

## **The paradox of anthropology at home and solutions to it: a handout and review**

**Preliminary statement.** From Jeanette Edwards: “I disagree with those who adhere to a notion that anthropology at home is an oxymoron because anthropological knowledge is generated, by its nature, through epistemological unfamiliarity.” (2000: 11)

**Reconstruction.** It seems the defender of anthropology at home must abandon one of the following propositions, but which? (1) Anthropologists achieve knowledge by starting with different assumptions from those studied, leading them to be struck by the differences and report them. (2) There can be anthropology at home. (3) Anthropology at home is anthropology amongst people who share one’s assumptions.

**Solutions.** There are various solutions in the literature, of which I shall identify four I suppose.

**From Susan Carey: the meaning holist internal diversity solution.** Some people at home might appear to be making the same assumptions, but they are not. And they are using the same words to express different concepts (1986). This person does not use “guess” to express our concept of a guess, and so forth. (How does the anthropologist detect this though? Is there some departure from the epistemology in (1)?)

**From Marilyn Strathern: the foreign anthropology solution.** An English anthropologist studying England can achieve “epistemological unfamiliarity” by using a foreign anthropological framework, such as a French or American one (see Strathern 1992: 4) The solution is underdeveloped. There is no detailed example of how it works. Also, a consistency worry: she casts herself as describing general processes in Western culture (1992: 6).

**From Jeanette Edwards: the internal diversity solution.** “To participate in a shebeen in Manchester and then a game of croquet on a lawn in Windsor would require, for many of us, an adaptation in behaviour and language with a sensitive negotiation of appropriate manners.” (2000: 11) In short, the anthropologist can find groups who are sufficiently unfamiliar at home. But it is doubtful that this is a solution for anthropologists who are interested in very widespread assumptions and alternatives to them, such as Strathern.

**From me: logical analysis.** It is possible to identify assumptions of a group studied not because one does not share them but simply by logical analysis of a discourse (see Edward 2017). This is an alternative to the epistemology presented in proposition (1) of the reconstruction.

### **References**

- Carey, S. 1988. Conceptual differences between children and adults. *Mind and Language* 3: 167-181.
- Edward, T.R. 2017. When can we know our assumptions? *Philosophical Pathways* (208): 1-4.
- Edwards, J. 2000. *Born and Bred*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strathern, M. 1992. *After nature: English kinship in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.