

---

## **Primitive Anarchs: Anarchism and the Anthropological Imagination\***

---

**Charles J.-H. Macdonald**

*Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Marseille*

### **ABSTRACT**

*I make a few comments on the state of social anthropology today and call the reader's attention to 'primitive anarchists', an intriguing category of communities seemingly devoid of any social organization. I explain what I mean by that and develop the relevance of anarchy as an anthropological concept, in understanding social evolution in general, but also interpreting important aspects of modernity, such as democracy and the state. I suggest that a conceptual framework allowing for non-social organizations could possibly be a turning point in our anthropological imagination.*

### **INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: THE LOSS OF THE PRIMITIVE**

I am really unable to say what precisely social and cultural anthropology is all about in 2011. What exactly do anthropologists study and how? What are the main questions they strive to answer? I find it impossible to propose a synthetic statement of what the discipline is, in spite of several attempts at such an assessment in the past two or three years (Macdonald 2008a). Most of what was the gist of my profession in my formative years (the 1960s and 1970s) has more or less been obliterated by successive waves of critical and reflexive thinking, one being post-colonialism. These waves have battered our stronghold and dismantled our fortifications. It has freed us in a way, and in another way it has deprived us of our main asset. What I am saying is this: we, anthropologists ('ethnologues' as the French used to say), were first of all specialists of the primitive, the traditional, the pre-modern. From this maybe narrow expertise,

we have today become experts in everything, mostly reporters and journalists of whatever goes under the sun.<sup>1</sup> It is liberating, in its allowance for a universalist discourse, but the flip side is the loss of a paradigm. The primitive was a template against which we could compare and theorize the basis of social and/or cultural life, from gods to incest, from the sacred to the mundane, from the left hand to mythology, from simple habits to arcane mental figures. It offered a possibility to define something primeval, an origin, a starting point, maybe even give a stab at human nature.

Now post-colonialism has alerted us to the falsity and deviousness of such a quest. There are no primitive people, we are told, but just colonized creatures that our self-centered Western colonial imagination transformed into Platonic ideas of survivors from another time, another world. We thought we were studying something true and authentic when we described and interpreted the ways of the Hopi, the Tikopia, the Nuer or the Eskimos. We were just projecting ourselves, or worst, the dregs of our colonialist past and our still imperialist present.

The thrust of the post-colonialists is, in my opinion, partly misdirected (see below) but it is not my intention to dismiss or rebuke. My aim is not primarily critical, but participatory. So in the following remarks I will be bluntly and candidly stating what is in my view a profitable way (but not the only one) to continue doing social anthropology. I will advocate the concept of anarchy and look into anarchism as a profitable and viable intellectual path to revive the 'Grand Tradition', represented by Stanley Diamond, or Lévi-Strauss for that matter, harking back to Rousseau and Montaigne. I want to show that a rethinking of the primitive is still the main portal to understanding the human social animal. What Stanley Diamond wrote in 1963 still holds true: 'Primitive, I believe is the critical term in anthropology' (Diamond 2007: 118). The 'primitive', however, has to be recast in a somewhat different mould. Starting then from a narrower definition of 'primitive', I will delineate a smaller category of anarchic communities. I will try and show further that most contemporary issues and major topics in anthropology but also sociology, political science and history, can be critically and usefully redefined, starting from ethnological considerations regarding this category of 'primitive anarchs'. I believe that realities such as the state, the nation, the existence of wars,

democracy and even morality can thus be understood better, providing us with a deeper, sharper insight into aspects of our daily life and political history. I will endeavor to demonstrate that modernity itself can indeed become more intelligible from the perspective of a theorizing of anarchy. It is also one way to make anthropology the critical discipline it ought to be, and not a collaborationist discourse as it appears to be sometimes, unwillingly or unconsciously. I shall thus make mine the following statement: 'Critical anthropology perceives itself as a commemoration of the primitive being something entirely different, but at the same time historically pregnant, rather than an abstract or backward looking utopia' (Narr 2004: 48).

My interest for anarchy and anarchism does not, so far, show signs to be a passing fad. It proves to be one of the most productive ideas I have ever met in my career as a professional anthropologist. I am amazed at how well it explains a number of crucial aspects, usually taken for granted, of my own social and political environment. Also I can see a growing interest in anarchy and anarchism among other anthropologists and social scientists. After Barclay (1982) and Clastres (1989), of course, Graeber's books and articles have to be mentioned (Graeber 2004, 2007). Noted scholars like Benedict Anderson and James Scott published very recently volumes with the words 'anarchist' or 'anarchism' in their subtitles (Anderson 2005; Scott 2009). A number of researchers in Latin America and elsewhere are now thinking about anarchism as a new paradigm for our discipline (Gayubas 2009). Although I am a little doubtful about the kind of anarcho-primitivism à la John Zerzan (1994) I concur with some of his important statements. I see in anarchic egalitarian communities the twin facets of a radical and exemplary otherness, containing both what our humanity is made of and what our society is *not* made of.

#### **WHAT ARE ANARCHS?**

The line I am arguing here does not stem from epistemological, philosophical or abstract thinking. It does not even come from the specialized literature, or only partly. It comes from staying many years with people living in a state of anarchy, from trying to theorize them into the Procrustean bed of a social structure, for failing to do so, and for realizing, at last, that none of the basic rules defining society applied to them. From this observation another revelation fol-

lowed: the people I had been investigating were quite similar, essentially identical even in their fundamental anarchy to some other people in the world, not in any way historically related, not even sharing the same economic basis, nor living in the same environment. There was, I realized with amazement, one unnamed and quite distinct category of people among all people to whom the adjectives primitive, traditional, or archaic could more or less justifiably be applied. I call them today 'open-aggregated' and, in French, 'anarcho-grégaires', or just anarchists, as R. Dentan does (Dentan 2010: 139 and *passim*). Their one common defining feature is that they do not have a social structure and do not form a society in the sense of abiding by the basic rules of social life as anthropology has defined them. They are not 'social'.

So what are those rules that they do not follow, rules that are constitutive of what we call an organized society? I see three main ones: 1) hierarchy, or ranking; 2) reciprocity, or exchange; 3) corporation and transcendence of the collective. These principles are not only constitutive of society but of the theory that social sciences have produced in order to understand social life and what makes humans cohere into a body politic. These rules lie within a general conception of society as something that is mechanistic, deterministic, non-stochastic, predictable, and transcendent. The groups that I call 'open-aggregated' and 'non-social', instead of hierarchy or ranking opt for strict equality<sup>2</sup> as a distinct mode of organization. They tend to be suspicious of gift-giving and put a premium on sharing (the opposite of reciprocity). Their view of collective living is entirely immanent and no collective entity ever acquires a transcendent existence. On top of that they tend to prefer a peaceful and non-violent approach to human relations, joking and humor as a fundamental mode of sociality, maximum individual autonomy, a worldview imbued with a sense of immediacy, of living in the now, of belonging to the natural environment in which they live (rather than the other way around). Their ethos is marked by values emphasizing togetherness and unanimity. They strive for what is best, albeit imprecisely, called 'harmony' as opposed to linear order, but live in an extremely volatile atmosphere of conflict-ridden interactions, which they usually manage to peacefully resolve or just brush away, as they are not interested in justice, but in tranquility. Likewise they are interested in sufficiency, not productivity, and in

being spared as much as possible from bodily diseases and ailments. Regarding this, they have no or little religion but are highly motivated by an explicit morality whose central notion seems (and this is a transcultural fact of the greatest importance) to be glossed in most cases as 'sympathy' or 'compassion'. The form taken by their organization is not social-structural but aggregative, and corresponds to what Dentan calls 'familiarity' (Dentan 2010, n.d.), Gibson 'companionship' (Gibson 1986), Service 'familism' (Service 1966), and myself 'fellowship' (Macdonald 2011b).

The study of such communities forming stable populations of eagerly interacting, cooperative, and culture-producing individuals, requires intellectual tools that were not available to social scientists a century ago. The conceptual tools we need are, more than others, those of complexity, entropy, and weak ties.<sup>3</sup>

I have started elsewhere to construct the beginning of what could be a theory of anarchic, open-aggregated communities (see Macdonald 2008b, 2009, 2011a) and I have developed concepts such as sharing, weak ties, harmony, conditions of felicity, anarchy, complexity, *etc.* with some detail, using ethnographic data in a comparative and transcultural framework.<sup>4</sup> I will capitalize on these results here. I will try to look forward rather than backward, and see how these views can benefit us when applied to our present conditions of modernity. I shall thus contribute modestly to our common quest for a new anthropology.

I need first, however, to explain certain things a little better. Among all the traits mentioned above the one that is most conspicuously non-social is a habit of creating impermanent aggregates, relying on multiple networks rather than precisely bounded groups, with no collective entity becoming an abstract and superior reality to which individuals owe any loyalty in the long-run.

### **WHO ARE THE ANARCHS?**

Anarchism is not a social science; it is mostly a project for a just and free society as well as a form of radical criticism against the state and all constraints that originate in it. Founding fathers, Goodwin, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Proudhon,<sup>5</sup> Stirner and others did not really pretend that anarchism was a science, like Marxists did (the science of historical materialism). Ethnography, however, does provide us with a number of clearly documented cases and concrete

instances of groups or communities that seem to fit a possible anarchic model, at least by defying any attempt at squeezing them in a social-structural mould. They are round pegs for our sociologically square holes. Several examples come to mind. One is the case of Guiana where Peter Rivière characterizes society as ‘little more than the aggregate of individually negotiated relationships’ (Goldman 1986). This observation caused the reviewer, Irving Goldman, to exclaim: ‘For societies that are so minimally constructed, we shall surely need to improvise a special anthropology...’ (*Ibid.*). Another one would be the case of the Baining of Papua New Guinea who so lack ‘any formulable culture or social organization’ that they were deemed ‘unstudiable’ by G. Bateson (Fajans 1997: 3). In Africa yet another example comes to mind, that of the Lobi studied by Henri Labouret in the 1920s. ‘The social organization of the Lobi is extremely loose, wrote a reviewer, – so much so that, on a superficial view, one might be tempted to declare it non-existent’. The Lobi indeed had ‘no chief, no village, no tribe’ (Werner 1933: 21). Again, as Gell remarked of the Chewong: ‘In *the absence of almost all the features of social organization*’ it is hard to use an ‘orthodox approach’, and to make sense at all of their way of organizing themselves (Gell 1985: 36 – emphasis added). This anthropological nightmare (non-societies yet real communities) has been, in my opinion, brushed under the carpet. Social scientists were not able to deal with them. There was no concept that would make sense and put them safely in a labeled box on the shelves of our neatly-arranged academic collection.

To make things worse, such non-societies transgress the accepted boundaries of evolutionary classifications. While anthropologists dealing with hunters-gatherers<sup>6</sup> started to identify principles at work in such strictly egalitarian groups,<sup>7</sup> other anthropologists dealing with horticulturalists were outlining in their turn the same principles at work in delayed-return economies. Examples are the Buid (Gibson 1986), the Semai (Dentan 1968), the Palawan (Macdonald 1977, 2007), the Majangir (Stauder 1972) and others as well.<sup>8</sup> Nomadic sea-dwellers like the Sama or Bajau Laut (Sather 1997) were also to be included in the primitive anarchists' club.<sup>9</sup>

It can be said that hunters-gatherers opened the Pandora box of open-aggregated anarchs, but again the very concept of non-social organization can now be convincingly extended to delayed-return

economies, thus belying the graded sequence of nomadic hunters-gatherers to sedentary agrarians (coterminous with most primitive to more civilized). It must be noted also that the egalitarianism of these groups is not the zero degree of hierarchy or anything like a 'lack of' (ranks, corporate groups, chiefs, centralized organization, large demographics, *etc.*), but a reality *sui generis* (Boehm 1993). Clastres' contention that stateless societies were basically not societies *without* a state, but societies *against* the state can be thus vindicated.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, and to sum up this section, there are around the world, in completely different surroundings and historical contexts, strange human congeries that are not social, but are, nonetheless, stable and cohesive populations, gifted with complex sets of ideas and representations (*i.e.* 'cultures'). These aggregates show a high degree of cooperation, adapt fairly well to their environment (whether the seas, the ice banks or the tropical forests) and survive over long periods of time, centuries and probably much more. And this they do on the basis of various subsistence techniques, being constrained but not strictly determined by a 'mode of production' or by the material basis of their economy. It is rather a preference for values such as freedom from constraints by rulers together with an availability of abundant resources and, above all, space, that made some agriculturists abandon their field in order to be 'free in the forest'.<sup>11</sup>

But I want to make one point clear. In my view only a small class of stateless societies can be called non-social, or truly open-aggregated. Most anarchist anthropologists may not agree with me on this.<sup>12</sup>

### THE TRANSCENDENCE OF STRONG TIES

I would like to illustrate the relevance of anarchist ideas by first touching upon the concept of transcendence which I found of central importance in the understanding of the social world. This is probably what David Graeber calls the 'transcendent abstraction of the corporate form' (Graeber 2007: 107). This is closely linked with several other concepts, namely those of 'strong' and 'weak ties', of corporation, of the sacred. Let me remind you that the functionalist theory of society as articulated by Radcliffe-Brown and the British school of anthropology was based on the idea of corporate group defined

as a bounded entity with a center, a chief, a property, a territory. Such an entity exists forever, at least putatively.<sup>13</sup> This trait alone makes it transcendent because it transcends the life of its individual members. It exists in the realm of 'superior', abstract and eternal entities. The sacred is not very far. The very idea came from an earlier generation of social scientists, and in particular Henry Sumner Maine who famously said: 'Corporations never die'. In this definition we find the sort of mechanistic, deterministic and sociologicistic definition of what constitutes society in a supremely Durkheimian ideology: an organism (but, of course, there is nothing organic about it) made of solid and durable parts that complement each other and work according to an overall plan. Modern anthropology does not explicitly use this model anymore but has proposed, to my knowledge, no other. I believe the concept of the corporate is still of the essence when we speak about society or social structure.

What anarchic communities display is almost the exact opposite of this bodily metaphor: there are no groups, with no chiefs. It is not a body, and if it is, it has no head. Aggregates do not last, collective entities are not conceived as everlasting, but as ephemeral realities. There is no overall plan. What endures is a non-holistic totality of people who generation after generation reproduce stochastic patterns of temporary associations that constantly vanish and reappear according to the vagaries of free individual agents. These communities are truly organic in the sense that the whole is not made of durable parts. The structure is independent of its elements. As such they are complex (see Morin 2005).

In other words we see two opposed principles at work: on the one hand, strong ties endowed with transcendence, on the other – weak and immanent ties. My point is that the latter are truly hominian and deep-seated dimensions of human behaviour (Maryanski and Turner 1992), while the former were later in coming, culminating in more recent historical developments. One needs to understand the creation and development of strong ties in order to explain how groups become permanent, or at least achieve any durability in the mind of their members. There is at some point a need for strong ties to come into existence in order to create what we call society. But what is a strong tie? Departing from Granovetter's definition, I define a strong tie as a tie that 1) cannot be dissolved by a unilateral decision of one of the parties, 2) endures until death and be-



yond, and 3) is enforced by an external agency, not the parties themselves.

In this sense love or friendship are weak, citizenship or loyalty to a nation are strong. We tend to be fooled by the habit of disguising weak ties under the appearance of strong ties ('love beyond death', 'friends forever', *etc.*), but they are not the same. A quick look at the obvious personal experience of everyman confirms this view easily. Weak and strong ties pass for each other in the rhetoric of noble sentiments (marriage as a life-long contract or love for one's 'motherland').

It appears that strong ties of a personal nature were predominantly displayed at a certain historical stage, under the form of collective killings of followers, what Testart has analyzed and brilliantly theorized under the name of 'les morts d'accompagnement' (Testart 2004). Archaeological evidence of mass graves predating the birth of great empires, such as Rome or China, tells the story of a particular practice observed around the world: slaves, servants, followers, dependants, consorts and familiars (including horses) were put to death after the demise of a prominent person or man of high status. If we follow Testart (*Ibid.*) these deaths are a clear sign that personal links of loyalty and fidelity ('fidélité personnelle') were institutionalized, leading to the killing or self-sacrifice of dependents and followers. Loyalty to a person until death and beyond became in many places around the world an institution. It is only this kind of personal loyalty, together with the widespread development of slavery and debt-bondage in primitive and pre-state societies that led to the formation of early states. These were nothing but transference of strong ties between persons, to strong ties between subjects and rulers and, later on, between citizens and nation. Strong ties once internalized make tyranny acceptable as La Boétie told us five hundred years ago in his aptly entitled essay *De la Servitude Volontaire*.

Anarchic and open-aggregated communities observed by ethnographers do not put any premium on such ties. They display loyalty and trust to a high degree but very rarely to the point of self-sacrifice and death outside the domestic family. Instead they rely on weak ties, like those of friendship and partnership. Weak ties are, and probably were in a majority of pre-Neolithic communities, the material with which communities were built. These ties entail a continual negotiation between partners and consociates, leading

to frequent and repeated fission and fusion of groups, bands, local settlements and other temporary forms of association (Dentan 1992). Weak ties bind people together but do not weld them together. They permit solidarity and cooperation, occasionally create intense feelings, but are not forever, and at any moment anyone can and may shake them loose. They imply no long-term commitment. They must match certain requirements and obey what I have called 'conditions of felicity', that is conditions that enable interpersonal relations to happen and meet basic psychological and emotional requirements of the actors concerned, in order for these relations to get established and recur (Macdonald 2008b, 2009, n.d.).

I have used elsewhere the word 'fellowship' instead of 'society' or 'social group' to name communities based on weak and immanent interpersonal links. Cliques, bands, neighborhoods, camps, moorages, and so on, are temporary collective entities of like-minded individuals who cooperate in order to share something (material or human resources), who display solidarity of a personal nature, structured in the language of kinship,<sup>14</sup> and eventually disperse. Their personnel is recruited from a larger network of individuals, something that used to be called a tribe or an ethnic group, a population variously characterized by a language, a culture, a habitat, or a way of life.

I think that a new sociology of fellowships could be initiated. Fellowships morph in time and some can become corporate groups. When they do, a principle of ranking is usually at work and some measure of hierarchy and power comes into play. We know that a number of Amazonian Indians, African hunters-gatherers, or Southeast Asian horticulturalists make sure that this never happened. We observe their egalitarianism, which we are ready to accept as a fact, but we have a real problem accepting its corollary: the absence of group loyalty and the absence of linear order, and with it, the absence of social organization. Anarchy is puzzling. Actually social anthropology remains, with few exceptions, largely within the confines of what society means to us, and has not yet fully comprehended what life is like outside the social matrix.

#### **THE ORIGIN OF THE STATE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

What was said by Maryanski and Turner (1992) on the biological antiquity among hominids of weak links, what Testart said about

the emergence of strong links in pre-state societies, what I and others, like Stanley Diamond (2007: 159ff.) or David Graeber (2007: 107) said about transcendence as the hallmark of the 'social', and a general consideration about the fundamentals of social life (hierarchy, reciprocity and corporation), make for a convergent argument in favour of the late and progressive emergence of the state from conditions long predating it, namely strong links and a new representation of the group as a person to whom one owes one's loyalty. The state seems to me to be just an extraordinary development of strong ties, originating in personal loyalties, and the ultimate avatar of hierarchy, transcendence and corporation.<sup>15</sup> It exists together with the nation as the perfected territorialized form of society. We know, of course, that many people resisted it and still do. But we have not theorized it as a resistance coming from the oldest, probably Paleolithic part of us, the part of us that is not social, but anarchic and gregarious. Now and again this resistance shows its face in world religions (see the *ur*-anarchist Sermon on the Mount), in communes, in maroon communities (Scott 2009), in rebellions, in anti-state movements, in intentional communities (Niman 2010), in disaster communities (Solnit 2009), and under a number of forms and names, including what Peter Lambourn Wilson (also known as Hakim Bey) calls Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ) (Bey 2003), and Robert Dentan 'interstitial anarchists' (Dentan 1994, 2010).

If state and nation have become twin concepts that entail each other, then obedience to the state and love for one's nation are also twin phenomena. Political science wants I guess to present these two faces of the same coin as separate phenomena. My view is that they are one and that in turn they entail another important phenomenon: war. Everything indeed I said about corporation, strong ties and transcendence, and their proto-historical development is contained in the notion of loyalty to a supreme and 'sacred' collective entity rigged out with the attributes of the human person. Nationalism and patriotism are synonyms, no matter what shrewd politicians try to tell us. The sense of group identity they presuppose is necessarily of a hierarchical and, moreover, violent order. The state in its sovereignty is not so much what holds the monopoly of force (Weber) but rather what supremely encapsulates the social principles: a mechanical and

vertical order, defined by territorial boundaries, the fetishistic worship of which makes their transgression a cause of war and much else in the way of massacres and mass murder. Wars are triggered by a strong sense of national or religious identity, and draw, in a violent form, the boundary between us and them, a boundary that is already drawn by simple and everyday nationalism.

The sense that a group is in anyway sacred and endowed with a superior and eternal life, that it possesses a sacredness that forces loyalty, is present under other forms as well. One that I find particularly conspicuous is loyalty to clubs in team sports. Although loyalty to a club or a team is conducive to nurturing a mental habit of hatred and exclusion (literally put into practice by soccer hooligans) it is, in its milder forms, deemed innocuous and healthy by all educators. Not one social anthropologist raises his or her voice to denounce it. 'The violent games, the football, the intense team spirit, the sense of Christian gentlemen standing together against barbarians – I wonder if it does not all tend to make their graduates too aggressive, too belligerent' asks a character in Auchincloss' novel *The House of the Prophet* (MacFarquhar 2008: 63). The same must be said of patriotism. When Harman, the notorious Abu Ghraib photographer, tried and convicted by a court-martial in May of 2005, was asked how the other MPs could go about abusing and torturing prisoners without apparent inhibition, or at least with less inhibition than she, she replied: 'They are more patriotic' (Gourevitch and Morris 2008: 55). That says it all.

In view of the above the colonial expansion of territorial states outside their boundaries and the war they successfully waged against foreign lands they came to occupy and plunder, is just a sequel of the existence of nation-states and their unquenchable greed; the nation-states in turn are nothing but the logical outcome of the basic social rules: strong transcendent ties, territorial corporations with a strict hierarchy and, as a result, a sense of group identity that translates into contempt and hatred for others, they be 'barbarians', 'infidels', *Untermenshen*, or just, simply, enemies (racial, political, religious, you name it). In this sense *colonialism is an epiphenomenon and a critique of the social sciences (anthropology particularly) based on such a secondary and non-essential phenomenon is by necessity a second-order criticism. To be fully critical we need to be critical*

*of what is at the root of our social existence and of the representations that stem from it.* We need to question the very idea of society as a necessary product of human collective behaviour and start envisaging and comprehending what lies outside such an organization. Primitive anarchic communities help us do that. At least they free us from thinking that order is just or necessary.

#### **ANARCHY AND DEMOCRACY: SOME NAÏVE ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUESTIONS**

After touching ever so briefly on the state, nationalism and war, I am now going to say something about democracy. I will be bold to the point of looking presumptuous by offering another definition of its standard one as a 'form of government'. Democracy, I believe, is an ongoing social and historical process rather than an institutional form. The bottom line of this process is anarchy.

Suppose that an ethnographer coming from a faraway country, uneducated in the ways of European nations, starts his or her fieldwork in one of these countries. He or she will probably be wandering around and notice in various places, conspicuously carved on the pediment of government buildings, town halls and such, the words 'liberty, equality, brotherhood'. What will this ethnographer conclude from this observation? That an official edict has created and enforced a society where the principles at work are precisely this: no differences in rank or status, people being basically free to do what they choose, and finally a kind of deep loving trust, understanding and mutual aid among all. How long will it take him or her to realize that each of these claims is radically belied by the concrete and real situation of class differences, wealth amidst general poverty, indifference to individual suffering<sup>16</sup>, fierce competition, and a stifling web of constraints on every activity and movement? A cozy place to be for some, a miserable place to stay in for many.

This, of course, raises an interesting anthropological question. How can a society that is by definition and essentially unequal, authoritarian and competitive declares itself in all its pious political statements to be 'equal, free and loving'? The first and most obvious way to answer this is to claim that a majority of people in such a society do benefit from equal rights, in certain areas at least, from relative safety and protection, from sufficient means of survival, from the liberty to do a number of productive or interesting things

freely chosen among a number of possibilities, one being free speech, and from other resources such as justice and education. This, of course, is without looking at what happens in a world order, within which the denizens of the country in question appear as the lucky winners in a global lottery. In this sense democracy is both an actual situation and an institutional form of government, with the state being hailed as a provider of goods. The answer, however, may not satisfy our anthropologist, just because inequality, constraint under an authoritarian state, competition and unfair treatment of a great number just tip the balance too much towards its opposite, namely what democracy should be according to its own motto.

My view, of course, is more radical than that. European countries are made of societies that are 'social', that is, based on the principles outlined above: transcendence and corporation, ranking and authoritarian hierarchy, exchange and market economy. The principles of open-aggregated, immanent groupings, sharing and strict equality are available only marginally. Democracy then appears as a self-defeating endeavour, a process whereby selfish and competing individual agents pretend to live together according to principles that contradict their own praxis. I define therefore democracy as *the struggle of society against itself*. This struggle is an anthropological problem that libertarians and anarchists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century faced and tried to solve. We know indeed that they, Proudhon in particular and the 'Communards', advocated anarchist principles of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' because they were the unfulfilled promises of the French Revolution. The Republic kept the words and threw away their meaning.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have been trying to show that a look at *some* primitive communities such as the Buid, Palawan, Semai, Paliyan, Hazda, Inuit or others, could teach us a great deal and should not be dismissed as figments of our colonialist imagination. What they tell us, if we look at it without the blinders of a Durkheimian sociology, and without the dogmatic rigidity of historical materialism, and if we take some pains in the study of our distant past, what they tell us is that human beings can live and probably did live for a very long time (much longer than our historical societies), not in a rigid and

mechanical social structure, but abiding by values conducive to a free, open, equal, solidary, intensely gregarious and mutually concerned way of living, no matter what difficulties and hardship this way of life entailed. This has made us what we are, at least in part, and it survives in the heart of many. It appears whenever the reach of the state falters (Solnit 2009; Dentan 1994, 2010). The biggest irony is the survival of its ethos amidst the most coercive state apparatus and the most unequal institutions, those of the modern states, or that of a Church bearing the name of its founder ... an anarchist.

### NOTES

\* This is a revised draft of a presentation for the EASA Conference, Maynooth, August 2010. I am grateful for the comments and critical remarks made by R. Dentan, O. Herrenschmidt, A. Gayubas and K. Sillander on an earlier version of this paper. They helped make this essay a little less faulty and, especially thanks to Bob Dentan, more relevant to the current literature.

<sup>1</sup> Look, for instance, at the titles of doctoral dissertations listed by candidates applying for admission into the social anthropology section in French Universities in the past few years. You will be provided with a 'liste à la Prévert' the kind of which the most imaginative poet could not have dreamed of (see Olivier Herrenschmidt's *Un ethnologue mécontent et heureux* presented at 18<sup>th</sup> Conference Robert Hertz, Paris, June 10, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> I am not discussing here the theoretical possibility of absolute equality – according to Sahlins no society can be said to be truly and completely egalitarian. I have tackled the question in a previous paper (Macdonald 2011b) using the notion of a dialectical relationship between asymmetry and equality and the inherent non-transitivity of asymmetrical relations.

<sup>3</sup> This conceptual framework is closely linked to a theorizing of nonviolence in human communities (see Dentan 1992, 1994, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Various attempts at defining such collective mode of living have been posted on a website (<https://sites.google.com/site/charlesjhmactdonaldssite>).

<sup>5</sup> 'Before all else' writes Proudhon (1989 [1851]: 77), 'it was for us to find out whither we are going, not to dogmatise...' (quotation provided by R. Dentan).

<sup>6</sup> Such as the Kung Bushmen (Marshall 1976), the Hazda (Woodburn 1982), the Mbuti (Turnbull 1961), as well as the Batek (Endicott 1988), the Paliyan (Gardner 2004), the Nayaka (Bird-David 1992), the Inuits (Boas 1964), and many more.

<sup>7</sup> Like individual autonomy of the subject (Boehm 1993), immediacy (Bird-David 1994), sharing as opposed to reciprocity (Woodburn 1998), extreme peaceability (Fry 2006; Dentan 1992, 2010), radical otherness (Ingold 1999), etc.

<sup>8</sup> The Roms ('Tsiganes') are most probably to be included in the list of open-aggregated anarchists (Williams 1985: 129–131, 133–134, 137). At one point the author poses the question: 'Peut-on encore parler de société?' (*Ibid.*: 137).

<sup>9</sup> A forthcoming volume initiated by myself and Sillander, entitled *Anarchic Solidarity* (Yale University Press, edited by T. Gibson and K. Sillander) includes discussions about such groups in insular Southeast Asia.

<sup>10</sup> The 'state' in Clastres' writings must be understood as a trope of the concrete 'states'. Like the 'social contract' of Rousseau is not an actual written contract, but a platonic idea of a general agreement between members of society. Rousseau, no more than Clastres I suppose imagined a bunch of cavemen or Indians around a campfire with one of them suddenly saying: 'Hey, guys, I have an idea, let's sign a contract!' or 'Hey, guys, let's fight the government of Brazil!' This would make an excellent cartoon for the *New Yorker* but hardly represents what these authors had in mind. Such statements should not be taken too literally, a mistake I made myself (Macdonald 2008b).

<sup>11</sup> According to Jim Scott (2009) a number of Amazonian groups were agriculturalists until the arrival of the Europeans and then only become hunters-gatherers. This is Clastres' thesis, vindicated again.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Barclay discusses the Ifugao as an anarchy. In my opinion this group, living in the Grand Cordillera of Northern Luzon, is definitely social and, despite its being stateless, shows all the trappings of a social structure: clearly bounded, territorial groupings, ranks, warfare (see Barclay 1982; Barton 1919).

<sup>13</sup> It has 'presumptive perpetuity' (Brown 1976).

<sup>14</sup> I am not discussing kinship here. I have tried elsewhere (Macdonald 2011b) to locate kin ties within a framework of open-aggregation. A discussion of kinship would be important here, as Gayubas and Herrens Schmidt correctly remarked (personal communications).

<sup>15</sup> See Skalniak 2009 on early state concept. What I am discussing here, however, is less the state under its present form, than the possibility for something like the state to emerge from conditions predating its historical appearance.

<sup>16</sup> A recent survey shows that in France today a staggering four million people or more (9 % of the total population) are 'objectively isolated', being deprived of any contact or link to friends, family, work, associative structure or neighbors (Fondation de France, Observatoire, *Les solitudes en France en 2010*, juillet 2010).

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, B.  
2005. *Under Three Flags. Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*. London – New York: Verso.
- Barclay, H.  
1982. *People without Government*. London: Kahn and Averill.
- Barton, R.  
1919. Ifugao Law. *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 15(1): 1–186.
- Bey, H.  
2003. *T.A.Z. Temporary Autonomous Zones. Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. New York: Autonomedia.



- Bird-David, N.  
1992. Nayaka. In Levinson, D. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*. Vol. III. *South Asia* (pp. 194–196). Boston, MA: G. K. Hall.
1994. Solidarity and Immediacy: or, Past and Present Conversations on Bands. *Man* 29(3): 583–603.
- Boas, F.  
1964 [1888]. *The Central Eskimo*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Boehm, C.  
1993. Egalitarian Behavior and Reverse Dominance Hierarchy. *Current Anthropology* 34(3): 227–254.
- Brown, D. E.  
1976. *Principles of Social Structure: Southeast Asia*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Clastres, P.  
1989. *Society Against the State. Essays in Political Anthropology*. New York: Zone Book.
- Dentan, R. K.  
1968. *The Semai. A Nonviolent People of Malaya (Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology)*. New York – Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
1992. The Rise, Maintenance and Destruction of Peaceable Polity. In Silberberg, J., and Gray, P. (eds.), *Aggression and Peacefulness in Humans and other Primates* (pp. 214–270). New York: Oxford University Press.
1994. Surrendered Men: Peaceable Enclaves in the Post-Enlightenment West. In Sponsel, L., and Gregor, T. (eds.), *The Anthropology of Peace and Nonviolence* (pp. 69–108). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
2008. Recent Studies on Violence: What's In and What's Out. *Reviews of Anthropology* 37(1): 1–27.
2010. Nonkilling Social Arrangements. In Pims, J. E. (ed.), *Non-killing Societies* (pp. 131–182). Honolulu, HI: Center for Global Non-killing.
- n.d. Childhood, Familiarity and Social Life among East Semai. In Gibson, T., and Sillander, K. (eds.), *Anarchic Solidarity. Autonomy, Equality and Fellowship in Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. In press.
- Diamond, S.  
2007. *In Search of the Primitive*. New Brunswick – London: Transaction Publishers.

- Endicott, K.  
1988. Property, Power and Conflict among the Batek of Malaysia. In Ingold, T., Riches, D., and Woodburn, J. (eds.), *Hunters and Gatherers*. Vol. 2. *Property, Power and Ideology* (pp. 110–127). Oxford: Berg.
- Fajans, J.  
1997. *They Make Themselves*. Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fry, D. P.  
2006. *The Human Potential for Peace. An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence*. New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, P.  
2004. Respect for All: The Paliyans of South India. In Kemp, G., and Fry, D. (eds.), *Keeping the Peace. Conflict Resolution and Peaceful Societies around the World* (pp. 53–71). New York – London: Routledge.
- Gayubas, A.  
2009. Pierre Clastres y las Sociedades contra el Estado. *Germinal: Revista de Estudios Libertarios* 8.
- Gell, A.  
1985. Review of *Society and Cosmos* by S. Howell. *Man* 20(2): 365–367.
- Gibson, T.  
1986. *Sacrifice and Sharing in the Philippine Highlands: Religion and Society among the Buid of Mindoro*. London: Athlone Press.
- Goldman, I.  
1986. Review of *Individual and Society in Guiana: A Comparative Study of American Social Organization* by Peter Rivière. *Man* 21(1): 161.
- Gourevitch, P., and Morris, E.  
2008. Exposure. *The New Yorker*. March 24: 44–57.
- Graeber, D.  
2004. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.  
2007. *Possibilities. Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*. Oakland – Edinburgh: AK Press.
- Ingold, T.  
1999. On the Social Relations of the Hunter-Gatherer Band. In Lee, R. B., and Daly, R. (eds.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers* (pp. 399–410). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Macdonald, C.  
1977. *Une Société Simple*. Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie.

2007. *Uncultural Behavior*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- 2008a. L'anthropologie sociale en France, dans quel état? *Ethnologie Française* 38(4): 617–625.
- 2008b. Order against Harmony: Are Humans Always Social? *Suomen Anthropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 33(2): 5–21.
2009. *The Anthropology of Anarchy*. Occasional Papers from the School of Social Science. Princeton, NJ: Institute for Advanced Study.
- 2011a. A Theoretical Overview of Anarchic Solidarity. In Gibson, T., and Sillander, K. (eds.), *Anarchic Solidarity. Autonomy, Equality and Fellowship in Southeast Asia* (pp. 17–39). Monograph 60. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies.
- 2011b. Kinship and Fellowship among the Palawan. In Gibson, T., and Sillander, K. (eds.), *Anarchic Solidarity. Autonomy, Equality and Fellowship in Southeast Asia* (pp. 119–140). Monograph 60. New Haven: Yale Southeast Asia Studies.
- n.d. Joyous, Equal and Free: On the Conditions of Felicity in Human Organizations. In Egan, M. (ed.), *Homage to Robin Fox*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press. In press.
- MacFarquhar, L.  
2008. East Side Story. *The New Yorker* 25: 54–63.
- Marshall, L.  
1976. *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Maryanski, A., and Turner, J.  
1992. *The Social Cage*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Morin, E.  
2005. *Introduction à la pensée complexe*. Paris: Seuil.
- Narr, W.-D.  
2004. The Anthropologist as Partisan. *Dialectical Anthropology* 28: 33–63.
- Niman, M. I.  
2010. *People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia*. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press.
- Proudhon, P.-J.  
1989 [1851]. *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Pluto Press.
- Sather, C.  
1997. *The Bajau Laut: Adaptation, History, and Fate in a Maritime Fishing Society of South-Eastern Sabah*. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

- Scott, J. C.  
2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven – London: Yale University Press.
- Service, E.  
1966. *The Hunters*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Skalnik, P.  
2009. Early State Concept in Anthropological Theory. *Social Evolution & History* 8(1): 5–24.
- Solnit, R.  
2009. *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*. New York: Viking.
- Stauder, J.  
1972. Anarchy and Ecology: Political Society among the Majangir. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 28(2): 153–168.
- Testart, A.  
2004. *L'Origine de l'Etat. La Servitude Volontaire II*. Paris: Editions Errance.
- Turnbull, C. M.  
1961. *The Forest People: A Study of the Pygmies of the Congo*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Werner, A.  
1933. Review of 'Les Tribus du Rameau Lobi' par Henri Labouret. *Man* 33: 21.
- Williams, P.  
1985. Paris – New York: L'organisation de deux communautés tziganes. *L'Homme* 95: 121–140.
- Woodburn, J.  
1982. Egalitarian Societies. *Man* 17: 431–451.  
1998. Sharing is not a Form of Exchange: An Analysis of Property-Sharing in Immediate-Return Hunter-Gatherer Societies. In Mann, C. M. (ed.), *Property Relations. Renewing the Anthropological Tradition* (pp. 48–63). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zerzan, J.  
1994. *Future Primitive*. New York: Autonomedia.