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978-0-521-62982-9 - An Introduction to Theory in Anthropology

Robert Layton

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In this innovative introduction, Robert Layton reviews the ideas that have inspired anthropologists in their studies of societies around the world. *An introduction to theory in anthropology* provides a clear and concise analysis of the theories, and traces the way in which they have been translated into anthropological debates. The opening chapter sets out the classical theoretical issues formulated by Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx and Durkheim. Successive chapters discuss Functionalism, Structuralism, Interaction theories, and Marxist anthropology, while the final chapters address the competing paradigms of Socioecology and Postmodernism. Using detailed case studies, Professor Layton illustrates the way in which various theoretical perspectives have shaped competing, or complementary, accounts of specific human societies.

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ROBERT LAYTON

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i>	viii
<i>List of tables</i>		x
<i>Note on the text</i>		xi
CHAPTER ONE	The idea of a social system	1
CHAPTER TWO	Functionalism	27
CHAPTER THREE	Structuralism	63
CHAPTER FOUR	Interactionist theories	98
CHAPTER FIVE	Marxist anthropology	127
CHAPTER SIX	Socioecology	157
CHAPTER SEVEN	Postmodernism and anthropology	184
<i>References</i>		216
<i>Index</i>		232

Figures

	<i>page</i>
1.1 Marx's model of positive feedback in capitalist production	12
1.2 Marx's multi-linear model of progressive social evolution	16
2.1 Intermediate structures in Functional analysis	38
2.2 Sarakatsani kinship and the extent of personal kindreds	42
2.3 Sarakatsani inheritance	44
2.4 Samburu age grades	46
2.5 Sarakatsani kinship, with composition of putative descent groups indicated	48
2.6 Single lines of descent and segmentary lineage	49
2.7 Diagrammatic structure of the Asante kingdom	54
2.8 Descent, kinship and marriage in Radcliffe-Brown's typology of Australian kinship systems	58
3.1 Development of a Yanomamö marriage alliance	72
3.2 Example of a Crow-Omaha type kinship terminology	76
3.3 The structures created by the three types of cross-cousin marriage	78
3.4 'Murngin' (Yolngu) kinship terminology	82
3.5 Actual marriage exchanges between 'Murngin' (Yolngu) clans	83
3.6 The Navaho classification of the natural world	84
3.7 Some skin diseases in Subanam	91

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF FIGURES ix

4.1	Diagrammatic representation of the relationship between the segmentary lineage and ownership of territory among the Nuer	105
4.2	The 'Nuer' and 'Pathan' models of segmentary opposition	120
4.3	Segmentary opposition in the Swat Valley	120
5.1	Changing patterns of land use in Maiurno	147
5.2	Relations between the metropolis and colony	151

Tables

	<i>page</i>
1.1 Durkheim's unilinear model of progressive social evolution	22
3.1 Durkheim and Mauss' reconstruction of the development of Aboriginal social systems	65
3.2 Durkheim's model of clan totemism	67
3.3 Saussure's model of the linguistic sign	67
3.4 Tripartite structures in the symbolism of rites of passage	70
3.5 Four-section system created by combining generational and patrilineal moieties	75
3.6 Lévi-Strauss' model for the symbolism of food	88
6.1 Ranking of foods in the Ache optimal diet	165

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Note on the text

This book is not designed to provide a complete history of anthropological thought. The book has been written with an eye to current debates and it focuses upon the way in which theories have impinged upon anthropology rather than tracing their history in full. The application of each theory is exemplified by showing how they have helped explain social and cultural processes among particular peoples. Where possible, I have tried to show how different theories provide complementary, or competing interpretations of the same ethnographic cases. I consider that the most important theories at present are those of Socioecology and Postmodernism and have been influenced, in selecting earlier theories for discussion, by their contribution to the development of current theoretical debate. Diffusionism is not reviewed and the idea of evolution as progress probably receives less coverage than it deserves. Even in the theoretical fields that are considered, many important writers and works have not been mentioned. Going back to the sources which are discussed, I invariably found that they were far richer in ideas than any secondary source could indicate. The book is intended to orientate readers towards the original texts, rather than to replace them. The publisher's anonymous readers have made many helpful comments and recommendations which improved the final text.