed elements, has evolved in such a way as to create a new culture, distinct from the conflicts that in principle brought it about. The process of acculturation, reinforced by native invention itself, has given Indo-Latin culture an individual profile and character.

The survival of representatives of the original opposed groups, despite four and a half centuries of contact, constitutes one of the significant characteristics of racially-mixed America and also one of the major reasons why governments are obliged to concern themselves with the integration of these groups into

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national societies forged by historical evolution. But at the same time this permanence is the objective manifestation of forces that are opposed both to invention and to acculturation, and consequently to any evolution of the culture itself. These forces are supported by the mechanisms that safeguard the stability and continuity of the culture and without which invention as well as acculturation would be devoid of significance.

The economic development of Euro-American cultures, and the colonial regime which they maintained until a very recent period toward the underdeveloped peoples, acted to produce a forced or spontaneous acceptance of the ways of life of the industrial culture, and more particularly, of machine-made products. The colonial and semi-colonial peoples have never accepted without reserve "loans" of a cultural order, even in cases where the new thing was demonstrated to be obviously superior to the old. They responded to innovations by referring them to their experience and tradition, which led them to accept what they could reinterpret and integrate into their own cultural "patterns" and to reject what they judged inoperative or dangerous for the stability and continuity of their way of life.

The selective acceptance so to speak of cultural elements made the pre-alphabetic peoples appear to be hostile and impervious to change, and the state of exploitation and subjugation in which they existed is explained by their conservative immobilism. In reality, the stabilizing mechanisms of culture do not arise exclusively from the subjected party but also, in large measure, from the dominant element. There are, in fact, two categories of opposing forces that enter into play, namely: 1) those that issue from the culture itself and that represent a phenomenon one could call *endoculturation*, and 2) those that operate from the outside and that result from an act of domination.

Endoculturation has been defined as the process by means of which an individual assimilates the traditions of his group and conforms in his behavior. But here at this point two contrary impulsions should be distinguished: that which operates during infancy and that which makes itself felt at an adult age. During the span of the first period the individual is encircled and conditioned by basic models, which provide the basis of the

culture on which he depends. Thus he learns how to handle the symbols of language, the accepted forms of behavior, the recognized values and the institutions to which he is held to adapt himself. His subconscious is impregnated with all this to such an extent that his adherence to the ways of life of his group receives from it great and firm solidity. But in the course of the second phase this kind of endogenesis of cultural elements emerges onto the level of consciousness. What is being communicated to the individual, what is being "lent" to him, may be accepted but also rejected, and the conscious mind makes a critical selection among the alternatives offered to it.

The first phase of conditioning hence generates, by the indirect means of endoculturation, mechanisms which give each culture its stability; this is the factor that spares culture disorganization, even at times of especially rapid changes. The second phase, the conscious phase, on the contrary opens the door to mutations and revision. This latter characteristic, which reestablishes the equilibrium with regard to the first, prevents a people, however primitive and isolated it may be, from remaining impervious to all evolution. But resistance to change could not be explained by forces emanating from within alone if these were not reinforced by elements of support having an outside origin.

In that part of America where cross-breeding took place, as we have said, indigenous and Latin groups exist which demonstrate a rigorous conservatism. These groups live together in refuge areas and show symbiotic relationships an analysis of which throws light on the forces that, opposed to invention and cultural borrowing, retard the evolution of culture. Their study assumes importance from the fact that the practical conclusions derived from it help set in motion planned action with the aim of modifying the existing situation. As anachronistic as it is this situation represents one of the major obstacles encountered by the American peoples of mixed race in their efforts to institute modern and more adequate forms of community life within the general framework of the evolution of their culture.

If we delineate carefully on a map of South and Central America the inhospitable regions—the plateaux situated at an exceedingly high altitude with their arid plains, the upper levels

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of the mountains covered with pines and fir trees, the marshy savannahs and tropical forests with their humid climate, the steppes and the extended desert areas with their xerophilous vegetation—and if we superimpose on it another map showing the areas occupied by extant indigenous peoples, we discover, surprisingly, that these surfaces coincide.

In their struggle to secure habitable land, human groups of different cultures tend to establish themselves in places that furnish them with the possibility of a livelihood and of multiplying their number, in accordance with the technical means at their disposal. Cultural groups that are less developed are then pushed out as time goes by into regions which are in some way marginal both climatically and topographically and in which human groups that are more advanced culturally would have difficulty establishing themselves without enormous efforts.

The indigenous peoples find refuge in these little coveted regions. Here they also isolate themselves from all contact with more advanced cultures. This enables them without much difficulty to maintain the mechanisms of integration by which they control the cohesion of their own group and the stability of its way of life, keep watch over the clan organization and safeguard an economy on a purely subsistence level—in sum, mechanisms which enable them to assure the continuity of their culture.

Yet indigenous groups that occupy these areas of refuge, although self-sufficient and self-perpetuating, are not completely independent. Groups of Latin peoples, adhering to conservative norms or at least less advanced within their national culture and representing the majority or the dominant group, live among them. In general, the *Ladinos* congregate in a town that acquires and maintains the status of the metropolis in the refuge area, whereas the natives, dispersed in the surrounding environs, are relegated to a subordinate position and represent a sort of *binterland* of the central *urbs*.

Indians and *Ladinos* live in a state of socio-economic symbiosis with neither one losing their own cultural identity. The relations which are established between them assign to each group a distinct place in the structure and in economic activities, in the social hierarchy and in the apportionment of political

rights, a rank or place whose limits could not be transgressed without provoking serious disorders accompanied by violence and repression.

The economic, social and political segregation, thus established in the statues, gives rise to a structural dualism in which the Latins occupy the positions of command and subject the natives to merciless exploitation.

Within the framework of such a structural dualism the primary activities of the productive process are carried out by the natives: the majority if not the entire active population is engaged in agriculture, while the Latins reserve exclusively for themselves the secondary activities of conversion, as well as the tertiary sector of the economy, comprising the private and public services, business, transport and communications. The direct consequence of the distribution of productive activities established thus according to the differences in ethnic origin is that agriculture remains at the level of the indigenous development, that is, almost without modification as to type and quality of the harvests, the organization into clans for the exploitation of the land, and the inefficiency of its technical means.

This division of labor between native and Latin groups involves an interdependence which affects equally the lot of both of them. The irrational utilization of the capacity for work in the primary activities inevitably has its repercussions on the organic development of other sectors. The forced separation of the productive fields of the economy according to the origin of the population does not encourage the natives to improve productivity, which curbs the development of the Latin economy in the secondary and tertiary sectors, since they rest on a native economy without a solid basis.

The social structure of the Latin-American countries up to World War II could be described as a neo-feudal complex, characterized by its duality and pyramidal form. At the top of the social pyramid in fact was a small elite of large landowners, educators in the fields of science and literature, businessmen, bankers (money-lenders) and politicians, all of whom controlled wealth and power, and who handed down this control from generation to generation. Below this elite furthermore, down to

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the base of the same pyramid, was an immense world of poor and illiterates who were engaged in agriculture, artisanal activities or were intermediaries of every sort. Between the top and the bottom there was no middle class resembling the middle classes of European societies, and the whole was therefore reduced to an elite and the illiterate masses.

At the present time these structural characteristics are beginning to change and have already been modified in the great urban centers and in the most favored regions. On the other hand, in the refuge areas they remain unchanged with their separate historical background: the dualistic and pyramidal structure is not based only on the simple relationship between two social strata, but on a real relationship between two castes, in which the summit of the pyramid is invariably occupied by the Latin element and the base by groups of the indigenous population. In such a structure there can be no social mobility—or almost none. The passage from the status of an Indian to that of a Latin is obstructed by external pressures which are exerted from the summit and by internal pressure from the base.

The survival of social structures which are neo-feudal or colonialist must be held responsible, as we have seen, for the immobilism of indigenous culture or the exceedingly slow rhythm of its evolution. The external pressures, which are the consequence of the process of domination, have the same importance as those that emanate from within the cultural body, and they are typical of the process of endoculturation. Both make the native appear to be impervious to all change and hostile to any participation in programs aiming at raising him to a more equitable and human level of life in a common relationship with the other stratas of the population.

A study in depth of the process of invention and acculturation, as well as their opposites, endoculturation and foreign domination, has inspired, under the impetus of the social sciences in Mexico, the elaboration of practical solutions which have been applied in the form of programs destined to promote the development of refuge areas and to facilitate in this way the evolution of the surviving Indian and Latin cultures. The aim of these plans is the integration of these regions and their inhabitants into the national culture.