

MAGYAR AFRIKA TÁRSASÁG
AFRICAN–HUNGARIAN UNION



AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA–TUDÁS TÁR
AHU HUNGARIAN AFRICA–KNOWLEDGE DATABASE

SZENT-GYÖRGYI, Katalin

Anthropologists and anthropology / Antropológia és antropológusok

Eredeti közlés /Original publication:

Acta Ethnographica, 1975, Tomus 24, 1–4, 184–188. old.

Elektronikus újraközlés/Electronic republication:

AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA–TUDÁS TÁR – 000.002.623

Dátum/Date: 2018. január / January 18.

filename: szent-gyorgyi_1975_recKuper

Az elektronikus újraközlést előkészítette

/The electronic republication prepared by:

B. WALLNER, Erika és/and BERNACZKY, Szilárd

Hivatkozás erre a dokumentumra/Cite this document

SZENT-GYÖRGYI, Katalin: Anthropologists and anthropology /
Antropológia és antropológusok, 2018, **pp. 1–11.** old., No. 000.002.623,

<http://afrikatudastar.hu>

Eredeti forrás megtalálható/The original source is available:

Közkönyvtárakban / In public libraries

Kulcsszavak / Key words

magyar Afrika–kutatás, könyvismertetés (KUPER, Adam: *Anthropologists and Anthropology. The British School 1922–1972*, 1973)

African research in Hungary, book review (KUPER, Adam: *Anthropologists and Anthropology. The British School 1922–1972*, 1973)

AZ ELSŐ MAGYAR, SZABAD FELHASZNÁLÁSÚ,
ELEKTRONIKUS, ÁGAZATI SZAKMAI KÖNYV–, TANULMÁNY–,
CIKK–, DOKUMENTUM- ÉS ADAT-TÁR / THE FIRST HUNGARIAN
FREE ELECTRONIC SECTORAL PROFESSIONAL DATABASE FOR

BOOKS, STUDIES, COMMUNICATIONS, DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATIONS

* Magyar és idegen – angol, francia, német, orosz, spanyol, olasz és szükség szerint más – nyelveken készült publikációk elektronikus könyvtára / Writings in Hungarian and foreign – English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian and other – languages

* Az adattárban elhelyezett tartalmak szabad megközelítésűek, de olvasásuk vagy letöltésük regisztrációhoz kötött. / The materials in the database are free but access or downloading are subject to registration.

* Az Afrikai Magyar Egyesület non-profit civil szervezet, amely az oktatók, kutatók, diákok és érdeklődők számára hozta létre ezt az elektronikus adattári szolgáltatását, amelynek célja kettős, mindenekelőtt sokoldalú és gazdag anyagú ismeretekkel elősegíteni a magyar afrikánisztikai kutatásokat, illetve ismeret-igényt, másrészt feltárni az afrikai témájú hazai publikációs tevékenységet teljes dimenziójában a kezdetektől máig. / The African–Hungarian Union is a non–profit organisation that has created this electronic database for lecturers, researchers, students and for those interested. The purpose of this database is twofold; on the one hand, we want to enrich the research of Hungarian Africa studies with versatile and plentiful information, on the other hand, we are planning to discover Hungarian publications with African themes in its entirety from the beginning until the present day.

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGY

KUPER, Adam: *Anthropologists and Anthropology. The British School 1922–1972*, 1973, London, Allen Lane, 256 old.

SZENT-GYÖRGYI, Katalin

Acta Ethnographica, 1975, Tomus 24, 1–4, 184–188. old.

Anthropologists and Anthropology was written to commemorate the 50th anniversary of British social anthropology. Dr. Kuper states 1922 to be the date of the founding of British social anthropology, and he assembled his recapitulation of ensuing developments in 1972. The discipline dealt with encompasses only a short period of time. With respect to leaders and their followers in the various schools where this discipline was elaborated, as well as regarding theoretical issues, and the relation to this discipline to the wider context of contemporary affairs, Kuper's subject matter remains narrowly delimited. This specificity may be both advantageous and disadvantageous for the reader – in any case it is quite instructive.

The basic format of Kuper's presentation of his material is chronological. After a brief introduction, in which he orients the reader regarding the generally "cautious" academic intellectual atmosphere in Great Britain as of the first two decades of the 20th century, a situation supposedly sandwiched between the influences of evolutionism, diffusionism and the French sociologists, he delves into the career of Bronislaw Malinowski. Aspects of Malinowski's training which have might influenced his work are brought out. Kuper then discusses his fieldwork experiences and methods, distinguishing as a "hallmark" of Malinowski's approach the separation of – 'what is said to be done' from "what is done," and from "what is thought." Reverting to Malinowski's career at the London School of Economics (1923–1938), which followed his major ethnographic fieldwork in New Guinea and on the Trobriand Islands (1915–16, 1917–18), Kuper refers to the social scientist's relationship to colleagues (i.e. Seligman,

Westermarck, Hobhouse and Ginsberg) as well as to students. He emphasizes the personal loyalty demanded of friends by this social anthropologist, the polemic accusations directed towards antagonistic scholars and concepts.

The development of Malinowski's concepts and theory are traced, beginning from the time of the publication of the Trobriand monographs (1922–35), in which one institution is usually focused upon but the "integrated whole" nature of culture remains nevertheless a recurrent theme. In these works the calculating individualistic stereotype of Trobriand man is elaborated, supposedly a result of "enlightened self-interest," whose actions must be separated from what is said and must be understood in "proper" context. Malinowski's later work concerns more general issues – as, for instance, his theory of culture which entails both "horizontal" (with respect to activities and beliefs) and "vertical" (with respect to "needs") integration. His "three-band" theory of culture change (traditional culture vs. intrusive European culture and intermediate "syncretic" culture), stemming from his interest in colonial countries – mainly in Africa – and related political affairs, has been widely criticized, by his contemporaries as well as by Kuper. Dr. Kuper also points out the weaknesses of Malinowski's earlier ethnographies, since they present "untouched" tribal cultures and do not account for "realities of change", nor is Malinowski's theoretical apparatus capable of dealing with whole social systems or group relationships. Kuper does not, however, neglect to stress the value of Malinowski's portrayal of individualistic Trobriand man "in all his humanity", and to remark about the significance of the principle of reciprocity expounded in the Trobriand monographs.

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown is identified by Dr. Kuper as another one of the "founding fathers" of British social anthropology. In contrast to Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown's contributions to the discipline are said to rest not so much in fieldwork as in providing a more systematic and useable framework for later theoretical elaboration. His ethnographic work among the Andaman Islanders, and from 1910–12 among the Australian aborigines showed his analytic abilities rather than skill in doing fieldwork. His "conversion" from the diffusionism of Rivers and Haddon to the conceptual outlook of the French sociological school (about 1908–1909) is said to have played a fundamental role in setting the train of thought for both Radcliffe-Brown and British social

anthropology. Until 1937, Radcliffe-Brown spent his life in various parts of the world, teaching and/or setting up anthropology programs and spreading his influence (Australia 1914–19, Cape Town 1920–26, Sydney 1926–31, Chicago 1931–37). From 1937 until his retirement after World War II he was professor at Oxford University in England, where he took over from Malinowski (who moved to the USA) the role of being the most influential figure in British social anthropology.

Dr. Kuper deals with Radcliffe-Brown's theory in detail. He pinpoints aspects which suggest the influence of "Spencerian evolutionism" (in that cultures are like organisms and must be investigated via methods of the natural sciences), as well as that of Durkheim and other sociologists (Steinmetz and Westermarck). His 1922 monograph on the Andaman Islanders is said to contain suggestions of the Durkheimian notion of collective sentiments. Radcliffe-Brown's concept of social morphology supposedly stems from tendencies apparent in Durkheim's *The Division of Labor*. From the 1920's, Radcliffe-Brown's subject of study is identified as being social systems (all social relations between individuals at a given point in time), from which structural forms are abstracted, classified (social morphology), and from which social laws are then formulated. Laws of social statics pertain to needs that must be fulfilled for the continuance of a social form; laws of social change pertain to how societies change their type.

Dr. Kuper says that Radcliffe-Brown employed and elaborated these concepts most fruitfully in his studies of totemism and of kinship systems. He points out Radcliffe-Brown's efforts to separate social anthropology (for him synonymous with comparative sociology, treating societies ahistorically or with the aid of "proper history") from ethnology (its use of conjectural history supposedly "objectionable"). Kuper contrasts Radcliffe-Brown's emphasis on society with the emphasis on culture by Malinowski and the American tradition. According to the former, the study of society is a natural science, according to the latter the study of culture is a discipline or method of investigation closer to psychology. He praises the "simple-mindedness" of Radcliffe-Brown's mature work and calls his analytical framework more "satisfactory" than that of Malinowski.

Having presented the technique, methodology and theoretical orientations of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, the amalgamation of which provided a basis for traditional British structuralism-

functionalism, Kuper concerns himself with the work of their students, the “second generation”. He traces parallel tendencies during the 1930’s–40’s: changes from the Pacific Ocean to Africa as areas of fieldwork concentration, from Malinowskian functionalism which emphasized descriptive ethnographies, to works with more of a structural approach – culminating in the “neo-RADCLIFFE-BROWN studies” carried out in the 1940’s by Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes. Dr. Kuper stresses the “weaknesses” of the Malinowskian monographs, which supposedly lack concise, comprehensible theoretical frameworks (he refers to the works of Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, Isaac Schapera, Fortune – as often containing irrelevant descriptions) and he depicts the atmosphere in the late 1930’s as being one of a search for such theoretical orientations (Gregory Bateson’s *Naven* and Evans-Pritchard’s *Witchcraft Among the Azande* are used as examples).

Treatment of the so-called “breakthrough” in kinship studies of the 1940’s, exemplified in studies by Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes (*African Political Systems*, 1940, *Web of Kinship Among the Tallensi*, 1949, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, 1950, *Kinship and Marriage Among the Nuer*, 1951), is quite detailed. Kuper attributes this advance to the “dual context of domestic and political kinship groups”, to the recognition that not only interpersonal, familial relations, but legal and political arrangements also influence kinship systems. The “core” of Radcliffe-Brown’s framework is retained, but a new and necessary dimension is added to it, the main weakness of Radcliffe-Brown’s approach having been its overemphasis on familial relations. It is the family from which Radcliffe-Brown said kinship relations to have derived.

Fortes’ and Evans-Pritchards’ well-known studies of segmentary lineage types of societies are said to have contributed to the general neglect by British social anthropologists of stateless societies lacking segmentary lineage systems. Kuper imputes this imbalance to other factors as well. Among these, he mentions Durkheim’s model of the segmentary basis of primitive society, Morgan’s and Maine’s juxtaposition of kinship-based primitive society vs. the territorially-based state, and the general bias and expertise of anthropology with respect to kinship, a slant which facilitated the use of this concept to serve as a means with which to analyze political systems. Kuper refers to the “accident” of how both Fortes and Evans-Pritchards’ studies

centered on segmentary lineage-type societies. He also protects the Nuer against attacks by “Malinowskians”, who rejected the adequacy of Evans-Pritchards’ fieldwork, and protested against Evans-Pritchards’ level of abstraction and his neglect of individual variation. He seems to approve of Evans-Pritchards’ and Fortes’ “more sophisticated” use of the concept, structure, according to which it entails general principles that are at the same time all the more abstracted from observable phenomena. Kuper points out the need for such abstraction so as to be able to deal with the domains of both politics and kinship.

The upswing of British social anthropology between World War I and World War II is also dealt with in the wider context of British colonialism. The establishment in the 1930’s and 40’s of institutes to aid colonial development economically and administratively, especially in Africa, provided funds and opportunities for carrying out programs in applied anthropology. Kuper mentions the frequent frictions between colonial governments and anthropologists. He also comments on the “functionalist” stereotype into which such British anthropologists were thrust. Supposedly opposed to “dangerous” change, they avoided situations in which they would have had to deal with related questions, concentrating on such aspects of society as kinship, cosmological and tribal systems (the latter with respect to political constitution). Moreover, racist and evolutionist implications are said to have been incorporated in such constructions.

Dr. Kuper points out the hindering effect of colonial administration on British social anthropological theory, by contrasting trends apparent before the mid-1950’s with those developments following Great Britain’s growing disengagement from colonial administration. Already, not long after the end of World War II, anthropology in England underwent substantial expansion, due to increased funds and sources of funds, and proliferation of departments specializing in this discipline throughout the country. Henceforth, Kuper refers to “three generations” of scholars active in the discipline: Malinowski’s students recruited in the 1920’s–30’s; those “professionals” recruited after World War II; the holders of junior positions, recruited since 1963. He traces the different “schools of thought” crystallizing around the proliferating network of departments throughout the country.

Each department, of course, bears in some way the influence of its founder and/or of dominant scholars who worked there. For instance,

the London School of Economics is closely associated with Malinowski and his direct followers – Raymond Firth and colleagues who follow Malinowskian functionalism to a limited extent, relatively untouched by Radcliffe-Brown structuralism. University College London's department was renovated after World War II by Daryll Forde, who was interested in general anthropology, evolution and ecology, although his students (M. G. Smith, Jan Vansina, Jaques Maquet) have displayed interest in political development. The program at the School of Oriental and African Studies, under the direction of Fürer-Haimendorf, has stressed ethnography and has attracted experts on India especially. Oxford shows the marked effects of Radcliffe-Brown, then of Evans-Pritchards' methodology. Cambridge is connected with M. Fortes' approach, as well as with that of Edmund Leach. Manchester consists of M. Gluckman and his followers, an extremely solidary group. Kuper does stress, however, that although the establishment of new departments entailed decentralization of a discipline once centered around 1–2 men (Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown), when attacked from “outside”, British social anthropologists have retained their cohesiveness.

With respect to more specific developments of the 1950's, Kuper highlights Evans-Pritchards' divergence from the stricter neo-Radcliffe-Brownian structuralist approach. Evans-Pritchard favored a historical, humanistic, ethnographic and interpretative orientation, entailing an over-all scepticism with regard to sociological analysis and generalisation. “Orthodox” monographs published during this time also made use of historical materials, and concentrated on magico-religious systems as well as on witchcraft.

Dr. Kuper not only covers the most “orthodox” orientations, he pays special attention to the trains of thought of the two “nonconformists”, Max Gluckman at Manchester, and Edmund Leach, at Cambridge but quite distinct from the “school” of Meyer Fortes. Although Gluckman is identified as being basically an “Oxfordian structuralist”, Leach as a “Malinowskian”, similarities in their approaches may be discerned. Kuper points out their interests in conflicting norms, manipulation of rules, the use of historical material and the “extended-case method” of investigation. Their respective students (Barth, Barnes, Bailey) dealt with similar problems – all the more demonstrating convergences of interest. Gluckman, in elaborating Evans-Pritchard's ideas on fission and fusion in

segmentary societies, produces a model in which the “dialectical” balancing of opposing, conflicting norms accounts for the dynamics of social life from which social equilibrium emerges. On the other hand, Leach sees the dynamics of the “precarious balance” in society as being the “stress of conflicting interests and divergent attitudes” stemming from “differential” political and economic interests of the individual. Kuper quite skilfully points out Leach’s concentration on the “individual’s manipulation of rules” (more of a Malinowskian line) and on ritual aspects of social life, in contrast to Gluckman’s emphasis on the “coercive force of such rules and values” (suggesting Radcliffe-Brown’s approach) and on legal questions. However, both men deal with the continuation of social systems, in spite of inherent, built-in contradictions mentioned above.

Dr. Kuper continues his treatment of Leach, when discussing the introduction into Great Britain of the French Lévi-Straussian version of structuralism. With respect to British reaction to Lévi-Strauss’ theory and his methodology, Kuper states the basic issues of dispute to include the following: is one concerned with the actors’ or with the observers’ formulations of what “ought” to be done? Or is one to deal rather with what is done? Regarding Lévi-Strauss’ principle of reciprocity, a basis for his analysis of kinship systems, the organization of which is supposedly brought about by the exchange of women in marriage, Kuper also poses the problem of defining the units carrying out such exchanges.

In Great Britain the conviction that social solidarity is achieved through exchange of women has provided a foundation for the “alliance school”, which stresses the importance of alliance and affinity, and has been supported by Leach. The “classical descent” school has opposed the “alliance” theorists, and led by Fortes, has emphasized the significance of descent as a mechanism for recruiting and organizing internally “perpetual corporations” in society. Debates in the study of kinship systems between alliance (i. e. Leach, Rodney Needham) and descent theorists have preoccupied British social anthropologists for two decades. Kuper does point out divergences between Needham, Leach and Lévi-Strauss, the former two scholars positing qualifications (prescriptive vs. preferential systems, or with regard to specificity) which the latter would have denied.

Lévi-Strauss’ treatment of classification of social and natural phenomena by human thought into pairs, then into systems of

oppositions is further elaborated by Leach and Mary Douglas, who consider the nature of anomalous third terms or categories, which due to their indecisiveness are often surrounded by taboos. Kuper states that Lévi-Strauss is concerned with psychological universals, and in his concern with mental processes and linguistics, he is similar to contemporary trends in American anthropology. However, his interest in “total systems within one single frame of reference” brings his approach closer to that of British contemporaries.

Dr. Kuper concludes his survey by presenting a relatively optimistic prediction regarding the future of social anthropology. As of 1972, following the breakdown of British colonialism, to which social anthropology had been closely connected, and following the influences of trends from abroad and from other disciplines (e.g. linguists, etc.), dire predictions had been made by some anthropologists regarding the autonomy of the discipline in the future. Kuper’s response is that social anthropology may be useful in investigating all human societies, its strength resting in its approach of participant observation, its “total-system” approach to society, its ability to distinguish what is said by the actors from what is done and incorporation of both aspects into analyses. In this manner, the basic tenets set down by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, then elaborated by their students and followers, are emphasized once more, in a positive context.

One of the advantages involved in becoming acquainted with this book is the insight one might gain into currents of thought dominating British social anthropology today. Although Kuper relies primarily on published material which is easily obtainable by most people in England, his perception of many of the hotly-debated issues as well as insights into the surrounding circumstances may prove helpful. His style is very readable and clear, his training as a historian, which preceded his anthropological education under Fortes, also aids in elucidating his presentation of the material.

One may have to allow for some imbalance of information as well. For instance, Dr. Kuper’s preference for the approach of Meyer Fortes may make for a more detailed and appraising exposition of Fortes’ work and theory than an outsider would have allowed. However, such weighting does not invalidate positive aspects of a clearly presented exposition, one which supplies valuable insights into a discipline whose specificity of approach and whose cohesiveness is

demonstrated in the framework, itself, of *Anthropologists and Anthropology*.