

The Structural Dialectics of Claude Levi-Straus' Mythology as Revealed in the Culture of Perpetual Internal Migrants

BODY: Mythical Bricolar Opposition

I. Mythical bricolar opposition exists. [5]

“A sorcerer pats you on the back and you die right away. If someone pats you on the back, do the same to him. Sitting on a bus, a man taps his finger on the seat: do the same to counterattack.” [6]

This view of opposites (tapping/not tapping: bad luck) is erased by repeating the measure. It is duplicated, presenting a bricolar diversion, as one act is carried out by the instigator, the other by the victim. A system of arbitrary symbols, when we use language (and body language) to encode our experience of the world/one another, bipolar entities define parameters of experience. Theories develop formal descriptions that explain how, in terms of cause/effect, part of the world works. Study of human languages in binary opposition is debated by anthropological linguistics in linguistic anthropology.

Cultural tinkering via bricolage (up/down, dark/light, etc.) combines/contrasts elements through experience of universal human mental structures.

A. The homology (orderly correspondence) between myth and ritual reveals the former to exist on conceptual level: the latter, the level of action. [7]

Some thoughts from mostly Early- and Mid- 20th Century theorists:

GEERTZ: *Symbols (language:series of symbols) are vehicles of meaning. They are vehicles of culture. [8]*

MEAD: *(Culture/Personality Approach), why do adults from different cultures hold different values and engage in different practices? This is not just due to their different languages.*

GEERTZ: *Use the actor-centered perspective. Plant the actor at a model's center. Internal logic uses core symbols found at the center for a “culture system” [8]*

STEWARD: *And yet I ask, as a cultural ecologist, how do human cultures interact with environment?*

LEVI-STRAUSS: *I can answer that. Myth exists on the conceptual level and ritual on the level of action.*

Action is response to environment, while myth is more in line with language and symbols.

STEWARD: *(Multilineal evolutionist) I say evolutionary trajectories in similar societies can go in different directions, depending on their culture, technology, and adapting environment.*

DE SAUSSURE: *Maybe. But don't overemphasize biological influences. The linguistic structural makeup of a society should be analyzed via phonemic structures. Depend on language of myth over ritual.*

RADCLIFFE-BROWN: *While Ethnoscience borrows techniques of linguists for classification within environments, my Structural Functionalism side says we should focus on preserving the structure of society itself. What keeps societies from falling apart? Do myth and/or ritual factor in?*

STEWARD: *Cultural change, over time is conditioned by specific cultural developments, especially subsistence technology. How do squatters use their technology to get whatever they need from their environment? Technology is ritual: it goes beyond words to action...yet unique in different settings.*

JESUS: *Historical Particularists focus on distinct histories of change in societies. Mankind is similar across all culture in one ritual: There's no one who hasn't sinned (except me) [9]. Sin is a ritual that is based on a myth. Technology and societal preservation notwithstanding, all humans sin.*

ME: *Ecological Anthropologists say if different human biology is not the reason for varying human adaptation, then environment is cultural diversity's cause Humans adapt to original sin. How man reacts to his temptations define his culture's destiny. These are standard elements.*

1. There are exceptions to this rule: myth and ritual can be dialectical when reduced to their standard elements. [10]

TYLOR: *If law is anywhere, it's everywhere. Languages, customs, techniques, ritual: material phenomena.*

MALINOWSKI: *Modern participant-observation field methods set standards for collecting ethnographic data to influence future anthropologists. As a functionalist, I classify myth/ritual by customs/beliefs in how they satisfy basic human needs. Similar needs reflect similar myths/rituals.*

DURKHEIM: *Functionalism also could include cultural areas, in mappably decisive simple or complex structures. Myth and ritual, regardless of society, are mutually redundant. [11]*

2. The relationship between statics and dynamics concerns structural analysis and dialectical method. [11]

TURNER: *Material phenomena exists in the world tangibly and is measurable by the senses. Social dramas are people's interactions and conflicts in everyday social life. How people make sense of their lives is through ritual, pilgrimage and theatre- "things that stand for other things"*

MARX: *(Historical Materialism) History's material forces explain in world-history terms. Unilineal Evolutionists analyze social/political conflict, domination/inequality. Ecological constraints are less important than social constraints generated by culturally constructed modes of production. Landowners/people who own no land, so rent from the owner. Make history by exercising agency.*

ME: *Look at the Mindanao squatters. See Exhibit F.4. Many of the squatters who said they owned their own property only owned the SHACKS they had built on someone else's property!*

"Migration of peoples has a long and honorable history- people leave their homeland for many reasons, the traditional flight from farm to city, other people cross the ocean to look for a new life, still others are forced to migrate because of war, famine, lack of resources in their own land." [12]

"Most immigrants move to urban areas where they expect to receive support from relatives and friends...to form residential clusters. Policies for housing development...led to the sporadic movement of squatter and slum settlers further away from city cores." [13]

ME: *The squatters are actually playing a "Grass is always greener" scenario.*

KROEBER: *It is the superorganic nature of culture. Culture has a mind of its own. It is a "parasite".*

JESUS: *Abraham squatted, and so did the Israelites with Moses, in the wilderness...for 40 years! [14]*

ME: *Push factors would include parents being overbearing to newlyweds, as seen in Exhibit F.1.*

"Converging motives are often categorized as "push" and "pull" factors. "Push" factors repel people and make them migrate. "Pull" factors attract people to migrate to specific places." [15]

"International/internal migration as a major component of demographic change is a widespread phenomenon in the world today. In urban areas, one can detect these trends by the presence of different ethnic groups and the rise of slums/squatter areas where most migrants are concentrated. In the Philippines for example, between the years 1960-1970, 24.5% of the country's population aged 10 and over, that is more than 8.9 million people changed their residence." [15]

B. The Myth of the Pregnant Boy reveals origin of shamanistic powers. [11]

JESUS: *The poor in spirit- theirs is the Kingdom of God (property in heaven). The poor do own land! [16]*

GEERTZ: *Culture is not something inside people's heads, but embodied in public symbols which the members communicate their worldview, value-orientations, ethos, to one another and future generations. Literary theory explains that cultures are made of texts (stories that people tell about themselves) The "thick description" is finding the local meanings of cultural texts (myths).*

- 1. An ignorant young boy becomes a hero after noticing his power to cure the sick: he kills the jealous old medicine man after being made pregnant by the latter and is subsequently healed when the sympathetic magical animals abort his fetus. [17]**

There is a power exchange here, in Levi-Strauss' drama from G.A. Dorsey's research among the Pawnee Indians (North American Plains). When we compare this to the Philippine squatter beliefs, we notice a similarity of fear/awe of the supernatural:

"The potency of an amulet or talisman was judged by the results it produced...if one suffered misfortune and illness, one ceased one's belief in the object and abandoned it for another." [18]

"An amulet is an object, charged with power, one carries on one's person or in one's dwelling to ward off misfortune, disease, or harm from malign beings. A talisman is an object one similarly employs to enhance success. The two are separate aspects of the same phenomena. Amulets are designed to repel what is harmful. Talismans are intended to vitalize what is beneficial. Both possess inherent qualities which can be transmitted to human beings by contact." [19]

ME: *Ah, Anthropology: a science of discovery. Compare/contrast squatters with Indians to see struggle in anthropology (relationship of culture/individual). How culture affects human: how are humans of different cultures similar? How human affects culture: how humans of different cultures differ.*

LEVI-STRAUSS: *Not just in comparison. In structural analysis, we find the same patterns in other domains of culture. Structural studies of myth. Cultural diversity. Surface diversity results in underlying processes of thought rooted in human structure. Human agency is not really the focus.*

- 2. The myth is built on oppositions of: 1) initiated shaman vs. non-initiated shaman, 2) child vs. old man, 3) confusion of sexes vs. differentiation of sexes, 4) fertility of the child vs. sterility of the old man, 5) irreversible relationships of the son's fertilization vs. the revenge of the father, 6) real plant magic vs. symbolic animal magic, and 7) magic by introduction vs. magic by extraction. [17]**

ME: *Viewing opposites, our understanding is non-goal oriented: process-based. Were it goal-oriented, the outcome would depend on material. Instead, the process of understanding engrains in the mind of the squatters a fear that keeps them on the move. There is some real fear here, as there is among the squatters, in the dark of night, with cockroaches crawling down the wall and up your pantleg! The fear of the unknown builds a terror of even the obvious. You'd think that being at home or carrying a light would keep a person safe as he traveled muddy paths in the dark. But parents in the following 2 myths wanted to make sure that the children did not get careless in their security:*

"...the sigbin in the Philippines kills people. It does not bite your body. It bites your shadow. If you carry a torch at night you will cast a shadow you may be bitten [SIC]. If you are bitten, you will die. That is why I pray to the Lord that they will be driven away from us." [20]

"There is also a witch that flies at night and victimizes people asleep in their homes. This witch sits on the roof of the house and lets its tongue down through a hole in the thatch. Then through the power of the evil ones, the tongue of the witch grows long and reaches the body below. The witch sucks out the blood and the liver from the body and the victim dies right away."

JESUS- *Opposites are built into literature to define society After all, I am the embodiment of such an opposite: God and man at the same time. In me dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. [21]*