FREUD ENCOUNTERS *FIN DE SIÈCLE* ANTHROPOLOGY: THE CASE OF TOTEM AND TABOO

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From its time of publication in 1913, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1938) has continued to stir controversy in anthropological circles.[1] Yet *Totem and Taboo* has received little analysis with respect to its proper historical context, especially in relation to the anthropological writings available to Freud. The fact that Freud relied heavily on evolutionary writings, which were generally accepted in the *fin de siècle* intellectual circles of Freud's time, should be kept in perspective.

The aim of this inquiry is neither to recapitulate the subsequent controversy over the book, nor to document the general impact of Freud on anthropology.[2] This essay is also not a study of Freud's intellectual configuration. It does, however, examine how Freud *interacted* with the intellectual *Zeitgeist* in which he wrote. An understanding of the state of knowledge and currents of thought prevalent when Freud turned his penetrating intellect to the riddle of the origin of culture, will help us view the book more lucidly within its proper historical context.

Ernest Jones (1955, 1956) presents an exposition of the sentiments Freud held while writing *Totem and Taboo*. In 1911, Freud informed Jones that he had begun a project that was to "occupy him for some years" (Jones 1955:350). Freud wrote to him that he had turned his full attention to the "psychology of religious faith and ties" and "I know I am following a crooked way in the order of my works [i.e., "working"], but it is the order of unconscious connections" (Freud, quoted in Jones 1955:350). A few days later Freud informed the Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Ferenczi by correspondence "I am entirely totem and taboo" (ibid.:351).

In Jones' biography of Freud (1955), we find what initially motivated Freud to juxtapose the evolutionary writings on totemism (as it was defined at the turn of the century) with the then widespread interest in taboo (the behavior that missionaries described as "forbidden" to Polynesians). It is well known that Freud respected Jung intellectually so much that at one moment in the history of the psychoanalytic movement, he expected Jung to be his natural successor. By 1909, Jung was conducting his own research in the field of mythology and comparative religion. Reading Jung's *Wandlungen und Symbole der Deutische Libido* (1938), Freud perceived that the intellectual gap between Jung and himself was increasing. Freud objected most to Jung's "rather uncertain conclusions" (Jones 1955:351) derived from his study of folk narratives. It particularly disturbed Freud that Jung applied these conclusions to clinical cases.[3] A paradoxical aspect of Freud's objections to Jungian methodology is that in *Totem and Taboo,* Freud did essentially the reverse: he applied clinically derived data from neurotics to anthropological issues. Ironically, anthropologists have largely rejected or ignored Freud's *Totem and Taboo* on those grounds.

The influence of Jung's writing as a catalyst in the decision to address the issues in *Totem and Taboo* is clearly articulated in Freud's private correspondence with Jones. By June 1913, Jung had deserted the psychoanalytic movement; at that same time, Freud was hurriedly finishing the last chapter of *Totem and Taboo.* Freud wrote the critical last chapter in a month, and wrote to Jones, "I am working on the last section of Totem, which comes at the right moment to *deepen the gap*" (1955:353). (At the word 'gap' Jones footnotes "between him and Jung" [ibid.]) Abraham also noted that Freud had informed him in a letter that *Totem and Taboo* "would serve to make a sharp division between us and all Aryan religiosisty. For that will be the result of it" (ibid.). Freud was referring to Jung's writings.

Totem and Taboo is, to a considerable degree, a consequence of the Freud-Jung separation--as Jones suggests, "It was undoubtedly these considerations [Jung's writings] that spurred him to see what contributions he [Freud] could himself make" (ibid.:351). It is of interest that in the history of ideas, these more personal yet decisive motivations frequently go unnoted when considering important works such as this one.

Taboo

The widespread interest in taboo prohibitions reported in the anthropological literature, based on the Poly-

nesian notion of *tabu* (Webster 1942) or "forbidden" behavior, attracted Freud's interests as he himself had spent much of his intellectual life analyzing the dynamics of the "forbidden" in Victorian bourgeois culture. His clinical work with "people who have individually created such taboo prohibitions for themselves, which they follow as strictly as savages observe the taboos common to their tribe or society" (Freud 1938:827) led Freud to conclude that such individual prohibitions were motivated by an underlying ambivalence of emotions. Viennese patients with touching phobias provided examples. These patients obsessively avoided touching or having any contact with certain objects. Freud argued that this syndrome originated when the patient's touching of his or her genitals was met by a strict parental prohibition. The prohibition was internalized by the patient because of fear of and love for the parents. Although this prohibition is internalized, it does not stop the underlying wish to carry out the activity. The prohibition only represses the wish into the unconscious where the conflict remains fixed. The ambivalence is constituted by a strong wish to masturbate, met by an equally strong internal prohibition of the wish; this clash of opposing tendencies is displaced onto the ritual avoidance of certain objects.

It is with this model of ambivalence at the root of individual prohibitions that Freud approached the anthropological literature on taboo prohibitions. Freud, however, made the following conservative observation in *Totem and Taboo:*

> The similarity between taboo and compulsion disease may be purely superficial, holding good only for the manifestations of both without extending into their deeper characteristics (1938:827).

The most obvious difference between taboo and personal phobias is the one (taboo) is collective and inherited as part of the social heritage, and the other is individual, the product of unique experiences in the psychosexual development of the individual. Despite this objection of which Freud himself was keenly aware, his psychoanalytic treatment of taboo and the ambivalence of emotions is a brilliant example of how the tools forged to explain one set of phenomena can at times be used successfully to explore related issues.

Relying heavily on the evolutionary writings of Frazer (1910) and Wundt (1916), Freud organized a series of reported ethnographic facts around his concept of ambivalence of emotions. An example of this is the taboo restrictions imposed on warriors after having killed an enemy. The slayer

is in many cases subject to severe restrictions, such as isolation from his group, and having to observe food taboos. The period of observance is only over after the killer has endured these rules of "reconciliation, restriction, expiation, and purification" (Freud 1938:839). For Freud this illustrates two essential points. First, taboo prohibitions, not unlike individual compulsive neurosis [see Freud 1938:829] are governed by the "contagious" principle. The killer who has come into contact with a taboo corpse is now himself taboo. Second, the severe taboo prohibitions that the warrior must endure point to the ambivalent feelings towards the slain enemy. Feelings of hatred are met with internal feelings of remorse and even admiration towards the enemy.

A series of ethnographic facts presented in Frazer's massive collection regarding the "taboo of the rulers" (Freud 1938:839) are likewise organized by Freud under the theme of ambivalence of emotions. As Frazer indicates, although rulers are in many cases thought to be able to control the course of nature, the ruler "must not only be guarded, he must also be guarded against" (Frazer, quoted in Freud 1938:839). Consider the restrictions placed on a priest-king called Kukulu at Cape Padron, Lower Guinea:

> ...Kukulu lives alone in a woods; he is not allowed to touch a woman or to leave his house and cannot even rise out of his chair, in which he must sleep in a sitting position. If he would lie down the wind would cease and shipping would be disturbed. It is his function to keep storms in check, and in general to see to an even, healthy condition of the atmosphere (Freud 1938:842).

Although Kukulu has supernatural powers which make him respected and feared, there is also a tremendous amount of hostility and ambivalence towards him, manifested in the severe restrictions imposed on his life, according to Freud's analysis.

In reviewing the ethnographic data available to him, Freud concluded that a series of esoteric practices could be understood by applying to them the psychoanalytic method of investigation. For example, Freud's concept of "projection," an unconscious maneuver by which taboo thoughts or feelings originating within are attributed to an outside agent. Contending with ethnographic reports, Freud asks: Why is it that in many cases once a trusted and beloved member of the group dies, his or her spirit is feared and

at times becomes demonic? "Why did they make demons out of them?" (Freud 1938:853) Here Freud sees a case of "projection" in attributing psychological states to the deceased. The underlying (ambivalent) hostility felt towards the dead kin is projected and thus attributed to the deceased in his or her demonic nature.

Freud's lifelong preoccupation with the "forbidden" in Victorian bourgeois society largely determined the way he interpreted the ethnographic literature on taboos. Earlier, Freud's clinical researches had led him to conclude that an "ambivalence of emotions", rooted in the infantile situation, was a central theme in the human experience. This conclusion was extended to explain successfully the meaning of a series of ethnographic reports.

Totem

Several factors led Freud to analyze Australian totemism. Undoubtedly the role of animals in totemic practices reminded Freud of his previous work on animal symbolism. The case of Little Hans, a small boy with an acute fear of horses, helped Freud formulate certain conclusions on the unconscious meaning of animals. Little Hans' phobia was so strong that it prevented him from going outside his house. The child fantasized that a horse was going to bite him as punishment for having wished that the horse would fall (die). Freud interprets this phobia as symptomatic of the Oedipal situation in which the child wishes that the father, represented by a symbolic equivalent, the horse, would die. The unconscious wish for the rival father to die brings a tremendous fear that the father will retaliate, by destroying the child's penis, creating "castration anxiety" in the child.

Freud's conclusion that paternal power is often represented by animals was derived from a series of such clinical case studies of Oedipal situations in children. The phobia of dogs of a four-year-old patient of Freud's colleague, Wulff, was another case. This child had a serious fear of dogs and each time a dog would come towards him, he wept and cried, "Dear dog, don't touch me, I will be good." When questioned as to what he meant by "I will be good," the child responded, "not to play the violin any more" (to practice onanism); (Wulff, quoted in Freud 1938: 905). Wulff concluded that this represented "his fear of the father displaced upon the dog, for his peculiar expression: 'Dog, I will be good'--that is to say, I will not masturbate--really refers to the father who has forbidden masturbation" (ibid., 905-6).

The case of Little Arpad helped Freud formulate another important point. Besides showing the displacement of ambivalence towards the father onto animals, it illustrated the child's remarkable identification with this symbol of paternal power. When Little Arpad (analyzed by Sandor Ferenczi at age five) was two and one-half years old, his penis was bitten by a chicken as he was urinating in the chicken coop. A year later the child returned to the same summer resort where this event happened, and "he became a chicken himself" (Freud 1938:907). At this point, apparently, the child gave up human speech for crowing and cackling and became obsessed with the chicken coop and with any events that took place there. At age five, while being analyzed by Ferenczi, he did speak, but only about poultry issues. He played only with poultry toys, and sang poultry songs. His behavior towards the animal was obviously ambivalent: "The slaughtering of poultry was quite a festival for him. He could dance around the animals' bodies for hours at a time in a state of intense excitement" (Ferenczi, quoted in Freud 1938:907).

For Freud, these cases illuminated some basic issues. First, there exist acute, ambivalent feelings towards the animal. Second, there is a remarkable identification with the animal, who is a symbolic equivalent of the powerful father. It is with this insight into the unconscious significance of animals that Freud went through the writings on totemism.

The *fin de siècle* intellectual ethos was permeated with evolutionary notions. Darwin's findings in biology provided fresh fuel for much older speculations about the nature of cultural change (Lowie 1937:19). The hierarchical ordering of cultures according to increasing complexity resulted in the arbitrary savage-barbarian-civilized grand formula for the history of humanity. In the unilineal sequence of cultural evolution, the "totemic age" (Wundt 1916: 116-280) was viewed as the earliest form of human social organization (Lang 1905). Freud, who was interested in the riddle of the origin of culture, became naturally interested in these reports from the anthropological establishment.

Frazer's massive four volume *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910) (a case *par excellence* of armchair anthropology) impressed Freud very much, especially Frazer's theory of exogamy and the incest taboo. Frazer's writings on the sexual restrictions imposed by totemic systems in Australia appears to have come as a great surprise to European intellectuals and their fantasies about sexuality among the "savages." Consider the following excerpt from an early review of Freud's work:

> Analysis of trustworthy records describing the life and customs of the most primitive Australian races still extant, shows that, far from leading a life of erotic abandon and indiscriminate sexual debauchery, these races are hemmed in and their sexual habits restricted by numerous customs, proscriptions and taboos. In many respects their sexual life is even more restricted than among people of culture (Van Teslaar 1913:218-19).

In Australian systems of totemism, members of the same totem are strictly forbidden to enter into sexual relations with each other. Among other things, the totem is a constraining device, restricting the sexual choices of every individual. Freud argues that these strict prohibitions must be enforced against such crimes for which there is a "natural instinct" (Frazer, quoted in Freud 1938:902). Clearly, both Freud and Frazer were arguing against Westermarck's idea that the "dread of incest" is due to an "innate aversion" to having sexual relations within one's group. Here Freud encountered the "enigmatic" (Freud 1938:888) link between totemism and exogamy.

A series of other issues went into the making of Freud's education on totemism. S. Reinach's *Code du Totemisme* (Freud 1938:885) outlined three important beliefs and practices in totemism. First, there are strict prohibitions against eating the totemic animal. Second, mourning is observed after the ritual killing of the totemic animal. Third, it is believed that the totemic animal is the ancestor of the group. In Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910), Freud found essential agreement with Reinach's summary. Wundt (1912) introduced Freud to the fact that, "under certain conditions there was a kind of ceremonial consumption of the totem flesh" (Wundt, quoted in Freud 1938:884). From these facts Freud concludes:

> The totems were originally only animals and were considered the ancestors of single tribes. The totem was hereditary only through the female line; it was forbidden to kill the totem (or to eat it, which under primitive conditions amounts to the same thing); members of a totem were forbidden to have sexual intercourse with each other (Freud, 1938:885).

The issue of ritually eating the totemic flesh is elaborated by Freud while discussing W. Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1907).

Sacrifice as Communion

Robertson Smith's works, including *The Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1907, orig. 1889) had an important impact on the thinking of Robertson Smith's protege, Sir James Frazer, as well as on the works of Emile Durkheim, especially his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) and, of course, on Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Robertson Smith's penetrating writings fascinated Freud: "to read it was like gliding in a gondola" (Freud, quoted in Jones 1955:353), he cheerfully wrote in a letter to Jones.

Freud was particularly interested in Robertson Smith's understanding of the nature and meaning of ritual sacrifice. For Robertson Smith, sacrifice at the altar--"a fixed meetingplace between the worshippers and their God" (Robertson Smith 1907:213), was the essential rite of old religions. The offerings to a deity, to appease him and to incline him to be favorable to the group, consisted of flesh, cereals, and fruits. Animals were sacrificed, their blood was drunk by the group, and the flesh was eaten by both worshippers and their God, and it was thought that the sacrifice was the God's "real food."

The sacrifice in the old Semitic religions according to Robertson Smith, was always public ceremony, emphasizing social community and community with the God. To eat together implies "commonality" in that worshippers and their God participate in the same sacred meal, taking in the same substances. As well as implying mutual obligations, the meal confirms the relations between the God and the worshippers. In summary, Robertson Smith maintained that "the most basic sacrifice from which all other forms derived, involved an act of communion between a social group and a supernatural being with which the group sought to reaffirm its union" (Beidelman 1974:53). Robertson Smith emphasized the "commonality" of God and worshippers as revealed by the totemic meal, and viewed the sacred totemic meal as reaffirming the common origin of the God and the worshippers. And further, "the most primordial form of this was a religious feast at which time the group killed and ate the totemic animal from which they thought themselves descended" (ibid.).

Freud, who had independently arrived at some general formulations on animal symbolism, found in Robertson Smith's writings "confirmation of the ideas he was inclined to think too daring" (Jones 1955:353). His earlier clinical researches had led Freud to conclude that animals were often used unconsciously to represent paternal power. In Robertson Smith, Freud encountered a parallel thought: the totemic animal, the *ancestor* of the group, was a collective

source of power, which was literally orally incorporated in the sacred meal.

The Deed

Freud's synthesis of the anthropological writings encountered by him during the work on *Totem and Taboo* is rather brief but much to the point. In speculating about the origins of totemism, exogamy, religion and civilization, Freud relies on Darwin's writings on pre-cultural man, which asserted:

> Therefore, looking far enough back in the stream of time, and judging from the social habits of man as he now exists, the most probable view is that he aboriginally lived in small communities, each with a single wife, or if powerful with several, whom he jealously guarded against all other men. Or he may not have been a social animal, and yet have lived with several wives, like a gorilla; for all the natives "agree that but one adult male is seen in a band; when the young male grows up, a contest takes place for mastery, and the strongest, by killing and driving out the others, establishes himself as the head of the community" (Dr. Savage in *Boston Journal of Natural History*, Vol. V 1845–47, p. 425). The younger males, being thus expelled and wandering about, would, when at last successful in finding a partner, prevent too close interbreeding within the limits of the same family" (Darwin 1897:591).

Following the third hypothesis, Freud pictured pre-cultural man living in small hordes where a strong, tyrannical father prohibited the younger males from having sexual access to the females in the group. As the young males grew and demanded to have their sexual drives satisfied, the greedy father drove each of them out. One day when enough of them were driven out, "the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father and thus put an end to the primal horde" (Freud 1938:915). Together, the brothers accomplished what individually would have been impossible. Eating the father reflected the intense hatred and rage felt towards him. Furthermore, the consumption of the paternal flesh served as the ultimate form of incorporation of the envied, powerful figure, by literally "taking him in," and thus acquiring his power. Later, the sacred killing of the totemic animal, a symbol of paternal power, is

in Freud's eyes "the first human celebration, the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began--social organization, moral restrictions and religion" (Freud 1938:916).

Freud's earlier conclusion on the "ambivalent" nature of human emotions, was naturally translated into his excursion on the origin of culture. Pre-cultural man acted out what is a repressed fantasy in children and neurotics: they commited the Oedipal crime, killed the father in order to have sexual access to the females in the group. Yet, in addition to hatred, the tyrannical father also inspired great admiration: he had for himself what they most desired. This ambivalent attachment to the father (fear and admiration), Freud argues, produced the "post-supper guilt" about the deed. In turn, the brothers had to renounce, through "subsequent obedience," what they most desired. They prohibited for themselves what the father had previously imposed on them: abstention from sexual access to women of the horde. Thus, exogamy was created. Further, the brothers prohibited the secularized killing of the totemic animal, the substitute father. Both exogamy and totemism were born "out of the sense of guilt in the son" (Freud 1938: 916). The two totemic prohibitions, endogamy and patricide, "survive," in the individual psyche and constitute the core of the Oedipal complex, the resolution of which demands the renunciation of the mother as a sexual object and the transformation of the hatred of the father into admiration and identification.

This idea of "survivals" is of course related to Freud's unfortunate adaptation of Lamarckianism. Lamarckian biology, then well established in the scientific community, advocated the principle that an acquired trait (in this case, guilt) could be inherited generation after generation. Therefore, Freud based his assumption that there is a psychic continuity in the species on scientific theories available to him.

The Impact of *Totem and Taboo*: A Sample

Totem and Taboo was received with warm enthusiasm within psychoanalytic circles. In a 1913 review of the first chapter of the book *The Savage's Dread of Incest*, Van Teslaar was impressed by the "trustworthy" nature of Freud's data and concluded that Freud's theory of incest "proves" a close genetic correspondence between certain neuroses and certain marriage taboos in Australia (Van Teslaar 1913: 218-19). Freud's analysis of the incest taboos, perhaps his most important contribution in the book, also had a

warm welcome in anthropological circles. Even "social structure" oriented anthropologists who were generally hostile to psychologizing social facts, acknowledged Freud's insightful conclusions. For example, George P. Murdock has declared: "Freud's theory, as previously suggested, provides the only available explanation of the peculiar emotional intensity of incest taboos" (1960: 293).

Van Teslaar in his review of the second chapter of the book (*Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotions)*, remarked that Freud's penetrating analogy between certain taboos and compulsion neurosis "must stand as an additional proof of the rich suggestiveness of the psychoanalytic method of research" (1915:114). White, a psychoanalyst, in one of the earliest reviews of the whole book, was impressed by Freud's "fascinating" conclusions and indicated that "the work is an exceedingly interesting and valuable contribution to the problem of mass psychology in its developmental and evolutional aspects" (White 1918:445). Clearly, psychoanalysis was unequipped to evaluate the major weaknesses in Freud's book. This criticism did not occur until Kroeber's first (1920) evaluation of the work.

Kroeber thought it was important to critically evaluate *Totem and Taboo* because "the vogue of the psychoanalytic movement founded by him is now so strong that the book is certain to make an impression in many intelligent circles" (Kroeber 1920:48). Kroeber enumerates a series of points in which Freud's thesis is untenable:

> (1) The Darwin-Atkinson supposition is of course only hypothetical. It is mere guess that the earliest organization of man resembled that of the gorilla rather than that of trooping monkeys (Kroeber 1920:49-50).
>
> (2) Robertson Smith's allegation that blood sacrifice is central in ancient cults holds chiefly or only for the Mediterranoid cultures of a certain period--say, the last two thousand years B.C.--and cultures then or subsequently influenced by them. It does not apply to religions outside the sphere of affection by these cultures (Kroeber 1920:50).
>
> (3) It is at best problematic whether blood sacrifice goes back to totemic observance (ibid.).

Kroeber's final criticism is of Freud's commitment to Lamarckianism, specifically, the obscure question of "surviving"

guilt for the primal deed.

Twenty years later, after having studied and practiced psychoanalysis, Kroeber wrote again on *Totem and Taboo* (1939). In his second view, Kroeber concluded it was best to disregard the supposed historicity of the "primal crime."

> We may accordingly properly disregard any seeming claim, or half-claim, to historic authenticity of the suggested actual happening, as being beside the real point, and consider whether Freud's theory contains any possibility of a generic, timeless explanation of the psychology that underlies certain recurrent historic phenomena or institutions like totemism and taboo (Kroeber 1979:25).

Robin Fox (1967, 1980) is critical of Kroeber's "timeless" interpretation as unwarranted by Freud's own theoretical position. Fox argues that Freud never intended to have his hypothesis pictured as a "just-so-story" (Fox 1980:54).

Margaret Mead also wrote two articles on *Totem and Taboo*. In her earlier note, written in 1930, Mead accepted Freud's request that an anthropologist submit the main thesis of *Totem and Taboo* to an ethnographic test. Mead analyzed Freud's views on the ambivalence of emotions at the root of feelings towards the deceased. Illustrating with materials from the Chukchee, the Koryak, the Bagobo and the Yabut, Mead concluded:

> I. Some cultures, rather than retaining a great number of contradictory elements, will tend to emphasize one aspect of the emotion, either grief and love as in our own culture, or fear, distrust and hostility as in the Siberian cultures described; and that when one aspect is so heavily stressed, it is the other which, excessively developed, leads to conflict. Which aspect of the attitude is culturally stressed will depend upon historical causes (Mead 1930:304).
>
> II. Other cultures, like that of the Bagobo, may develop an institutionalized attitude towards personality which, objectifying the conflict between contradictory emotions, presents a cultural solution of the conflict and necessitates no such suppression on the part of the individual (Ibid.).

That is, cross-culturally, people's feelings towards their

dead "might also include" culturally determined attitudinal patterns independent of unconscious processes. Further, cultures may provide institutionalized attitudes which demand no "suppression" on part of its individual members. Bryce Boyer criticizes Mead on this point, arguing that it can be inferred that Mead is "unaware of the strength of the unconscious mind" (1978:274) by the nature of her conclusions.

Mead turned her thinking to *Totem and Taboo* again in 1963, after having seriously studied psychoanalysis (Boyer, ibid.). Her second view is more favorable and, as Boyer summarized, includes "insightful comments to the problems involved in equating the thinking of the child, the neurotic and the savage" (ibid.).

Derek Freeman (1969), essentially following Kroeber's earlier conclusions, argues that Freud's hypothesis is "scientifically untenable" on three basic issues: (1) Darwin's hypothesis about the social state of primitive man, (2) Robertson Smith's contentions of "the totemic meal as a *sine qua non* of totemism" (Freeman 1969:61) and (3) the phylogenetic issue. Like Kroeber before him, Freeman concludes that Freud's main weaknesses are to be found in these points. Also like Kroeber, Freeman recommends that the historicity of the primal crime be disregarded. Picking up the "fact of fantasy issue" of the primal crime, Freeman bases his argument on the following passage of *Totem and Taboo*:

> We find no deeds [in neurotics], but only impulses and emotions, set upon evil ends, but held back from their achievement. What lie behind the sense of guilt of neurotics are always psychical realities and never factual ones. What characterizes neurotics is that they prefer psychical to factual reality and react just as seriously to thoughts as normal people do to realities. May not the same have been true of primitive men? We are justified in believing that, as one of the phenomena of their narcissistic organization they overvalued their psychical acts to an extraordinary degree. Accordingly, the mere hostile impulse against the father, the mere existence of a wishful phantasy of of killing and devouring him, would have been enough to produce the moral reaction that created totem and taboo (Freud, 1938:928-29).

For Freeman, viewing the thesis under this light makes it "fully tenable in the light of modern knowledge" (Freeman 1969:66). Freeman notes that this argument avoids the

"grave difficulties" (as Freud himself was keenly aware) of having to postulate an obscure "memory," where these ancient events somehow "survive." By postulating an "imagined patricide," experienced generation after generation anew in the form of Oedipal fantasies, the obscure "memory" is no longer necessary as an explanatory tool. The real guilt this imagined crime caused was sufficient to bring about the restrictions the "actual" crime would have caused, argues Freeman.

Freeman opens himself to the same sort of attack that Fox launched on Kroeber. What did Freud really intend, an actual crime or a timeless cyclical fantasy? Regardless of how Freud is interpreted on this crucial point, it should be clear that Freud, like his contemporary fellow scientists, was a Lamarckian. Freud believed that acquired traits, such as "guilt," could be inherited. Consider Freud's enthusiasm about the "Lamarck idea":

> Have I really not told you anything about the Lamarck idea? It rose between Ferenczi and me, but neither of us has the time or spirit to tackle it at present. The idea is to put Lamarck entirely on our ground and to show that the "necessity" that, according to him, creates and transforms organs, is nothing but the power of the unconscious ideas over one's own body, (of which we see remnants in hysteria)--in short, the "omnipotence of thoughts." This would actually supply a psychoanalytic explanation of adaptation; it would put the coping stone on psychoanalysis (Freud, quoted in Freeman 1969:63).[4]

Considering that Lamarckian biology was well established in the scientific community, or as Kroeber writes: at that time, "it did not clash with the standard scientific attitude" (Kroeber 1979:26), it is certain that Freud had an actual crime in mind--an event which then survived in the "memory" of the species, and constitutes the core of the Oedipal complex. Aside from the Lamarckian idea, throughout the book, Freud stresses that "savages" did act out what is a fantasy in children: they killed and ate the father who stood in the way of their sexual desires. Freud's writings on this point are too clear to be misinterpreted:

> The analogy between primitive men and neurotics is therefore much more fundamentally established if we assume that with the former, too, the psychic reality, concerning whose structure there is no doubt, originally coincided with the actual reality, and that primitive men really did what according to all testimony they intended to do (Freud 1938:930).

and

> Primitive man is not inhibited; the thought is directly converted into the deed, the deed is for him, so to speak, rather a substitute for the thought (Ibid.).

The point is that Freud was writing under the influence of a biological school whose theories later collapsed with the establishment of genetics (see Freeman 1969:64-65). Freeman comments that "Freud insisted on the Neo-Lamarckian views almost against his better knowledge" (1969:52).[5]

The Times: Some Concluding Thoughts

Kroeber, in his first review, outlined the most serious problems with Freud's thesis. What anthropologists have not sufficiently stressed is that Freud was participating in an intellectual milieu while writing the book. Freud was very much a product of his times in emphasizing evolutionary thinking and endorsing Lamarckian biology. Further, Freud was relying on the writings of some of the most influential of his contemporaries. Let's take the case of Robertson Smith. Beidelman, Robertson Smith's biographer, puts his contributions in historical perspective:

> In Smith's day his interpretation of sacrifice was a valuable corrective to earlier theories, but his communion theory is seen *today* to be as inadequate as was Tylor's gift theory (1974:54, my emphasis).

Beidelman points out that even after Robertson Smith's death, the "great Semiticist Salomon Reinach favorably regarded Smith's theory of sacrifice" (ibid.). Freud, who read and quoted Reinach, found in this scholar further support for Robertson Smith's arguments. Although Freud did become aware of the debate over the validity of Robertson Smith's theories of sacrifice, he was not convinced by the arguments. In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) he writes of those criticisms: "Yet I have not been convinced either of their correctness or of Robertson Smith's errors" (Freud 1939:169).

Freud's encounter with the "proto-primatologists" further illustrates how much the untenable aspects of *Totem and Taboo* were directly derived from ideas which were then widespread. Freud's endorsement of Savage's second-hand descriptions of the social life of the gorilla was by no means an isolated event. Before Freud, Atkinson (1903) and Darwin himself had also been seduced by the Savage reports.

Lang (1905:111-14), in his *The Secret of the Totem,* also discusses at length these writings. Westermarck (1922), in his monumental *The History of Human Marriage,* also consults Savage's writings on the subject of primate behavior.

Freud, who read all of these eminent experts, should be retrospectively excused for having relied upon the conclusions of Darwin, Robertson Smith, and Lamarck. In this sense, Freud's major weakness was to have endorsed uncritically the views of these intellectual giants. Yet, some of their writings, upon which Freud based many of his ideas in *Totem and Taboo,* were well regarded in scholarly circles at the time, although they would later be discarded as either controversial or quite simply incorrect.

This study of the making of Freud's synthesis attempts to illustrate how an active interaction between Freud's biases, experiences, and creativity, on the one hand, and the scholarly *Zeitgeist* on the other, went into the making of the book *Totem and Taboo.*

NOTES

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[1] For a sample of such controversy, see Kroeber 1920; Malinowski 1927; Mead 1930; 1963; Kroeber 1939; La Barre 1958; Fox 1967; Harris 1968; Freeman 1969; and Fox 1980. For a sample of how psychoanalysts received the book, see Van Teslaar 1913; 1915; White 1918; Bunker 1947; Jones 1955; 1956; Westphal-Hellbusch 1960; Roheim 1969; and Boyer 1978.

[2] La Barre (1958) has already done the former.

[3] For a sample of such work, see Jung (1958).

[4] For an examination of Freud's Neo-Lamarckian phylogenetic thinking, see Lucille B. Ritvo, "Darwin as the Source of Freud's Neo-Lamarckianism" (1965); also Stewart (1976).

[5] For an insightful, yet controversial analysis of Freud's ambivalence towards his own father, and the possible influence this had in leading Freud to his "primal murder" theory, see Freeman (1969:53-78).

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