

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN CULTURAL STUDIES THROUGH THE CASE OF SIGMUND FREUD AND BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI

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Abstract:

Through a review of two of their classic works, the article highlights the interdisciplinary trend in cultural studies through a case study of the famous twentieth-century scientific debate between two prominent scholars, the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and the anthropologist Polish-British Bronislaw Malinowski. Although they represent two different disciplines, they have created useful interrelated dialogues, bringing many important contributions as well as giving birth to a new approach called “culture and personality” in the study of culture. From there, it can be seen that social science disciplines do not necessarily contradict each other; rather, differences can lead to new research results.

Keywords: *Bronislaw Malinowski; Cultural studies; Anthropology; Psychoanalysis; Sigmund Freud.*

1. Introduction

An interdisciplinary approach has become an unavoidable trend in the humanities and social sciences. It goes beyond the boundaries of the inherent fields, integrating and applying their approaches and research methods to thoroughly study the scientific object. Culture is an overall object, but it is a synthesis of many different aspects such as sociology, psychology, ethnography, and ethology. On the other hand, it is the interaction between these fields that contributes to projecting culture from many different angles, resulting in new research results that appear to be unique, separate, but consistently and completely constituting culture.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), two prominent twentieth-century scholars, made significant contributions in their respective fields

(psychoanalysis and anthropology). Despite their opposing viewpoints, they have made significant contributions and introduced novel approaches to cultural studies.

2. Research overview

Totem and Taboo, first published in German in 1913 and translated into English five years later, is Sigmund Freud's first and most daring foray into the field of cultural anthropology. Of course, he didn't walk in without having done his homework. Freud drew heavily on the works of Edward Westermarck, Havelock Ellis, and German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, as well as Charles Darwin, W. H. R. Rivers, and William Robertson Smith. He was heavily influenced by E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1876), Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology* (1876), and Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877). Morgan's savagery, barbarism, and

civilization model, which was compatible with Freud's psychological model of childhood sexuality at the time, progressed along a three-stage corresponding trajectory - oral, anus, and phallic.

However, James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) is the most important entry into Freud's primitive culture. The majority of the quotes in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* are taken from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. Frazer's work focuses on the comparative study of religion and mythology, drawing on a wealth of material from the journals of travelers, adventurers, and missionaries returning to Europe, as well as ethnographic works and folklore. However, Frazer never visited the local areas or met the people he wrote about. This was also the general trend of armchair anthropologists (as Ruth Benedict referred to them) at the time, as opposed to later Anglo-American anthropologists, most notably Malinowski, who will be mentioned later. Freud's psychoanalytic research methods are frequently referred to as clinic methods, or more specifically, clinical methods such as free association, dream interpretation, and illusions.

Freud traces the origins of human culture - including religion, social organization, and all material inventions - to the act of primordial father-killing, the first form of manifestation of the Oedipus complex in historical origins, in *Totem and Taboo*. Freud asserted the primacy of psychoanalysis by placing paternal murder at the dawn of history, sparking a lengthy debate about the universality of psychology and the relativity of culture.

Two years after the publication of *Totem and Taboo* (1915), the father of functionalism, a Polish anthropologist, traveled to the Trobriand Islands in Northwest Melanesia to study societies. His goal was to refute the universality of the Oedipus complex, which Freud claimed was present in all people, as well as to argue that different family structures produce different family complexes. Fieldwork, or participatory observation, which is Malinowski's primary research method, also contradicts earlier

anthropologists' methods of analyzing written accounts and opinions of others as well as psychoanalysts' clinical methods. Although influenced by Frazer and *The Golden Bough*, Malinowski recognized the limitations of secondary ethnographic works at the time and speculated that assumptions about totemism, religion, and society had reached a dead end. As a result, he chose direct data collection from the field, which would later prove to be a revolutionary path for ethnographic and anthropological studies.

In addition to the ethnographic works *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926), and *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927), Malinowski's argument against Freud and his psychoanalytic followers is crystallized. His work on sexual selection and inhibition in primitive tribes, based on an intercultural comparative approach, serves as a research problem, but also as an interesting dialogue between psychoanalysis and anthropology in the study of culture, as shown especially in Part III, when he examines the dividing line between the two disciplines as well as the role of primordial paternity in the formation of culture. While psychoanalysis was becoming popular in the 1920s, the book was also an important contribution to the field at the time.

In general, each scholar has taken his own path, with his own approach to culture. If Freud's *Totem and Taboo* marked the start of an interdisciplinary dialogue between psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology, Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* marked the meeting point, or turning point, in the two disciplines' relationship.

3. Methodology

This article re-examines the two incidents that framed anthropology's initial interaction with psychoanalysis, highlighting key publications and their reception in the literature. Although Bronislaw Malinowski's embrace of psychoanalysis, which was foreseen through a close reading of his well-known work *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, marked a turning

point in relations between the two disciplines, the interdisciplinary dialogue was initially sparked by Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Malinowski argued that the Trobriand Islands contained an avuncular complex rather than an Oedipal one. The author examined ten introductory psychoanalysis and anthropology textbooks published in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In most of these books, the classic work *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* is revered for illuminating the limits of Freudian theory's ethnocentrism and the impact of culture on personality. When Freud is mentioned, it is in the context of his Oedipus complex theory, as presented in *Totem and Taboo*.

4. Research results

4.1. Complex and culture

To understand the fundamental difference in perspectives between Freud and Malinowski on the relationship between the complex and culture, consider a central concept - the father and his role.

Following the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and the findings of the Hans study in 1909, Freud established the Oedipus complex in *Totem and Taboo*, with the belief that civilization is derived from variables. Oedipus, the act of murdering the father, and primitive human thinking all represent our childhood state. In general, the Oedipus complex expresses the boy's unconscious desire to kill his father in order to possess the mother, and it frequently translates into a conscious desire to defeat (or castrate) him. This complex is a childhood phenomenon that appears after the phallic phase, around three years of age, and usually disappears by early childhood (around five years of age), when the child realizes that either choice will result in castration. If he tries to intimidate his father, he will always fail, because the father is always stronger and can satisfy the mother's desires in ways that the child cannot, whereas if he wants to be in its mother's mind, he must castrate himself. As a result, it rejects the Oedipus connection and begins a period of sexual regression that lasts until puberty. The superego has now supplanted the

Oedipus complex as the source of morality or conscience in each individual, acting as a reluctance to accept parental authority in preventing forbidden incest. Freud proposed that the Oedipus complex occurs in everyone, including adopted children, because it is related to the importance of parental patterns rather than biological genetics.

In Western society, the father is essentially the element of the individual family based on modern monogamy and *patria potestas* (power of the father). The Oedipus complex corresponds to the Western family, which is reinforced by Roman law and Christian dogma, and later by bourgeois industrial organization. The father is the family's head, the link to the kin, and the economic provider. The father is given power in the Western family, and for the child, the father is a symbol of supremacy in the family, synonymous with punishment and forced submission. As a result, cracks in the relationship between a father and his wife and children are easy to appear. As the mediator in that relationship, the mother becomes the object of the son's emotional attraction.

Malinowski writes in *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* that the physical bond between a father and his child is not recognized in the Trobriand Islands' matriarchal institution. In Trobriand, the father-child relationship was merely social; that is, the Trobriands felt it necessary to assign the father a social role. A father's duty is to be a labor provider for his wife's family while also being a friend to his children, eager to perform his duty to his children with enthusiasm and affection. On the contrary, all authority in the family is transferred to the uncle, the mother's brother, and all the privileges and status that the child inherits are transferred to his uncle. In another dimension, instead of their mothers, children develop an inhibited desire for their sisters, who have been separated from each other due to indigenous taboos.

Despite his reservations about universal evolutionism, Malinowski learned the fundamental concept of marriage from

evolutionists. He saw marriage as the foundation of culture, but he discovered a complex marriage system even in the most primitive societies. His methodological issue was that he tried to describe systems as realistically as possible without comparing them. In other words, he emphasized the uniqueness of each culture rather than its universality. Malinowski frequently uses the concept of “father” in Trobriand society to highlight the fundamental difference between Trobriand Islanders and Westerners. The Trobriand word *tama* simply means “my mother's husband,” which is not synonymous with the term “father,” and he even considers it similar to the word *tomakava* (stranger). This is understandable given that the Trobriand society has the authority to calculate lineage based on matriarchy while disregarding biological paternity.

Malinowski observed that in a typical Trobriand family, the boy's uncle (the mother's brother) would stand in for the father, the family's representative of authority. Malinowski became skeptical of Western society's institutions after closely observing family institutions in other cultures. The Trobriandian concept of *tama*, which is distinct from the “father” in Western patriarchal society, provides an opportunity to consider whether the standard role of “father” is only accepted in Western culture and society. Later, as Malinowski increased his critical criticism of the Freudians, his main target was the Oedipus complex's thesis on universality. The entire Oedipus complex, according to Freud, takes place in the nuclear family. However, Malinowski contends that the Oedipus complex is insufficient to explain psychological events in a Trobriand family, in which the father does not play the same role as the father in a European family.

However, Malinowski, like many Freudians, chose the term “father” as central to the structure of the family system, which he considered fundamental to human society. The father's various roles have proven to be cross-cultural. However, why is “the father” always seen as the focal point - rather than the “mother” or

“sisters”? As a result, Malinowski's problem cannot avoid the Westernist, patriarchal prejudice. Furthermore, many critics have pointed out that Malinowski's social system adheres to Freud's theory: “the mother's brother” in the Trobriands is a type of inhibition of the “father” - the power of “the mother.” The phrase “father” was simply replaced by “mother's brother.”

As a result, the author supports Malinowski's concept of the *nuclear family complex* as a representative concept for the complex's universality. Because the complex has its object conversion in various social institutions. When we compare the Oedipus complex in civilized Western society to the matriarchal complex found in primitive Trobriand society by Malinowski, we see a hostile transformation of the boy from the father (in the sub-society). Western authority) to the mother's brother (in Trobriand matriarchal society), but it is still the object representing authority in the family before the child in essence. At the same time, the affection that stems from the Oedipus complex's taboo for the mother is transformed into affection for the sister, which is a taboo object in the Trobriands. Similarly, the Electra complex (derived from the Greek mythological character Electra, he and his younger brother Orestes plotted revenge against their mother Clytemnestra and stepfather Aegisthus for the murder of their biological father, Agamemnon), an inverse of Carl Jung's proposed Oedipus complex, refers to the daughter's competition for the mother towards the father; the brotherly complex Romulus and Remus (the Cain and Abel complex is also referred to in some documents. Derived from the legend of the twin brothers Romulus and Remus, who founded Rome. Romulus built Rome and murdered his brother Remus to become the Roman Kingdom's first king), which deals with the brother's jealousy of wanting to overcome his brother's shadow, and the brother reacts with a violent attempt to restrain the brother; they are the multifaceted variety of the nuclear family complex, which begins in childhood.

The impact of social mechanisms operating in a given society is emphasized in Malinowski's most important argument about complexity and culture. The main aspects of this mechanism are the regulation of childhood sexuality, incest taboos, exogamy, power division, and family structure. It also demonstrates the connection between biological, psychological, and social factors. Furthermore, Malinowski developed a theory about the variability of instincts in culture and the transformation of instinct response into cultural adjustment in *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*. In terms of psychological theory, he proposes a method that emphasizes the influence of social agents, thus refuting hypotheses about the "crowd psychology," "the collective unconscious," "herd mentality," and other metaphysical concepts.

4.2. The act of killing the primal father - the beginning of a culture or the way to interpret cultural phenomena?

Malinowski's work analyzed and refuted one of Freud's arguments about the act of killing the original father as a milestone marking the emergence and formation of culture, the "great event" or "the primordial cause of culture." As previously stated, the Oedipus complex is the primary tool for interpreting totemism and incest taboos. Freud's description of the act of killing the primal father is closely related to Charles Darwin's concept of the "primitive horde." There is a savage tribe with a violent and cruel father who drives out all of his sons to take over the herd's women. Later, the expelled children band together to slay the father. They then threw a party and ate their father to celebrate their victory. This behavior, according to Freud, is the children's attempt to identify with the father and, in a symbolic way, to capture his power and authority. The totem meal was the beginning of religion, which later evolved into sacrifices. At the same time, the children's suppressed emotional urges resurfaced after identifying with the father and satisfying the envious hatred. They feel remorse and create a substitute totem for the father, as well as set taboos against eating totem species to alleviate guilt. This "great

event" led to the formation of the most primitive institutions of human society, as well as the means of inhibition (or taboo).

Totemism, the dominant belief in certain social and religious institutions among primitive peoples in Australia or elsewhere outside Europe, has piqued the interest of academics since the late nineteenth century. Géza Róheim, for example, studied totem-worship in Australia's primitive tribes, while Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict studied indigenous tribes in North America. The fact that these primitive tribes are divided into smaller clans, each with its own "totem" - usually an animal or a species of animal - is a striking pattern. Members of the clan revered this totem as a plant or natural phenomenon. Totem animals are not to be killed or eaten by clan members, according to a strict rule. However, during sacred festivals, these people are permitted to consume totem meat.

Furthermore, anthropologists discovered a customary law parallel to totemism in these primitive tribes at the end of the nineteenth century. A man is not permitted to marry a woman from his clan; instead, he must marry a woman from another clan. This is exogamy customary law. Freud was the first to associate exogamy with a fear of incest. Exogamy, according to Freud, was an extended form of the incest taboo, in which a man was forbidden to marry not only his immediate relatives, but also all the women of his clan, whether blood related or not.

As a result, the "primitive horde" and the act of killing the primal father can be viewed as the result of research into the close relationship between totemism and the incestuous taboo. The need to suppress this first sin gave rise to all human institutions and customary laws. Totem species serve as replacements for the primal father, who was murdered. Surprisingly, even though totems are revered and cannot be killed, there are times when they can be killed and eaten. It means that the tribe members unconsciously recreate the first murder.

Returning to Malinowski's criticism, he uses the phylogenetic perspective and the sociological

point of view to analyze Freud's primordial father-killing hypothesis. If the act of killing the primordial father is considered a phylogenetic experience, then all men will have an Oedipus complex because they all inherit the guilt that comes with the act. Kill their father, even if they don't have one. Modern biology has completely rejected this view of phylogenetic experience. To emphasize this point, Malinowski uses the structure of the primitive hominid family, the habit of segregating males into adulthood, which contradicts Freud's idea of being banished and returned to kill the father, and which, as the males mature, tend to find new females and form their own hordes. More importantly, Malinowski emphasizes, if the act of killing the primal father is considered the source of all cultures, then there is no way for the totem crime sequence to be fixed into cultural institutions in the natural context. In other words, culture and all of its achievements do not appear "overnight" as a result of a single act of killing the primal father; rather, they must go through a long historical process of formation.

5. Discussion

Again, we see a fundamental difference between Freud's and Malinowski's approaches. Malinowski, as a representative of realist ethnologists, strives to present the most realistic and objective picture of other cultures. In contrast, despite a historical approach to the origins of totemism, the primal father-killing argument is based on the speculative hypothesis that a primitive human population existed at the dawn of history, a hypothesis that not everyone can prove.

The common belief is that the Oedipus complex, or primal father-killing, is a type of "myth" rather than a fact as the origin of all cultures. In this light, the act of killing the original father and totemism becomes an explanation for the culture and its phenomena.

Taking totemism as a cultural interpretation, one can see that the ultimate goal of *Totem and*

Taboo is the parallel connection between psychopaths and savage primitives. All of their minds are the result of inner hidden memories, such as lingering desires, love or hatred for taboo objects. These desires exist in people's unconscious; they don't understand why they must obey these taboos; they only know that they must. Freud saw taboos as symptoms of underlying issues. Or barbaric customs such as dreams, which are manifestations of fragments of past events. The past is reintroduced into reality, and the present does not exist in parallel but is present in reality. According to Freud, all systems of totemism and taboos constitute primitive man's worldview. Primitive people's customs, laws, or beliefs represent a primitive people's philosophy of the universe, which makes sense from their barbaric perspective.

6. Conclusion

We can compare the dimension of approach to scientific subjects between psychoanalysts and anthropologists by using totem and taboo systems as reference frames. Psychoanalysts seek to approach systems in depth, going beyond the surface to access the psychological nucleus, whereas ethnographers and anthropologists are only interested in the surface dimension, detailed description of those systems. However, as Malinowski states at the end of his work *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, collaboration and sharing will greatly benefit psychoanalysts and anthropologists. The encounter and dialogue between psychoanalysis and anthropology itself set the stage for and inspired the later "culture and personality" school of cultural/psychological anthropology, resulting in many important works, such as Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934).

Finally, viewing culture through two lenses, psychoanalysis and anthropology, will provide a holistic, definitive, and comprehensive view of culture, both in terms of expressive material culture and hidden spiritual culture.

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ĐỐI THOẠI GIỮA PHÂN TÂM HỌC VÀ NHÂN HỌC TRONG NGHIÊN CỨU VĂN HÓA QUA TRƯỜNG HỢP SIGMUND FREUD VÀ BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI

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Tóm tắt:

Bài viết chỉ ra khuynh hướng liên ngành trong nghiên cứu văn hóa, dựa trên trường hợp nghiên cứu là cuộc tranh luận khoa học nổi tiếng thế kỷ XX giữa hai nhà khoa học lỗi lạc là nhà phân tâm học Áo Sigmund Freud và nhà nhân học người Anh gốc Ba Lan Bronislaw Malinowski, thông qua xem xét hai công trình kinh điển của họ. Cả hai, mặc dù đại diện cho hai chuyên ngành khác nhau, xuất phát từ những luận điểm trái ngược nhau về nguồn gốc của văn hóa, mối liên hệ giữa phức cảm tâm lý và văn hóa, họ đã tạo nên những đối thoại liên ngành hữu ích, mang lại nhiều đóng góp quan trọng cũng như sinh ra cách tiếp cận mới mang tên “văn hóa và nhân cách” trong nghiên cứu văn hóa. Từ đó để thấy rằng, các chuyên ngành khoa học xã hội không nhất thiết phủ định lẫn nhau, trái lại, có thể từ sự khác biệt hướng đến những kết quả nghiên cứu mới.

Từ khóa: Bronislaw Malinowski; Nghiên cứu văn hóa; Nhân học; Phân tâm học; Sigmund Freud.