

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A COMMUNITY STUDY OF A SMALL TOWN IN THE AMERICAN MIDWEST

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I. Introduction and summary

In spite of its respectable credentials in anthropology, or maybe because of them, the community study methodology seems to be not quite so popular recently as it once was. And though some have still been published recently, their theoretical importance and impact on the field seem much less important than much older "classical" ones such as those done by Redfield, Lewis, Warner, etc. There seems to be a general feeling expressed in many articles published during the last fifteen years that more problems than solutions have been raised and that the whole methodology was not productive enough in relation to the problems interesting most anthropologists. The new directions taken by cultural anthropology towards the study of formal systems demand material that can be best obtained through different methods. Social anthropology, which had always been the prime producer of community studies came to the conclusion that its problems could not be solved in the framework of a community, went, either down to the smaller units, or up to much wider ones. We shall come back at more length on these problems and trends in the first part of the proposal when I try to face some of the theoretical problems confronting the study of "complex," "modern," I would prefer to say simply "large and differentiated" societies.

Yet, in spite of what I just said about the relative "unfashionability" of community studies, I think there is still a need for such ethnographically oriented studies of "part-wholes." I further think that, if the latest progress in general anthropological theory is adapted to the study of communities, many of the problems that stalled research could be seen in a new light and further advances should be possible.

As I shall explain later, it is not possible any more to speak of a community as an actual "whole," particularly

not in the U.S.A. Yet it is, I think, possible to study holistically only a segment of a society. From the point of view of the people inside a system, the relative size and "complexity" of a society does not make very much difference: they still live in some sort of "whole." It is still possible to study their life in a way very close to that first fully outlined by Malinowski (1922). It is still possible and fruitful to participate, observe, and try to understand how the different domains of cultural life interrelate, though I want to do the latter in a "structural" (in Lévi-Strauss' terms) rather than in a "functional" way.

II. Some theoretical problems

Dumont and Pocock, in a review article of Srinivas' book on the Coorgs in India (1959) answer the question of the relations between the religion of a small local group and the wider sphere of Hinduism and India as a whole in the following way:

"From an objective point of view, the matter is quite different, and the question can even be reversed: what is there among Coorgs that is not Hindu? Nothing, because the Coorgs are Hindus. And they are Hindus essentially because they adhere to Hindu values." (author's emphasis) (1959:42)

The reviewers had been showing how Srinivas had tried to distinguish between those aspects of Coorg religion that were typical to them, those that they shared with general Hinduism but without being "conscious" of it, and those that they also shared and were conscious of. Such an apparently gross overstatement does not mean that Dumont and Pocock are in any way unconscious of the problems involved in studying very large, differentiated societies that are called in anthropology "complex" societies. We shall come

back to the concept of complexity and its different aspects. In a preceding publication (1957) Dumont had confronted the problem more directly, insisting on the necessity of seeing India as a whole and "never to forget that India is one" (p. 9). As he began to show in this article and pursued more deeply in Homo Hierarchicus (1966), this unity is not to be found at the superficial level of elements but at the level of the relations between the elements, and in the main ideas "that go without saying" behind these structural relations. He says:

"The unity of India consists more in relations than in isolated elements...The moment we get from haphazard notes to exhaustive, intensive study, and from isolated features to sets of relations between features, the empirical diversity recedes in the background, and an almost monotonous similarity springs forth." (1957:10)

In relation to the problems raised by most of the other anthropologists who have dealt with the problem this "solution" to the problem is very radical. We are thus going to go back somewhat and review briefly the problems and the discussion thereof. Another answer to the problem stands closer to the main stream of thought on the subject. It was given by Redfield:

"In what way or sense is this study of a small city in Indiana a representation of the United States? I think it may simply be said that it "stands for" the United States; what appears in Middletown is what might be found to appear in many other communities in the United States." (1962:381)

Yet this answer is probably not radical enough and is rather a restatement of the problem than a solution of it. Redfield's own answer was in fact much more subtle and complex. The problem itself can be stated as that of the theoretical implications for anthropology of the relation between the highest levels of the culture as expressed in literature, philosophy, theology, and the

local level of a small community. It has probably best been discussed in relation to the study of India, by Singer particularly (1970). Redfield also dealt at length with the problem (1956a,b, 1962) and developed the concepts of "great" and "little" tradition and little and great communities to account for those visible differences between the two levels which Dumont sometimes appears to discard too easily. The difficulties implied have also been discussed, though more briefly by many other writers, e.g., Geertz (1961), Mandelbaum (1955).

The latter was the only one to refer specifically to America though in a very brief and unsatisfactory way. Redfield also referred in passing to community studies done in the U.S., but apart from Warner himself (1962) the specific problems of American studies were rarely faced. Yet there have of course been many studies of America which are often very contradictory in their results to say the least. Anthropologists and sociologists took as their unit of study either the whole culture (the national character studies, opinion surveys) or a small community but do not seem to have confronted seriously the gap between what Singer calls the "textual" studies and the "contextual" evidence. In anthropology or sociology, adequacy was thought to have been achieved either statistically by interviewing "representative samples" (Centers, 1949) or by finding "average communities" in which "normal" American situations arose (Warner, Lynd, 1929; West, 1945) or again by trying to summarize in a coherent way a lot of "cultural" information (Mead, 1942; Brogan, 1944; Gorer, 1948). The points of view differ and various aspects are stressed, but studies that try to take into account both the local and national levels are rare and seldom succeed in not falling into the two most common errors: assuming that the "average", the "normal" or the "typical" is what America "is", that what does not follow the model is "exceptional" and has

to be explained by a non-cultural analysis. And since no person or town can be fully "normal", American culture had a tendency to be considered as an assemblage of loosely related traits, a catalogue rather than a system. This error is most commonly committed by people who study the whole. Those who concentrate on the local situation normally fall into the opposite error, that of saying that most Americans do not live up to their ideals, and that the cultural definitions are "dreams" not supported by the "reality". Few of these scholars in fact generalized their findings except for Warner (1953). But the same general way of dealing with these problems is common among sociologists who are continually trying to "measure" the dream, to find out, for example, whether mobility is still possible in the U.S., if it has ever been possible, etc. (Myrdal, 1944; Riesman, 1950; Lipset, 1963; Roach, et al, 1969). Probably because these books were all written by Americans for Americans the "dream" is rarely identified except in its grossest traits and seems to be always taken literally, something which is understandable when done by politicians, but not when social scientists are dealing with it. As a matter of fact the only writer who seems to have understood what a good sociological study of the U.S. should be is Tocqueville (1835-1840), and I think his insights into the working of a "democracy" should be considered more seriously by those who write about America than they usually are. Something close to this type of study has been done very recently by Schneider (1968, 1969), though only for kinship and related domains. But it is precisely such intensive studies of limited aspects of the total life of a society that will permit the cultural anthropology of America to get out from the impasse in which the earlier students led the field. But we do not yet have enough studies of this sort to get at a coherent picture of the whole improving on that drawn by Tocqueville.

But his picture, however good and still applicable, is quite old now and not completely satisfying from a theoretical point of view. Thus the problem facing American studies is very much the same as that which faces scholars of India: how can we reach an adequate description of the general level? How can we relate what we learn at that level to the "reality" of actual social action at the local level?

Yet both aspects, or levels, represent realities, beliefs and actions of the same people: ignoring one or the other can only give a partial and inadequate view of the world as it is perceived and lived by the natives. Which does not mean of course that one should limit the study to those things of which people are directly conscious: people are normally conscious of only a very limited portion of the implications of their culture. As Dumont would say the really basic ideas "go without saying" and this may make us wonder whether the American "dream" or "Creed" is really the ultimate reality or rather an expression of something more basic of which it would only be a ritual expression. But what must never be forgotten in a large, very differentiated society such as America, is the fact that the experiences people have vary enormously and that the hunt for the "average" American is a hopeless task since there are many more people that are not average. It is in fact even possible to say that those who shape the culture and who possess it more fully are often very far from being "average". The anthropologist must try and find a middle course between individual cases and "exceptions" and the general level of rules and norms. Or rather, he should try and encompass both the exceptions and the rules as much as possible. As Durkheim (1895) and more recently Dumont (1966) stated, the sociologist-anthropologist must necessarily hold a holistic view of society. This is true even if the natives do not believe in "holism", or "so-

ciety" as is the case in America.

The necessity of such a holistic view leads us to the problem of the "complexity" of American society. The concept of a complex society arose out of the Durkheimian tradition and is ultimately based on an evolutionary view of society (Durkheim, 1895) logical and/or historical, which attempts to classify societies according to the number of units it possesses and the type of social relationships that occur between the units. This tradition was most purely embodied recently by Lévi-Strauss in Les structures élémentaires de la parenté, and he has been criticized for it (Leach, 1954) as Durkheim and Mauss have also been (Needham's introduction to Primitive Classification, 1963). But the concept of "complex society" as it is used now can be more directly traced back to social anthropology of the "British" type with Radcliffe-Brown and Redfield as the main "ancestors". The idea is that the anthropologist should discover and account for all the actual relationships that can take place in a particular society since they are all clearly necessary to the functioning of the society. This ultimately led Radcliffe-Brown to say that the whole world would eventually have to become the unit of study, at least in certain cases:

"The most expedient abstraction /anthropologists/ can make of a society is to take a territorially delimited group...The social anthropologist does this fairly easily with savage tribes...In certain regions of Africa it becomes more difficult to decide what unit to take. The problem becomes more complex still when you get to a society like that of the United States today. From certain points of view it would be convenient to take the whole of the U.S. as a unit -- obviously so if you are dealing with certain political problems. On the other hand, in considering economic institutions the whole world becomes the unit, the whole world is the society now. Again, for certain other kinds of social problems, the U.S. is far too big, and therefore, what we have to do is to take as a unit a smaller community which we can separate out, define and study as a system." (1948:60-61)

Radcliffe-Brown himself did not have to go much further into the difficulties implied by this position since he was mainly interested in small scale societies which had no relations with societies outside the limits of their territories. The model was already less adequate to account for larger societies in Africa or Asia and the problems become even more difficult when one tries to account for the relations that take place in very large societies. The conclusion was that the peasant societies, in fact all small communities, were "part-societies" and "part-cultures" (Kroeber, 1948; Redfield, 1956a,b; Geertz, 1961). The problem thus becomes: how is the part linked to the whole. Many concepts have been developed by those who think actual relating elements need to be found which can be empirically described as functional mechanisms. Geertz, quoting Wolf, talks about "cultural brokers". Eisenstadt, in a review of the state of the research in social anthropology (1961) catalogues "networks", "social fields", "social organization". Redfield has shown the importance of these concepts (1956b); he also pointed out the role of economic relations and how they take over the function of exchange systems. In the A.S.A. monograph #4 on The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies, Wolf points to the importance of kinship, friendship and patron-client relations, Mayer talks about "action-sets" and "quasi-groups" (1966). Yet, when these concepts are used to account for a particular situation, one cannot be very much satisfied and the picture produced is rarely convincing.

The search for these types of concepts derive directly out of the assumption pointed out by Singer (1966) "that primary face-to-face groups (especially the family) are the elementary bricks of all societies". This, itself probably derives from the basic methodological belief that relations have to be "real", i.e., empiri-

cally observable. But, though there may be such relations and they may be relevant, even though face-to-face groups may indeed be "elementary bricks", this does not tell us very much about "complex societies" which are more noticeable for their elaborate cultural life and ideologies. Leach went as far as suggesting (1952; 1954) that the possibility of doing a traditional social structural study of a primitive people by taking into account all relationships, could be an illusion created by theoretical a prioris and the special nature of the societies normally studied such as Australian tribes or Polynesian Islands. And he showed how the structure of the Kachin system as it could be abstracted from the data was far from corresponding to a summary of the actual relationships taking place among the people, yet his model represented a much more adequate picture of the Kachin society than one that would have attempted to cover everything that took place, a task in fact impossible since the Kachin did not have any clear cut boundaries, relationships with the "foreign" Burman Shan as relevant as those occurring among the Kachin themselves.

One of the paradoxes of social anthropology was that, in spite of its theoretical commitment to a study of all interrelationships, the first studies made in large societies consisted mainly of "community studies" in a narrow sense which had a tendency to cut off artificially the relevant relationships between the community and the larger society of which it was only a part, in an attempt to study it "as a system". The answer most easily given was that the community was in a sense a "microcosm" of the larger society in which all the interrelationships could be recognized on a smaller scale that made them easier to study. This is the rationale that permitted Warner (1963) to say that the situation in Newburyport was more valid as a picture of American society than Morris, Ill., was, because there was an

upper upper class in the former and none in the latter. Warner did not accept the idea that upper upper classes are not culturally relevant in America and thus should not appear in a description of the social structure in the sense given to it by Leach.

Though Redfield himself always worked in the framework of a community (1930; 1941) or a set of communities, and though he still viewed the small community as the locus of actual social relations in a Radcliffe-Brownian sense (1956a,b), Singer points out that he was very conscious of the problems we outlined earlier, problems that seem to be completely by-passed if the A.S.A. monograph is a valid clue. Even those who, like Frankenberg, stress the fact that a small community is not a "primitive isolate", and not even really a microcosm, are still looking for the actual processes by which the different communities, the rural ones and the cities, etc., are held together in a functional whole. But though this may be a valid search for anthropologists (and it is not clear how this approach differs from at least some sociology) I think the interesting phenomena, those that need to be studied more thoroughly are the relation between all the things that are viewed as "cultural", ideology, religion, "social structure" even, and the way they are actually embodied in particular places.

It is by looking in such a way at large, differentiated societies that we can understand how the difficulties encountered in studying these are not primarily the consequence of "complexity". Assuming that what most interests the anthropologist is the "cultural level", whether a Parsonian definition is accepted or not, it becomes possible to defend the study of a very limited portion of the whole. By concentrating on a small community, one of course denies oneself the possibility of understanding the functional integration of the whole. I have already referred to the practical difficulties

of studying such a whole, the boundaries of which are almost impossible to draw. What is important is that it is not necessary to do such a study in order to understand the working of the American culture as a cultural system, and as an American system. As the traditional "cultural anthropologist" had understood, a culture is borne, or shared by all the people. Their error was the belief that it was possible to bypass the traditional and painful process of starting with limited studies and waiting before making valid generalizations about the "whole". For, though a cultural whole can be recognized in, and reconstructed out of, the various segments of the society, it is sounder methodology to remain at the local level as long as possible.

In fact, a whole such as a modern society can only be grasped through its parts. Even a purely textual study, or one that concentrates on a few key individuals with particular insights and/or power in the society, is a study of a "part". A university, or a newspaper, or a

in any way that in this quite arbitrarily chosen unit all the integrative mechanisms that could be found in the U.S. can be recognized in a small scale. I do believe that the solutions that are given to problems arising out of the peculiar situations farmers and small town dwellers are faced with will be solved in an American way. It is this "American way" of solving problems, organizing one's life, etc., which I think can be studied fruitfully in the framework of a small community. I could end this part of my proposal by quoting again Dumont and Pocock's declaration about the Coorgs which takes new meaning in relation to what has just been said.

III. Proposal proper

1. What?

a. The community study methodology has been widely used in the context of American society and culture. In fact, it can probably be said that it was first developed by American sociologists, particularly from the Chicago school, to account for American phenomena. Only later was it rationalized into social anthropology by Redfield mainly who indeed made one of the first anthropological community studies outside the U.S. The first period saw the works of W.I. Thomas (1918-20) and Park (1925) in Chicago and of the Lynds in Indiana (1929). But, as we have seen, the "community" was very well suited as a unit of study for the purposes of social anthropology when its interest shifted to more complex societies than the ones that were still mainly studied. Thus communities were soon studied all around the world starting with Mexico (Redfield, 1930, 1941; Lewis, 1951), spreading to Europe (Pitt-Rivers, 1954; Wylie, 1957, 1966; Banfield, 1958; and many others), and to India where the methodology

has raised most of the more relevant questions (Marriott, 1955). As of now about the whole world has been covered. In America the interest continued. Two important studies were done in the South (Dollard, 1937; Davis et al, 1941), and particularly Warner's fieldwork in Newburyport, Mass., the results of which were published over the next two decades in the Yankee City series (1941, 1942, 1945, 1957, 1959). This study could be considered the most important because of its scope and thoroughness, and also because it was the only one to be done primarily with anthropological interests and background while others gathered interest only a posteriori. Considering the good aspects of this study and its failings should thus teach us something as to what can properly be done in an American community. Warner's success led him and his students to continue in the same direction. They produced several studies of a small town in Illinois, the results of which were summarized in Democracy in Jonesville (1949). Less directly influenced by Warner and his "school" was James West's study of a Missouri small town (1945) which was later restudied by Gallaher (1961). Very important also because of its different primary emphasis on political organization rather than social stratification is Vidich and Bensman's study of Springdale, N.Y. (1958). These are but a few of the best studies that come closer to the idea of a "holistic" study. Many more have been made, some with specific problems in sight, such as the studies of the value center in Harvard that led to several publications; an attempt at a summary of the results was made by F. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), but we are here already out of the field of community studies properly speaking.

b. As an introduction to the specifics of my proposal, I would like to discuss briefly some aspects of most community studies that have been made in America till now,

focussing mainly on Warner because of the quality of his work and the possibility of placing him back in an anthropological tradition. Whatever we may think of Warner's way of dealing with stratification and classes, it is clear that he never could go beyond the "class system" as the ultimate reality of Newburyport social life. In fact it is probable that he did not even consider that the society could be structured along different principles from "classes". American classes, for Warner, had probably the same theoretical properties^{that} Murngin "marriage classes", which he had studied before, had when he talked about them: they were real groups involved in real interactions creating a "social structure" in the sense given to the word by Radcliffe-Brown (1940). But this definition does not even really work for the Murngin as was shown by Lévi-Strauss (1949) and Leach (1952, 1954). Even the Murngin system can be better understood if one does not expect all the possible relations to be relevant but only some of them which can then be expressed in a model that will account for all the situations that may arise through the units of the model, the 3+1 lineages Lévi-Strauss says are necessary to understand the system, do not possess the same sort of "reality" as the one postulated by Radcliffe-Brown. Generally speaking I agree with Lévi-Strauss' definition of social structure when he says:

"The term 'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built after it. This should help one to clarify the difference between two concepts which are so close to each other that they often have been confused, namely, those of social structure and of social relations. It will be enough to state at this time that social relations consist of the raw materials out of which the models making up the social structure are built, while social structure can, by no means, be reduced to the ensemble of the social relations to be described in a given society." (1953:525)

I quoted Leach close to Lévi-Strauss in order to stay away from the problem of the definition of "reality". Though I would have a tendency to agree with the French view that the idea behind a system, the structure is somehow "more real" than the relations themselves, it does not really matter if one says that the social structure in the sense I just talked about^{it} is simply the reflection of "verbal categories" or ideology as Leach argues (1954; 1958).

c. To come, at last, to the central point of this proposal, my ultimate goal in doing fieldwork in America is to understand the principles out of which "empirically" real situations arise, the model behind the relations. In America for example, it is very probable that "classes" are not real in this sense. But it must be stressed that this is only an ultimate goal. As Griaule argues brilliantly (1957) the idea behind a ceremony, the norme of a society is something that is only reached at the time of the analysis: in the field one should set the goal aside while gathering the data from which the structure will be inferred, the model built. In the field, the greatest time and effort of an anthropologist, especially at the beginning of an investigation, has to be consecrated to the collection of data from which generalizations will then be made. As Lévi-Strauss would say, the movement is from "social relations" to "social structure".

As a point of departure, there are two or three problems on which I would like to focus first. One of the problems in which I am most interested is the definition of "society" and related domains used by American culture. Definitions would be better, for as I have begun to suspect, many apparent "inconsistencies" in the behavior of people towards ^{what} appears to be the "same things", i.e., the government, American society, the "people",

the "United States" or "America", could be understood and made sense of by looking to the different relations people have with these categories, by finding out how the categories interrelate structurally.

This kind of study will, I think, best be done by concentrating on "political" life since it is on occasions pertaining to this domain that people more easily get to deal with units larger than the immediate family or job. But politics per se are not enough. As Vidich and Bensman show, in small communities few people are really involved and participate in decision making processes. Contrary to current opinions, to say that people are "prevented" from participating somewhat twists the facts that rather point to a kind of indifference on the part of many. I would like to start from this indifference in order not to cover grounds that have already been quite adequately covered by Vidich and Bensman. Questions of the type: what are the opinions of those who do not participate regularly? why don't they participate?, could be very fruitful in relation to the general problems of American culture. I suspect that the relative lack of interest shown by many Americans in using their rights, abiding by their duties, and following the ideal of "participation", can be understood through a study of the logic behind the different ways of classifying different aspects of American public life. Some answers to these questions have already been given by Tocqueville and my study could contribute to a review of his hypothesis in the light of modern anthropological thinking.

Another aspect of American culture I want to concentrate upon is the definition of time. America is so much oriented towards the future that to say that the European view is adequate to express America's conception of time is probably wrong. Studying "time" in such a way implies the idea, of course, that it can be considered to be cultural, and thus studied as a synchronic, structural entity.

As Lévi-Strauss (1952, 1962), and before him Evans-Pritchard (1940) have shown, there are two ways of seeing time: it is possible to talk about a "structural time", reversible and synchronic, and of a "statistical", historical time. The former represents time as it is perceived and lived by the people and belongs to the domain of anthropology, while the latter which is not really perceived or "lived" except in a general abstract sense is the domain of historians. Granted to these that "their" time explains the emergence of new structures better than the native's time, the latter yet represents something very real which has to be studied. Mead (1942) and Gorer (1948) have shown how it is possible to see the American career as involving only three generations: as Mead says, "we are all third generation". Another way of classifying time synchronically which I think can be recognized is one that would go like this: "bad past" (when America did not exist), "good old days", improvable present, improved future. Whether these represent actual situations is very doubtful indeed! Yet synchronic, "structural" time is as important to a good understanding of present day situations as "real" time. The views of time I have outlined of course correspond to different types of situations: again, a structural methodology is necessary to understand the complexity of the working of the system.

These two problems have not yet been studied fully or recently anthropologically with the idea of trying to interrelate every aspect inside a coherent picture. If I succeed in doing so for time and political attitudes in their wider sense, I probably already shall have contributed to research in the field. But if I have the time and the occasion I would like not to limit myself too narrowly to a small set of problems and keep as much of an ethnographical outlook as possible.

Though I do not literally believe that culture is an "integrated whole", I do believe that most important

actions of the same people will display similar structural properties in whatever apparently different domains these actions are set in, in political organizations and ideology, education, religion and of course "social structure". And though at the analytical level I would say the latter is probably the place where we can find all the structural relationships relevant, I do not want to concentrate mainly on those facts which are traditionally thought to be "social structural", particularly "stratification" when the U.S.A. is considered. At least as a first step, I want to reject the idea that any "level" of social life is privileged vis a vis others. As much as possible, I would like never to lose from sight the idea that all aspects of a cultural fact that can be distinguished analytically are in fact structurally inter-related, so that in fact the clue to stratificational systems may very well lie in religion or ideology. This does not imply anything as far as "causal" relationships go, if any. I do not want to say either that religion or ideology "determines" behavior as Weber seems to say -- his arguments can be understood in subtler terms -- or that it is social structural relationships that determine religious phenomena as Fortes would say (1959). I prefer a view of cultural phenomena that implies a certain formal isomorphism between the different "domains" at a structural level. This could be understood as a different formulation of Geertz's definition of religion as a model "of" and "for" behavior (1966), though putting the problem in such a way may imply directions in causal relationships, something which I want to steer away from. But generally speaking, my major intention is not to understand better or define more sharply either religion, social structure or culture. This may come as a side product of the study, but my main interest is America and its culture as expressed in the life of a small town.

This last goal can I think be best achieved through the intensive study of a small community. I have already talked about the theoretical problems involved and will come back to them later from a different angle. First, I shall describe what I am going to do -- what I want to concentrate upon. As I have already hinted I am more interested in "solutions" than in "problems" (as seen from the people's point of view). In Redfield's terms the question I am going to ask is "what do these people enjoy?" rather than "what do they suffer from?" (1956a: 136). As Redfield says both questions are valid, but for different purposes. Since I am interested in structure, norm, I think the first question, or a modified version of it, is the one that should underlie my study. From a practical point of view my models for the final monograph will be found in Redfield's Tepoztlan, Vidich and Bensman's Small town in mass society and particularly in Dumont's Une sous-caste de l'Inde du Sud. It does not mean of course that I am going to follow any of these blindly: in relation to Dumont's monograph which I would like to emulate, I am not postulating that religion per se possesses as much importance in America as in India. A priori political ideology seems to be closer to the central principles of structuring than religion is. If it is indeed, it is on this that I shall have to end, in the same way as Dumont finishes on religion. But this is an empirical problem to be answered after the fieldwork has been done.

d. Warner was sharply criticized by Thernstrom (1964) for the lack of an historical perspective, which, Thernstrom shows, did somewhat bias the results. But what is it that was really biased: the picture of Newburyport as a calm, well integrated city in the nineteenth century? This was definitely not the case and as history Warner's description is certainly wrong, something that

can be traced back to his synchronic point of view. Yet Warner's description possesses another value which he himself does not seem to have been fully conscious of: it has the value of "mythical" history, and as such can teach us a great deal about the synchronic situation and the way it is structured. I am particularly interested in this synchronic situation, for I think people only deal with the world in a synchronic fashion, and since the logic of this understanding is structural, structure, in the sense I use it, is eminently synchronic: it belongs to the present perception of the social world.

When all is said, it is clear that diachrony and synchrony can only be clearly differentiated at an analytical level. To a large extent, they constantly interact and a full understanding of a situation necessitates that both sides of the problem be taken into consideration. It is particularly dangerous to cut off oneself from considering seriously either aspect because this easily leads to the serious mistake of mixing the two and of believing that synchronic time represents real historical events and vice versa. Yet I think a valid monograph can be written which ignores, up to a point, either aspect. I want to concentrate on the synchronic side to try and understand how the system articulates in the present, how it is perceived by the people. Working at the level of the "ideology", as it could be called, or of the grammar, as I would prefer to say, I think that at a first stage I can safely pay but minimal attention to real history. One of the main reasons is that I do not feel adequately equipped to tackle successfully historical problems. But this will not prevent me from checking the historical informations given by informants by looking to actual documents. And as can be seen in my exposition of the criteria for choosing a community, I think one of them has to be the existence of some sort of adequate historical data.

2. Why?

a. In choosing to study a small community, I am conscious of the many criticisms that have been leveled against such a unit of study in the name of the lack of interest in the problems encountered in such communities or of their "irrelevance" to the life of the United States. Only a small percentage of the American population still lives in such small towns, and even though they may still have a disproportionate influence in relation to their size in the political life of America, the situation will eventually change: the political centers of influence will eventually move definitively to the large urban centers, a shift that has already happened in ^{just} about all other domains. Even more important, it could be pointed out that with the development of mass media in rural areas these are even less isolated from the wider culture than they once may have been. Small towns certainly do not seem to be "where the action is at."

I would agree with most of these points, except with the general one that it is not worth the trouble studying such small towns. I have already given at the end of the first part of the proposal some of my reasons. I said that I am more interested in "solutions" than in "problems". Many "problems" are universal while "solutions" are always heavily tinted by cultural factors. Thus, though some of the problems faced by farmers may be peculiar to them, and not very relevant for the nation at large I think that it is possible to say that the way they will solve, or refuse to solve, the problems will be as essentially American as the way a suburbanite would solve his problems. Of course further studies will be needed to determine what is American in general and what is particular to American farmers, and what is true for the latter in particular vs. the solutions that are general to all farmers and peasants in the world. At a first

stage, I shall only try to describe these "solutions", make sense out of them in a structural way. Only later will I try to go to a more general comparative level.

This kind of study could also have been done in a city, though I think with much more difficulty. Since it is obviously not possible to study everybody in a city, the problems involved in delimiting the field of study become more acute. To a high degree the choice involves many a priori ideas about how the culture works and what is relevant in it. Though the problems will eventually be solved by an ^{integration} of all studies and synthesis of their results, a process that can be recognized to have begun in the anthropological study of India, for example, the student of American culture is still faced with the lack of a general theory of American culture that can bridge the gap between the nationwide studies and the very limited ones done mainly by sociologists and which most of the time fail to give as convincing a picture of the society as a cultural system.

It is such a goal which I think can best be attained through the study of a small community in which most of the processes culturally defined as relevant can be seen at work. Politics, religion, "social structure", ideology, if they are all viewed as cultural systems, a structure, rather than as functional processes (and without denying that they may play this role too) can probably best be understood in their relationships and mutual dependence in a place where it is possible to see them at play all at once, i.e., in a small community.

b. Making a community study implies, among other things, that the concept of community be defined and ^{some} idea be given as to the boundaries of the unit of study. In relation to the U.S.A., the concept is particularly vague except as a valued way of life. Arensberg (1965) makes a good case for the relevance of cultural variations in the definition

of a community as a "natural unit". According to him, for example, it is possible to distinguish, in the Middle West rural and urban (small towns) communities which have little interactions except as two communities rather than as one rural-urban community living in symbiosis. This is certainly a distinct possibility that has to be taken into account though from my experience there I do not want to rely too heavily upon it as a working hypothesis. This means that I do not expect to concentrate only on a town, especially if it is not very large, but to include also the people living in rural areas for they, most of the time, rely as much on the resources of the town as the town people themselves. On this point I want to remain flexible for it is not really possible nor desirable to limit oneself a priori. Thus my unit of study will be the township at least, or the county if it appears necessary. I know also that most people nowadays do not limit their life to the boundaries of their "community" but that they have many relations with larger towns. But all these are empirical rather than theoretical problems.

As a matter of fact, and quite paradoxically when we think of the intense emotional value attached to the idea of community, a "community" as such may be something more difficult to find in America than anywhere else in the world. One may think, for instance, of the high turnover rate of population though this may be found elsewhere (Wylie, 1957). More symptomatic is the relative indifference of most people to the affairs of "their" community, something which has best been documented by Vidich and Bensman. Even in a small town people may be more attached to the national level than to the local level, something very different from the situation in France for example (Wylie, Kesselman), though again Banfield reported a similar attitude in Southern Italy. Geertz postulates a "depeasantizing" process, though one may wonder whether

French peasants are "more" peasants than Italian ones.

c. The choice of the Middle West as an area vs. the East or the Far West or any other regions of the U.S., is probably the least defensible choice from solid theoretical grounds, especially since I do not want to hide myself behind the pretense of "typicality". The best reason is, I think, the widely held belief that the Middle West is the "heartland" of America, a belief apparently shared by people even outside of it. The myth that it is what America "really" is may be recognized in the adjective "Middle" used to depict the area. On the other hand it is certainly true that, going from Chicago to New York for example one already feels that Europe is getting closer. Demographically too, the central point of the U.S., which has continually been moving west, has now reached the center of Illinois. Finally the myth of "past East", "present Midwest", "future West" and "frontier" appears to be indeed lived by the people. In my experience many of the people I have met in small towns had moved into them from the East two or three generations before, while their children overwhelmingly desire to "go West". How many actually do is another problem. But the pattern is not a wholly mythical one: in a sense the Middle West represents the present of the U.S.A.

One of the more practical reasons for choosing a Midwestern community is of course the proximity of Chicago and the University to the field, something which has some disadvantages in terms of cutting oneself off from one's background, but which can also be considered beneficial in terms of counseling and directing. Last but not really least is the economic side of the problem: studying in a place not much farther away than one day's drive from Chicago will permit me to cut down on travel expenses

3. How?

I think it is still too early at this stage to be very specific as to the techniques I shall use. But I do have some ideas as to what will be most helpful in order to answer the questions I am asking. My first moves will be the understanding of the way the system works empirically in the particular community I shall be studying: who are the main persons in the community? What are their opinions? How do they come to their present prominent situation (life-history), etc. I would like to do this for the few "big men", for the main priests and school teachers. More important to my ultimate purposes of finding out what the people without direct power, or those who do not participate, think, I shall have to do a sort of "opinion survey" of the population and at the same time to synthesize all the census material that may be relevant. This ought to permit me to get a better overview of the situation and also to discover a few good informants with whom I shall be able to go into more detailed consideration of certain aspects of the culture.

One of the things I shall be insisting upon will be the view the people have of the history of their own life, of their town, of the country. Most of the time, I shall be obliged to accept as accurate the description someone will give me of his life-history. The true story of the U.S., I shall leave to professional historians. Thus the only place where I shall be able to study the mythification process of history is in relation to the town. In order to understand the process better I shall try to write a short, and historically accurate, history of the town, something which would also have more general interest in view of the fact that the way in which Midwestern towns developed seems to be very general throughout the area.

4. Which?

Apart from the general area in which the community I

shall study will be situated, I have not yet picked any particular place. The cliché goes that there are "thousands" of small towns in the Middle West, and that they are "all the same". Thus I could close my eyes and pick haphazardly a town on a map opened in front of me. But there are several constraints which I must take into account.

The first is the relation between size and "completeness". I think that my unit of study, something that can be said to be a township, roughly, should be above 3,000 and less than 10,000 in order to get acquainted with as large a sample as possible in all categories of the population. "Completeness" is more elusive, and more important too. By this I mean that the small town I choose must possess most of the functions which Americans think are necessary to life, particularly a high school, several churches, a police force, a court, etc. This I think is necessary in order not to get a one function town such as an agglomeration of farmers or workers that have to drive to another community to shop or have to bus their children to another community's school. I have already talked about the problems of finding the boundaries of a community, and they are particularly sharp here. A "complete" community is probably as hard to find as a "typical" one. In relation to the same aspect of the problem is the necessity for the community I want to study not to be too close to a large urban center of which it would be a satellite.

There are two other more definite constraints. One is in relation to statistics and the other in relation to historical documents. The vital statistics of certain communities could be much better and ^{more} complete than those of another. There would thus be an advantage in finding a community of the first type for it would save me much time if I do not have to make my own censuses, not counting the fact that statistics made by professionals will neces-

sarily be much better than those I can ever hope to produce. Historical documents of some worth are probably a more elusive category; I know some communities have newspapers going back to very early periods in the middle of the nineteenth century: a complete set of such a local newspaper would certainly be a valuable asset. Some counties or communities have also been studied by local historians. The worth of these studies, I cannot judge, but they might be interesting and could play a role in the final choice of a particular community.

5. When?

I expect to do the preliminary work of choosing and acquainting myself with basic statistics and history of a small town in the summer 1970 for about a month. This should probably involve one or two weeks of driving around to see the situation first hand. I expect to leave for the field definitively sometime in October, 1970. If I have succeeded in securing contacts beforehand I would like to live with a family for two or three months to see the system from their individual points of view before going more specifically to the general level. In fact such an approach will probably permit me to see more clearly what is really important at the level of the whole community rather than trying to find it by haphazard soundings. From past experience I believe this is indeed possible, everybody being very hospitable. After this initial period it will of course be necessary to move out in order to cease from being identified with a particular segment of the society and from seeing the society only from one point of view. I expect to stay at first in the field for a full year, coming back to Chicago for no more than one or two days at wide intervals. In the fall of 1971 I shall come back to Chicago to put order in my notes and begin the analysis of the data. In the spring or summer 1972 I shall go back to the field to focus on the

specific problems that will certainly come up when I begin the analysis. I should then write the report over the academic year 1972-73.

Summary of schedule

Summer, 1970: one month preliminary survey and choice of a community

October, 1970 - October, 1971: field work proper, intensive interviewing

Winter - Spring, 1972: preliminary writing up

Summer, 1972: additional field work

Fall, 1972 - Spring, 1973: writing up period

(I have made an application to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for fifteen months of fieldwork)

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