

Inner sounds of anthropology

By Aurora Marquina

Some months ago, I lectured a summer course in Spain which I entitled "*Body Messages*". At the same time, I had to report the title of my lecture to the university where I work so as to be authorized a leave for my journey. And there, listening to my body, emerged in my mind the idea that each discipline has its own sound and that anthropology– if we listen to it- has its own particular tune as well, so I decided to give this title to the work and I hope to make it sound.

As some of you do not know about anthropology, I will develop a brief context in order to facilitate the understanding of some concepts to be heard here today.

Brief context

It could be said that it was in the early twentieth century when the scope of anthropology studies remained clearly stated. Anthropology will deal with the study of the "primitive" or "savage" human being and will be concerned with the culture of the peoples known as "primitive".

Then, Bronislaw Malinowski, as a result of his works in the Trobriand Islands (Islands in Papua New Guinea located in the Solomon Sea) would install fieldwork as the essential tool for the study of cultures and societies. This way, the anthropology steadies its bases on Fieldwork, on at-distance-based techniques and on Comparison. Its perspective is holistic. It is the era of the great monographs.

For the anthropologist, fieldworks imply living among the dwellers of the fieldsites during more or less long periods. The authority of the anthropology will emanate from this way of studying. It is ingenuously supposed that the anthropologist is absolutely objective because when studying cultures radically different from his own culture, he is able to observe the Other's behaviour clearly and without the slightest interest. This is known as the *bongo bongism*.

Years later, this belief drove the discipline to a dead-end since it was considered that there weren't any more primitive societies to be studied. Consequently, anthropology remained without scope and it was ready to disappear. This knowledge almost "magic" – attributed to the anthropologists about the peoples studied- acted as a double-edged sword.

The anthropologists: where do they come from and whom they worked for

Some anthropologists – mainly of colonizer countries origin such as Great Britain, USA, France, Netherlands, Germany, Belgium which had very clear economic interests) began to work in bona fides for their governments, reporting data that afterwards would be used against the peoples studied. The consequences of those actions have remained valid until today as it can be seen, for instance, in the case of the bloody war between the Hutus and the Tutsi tribes that cost more than a million deaths in Ruanda.

One case is that of Ruth Benedict who performed her fieldwork in Japan for the US Office of War Information (Intelligence and Propaganda). In her famous book *The Chrysanthemum and The Sword* - which I strongly recommend since it makes evident the issue about cultural relativism- she begins by saying: "*The Japanese are the most alien enemy the United States have ever fought*". In another moment of the book the author says: "*Conventions of war which Western nations had come to accept as facts of human nature obviously did not exist for the Japanese*". Later: "...what turned the Pacific War into something more than a series of landings in several shores and islands, something more than an insurmountable logistic problem, was that it made a major obstacle in the nature of the enemy. We had to understand their behaviour in order to cope with it".

Very soon, she stopped working for the government.

Similar cases had as a consequence the prohibition of entrance to anthropologists into some countries.

b) On the other hand, within the anthropologists, voices began to sound drawing the attention over the way in which fieldwork had been performed, not only denouncing that some anthropologists were at the service of governments as seen before, or of banks, factories and institutions all of which put under suspicion the results of their research and in doubt the researchers morality, but also was put under suspicion the narration about the reality observed.

The informants

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, it became evident that the persons in charge of supplying information felt different, had different interests and told the same thing in different ways. It

was observed that sometimes – most of the times- the “informants-interpreters” were unreliable. Today we acknowledge the considerable importance translators have in the passing on information from a language into another, even if they belong to the same culture. Imagine the misinterpretations between anthropologists and their interpreters who had a radically different culture and occasionally a different mental structure, and informants whom, in most of the situations, were paid.

There has always been the suspicion among a good number of anthropologists that neither the so called “primitives” were that “primitive” nor the “savage” so “savage” or the “civilized” that “civilized” and that according to the point of reference for the comparison, the people called primitive could be more advanced than those called the civilized. For example, Marvin Harris, an anthropologist from the material culturalist stream, claims that the Ikung Bushmen spent less time and energy in searching for food than the so called high tech civilized peoples, that all human beings evolve and that every people has its own history. It took a long time, but we advanced in the understanding that all humans belong to the same species, it is called into question the concept of race and its use, although there are persons persisting on excluding some human beings due to the colour of the skin or their particular beliefs.

The History

A very interesting point forgotten by anthropology during a long period was to consult the sources and the history to understand its scope of study, that is the present of the cultures and societies.

When studying the “primitive” peoples, generally illiterate, their history stems from oral tradition, subtracted from the tyranny of the writing, despite being undoubtedly subdued to the tyranny of oral tradition. This fact helped to develop the works – I would dare say- about the present, very cyclical, losing the perspective of the past (a still non-solved problem). However, this fact was absent when studying the “backwards” peoples such as those of the Mediterranean region having an abundant written history, it hardly was made use of it in spite of its importance, at the moment of understanding many of the present social phenomena.

I will set an example taken from my own experience. I developed my thesis in the Valle de Baztán, in the Spanish Navarrese Pyrenees about an excluded or marginal group “the agotes”, in Spain and Cagot in France. They were only allowed to enter a church by a special door distinct from their neighbours, they were allotted separate cemetery, for the communion, as they were forbidden to partake of the sacrament, the Eucharist was handed to them on the end of a long stick so as not to “get contaminated”. It can be read in documents that in some places, they were compelled to wear a Phrygian cap and a foot of goose or duck pinned on the dress shoulder. They were considered as members of the guild “carpenters to build” and as the woodcutters for Jesus Christ’s cross. They were impure beings and people should be protected from them. This happens in a valley where the very land was considered as noble and where in majority of the houses outstand their heraldic shields showing their origins.

How it could be understood the Agotes marginalization if we ignore their history? What could be done for both the Agotes and the non-Agotes integrate their rivalry and violence if we do not deepen into the root of the problem?

Searching back into written history does not mean that we have found the root of the problem but it opens a way of access.

In spite of the enormous mistakes made during the construction of anthropological knowledge and the severe consequences they had over some of the peoples studied, undoubtedly the anthropology has made a major effort to explain human behaviour, it has made evident the milliard of answers given by human beings at the moment of making life, has seen the necessity of advancing in this knowledge. And from the last third of the last century, hot topics such as the submission of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and the extinction of Native North Americans who have been set apart in reservations, the present annihilation of indigenes, mostly in Australia, Africa and Brazil, human rights violations, the increasing violence, the multiplication in the manifestations of religiosity, are driving the anthropology to pose what could be done to stop this dehumanizing process. (See *Recapturing anthropology, working in the present*. Edited by Richard G. Fox, 1991, or the feature by Carriders in *Current Anthropology*, number 45, year 2005)

Until here, I have given a brief setting about the scope of anthropology and its methods of collecting information.

Ethics

As soon as we listen to the inner sounds of anthropology, it makes evident the contradiction underlying in its core.

For that, I'll ask a series of questions:

- How could we speak about the other's morality or the others' customs when in the very definition of the object of study we start from concepts that were born imposed by our beliefs and values and that are considered as sheer truths?

Primitives, savages and backwards are the OTHERS, who were placed and are still placed by some, nearer to the "animalitas" than to the "humanitas", remember the debate with Padre de Las Casas about the questioning of the existence of soul within the indigenes, and needless to say if the same problem is posed regarding black people, to them it was absolutely denied so that slavery did not suppose any moral problem; well! It is a fact that within some African cultures, slavery was an institution as well.

The OTHERS become an object of study, things, as an author says: "anthropologists study men as if they were ants".

They dehumanize the other and at dehumanizing the others, they dehumanize themselves and also they dehumanize everything they touch, in this case, a discipline created by them, the anthropology. Yet THEY, the ones who study, the civilized ones, would not fit into these categories. For that reason, anthropological studies about "first world" societies are very recent.

On the grounds of which kind of ethics is constructed a knowledge if the ones who elaborate it do not realise – and if they do, they do not express it- that what defines "the savageness" or "the primitiveness" or "the culture" etc, it is not something given by human nature or by god -as it was sustained and believed during a long time and that still today some people continue believing- but something given by the intention of some human beings, a human construction, having very precise interests?

It is not perhaps that anthropology reassures its own beliefs when studying the OTHERS' customs? For instance, monogamy reassuring polygamy, monotheism reassuring polytheism, the myths of heaven and hell, etc.

The mental direction that headed, and in numerous occasions leads, social and cultural anthropology studies tends to justify the idea that there are some human beings below others, who are inferior and have to be submitted in order to teach them how to be civilized – euphemistically speaking- negating their own intentionality, their freedom, the rights to have their own culture according to their particular way of living. This appropriation of intentionality, of the OTHER'S subjectivity, is far from being a phenomenon corresponding exclusively to our occidental culture; we can notice in all societies how human beings are subdued in cascade. Enough already of the good savage myth! All the time this myth continues, it makes impossible to advance towards our future.

2- How could ethnography and anthropology, and ethno history be trustworthy when the investigator does not realize that it is he who has subjectivity and that this subjectivity tinges all his works and, even if he realizes, does not make it explicit?

3- in what way could be integrated the OTHER, the subjectivity of the one who informs, in the game of constructing knowledge?

4- How could we go further in this field in such a way that the reader of a paper understand that any knowledge is tinged by several subjectivities, included his own and that the social science field is mere interpretation?

Starting by the last point mentioned, the fourth, referred to the reader of an anthropological production, I would like to tell a personal anecdote. In a compilation of articles I prepared for the subject politics anthropology, I stated in its introduction that the viewpoint for selecting the articles- that included writers and anthropologists from several trends- was the Universalist Humanism or New Humanism.

You cannot imagine the scandal when some students of the fifth year of the career read that! The students asked my head together with all the authors they considered humanists: an Argentinean philosopher awarded the degree "doctor *honoris causa*" by the Russian Academy of Science, Silo; a researcher acknowledged by the University of La Sapienza di Roma, Italy, Salvatore Puledda, a lawyer, director of the World Centre for Humanists Studies, Oscar Cevey, from Argentina and an economist Guillermo Sullings. It was also included Edgardo Morin, anthropologist, whom I consider undoubtedly a humanist although he is not in the Universalist Humanism stream. And all that trouble just for publicly stating my position. I was denounced to the University chancellor, to the dean and to the department director and had to go on a-literally-"inquisitorial" trial.

There were some very interesting answers on behalf students. One of them said: "Ms Marquina makes explicit her position, she declares herself as humanist while you tell neither about own your interests nor about the head that is behind". People dislike listening others' standpoint. It is worth to hide it because if you reveal it, you are admitting the inadmissible: that the so-called "objectivity" in social and human science is inexistent. This does not invalidate investigations or theories, or knowledge about things. It simply spots one of the difficulties that an investigator has to face: the acknowledgment of his own subjectivity and the other's subjectivity, the merging between what has come to be called internal and external world.

It could have been avoided several mistakes, and sometimes much suffering, if scientists had acknowledge the impact of their subjectivity and intentionality at collecting data and elaborating theories about human behaviour. This is a problem yet to be solved in anthropology that had taken and takes a great deal of reflection within the discipline.

Regarding the third question that poses the integration of the OTHER, first of all, the other should be discovered in the construction of knowledge.

In the same token, it is a problem and an enormous difficulty to know what to do with the OTHER, that is to say, with the informants, those who provide the data beyond direct observation.

At one time, the informant was merely that, the person who passes information, the one who opens possibilities, the one who brings you to special places, for instance the mountain where rainwater is processed or to the place of the gods. The OTHERS were the objects of study, those who gave information but made things. They were the "non-voiced". Soon, anthropologists' voices called the attention over this fact. Thus, voice was given to the informants in different ways: through life histories, where the informants became protagonists of the anthropological work, preponderating their declarations, more recently, participating them the results of the investigation, etc. However, in spite of the interesting step forward given, the problem of subjectivities remains unsolved because the other mediated his information according his own biography and his own intentionality. It can be illustrated by means of visual images. At present this argument is still alive.

The anthropologists want to set in concrete their subjectivity as well and begin to publish their personal diaries where they collect their feelings, their joy and happiness, their most intimate thoughts, "subjectivity is ventilated", like was ventilated Malinkiwsky diary after his death accompanied by an utmost scandal when was revealed his intimate thoughts about the natives. Clifford Geertz in his book *The Anthropologist as author* (1988) collects and analyzes these particulars. The following are some declarations by Rabinow (who performed fieldwork in Morocco) and collected by Geertz. These declarations would have been unthinkable to be published twenty years ago.

"My answer was essentially an act of violence; it was carried out at a symbolic level, but it was an act of violence in spite of all. I was transgressing my informants integrity...I knew that what I was doing would coerce them, would almost blackmail them into explaining some aspects of their life kept passionately hidden till this moment...To those who claim that never have used symbolic violence as part of their fieldwork experience, I'll simply tell them I don't believe it. It is inherent to the structure of the situation."

And this is how things stand for a portion of the anthropology.

And I keep on wondering, do these confessions solve the problem of explicating the subjectivity of the one (the anthropologist), and of the other (informant) and of the reader (yours, mine, his)?

Of course, there have been advances in anthropological ethics, in anthropologists ethics and in a more moral behaviour since the debate about cultural relativism compelled them to consider the other as an equal and opened Pandora's' box, unveiling the weaknesses in anthropology, and in other sciences, as producer of knowledge.

The eagerness of the discipline for correcting the excesses committed at times by anthropologists – either female or male- had produced, for instance, the formulation of ethical principles at the "American Anthropological Association" to be observed by the entire sector intervening in fieldwork. In some places, they are getting so oppressive that investigators feel threatened with such amount of requirements. I won't enter into that matter which will give space for many lectures.

Undoubtedly, all these will help to make anthropology a more ethical and moral discipline and that knowledge will be benefited.

Contributions to social sciences from the Universalist Humanism.

I would like to propose in this ambit the advance that would suppose, for social sciences at least, the incorporation into the scientific language the concept of “landscape” as it is described by Silo in his book *Humanize the Earth*.

Before entering into the matter of Landscape, it is necessary to briefly make reference to Perception. Although there are several books where these contents are developed (See Notes on Psychology or Psychology IV by Silo, Morphology by José Caballero, Autoliberación by Luis Amman and others) I will start with the definition from de New Humanism dictionary: “*Today, Humanist psychology considers **perception** to be a dynamic structure of sensations in which the consciousness actively organizes the data received through the pathways of the senses... In every perception the phenomena of attitude, evaluation and preferences concerning a given stimulus are always present... In the social psychology of New Humanism the concept of “landscape” allows the development and application of a method yielding a rich knowledge of different cultures and their modes of perceiving the world.*”

Let's set an example. For sure, you will recognize what I'm about to say in any moment of your life although the prompting object would be different from the one I am proposing. Some people rejoice and others become sad, some get tense and others relax at watching the same picture or listening to the same music. How it could possible be if it is the very same object? So the thing it is not in the picture, neither in the music nor in the words, it is in oneself.

This is way the author of *Humanize the Earth* proposes to use the term Landscape to make clear to the listener or the reader and the writer that we are not speaking about the external world or the inner world or society as something outside or alien to us, since themselves constitute those worlds that are something more than what they see or listen to.

In his book he defines and differentiates between *External Landscape - is what we perceive of things-* and *Internal Landscape- is what we sift from them through the sieve of our internal world*” to end up saying: “*These landscapes are one and constitute our indissoluble vision of reality.*” And it is by this vision that we orient ourselves in one direction or another.”

He also refers to a *Human Landscape* to which dedicates several epigraphs of great interest for the matter of this symposium and to this part of social sciences. In this book, there are a wide range of themes and proposals of maximum interest to be developed.

If we accepted this proposal of speaking about *Social Landscape* instead of society or *Human Landscape*, to use the term *Looks*, instead of the mere “see”, we would give an important step forward because all would know that we speak about interacting human intentions... of interpretations and not of absolute truths.

The themes within the social and human landscape which anthropology have dealt with, have undergone variations through the time, or better said, whereas some became protagonists others were left behind, the same way that it have changed the perspective from which the phenomena were observed.

At times, certain aspects were studied depending on the organism subsidizing the investigation or the specialization made by a university or department, or the investigator's interest etc. I resort again to a personal example. Twenty-five years ago, I was participating in the humanist organism *La Comunidad for human development*. We were working, experimenting, learning about beliefs, all that experience was an amazing laboratory. With the knowledge acquired I elaborated a lecture for an anthropology congress. The title of the lecture was “Current Beliefs”. I can assure that many colleagues laughed at it, they did not understand my claiming that we strongly believe in the need of suffering; that there were several beliefs underlying the definition of nuclear family; that the relationship established between the youth and music is supported by beliefs and so on. Just one anthropologist (a female) approached to tell me that my theory could be said to be revolutionary. Nowadays, nobody doubts about what I stated over beliefs from the Universalist Humanism perspective and currently, there are abundant investigations on this field.

At present, the issues that were key for New Humanism and since many years we have been working on them, today are thoroughly fashionable; studies about the **body** not only from psycho-socio-biology perspective, but as application and symbolic meaning among different social groups and cultures, and as a prostheses of human intention in Humanists Studies Centres as well; **violence**, mainly that exerted by the state, religions, youth, etc, that is to say, violence and its different modes: political, religious,

economic etc and some more; about **religiosity, spirituality** (it is very interesting to read M. Eliade, a religions historian). Currently, a marked tendency towards yoga, tai chi, energy, healthy nutrition, is been observed, a search of something giving meaning to life; **suffering**, the major topic to be overcome. Suffering is a topic not only related to death as the ultimate image, it has to do greatly with coherent actions, with internal unity. Coherent actions have to do with behaviour, with costumes, moral and ethics. Coherent action and internal unity are both sides of the same coin, they are inseparable. The coherent action is a human beings and social groups aspiration. It is the action that tries to align thought, feeling and action in the same direction. If you observe yourselves and detect suffering, soon will discover that this suffering has to do with incoherence where thoughts, feelings and actions did not headed the same direction.

Contradiction inverts the meaning of life, generating suffering not only in yourselves but also in all those around you. Contradiction jeopardizes not only our future and that of those who are in contact with us. Let's reflect about how, due to adults contradictions, our children have been left in the void, and we all have fallen into the abyss, we do not recognize each other any more, it seem as if communication has been broken down. Contradiction contaminates Human Landscape like an invisible illness detectable only by its effects. "Should your influence, then, reach an entire people, take great care to overcome your own contradiction so as not to poison with it the air that all others must breathe. You will be responsible for yourself and for all those you gather around you".

These topics not only are in fashion among anthropologists, but historians, sociologists, philosophers, psychologists as well.

Since its origins, anthropology is devoted to the study of the OTHERS. She wanted to understand the functioning of societies; she wanted to know about the OTHERS culture in order to know us. There was too much arrogance, lack of kindness at the heart and Light in the understanding for the study about the Others would lead to deepen in the knowledge about ourselves, and above all, to deepen within human beings and to give reason of his meaning in life, why we do what we do, why we speak about gods and create myths that remain throughout millennia, why emerges the image of immortality, why we face in such diverse ways the fact of death and of transcendence.

However, the attempt, despite all its errors, was valid and contributed, undoubtedly, to the consideration of the others, to the vindication of the friendly intercourse to others. Many anthropologists committed with the case of the subdued. It also served to unveil the richness of human constructions, so diverse and sometimes so "beautiful".

Today, anthropology, as any other science, does not escape of the destructurement we are living, it is not something touching only our inner, outer and human landscape, but something that involves everything by the phenomenon of globalization towards which all the peoples are tending, at least, the peoples of this planet. In this **search**, at world level involvement, the anthropology could give an interesting step. It has to do with internalizing the perspective from which human events are studied. It has to do with the fact that the investigator could experiment the things about which he speaks. It has always been tried to explain the world from an outer look, everything was explained and justified from "outside"; thus gods, sorcerers, neighbours and the whole society were the one to blame for the evils that happened to us.

At this very moment of the search, apart from developing and deepening into the concepts of Internal Landscape, External Landscape, Human Landscape, Social Landscape applied to social sciences, I believe that it is high time of rescuing human being as a central value and that it was well explained yesterday by Loredana.

Perhaps, this is the moment for answering, from social science field, to the question posed in the sixteen century by Étienne de La Boétie (1530-1563) in his book *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude or The Anti-dictator* and that many others have been asking since the origin of the human being: "At which moment of its history human beings got alienated? At which moment in human history, the human being began to delegate, to yield its freedom?"

It is time of bringing out to the surface the best part of the human being.

It is time for social scientists not to be afraid of the questions about who am I and where do I go.

It is time for them to ask questions and to deepen into, not to be afraid.

It is time to pose the question about what do we understand by human being.

It is time for the myth about objectivity in social science investigation to be broken.

It is time for the myth that the social scientist has to render knowledge and not get compromised by pointing the direction to where these institutions studied, these relations, these informal networks that are being formed in this moment lead, or the direction they are actually taking.

It is time of revising and finding a new method according to the times that are approaching.

Of course, for all that we need parameters to compare and here I would propose to undertake the advances over Violence and Suffering as a measure of social and cultural evolution. Because, dear friends, isn't it to overcome pain and suffering a human aspiration? Don't we do all the wagers that we do just to feel good? A friend of mine told me one day, while drinking coffee: "Look at this cup. It is full of human intention. The person who created it thought about you and about everybody, he thought about the best way for you now could be able to handle it and to drink in it."

I propose in this ethics in social science forum that the Golden Rule would be the one leading our contribution to knowledge: "treat others as you would have them treat you" or "learn to treat others the way you would like to be treated"

There is a first look on this principle that has to do with moral, with behaviour, with customs and there is other deeper look that has to do with questioning yourself why should we treat others as I would like to be treated?

This issue has to do with ethics, with Heidegger's *ethos* based on Aristotle and other stoic philosophers, as the "inner place" that each and every man and woman has within and that involves a fundamental attitude for him and the world.

I would like to finish remembering a great spiritual guide that in this very place and long time ago said: "If you have come to listen to a man who it is thought transmits wisdom, you have mistaken your way, for true wisdom is not communicated through books or speeches—true wisdom is found in the depths of your consciousness, just as true love is found in the depths of your heart."