



History of Anthropology Newsletter

Volume 4
Issue 2 *Winter 1977*

Article 9

1-1-1977

Recent Doctoral Dissertations: "Maurice Leenhardt: Ethnologist and Missionary: A Study in Participation"

James Clifford

II. RECENT DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

"Maurice Leenhardt: Ethnologist and Missionary: A Study in Participation"

James Clifford
Harvard University, 1977
(History)

This biographical study introduces the life and work of Maurice Leenhardt, an influential French scholar, author and teacher during the 1930s and 40s, to an English-speaking audience. Although Leenhardt's impact on present trends in the social sciences has been relatively small, his ethnological theories--and more importantly, his ethnological acts--anticipated more than one currently fashionable school.

From 1902 to 1926 Leenhardt lived on the island of New Caledonia, where he and his wife were the first European Protestant missionaries. From 1926 to his death in 1954 he was a professional ethnologist, teaching and writing in Paris. His principal post was the chair in the history of primitive religions at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, where his predecessor was Marcel Mauss and his successor was Claude Lévi-Strauss. The length and intensity of his field experience marked him as exceptional in his scholarly milieu; among missionaries he was equally exceptional for the subtlety and rigor of his grasp of the relationships uniting and separating archaic and modern religions.

In addition to narrating the important events of Leenhardt's life, the dissertation attempts to evoke the variety of different contexts in which he was active, and to analyze his major contributions to ethnology, esthetics, translation theory, and missionology. Stressing the ambiguities of a work of liberal reformism within an exploitative colonial situation, the dissertation shows how Leenhardt's activities strained against practical and ideological constraints characteristic of the imperial context before 1950. Leenhardt's example contributes to our understanding of a significant colonial role--that of the "pro-native" or indigèneophile.

In Leenhardt's ethnographic practice, the element of participation received more than usual emphasis--an attitude which, in situations of intercultural conflict, results in a more fully dialectical anthropology, a scientific production of increased, not diminished objectivity. Contrasting his phenomenological perspective with more familiar points of view--notably those of Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss--the dissertation highlights Leenhardt's ethnological approach to the study of religion and myth. Leenhardt's ethnological theories of the person, which try to balance openness and plenitude against wholeness and completion, help to illuminate his own multi-relational, involved, life experience. His lifelong struggle with the exclusivities of the European self suggest the need to define personality through relationship and participation.

Although drawing on the standard secondary literature in the history and ethnography of New Caledonia, and on relevant general ethnology, the thesis is based primarily on Leenhardt's unpublished manuscripts and correspondence, which are in the hands of his children and students, as well as on mission and governmental archives, and interviews with surviving colleagues and family. It draws heavily on his extensive publications, the most important of which, Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World, will be published in translation in 1978 by the University of Chicago Press.

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"The Social Origins of Academic Sociology: Durkheim"

Brian James Turner
Columbia, 1977
(Anthropology)

This study analyzes the birth of Durkheimian sociology and its promotion into the French University system from 1879 to 1905. The theoretical and institutional progress of Durkheim's sociology is examined in relation to a wide spectrum of social contexts--from national social conditions to specific institutions and their key personalities. Within these contexts we can see why sociology was recognized as an academic science when it was, and why it was Durkheimian sociology alone that was introduced into the French University system.

Durkheim's sociology is analyzed as it fit into the social problematics perceived by the dominant republican political forces. He and his sociology met the needs of the middle-class liberals who were in political command, particularly those in the educational institutions. Durkheim committed his sociology in the republicans' political confrontations on two major fronts--against the previously dominant forces of the Right, and against the emerging challenge on the Left. Beyond this dual ideological combat, Durkheim's sociology was directly useful--and used--for the moderate republican's positive reform program.

As a sequence of determined events at a particular stage of French economic, social, and political evolution, the emergence of sociology can be seen as a necessary component of that broader social evolution. Like the rise of the labor movement, the development of mass education, and the beginnings of the welfare State, academic sociology can be understood as a normal product of the evolution of industrial society.

III. RECENT WORK BY SUBSCRIBERS

(Inclusion depends primarily on our being notified by the author. Please send full citation, or preferably an offprint.)

Banton, Michael, The Idea of Race (London, 1977).