Anthropology, by Comparison

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English, and their current polished form is due in large part to her sensitivity to nuances of meaning and skill at reading between the lines. In these ways, her contribution was decisive in making this international conversation on comparison accessible to a wider readership.

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Andre Gingrich
Richard G. Fox

Introduction

Richard G. Fox and Andre Gingrich

A familiar paradox currently haunts attitudes towards comparison throughout the social sciences and the humanities in general, and in anthropology in particular. If considered from afar, comparison seems to be the fundamental research tool it always has been, so self-evident that some scholars may not regard it as worthy of closer examination. But when comparison is exposed to close examination, a contradictory intellectual reaction often comes into play, and comparison appears not simple and self-evident but rather as a topic and a method impossible to think about, dissolving into dozens of other issues, pieces and fragments. Paraphrasing what the theologian Augustine (fourth/fifth century AD) said about time (Gingrich 1994), we may fairly characterize this attitude among anthropologists today towards comparative methods: 'When I do not think about [comparison], I know what it is about; but the more I think about it, the more I lose any understanding of it.'

In our view, this intellectual uncertainty with regard to comparison, which ranges from hesitant curiosity to reluctant scepticism, is not completely accidental, and nor is it detrimental. If we recognize that it is not accidental, we must then uncover the reasons for recent scepticism. When we allow that it is not detrimental, we acknowledge that our uncertainty provides a useful starting point for a fresh consideration of the topic.

At first glance, the concept of comparison appears to have been out of fashion for quite some time. As an anthropological practice, however, comparison is in use everywhere – from migration and gender studies to research on ethnicity or elites. A second glance reveals this contradiction between concept and practice to reflect a widespread intellectual impasse: whereas the majority of anthropologists tend to regard comparison as an outmoded methodology loosely associated with obsolete 'grand theories', a small minority still considers comparison the only valid, truly scientific procedure. Ironically, both perspectives share a tacit understanding of comparison that we find to be fundamentally flawed – that of comparison in the narrow, if well-established, sense of a 'hard-science' methodology employed to support some universal theory or meta-narrative.

This volume represents a concerted analytical attack on the validity of such

an understanding of comparison in anthropology, and in the social sciences and humanities in general. We believe that this (implicit or explicit) perception of comparison as a quasi-monolithic, coherent, hard-science methodology lies at the core of the prevailing scepticism. In order to break out of this intellectual impasse and make a fresh consideration of comparison fruitful, it is essential to challenge the prevailing paradigm through an alternative conception of a rich *plurality of comparative methods*. These methods may or may not support major theories, but they are not by any necessity tied up with 'grand theory' elaboration.

Such is the programmatic challenge to which this volume is committed, a challenge that stems from a situation of intellectual uncertainty. A number of factors may be identified that both influence such uncertainty and simultaneously indicate the rationale for a new and closer examination. First among them is the general state of anthropology at the beginning of the twenty-first century. By now the postmodern debates of the late 1980s and early 1990s have passed their peak, but their impact on what is and is not taken for granted by most anthropologists has been profound. Much of the established wisdom in international anthropology – in its dominant, mainstream forms between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War – was seriously criticized, challenged and questioned in these debates, if it had not been already in the late 1960s.

The critical self-inspection begun in the 1960s and 1970s indicted the field of anthropology for its political naïveté, at best, or, at worse, its complicity with European imperialism (Asad 1973; Hymes 1969). The established methodologies of cross-cultural comparison came to be viewed as especially suspicious because they compared what were assumed to be self-contained, stable and highly integrated cultures, when the reality was that all local cultures existed within a single world system integrated by capitalist expansion and absorption. The cultures that anthropologists treated as isolated modules were often, in fact, varieties of social life that had been generated by such expansion and absorption.

In the 1980s this disciplinary self-inspection shifted its focus to the power of anthropologists, through their writings, to inscribe and fix other cultures, to the exclusion of indigenous representations (Clifford 1983; Clifford and Marcus 1986). Again, this critique regarded comparative methodologies as an especially dubious undertaking. For if anthropology's presumed objectivity – the objectivity that had validated cross-cultural comparison up until then – was in fact merely 'science fiction', that is, merely the anthropologist's assertion of authority, then the legitimacy of comparison was undermined.

These various waves of criticism during the late twentieth century cast serious doubt on what previously had seemed a self-evident cornerstone of anthropology. In the 1920s and 1930s many anthropologists accepted cross-cultural comparison as a public responsibility. They not only believed that comparison should be done and could address public issues in significant ways, but also were confident that anthropology could carry out such comparison. Ruth Benedict, for example, set out in *Patterns of Culture* (1934) to compare

several markedly different societies. In addition to her direct comparison of three 'primitive' cultures – Zuñi, Dobu and Kwakiutl – Benedict made critical comparisons of their cultural configurations with those of her own contemporaneous US-American culture.[1] Similarly, by use of the comparative method, Margaret Mead expected her work in Samoa and New Guinea (1928, 1930, 1935) to lead to improved social policies in the United States. Before Benedict and Mead, Bronislaw Malinowski had pursued equivalent cross-cultural comparisons on issues of public interest when he questioned the universality of the Oedipus complex (1926, 1927) or when he implicitly contrasted sexual practices in the Trobriand Islands with European norms (1929). These early practitioners were secure in their claim that anthropology could comprehend all varieties of social life, and they accepted without hesitation a public responsibility to make cross-cultural comparisons for the public good.

In retrospect, 'comparison' in anthropology's history is often seen too narrowly as being closely associated with one particular comparative register of the past, the so-called holocultural approach, which gained currency in the 1950s. Holocultural studies pursued functional correlations between culture traits based on statistical manipulation of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) data (see Levinson and Malone 1980; Naroll *et al.* 1976). In their time, these holocultural and statistical sampling methods of comparison appeared to be living up to all accepted standards of a 'truly scientific' methodology – to an extent that had implications for major research funding institutions in North America and (to a lesser degree) Western Europe. Explicitly committed to quantitative procedures and to an objectivist epistemology for elaborating generalizations held to be universally valid, 'holocultural comparison' became almost synonymous with comparative methodology after the mid-twentieth century.

As we pointed out in the first paragraphs of this Introduction, even today there are many who tend to associate any general 'comparison' exclusively with George P. Murdock and this particular intellectual tradition. An only slightly closer look at the discipline's past, however, reveals such a perspective as one-sided and quite useless in understanding anthropology's comparative legacy, let alone in envisioning its comparative potential in the future. Even in their heyday, HRAF-based comparative procedures represented just one (explicitly universalist and objectivist) methodology among several others. This limited number of competing, dominant comparative methodologies of the post-1945 decades varied from universalist to medium-range and regional forms of comparison.

Another form of universalism widely used from the years after World War II through the early 1970s was neo-evolutionist comparison, which proposed stages or typologies of cultural development as having wide validity (Sahlins and Service 1960). Structural analysis, too, in so far as it assumed that cultural diversity was superficial and aimed to discover by comparison of these superficial differences an underlying and shared human cognitive structure, represented

still another version of a universalist methodology (Lévi-Strauss 1949, 1958). Medium-range comparative approaches in use in the mid-twentieth century included the investigation of regional variation and of culture areas, and the 'area studies' to which these gave rise. Regional and local-level comparison was prominent in studies of cultural ecology, ethnoscience and certain functionalist approaches. Until the late 1960s and into the 1970s, then, comparative methods were an accepted and secure scholarly resource for anthropologists.

In one way or another, of course, it is true that the dominant and competing comparative traditions of the past (neo-evolutionist, structuralist and holocultural) were closely associated with the grand theories of their time. The critical and differentiated perspective we take here on anthropology's comparative legacy does away with the fictitious 'HRAF monopoly', but it requires two additional qualifications. First, it is important to recognize that a variety of 'subaltern' comparative approaches coexisted, now and in the past, with the dominant traditions outlined so far. Several of these subaltern traditions deserve critical re-examination. This volume intends to stimulate further research along these lines by outlining a number of subaltern examples in past comparison (e.g., Lesser in Fox's paper; Eggan in Gingrich's). A second qualification is our emphasis that comparative approaches in anthropology's history were not exclusively theory-oriented. Most anthropologists today would, in fact, agree that the majority of earlier attempts at elaborating such 'grand theories' by means of comparative analyses were dubious, insignificant or entirely futile. The comparative legacy looks quite different, however, if we inspect not the theoretical, but rather the empirical and conceptual side of the record, particularly within the subaltern spectrum.

One such set of examples is represented by the Manchester school of British anthropology and their work in Southern Africa. Max Gluckman, for instance, was among the first to challenge dominant assumptions about discrete, self-evident empirical units as starting points for comparative analyses. Through his own analysis of 'Zululand' (Gluckman 1958) as a product of colonial and capitalist expansion, Gluckman demonstrated that these units of comparison emerge, within fuzzy and volatile boundaries, at the intersection of wider and more encompassing processes. The point is brilliantly taken up, modified and elaborated by Adam Kuper in this volume. But these critical insights, it must be emphasized, by no means persuaded the anthropologists working in Southern Africa to refrain from comparison. On the contrary, such insights helped them to refine their comparative endeavours in such fields as migration, racism, household organization, indigenous minorities, and so forth.

Another, more recent, case that shows how advances have been made through comparative studies is Melanesia. Indeed, fruitful comparative analyses with an empirical emphasis have been abundant in Melanesianist studies. One need mention only the well-known 'Big Man' debates, in which a broad range of scholars – from different parts of the world and of very different theoretical orientations – participated. In fact, one may justly wonder where anthropology

would stand today, if researchers such as Marshall Sahlins, Marilyn Strathern and Maurice Godelier, to name only the most prominent, had not examined regional variation and similarities in local political, social and gender relations over several decades. By developing, applying, re-assessing and differentiating key concepts throughout these comparative processes and debates, these anthropologists not only enriched the discipline's regional knowledge but also produced decisive, bottom-up contributions to anthropological conceptualization and reasoning.

Of course, today many of the grand theories which once inspired comparative analyses in Southern Africa, Melanesia, the Amazon, or, for that matter, in Europe and in urban studies are obsolete. Nevertheless, on the level of conceptual and empirical knowledge, through their errors as much as through their insights, some of these earlier comparative endeavours decisively advanced the discipline.

This implicit use of comparison in anthropology – often not in the service of grand theory but in opposition to it – continues today and provides the rationale for our renewed inspection of comparison in anthropology. Indeed, anthropology, by comparison, required major revision of two recent grand theories: Wallerstein's analysis of the capitalist world system and Said's notion of Orientalism. Wallerstein's theory presumed that capitalism, as it spread out from Europe, transformed the rest of the world to its liking. By use of comparison, anthropologists showed that indigenous resistance to the capitalist juggernaut took many different forms across the globe and frequently forced local outcomes that were less than optimal (Kahn 1980; Mintz 1977; Smith 1976; Wolf 1982). Said's Orientalism and the postcolonial analysis it generated (for example, Jameson 1986) also conflated vast regions of the world as subject to Orientalism and as 'colonial' in an undifferentiated way; anthropologists insisted that Orientalism and colonialism had quite distinctive outcomes as they were put in place around the world (Fox 1985, 1995; Sahlins 1985; Thomas 1994).

To make a fresh start in considering comparison, it is essential to emphasize the heterogeneity of dominant and subaltern traditions in anthropology's comparative legacy and to contrast this analytical and conceptual richness with the many theoretical ambiguities. Today, such a take on the past implies (1) a clear refutation of any alleged monopoly by comparative 'hard-science' methodology; (2) an interest in investigating further the contextually embedded, subaltern traditions in anthropology's comparative legacy; and (3) an unambiguous dissociation from any necessary link between a variety of comparative methods, including their conceptual and theory-oriented elements, on the one hand, and grand theory construction, on the other. The monopolistic, universalist and objectivist claims made in the name of comparison in anthropology today are not necessary. No more necessary is the allegedly essential connection of comparison to grand theory construction.

At the turn of the third millennium, none of these previously well-established comparative methods has escaped the broad critique pervading the social

sciences and the humanities since the late 1960s. Some of these methodologies were quickly abandoned by most anthropologists, along with their accompanying theories and epistemologies – often quite rightly so, as we shall shortly argue for holocultural analysis. Others were left at least partially discredited – and sometimes regrettably so, as the chapters in our section on certain earlier methodologies will assert. Still other comparative methods that had already dropped out of the mainstream were buried even deeper under anthropology's critical self-inspection of the 1960s through 1990s.

Cognitive science informs us that humans always compare, whether we intend to or not (Strauss and Quinn 1997). If this is true for everyday life, it is even more likely to prevail in academic labour. Accepting the inevitability of comparison, we might want to rethink where we stand on the issue of comparative anthropology. We might, for example, want to consider which elements from earlier methodologies are still useful, if reinvigorated for present-day research. We might also want to investigate a more innovative approach to comparison by exploring new methodologies that are less rooted in the past. Because these are among the issues that underlie many anthropologists' uncertainty with regard to comparison, they represent key questions to be addressed in this volume.

The contributors to *Anthropology, by Comparison* share a conviction that the time has come to move ahead seriously with these questions. A growing number of indicators currently signal critical re-assessments, fresh re-orientations and new initiatives in theoretical debates in anthropology and related fields. One indicator may be read in the titles of various publications that 'assess', 'examine', 'recapture', 'rethink' or 're-assess' anthropology and anthropological theory in the present.[2] Another indicator is the reinvigorated interest in theory that pervades professional organizations such as the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) and the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Still another indicator, for better or for worse, is the vogue for anthropological topics in such fields as cultural studies, history, political science (Bowen and Petersen 1999) and comparative literature. Finally, the hotly contested theoretical debates inside anthropology over such concepts as culture, society, nationalism, agency, gender and sexuality also reflect a quickening interest in developing an appropriate anthropology for the present.[3] If these indicators betoken a renewed theoretical impetus in international anthropology, as we believe they do, then it is high time to combine this reinvigorated interest in theory with a re-assessment of comparative methods. Against this background, the present volume offers a plurality of theoretical approaches that are situated in the present and that assess the use of comparative methods for specific contexts and problems.

Anthropology's uncertainty regarding comparative methodologies is undoubtedly related to the state of the world at present. In fact, this final factor amounts to a significant theoretical dilemma. On the one hand, globalization in all its aspects – from transnational media flows to mass migrations – connects

more and more human beings and makes them experience similar conditions. Individuals may respond to these new interconnections in varying ways: sometimes, converging on their cultural similarities; at other times, conserving or even emphasizing their cultural differences. These global connections and the heterogeneous local responses to them legitimate a renewed comparative agenda for anthropology and related fields. If people all around the globe are increasingly reacting to comparable conditions, it becomes a more obvious challenge for scholars to compare how people react and what results culturally from their reactions.

On the other hand, anthropologists are often confronted with two serious difficulties when they actually set out to meet this obvious challenge of the present and for the future. One difficulty pertains to the myopia imposed on our scholarship by past national traditions of comparative methodology. The second difficulty develops out of the necessity, voluntary or imposed, for anthropologists to meet public responsibility through their comparative anthropological research and, as a consequence, to develop shared standards for doing so. Outlining these two difficulties will introduce our readers to the ways in which this volume, in its overall format and throughout its three parts, sets out to deal with them.

The first difficulty is linguistic, cultural and institutional, rather than intellectual. Even after the critical debates of the 1980s and 1990s, most anthropological approaches in use today are still deeply entrenched in their respective linguistic or national boundaries, and this holds as true for comparative methodology as for general anthropology. To somewhat stretch this point: when anthropologists from the United States discuss early methods of comparison, they will refer to Julian Steward or George P. Murdock (1949); their French colleagues, by contrast, will primarily refer to Claude Lévi-Strauss; and their fellow anthropologists from Germany will most likely refer to diffusionism. 'Retrospective provincialism' might be the appropriate label for this inability to disentangle oneself from anthropology's compartmentalized pasts, in the plural. In a global world, however, referring to only one anthropological tradition is a serious – and dangerous – impediment to moving ahead.

With this issue in mind, the contributions to this volume were invited along two dimensions. First, we wanted to encourage an international dialogue and conversation about comparative research in anthropology today by bringing together scholars from twelve different countries in the meetings that generated these chapters. Although it is true that these scholars come primarily from western Europe and the USA, we see this enterprise as only a first step in breaking down parochial anthropological traditions. Second, we hoped that such an international forum would encourage each contributor to move beyond his or her own 'retrospective provincialism'. As a result, most of the authors represented here share an interest in explaining to a wider, international readership certain valuable (and some retrogressive) elements from their divergent legacies in anthropological comparison. After critically re-assessing such

elements from their diverse national pasts, most authors then move on to exemplify, through case studies from their own research, how they combine them with present problems in comparative analyses.

This means of overcoming retrospective provincialism – that is, by introducing valuable elements from divergent national anthropologies and by expediting an international conversation for an anthropology 'of the present' – is best represented in Parts II ('Reinvigorating past comparative methods') and III ('New methods of comparison') of this volume. The contributors achieve the goal in somewhat different ways, some arguing for conserving certain existing methodologies and others insisting on introducing new ones. Our discussion of each of the three sections of this collection will make clear these different approaches. At this point, it is enough to say that the goal of Parts II and III is for anthropologists to overcome this first difficulty, namely, to rise above the different national traditions of scholarship in order to meet the challenge of putting comparative methodologies to work in today's world.

The challenge of putting comparison to work in the world leads us to the second difficulty mentioned earlier: that anthropology must meet its public responsibility. This is the key topic of Part I of this volume ('Comparison and anthropology's public responsibility'), to which we now turn.

Comparison and anthropology's public responsibility

In addition to being a fundamental human cognitive activity, comparison in a more specific sense is basic to all anthropological activities that involve cultural translation. Translation, in this sense, implies analysing and representing human activities and relations in one sociocultural context for audiences (readers, spectators) in another sociocultural setting, which may intersect only to an extent with the first. Such public mediation and representation between sociocultural contexts involve, *a priori*, some basic comparative assessment of these contexts, carried out by an anthropological author moving between them.

Feminist, postcolonial and other critics inside and outside of anthropology have quite rightly pointed out that such cultural translation and accompanying anthropological comparison usually involve the negotiation of unequal power relations; the entire enterprise, after all, implies intellectual and academic hierarchies that are themselves situated in the wider world. The socio-political preconditions and contexts of such comparative activities therefore must be addressed. The present volume itself, for instance, is unmistakably based on collaborative academic networks related to the European Association of Social Anthropologists and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. As such, it brings together (particular groups of) North American and European, female and male, junior and senior voices from anthropology in an initial dialogue at a specific historical juncture. Despite their (encouraging) breadth, these networks do not yet succeed in bringing into the dialogue sufficient numbers of anthropologists from minority groups within Europe and the USA, or scholars from Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The need to clarify responsibly the power-related preconditions for comparative activities, however, is merely one side of the coin. The other side to negotiating unequal power relations concerns how we convey the topics and the results of these comparative activities to the public – and to its hierarchies of power. Anthropologists who pursue comparison encounter all kinds of public demands, ranging from 'accountability' to 'social awareness'. And public responsibility is by no means simply an external moral factor imposed upon anthropologists from the outside; rather, it is inherent in any such comparative project from the outset. We must, therefore, ask ourselves, what are the uses and purposes and the shared standards of comparative endeavours in anthropology?

It should be evident by now that the present comparative project takes very seriously most of the substantial criticism from anthropology's recent past. From the beginning, then, this attempt at a fresh, pluralistic consideration of comparison in today's anthropology includes reflections on our own public responsibility. But these reflections do not represent an attempt at formulating some universal 'code of conduct'; instead, they open up discussion of new ways for assessing comparison and public responsibility for anthropology today.

The authors of the three chapters that make up Part I of this collection argue in different ways that anthropology has a public responsibility to be comparative. They also suggest some of the issues that such a comparative anthropology would have to consider, as well as some of the benefits that anthropology could offer through a comparative focus.

Kirsten Hastrup in Chapter 1 takes up the question of what anthropology has to offer on the troubling issue of universal human rights. Can anthropology, which has invested so heavily in studying cultural difference, now fulfil a public responsibility to speak about human commonalities? Can comparison across societies, the methodology that grew out of anthropology's concern with cultural difference, now argue for cultural unanimity on human rights? Hastrup believes that anthropology is in a position to advance current public debate about human rights precisely because it emphasizes cultural differences and uses the methodology of cultural comparison. She finds that the legal language in which human rights has usually been promulgated and the philosophical discourse in which human rights has often been defended both project essentialized notions of humanity on which to base their universalist claims. Hastrup argues that anthropology's public responsibility is to reinvigorate these 'skeletal' universalist assertions about what humanity is and what laws it must follow with humanity's actual cultural diversity – especially, she maintains, with the 'complex human experiences of undignified behaviour, of violence and of outright evil'.

For Hastrup, anthropology will meet its public responsibility when it translates the violence and evil that people suffer in certain societies in a way that allows this suffering to be understood widely and compared with the plight of

individuals in other societies. By such comparisons, anthropology will help to develop an existential appreciation of universal human rights, an appreciation that goes far beyond the bare-bones legalisms and essentialist philosophical speculations about humanity that now undergird our understanding. Hastrup has an abiding faith that humans, cultural differences notwithstanding, are 'imaginable to each other', and she recalls anthropology to its public responsibility to activate this panhuman imagination through a methodology of comparison.

How would an anthropologist, in practice, combine comparative scholarship with public responsibility? Hastrup leaves the question open – no doubt because she feels there are many ways to achieve this end – but the next two chapters in our collection provide case studies of how individual anthropologists have worked to answer public issues by means of comparative scholarship.

James Peacock in Chapter 2 chronicles his own scholarly lifeline – from his early work on modernization in Indonesia to his recent service in higher education – as a continuous effort at what he calls 'action comparison' or 'active anthropology'. What he means is that the comparisons made by an anthropologist do not lead only to external cultural translations presented to audiences. There is also an interior and personal aspect: as anthropologists convert, through comparison, their personal experiences in the field into a professional anthropological identity at home, they develop particular insights and talents for public service. This capacity is Peacock's answer to the question of how to combine the anthropologist's comparative approach with public responsibility. Moreover, it details the particular strengths the comparative tradition gives anthropologists in such service. Peacock's anthropology recognizes itself as competent to take understandings developed from studying Muslims in Indonesia and Primitive Baptists in North Carolina and activate them in service to academic institutions, international scholarly organizations, and the like.

Like Hastrup, Peacock argues for the value, even necessity, of a comparative anthropology that collates these several endeavours. Peacock might have taken up his public responsibility as chair of his university's faculty or as director of a programme to study the American South less readily, and performed his duties less insightfully, had he not had the global perspective gained from his comparative anthropology. Comparison has permitted him to link ethnographic experience in several very different places with global social issues. His answer to the question of anthropology's public responsibility is both more personal and more activist than Hastrup's. Whereas Hastrup reaffirms anthropology's scholarly comparison of cultural difference as an important resource for instructing humanity, Peacock takes it as a resource for the personal instruction of the individual anthropologist – and asserts, moreover, that this instruction must energize the anthropologist into taking public action. Act locally *and* act globally, Peacock advises us. Study locally, think globally is Hastrup's quite different (but not necessarily contradictory) recommendation.

In Chapter 3 Marit Melhuus looks critically at this same issue of the anthropologist's public responsibility, but she approaches it in terms of anthropology's 'relevance'. In using this term, Melhuus highlights the fact that anthropologists are not always, or even often, able to exercise control over whether their scholarship is considered relevant or not. She reminds us that anthropologists' comparative studies of violence and evil may go unheeded by the public, and that activist anthropologists, attempting to act responsibly on public issues, may be thwarted and even rejected by the powerful institutions they hope to serve. Against the very attractive heroic images of the anthropologist as engaged scholar and informed activist that Hastrup and Peacock project (and who would not willingly embrace these images?), Melhuus reminds us that serving public institutions can often subject anthropology to bureaucratic 'quality control' (which is anything but) and can reduce the anthropologist's comparative consciousness to utilitarian and even irrelevant 'training' to qualify students for degrees.

Although Melhuus is wary of anthropology's claim to have control over its ability to speak responsibly in public, she is not pessimistic or dismissive of the anthropologist's need to try to do so. Recognizing the external constraints on anthropology's ability to say whatever it wants, Melhuus then asks the prior question: what exactly *would* we say if we had complete freedom of speech? She thereby begins to move towards a consideration of the canons or standards of scholarship (or personal action) by which anthropology could meet its public responsibility.

Setting such standards for comparative scholarship is essential, and the remaining chapters in this collection work towards this goal by carefully scrutinizing existing comparative methodologies. But setting standards is not purely a scholastic undertaking; it has real significance for the anthropologist's exercise of public responsibility. At a minimum, to set standards allows us to judge the issue of relevance that Melhuus introduces. If anthropology cannot meet its public obligations, is it the fault of anthropology's theory and comparative methodology? Or is it the result of external pressures to be 'relevant' in a bankrupt, bureaucratic way? How will we know, Melhuus asks, unless we set some standards for comparison, unless we are clear about our own methodologies? Melhuus goes on to argue for a seemingly contradictory and certainly very high standard for comparative anthropology: we must, at the same time that we make comparisons across place and time, conserve some of the ethnographic richness, the *context*, as she calls it, of the cultural beliefs and behaviours we study. Underlying her argument is the conviction that in order to make a contribution towards human understanding, anthropologists must engage in 'theory building', and she suggests that it is only by creating what she terms a 'theory of context' that anthropology will be able to proceed comparatively. Melhuus thereby puts forward the important point that 'context' is by no means an argument *against* anthropological comparison, as some have claimed. Rather, a proper conceptualization and theorizing of 'context' (perhaps similar to

Bourdieu's approach to 'practice') seems to be emerging, out of Melhuus's work, as a central asset of comparative methodologies for the present.

This theme of maintaining cultural context while making comparisons is repeated in many of the chapters in Parts II and III of this collection, which make specific recommendations about how this can be done. In this way they begin to bring into open scholarly discussion the characteristics defining comparative methods. The authors suggest that such an anthropology can be accomplished either by reinvigorating earlier methodologies or by inspiring new ones. But before we discuss their specific recommendations, we must recognize what the authors do *not* recommend: all the contributors reject, explicitly or implicitly, certain dominant comparative methodologies that were well established at some point in the past. In keeping with their concern for context, they particularly dismiss the universalist methodologies that promised to find laws, regularities or stages of development that would be applicable to all cultures or to humanity at large. For example, neo-evolutionist typologies – such as the sequencing of human evolution into 'bands', 'tribes', 'chiefdoms' and 'states' – are abandoned in this collection, even when some of the contributors speak of patterns of cultural development. Similarly, the holocultural methodology of comparison, dating back to Murdock's work and building upon the HRAF, pursues what often appear to be superficial or trite correlations at the expense of contextual ethnographic richness. No contributor suggests that there are underlying basic structures – of cognition, of kinship reckoning, or the like – that can be discovered independent of their expression in particular social contexts.

This volume therefore explicitly leaves behind some of the most prominent comparative methods of the past. Ethnoscience, neo-evolutionism and holocultural methodology – each of these sought what we regard as untenable general laws of human behaviour or cognition through methodologies that sacrificed too much ethnographic context for dubious intellectual gains.

The methodological focus of this volume, then, is non-universalist and non-quantitative. Qualitative comparisons clearly prevail here, carried out along various regional, historical, transnational and distant or macro dimensions. Together, they add up to our notion of what comparative methods in anthropology mean today.

To speak of 'the' comparative method in anthropology today seems to us just as myopic as we have indicated it was in the past. This position elaborates a point made by Ladislav Holy (1987) even before the appearance of the postmodern and postcolonial critiques, although it went largely unnoticed at the time. Today, it is possible to move beyond the ruins of a monopolistic claim to one kind of comparison and beyond the stifling of intellectual competition it visited upon anthropology. Now, a rich *plurality of qualitative comparative methodologies* has emerged – none claiming exclusive rights, each offering its insights and evidence – as the next two parts of the volume set out to demonstrate.

Reinvigorating past comparative methods

The authors of the four chapters in Part II explore, carefully and deeply, various elements from anthropology's divergent legacies of comparison. They thereby explain to a wider scholarly readership how these contexts and methods, if reconsidered and transformed, might provide inspiration for the present.

Jan de Wolf in Chapter 4 gives a thoughtful account of two comparative traditions that are relatively little known outside his native Netherlands. Although they once dominated locally, they were connected to wider international paradigms at the same time. One of them was closely related to evolutionism and to the early elaboration of global comparison. Its leading Dutch representatives – S.R. Steinmetz (1894), A.J.F. Köbben (e.g. 1952, 1966) and H.J. Nieboer (1900, 1910) – interacted primarily with Anglophone anthropology, from Edward Tylor (1871) to Murdock (1949). The other, somewhat better known legacy is the so-called Leiden school of structuralism, as represented by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong (1913, 1952), with its important interactions with Francophone anthropology, from Émile Durkheim to Lévi-Strauss. De Wolf does not embrace this particular legacy himself, and he subjects these two Dutch comparative traditions to a respectful and yet meticulous criticism. At the same time, he demonstrates two other important aspects of this work. First, that out of their unique and original local background these networks of Dutch scholars contributed remarkable results to the comparative mainstreams of their time because they were open to international developments in comparative anthropology, with which they constantly interacted. Second, picking up a main point of Part I of this volume, that in their comparative research, both de Josselin de Jong and Nieboer were inspired by pressing public issues of their day, which they tried to address through their work. Their welcoming of international influences and their sense of responsibility for public issues remain important signposts for comparative analyses today.

In Chapter 5, French anthropologist Emmanuel Désveaux takes us further into one of the comparative legacies that de Wolf discusses: that of structuralism. For some in US academia, this term may carry an almost pejorative connotation, but in European anthropology, this is not at all the case. Perhaps these different approaches to the structuralist legacy delineate a major difficulty in transatlantic conversations about comparison. Many North American anthropologists were highly critical of structuralism from the outset, and most sooner or later discarded it as both theory and methodology. By contrast, the initial impact of structuralism on most European anthropologists was much more profound, and their treatment of that legacy tends to be far less dismissive. Désveaux, in fact, demonstrates how an elastic and gradual transcending of the structural legacy may yield valuable results. Based on his own ethnographic experience among native groups of North America, Désveaux examines classic anthropological texts on Crow kinship, comparing, in particular, the notes and analyses of Lewis Henry Morgan (1871) and Robert Lowie (1912, 1917, 1935).

Désveaux uses the comparative structural method in a masterful analysis of the kinship sphere, but the results lead him to question basic premises of structuralist theory. He notes, first, that the local system clearly contradicts structuralism's universalist claim about kinship as a system of exchange. Second, his case study challenges the dichotomy of affinity and consanguinity that underlies most comparative studies of kinship. Third, a central element of the local system – an oblique form of 'bifurcate merging' that Désveaux has termed 'skewedness' – cannot be understood independently of the local speaker's gender, which therefore must be introduced from the outset as an analytical category. Désveaux concludes that kinship studies need to be incorporated into overall analyses of local societies and of their wider neighbourhoods. His study thus moves courageously right through the paradox: by pragmatically and creatively applying a comparative *structural method* of analysis, he offers a solution to an old puzzle of classic Native American kinship ethnography. At the same time, he uses his results to dissociate himself critically from certain central, universalist assumptions of *structuralist theory*. In this way, he shifts the problematic away from universalist claims and towards the more open research question of how underlying principles are realized in context and over time.

In the third contribution to this section, Adam Kuper explores regional comparison as a particularly significant legacy within British anthropology. He points out that some of that legacy was established – by Meyer Fortes and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), for example – by dissociating general 'types' from evolutionist and other theoretical frameworks and by relocating these types, without their prior frames, within a regional scale. Of course, Kuper points out, this did not solve any epistemological or methodological problems of comparison, but rather prolonged them. Kuper argues that regional comparison must actively confront methodological problems similar to those involved in any other comparative procedure in anthropology, including such topics as commensurability, the units of comparison and the question of boundaries.

Presenting examples from his own investigations in Southern Africa, Kuper demonstrates how conceptions about local groups, their sizes and boundaries are the complex outcome of historical processes, local power relations, state politics and other factors. As methodological starting points for regional comparison, such group designations, boundaries and intergroup relations therefore have to be explicitly examined and contextualized, instead of being taken for granted. Kuper proceeds to elaborate how through such work a *longue durée* model of local settlement patterns and their variation has provided a useful tool for historians and archaeologists in parts of Southern Africa. By means of his examples, Kuper is able to show that epistemological and methodological problems pervade any kind of ethnographic analysis. No matter how small or vast the undertaking, comparison is inherent to them all. In conclusion, Kuper makes two additional, and vital, points: first, that regional comparison can in fact be reinvigorated, if subjected to such epistemological and methodological scrutiny and contextualization; and second, that the renewal of comparative anthropology must emerge from engagement with research problems, rather than from elaborating methodologies. This latter judgement is shared by every contributor to this volume, and the injunction is put into practice in each chapter.

Out of their quite different French and British research traditions, Désveaux and Kuper thus both arrive at critical arguments for a new type of regional comparison that is conscious of the limits of its sources, the relativity of its scope and the significance of its connection to theory and context. In a certain sense, both authors represent variants of 'soft' (post- or neo-structural) comparative methods that are interested in identifying local relations with a *longue durée* continuity in time. These *longue durée* relations are not taken as a given, however, but are considered as open research hypotheses and are pursued through regional variations that are themselves embedded within wider local and interregional interactions.

It would be interesting to examine how these two authors confront their different national legacies in comparison while striving towards similar goals. The British anthropological tradition has, by and large, remained somewhat more sceptical than others of grand theory, and this scepticism could manifest in a marked preference for empiricism. But even these periodic swings towards empiricism always met with domestic criticism. In the early 1960s, Edmund Leach (1961), himself a key figure in emphasizing the significance of comparison, issued his famous warning: anthropological inquiries would amount to little more than 'collecting butterflies' if they were not able to move beyond empirical documentation (or, in today's jargon, if they restricted themselves to 'finely grained contexts').

Perhaps priorities similar to those addressed by Leach's warning were also responsible for the initial disinterest on the part of fellow anthropologists in the comparative results of Kuper's work, as has been noted by Kuper himself in Chapter 6. Emmanuel Désveaux, on the other hand, comes from a French anthropological tradition that for most of its history has held grand theory in particularly high esteem. Against this background, it is especially noteworthy to see how Désveaux downsizes elements from the meta-narrative into useful research tools for regional comparison.

In Chapter 7, Richard Fox also attempts to recover a methodology from the past, as he traces out the study of 'historical transformation' in American anthropology from Franz Boas (1896) to Alex Lesser (1933) and on to Sidney Mintz (1985) and Eric Wolf (1959, 1982). Fox's scrutiny of the past differs from Désveaux's and Kuper's, however. The methodology of historical transformation has been until recently (and is perhaps even now) a subaltern tradition in anthropology from the United States. At no time in the past was it ascendant, but Fox is able to trace its history throughout the entire time-span of the national discipline. Lesser's methodology of studying the 'careers in time' of culture traits, though always subordinate in reputation and influence, coexisted with Alfred Kroeber's historical configurations and with Benedict's and Mead's later studies of cultural patterns and key symbols. Wolf's methodology of

studying cultural 'lifelines' was less neglected, but it too played a secondary role to dominant approaches in US anthropology, including, at various points, ethnoscience, cultural materialism and interpretive anthropology.

Fox suggests that the methodology of historical transformation is particularly well suited for making comparisons in a world of increasing cultural interconnection rather than cultural distinctiveness. Historical transformation, he asserts, is a very particular kind of comparative methodology, which compares by examining the development of cultural variation over time. It is especially useful, therefore, in studying the outcomes of a single historical process, such as the spread of capitalism beyond Europe or today's course of globalization. Fox demonstrates in his own work on the impact of Indian culture upon transnational flows that the methodology of historical transformation, by focusing on the variations produced by such processes as they materialize or manifest themselves under particular historical and cultural conditions, represents an innovative approach by which anthropology can incorporate history and process into comparative studies today. The pursuit of a comparative methodology through the study of variation over time need not examine only large-scale historical processes, as our discussion of Christina Toren's chapter will indicate.

New methods of comparison

Whereas the chapters in Part II identified and conserved valuable methodologies from the past, the contributions in Part III advance new forms of comparison. The authors of these three chapters pursue innovative methodologies not for the sake of novelty, however, but because the questions they ask require new approaches. Andre Gingrich, for example, queries the effects of recent globalization on the authority of states and on the treatment of national minorities. Christina Toren and Thomas Fillitz argue, each somewhat differently, that existing theories and methodologies cannot effectively analyse the social phenomena they wish to understand, even though these phenomena – enculturation and art, respectively – have long been studied by anthropologists. At issue in all three chapters is the invention of more enlightening comparative methods in anthropology.

Like Fox, Toren in Chapter 8 favours a comparative methodology that analyses the varieties or transformations of a phenomenon that arise over time. For example, whereas Wolf's study of variation led him to ask macro-questions about the varieties of capitalism that were produced as that economic system engulfed new territory, Toren's study of variation is at the micro-level. She concentrates on variation in the attributes of individuals that can arise as a culture is reproduced and transformed from one generation to the next. Her focus is on the developmental process by which children constitute themselves as they grow up – in other words, the process of what anthropologists call 'enculturation', although Toren alters the meaning of this term. Individuals

constitute themselves through their intersubjective histories, she argues – that is, through the interactions they have with others, from infancy on.

Calling her perspective 'radically phenomenological', Toren emphasizes a concept of 'intentionality' that she takes from Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 1962). Intentionality means that individuals construct a social consciousness – what could also be termed their cultural beliefs and behaviours – out of their lived experience and the way they try to understand it. Toren calls for a comparative methodology that studies the 'microhistories' of how individuals come into being, which also means how cultural patterns are reproduced or transformed from generation to generation. The term 'microhistory' nicely links Toren's comparison of variations in the development of individuals with the macrohistorical study of variation done by Lesser, Wolf and the other American anthropologists noted in Fox's chapter.

Toren's perspective leads her to make a radical break with three other approaches to enculturation (or 'socialization') and child development. Going against the old enculturation literature, Toren takes the reproduction of cultural patterns as problematic, rather than automatic: if children come to follow the culture of their parents, it is the result of microhistories that have to be studied, rather than of automatic responses to upbringing. Toren also breaks away from Piagetian theory, which supposes that children go through developmental stages unmediated by their lived experiences with others. Toren's emphasis on cognitive development as a (micro-)historical process also dissents from evolutionary psychology's assumption that cognitive development is 'hard-wired' into people. By insisting that individual development is an historical process, Toren recoups enculturation as a fitting subject for comparative analysis in microhistorical transformations.

In a similar fashion, in Chapter 9 Thomas Fillitz examines selected comparative methods of the past and critiques them as inappropriate for his own research focus, namely, African themes in the anthropology of art. In the process, he demonstrates the very limited uses of certain types of regional comparison, in the established context of 'studies of styles' (or 'stylistic provinces'). Fillitz also ranks among the most critical of our volume's contributors regarding holocultural sampling methods. In a detailed examination of various holocultural contributions to art studies, he outlines the clear epistemological and empirical limitations of this method; by tracing Euro-African interactions in the field of art, he moves on to demonstrate that global flows are nothing new in this sphere. An anthropology of art, Fillitz argues, therefore has to be comparative from the outset: it must pursue a 'distant comparison' of the processes and results that are involved from all sides in these cultural flows – within Africa itself, and between Africa and Europe – while simultaneously studying the variations of meaning attributed by the artists to their work. Thus transcending what art historians usually study, such an anthropology of art also has to include aesthetic dimensions relating to the individual artists as well as to the art worlds they inhabit. The cases of two African artists, Youssouf Bath and

Georges Adéagbo, exemplify Fillitz's arguments. In conclusion, Fillitz argues that such anthropological studies of local art, its flows and its variations, also have to include clients' perceptions, which in today's world always bring in a global market factor.

Like Fillitz, Andre Gingrich takes the global condition as his starting point in the final contribution to this volume. Gingrich argues that the present phase of globalization implies a shift away from states to a stronger emphasis on transnational and local factors. This shift gives a renewed impetus for comparative endeavours in an anthropology for today because state violence may represent a reaction to precisely these local and transnational developments. Gingrich, in fact, identifies a whole series of recent anthropological studies in what he terms 'distant' or 'macro-' comparison, such as those of Eric Wolf (1998), Margaret Lock (1995), Bruce Kapferer (1989) and Ulf Hannerz (1992). Drawing on these works and selected elements from among anthropology's methodological legacies, he outlines a methodology of 'controlled, self-reflexive macrocomparison', which he then sets out to apply.

Gingrich's case study concerns the decay processes of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires at the end of World War I and in its aftermath. After identifying the similarities linking these cases, Gingrich posits an explanation for the decay of such multi-ethnic, semi-agrarian empires: if no alternative gains an early hold on mass opinion, the 'dethroned majorities' may easily be seduced by radical pan-nationalism once they face defeat, poverty and secession. Such a rise in pan-nationalism may lead to an ideological 'primordialization', through mass appeals for revenge against alleged humiliation by 'external and internal enemies'. Too frequently, the terrible result of such processes is mass violence against local minorities. After considering this hypothesis for the 1999 Kosovo crisis as well, Gingrich draws a methodological conclusion: self-reflexive, controlled macrocomparison is a qualitative, open research process that can shed additional light on individual local cases and at the same time has the potential to enrich anthropological theories – in this case, those that address nationalism across time and place.

By now, it must be clear that we use the term 'comparative methods in anthropology' in a radically new way. In our usage, it does not refer to the HRAF-style holocultural studies with which it was once commonly identified, nor does it invoke other universalist methodologies such as the stage theories of neo-evolutionism or Piagetian development. We intend, with this unconventional usage, to reclaim a variety of comparative qualitative methodologies, and, even more, to bring these methodologies up again for an open and measured scholarly consideration. We had initially subsumed these methodologies under a single label of 'cross-cultural comparison', but astute readers pointed out the limited methodologies implied by the term. Many anthropologists today, even while employing comparative methodologies, are critical of the isolationist and static understanding of 'culture' implied in 'cross-cultural comparison', and other anthropologists who make comparisons come from scholarly traditions

that never used the culture concept. Rather than restrict our inspection of comparative methodologies to those of the 'cross-cultural' variety, we have chosen to address the full spectrum of anthropologists who do their work by comparison.

Anthropology, by Comparison argues the case for a new, pluralistic comparative agenda in anthropology and related fields, an agenda lent a special urgency by the current phase of advanced globalization. Recent criticisms of older anthropological paradigms make it possible to abandon any exclusively objectivist, universalist and quantitative understanding of comparison. The new, pluralistic and primarily qualitative conception of comparative methods in anthropology recognizes from the outset that asking fundamental questions about human commonalities and differences – now as well as in the past – always involves the negotiation of unequal power relations between and among the networks and processes of social actors under study, the author(s), and the audience or readership. This is why the new pluralism in comparative anthropology strives to address shared standards and public responsibility, instead of taking the status quo for self-evident and for granted.

Such a basic shift of perspective also allows new approaches to anthropology's legacy in comparison. We have pointed out that along with a limited number of competing, dominant methods of comparison linked to the construction of grand theory, there often coexisted subaltern procedures of anthropological comparison. Some of them may be regarded, in a transformed and recontextualized manner, as helpful precursors of present tasks. This is particularly important today, when global anthropological networks of scholars need to overcome 'retrospective provincialism' in order to meet common intellectual and practical challenges.

Anthropology's comparative legacy therefore cannot be reduced to a timeless stalemate between confirmed relativists and confirmed universalists, emanating from a founding fathers' conflict (e.g. Boas vs. Morgan). Such a sharp dichotomy was relevant only for very specific periods in anthropology's history, and even then only within certain academic contexts. In a global historical perspective, the middle ground and the subaltern traditions are at least as significant as the dominant extremes of the past. Furthermore, the record of regional and historical comparison shows that, in practice, comparative projects often were able to contribute productive empirical and conceptual advances in anthropological knowledge, whereas the uses and abuses of comparison for elaborating grand theories remained ambiguous and doubtful.

We believe this volume demonstrates how such a broader, more nuanced and more differentiated approach to anthropology's comparative legacy will be useful and inspiring for a new comparative agenda. As has been shown, the 'units of comparison' need not be accepted as discrete, homogeneous and stable entities at all. Indeed, understanding them as the differentiated, changing results of wider developments, within their fuzzy boundaries, is essential for the new pluralism in anthropological comparison. It was likewise indicated that

medium-scale theory may – and indeed should – inspire the pluralistic comparative endeavours of the future. As Edmund Leach pointed out half a century ago, scepticism about 'grand theory' is no reason to adopt a false empiricist alternative. The public responsibility and intellectual challenges of the present demand wider answers from anthropologists, answers that move beyond the empirical and particular context to search for underlying forces, factors or principles as open research questions. This kind of search must be problem-oriented and theory-inspired at the same time. Problem-oriented, theory-inspired approaches to pluralist methods of comparison that take fluid, historical, differentiated 'units' as their starting point – these are some of the results for an anthropology of the future from our alternative excursion into anthropology's comparative past.

To recap the key points made here, we believe that anthropology today is facing three dimensions of comparison. First are the basic, or cognitive dimensions of comparison. Humans always compare; comparison is an essential element of human life and cognition. Since anthropologists study humans and are themselves human, the question can no longer be whether or not anthropologists should pursue comparison. Rather, the question is *what kind of recognition* scholars give to this basic human activity. The cognitive dimension of comparison is, in fact, relevant for scholars of all fields, and particularly for those working with human beings.

Second are the implicit (what in a philosophical sense might be termed 'weak') or methodological dimensions of comparison. This second dimension of comparison is more specific to anthropology and related fields. Wherever they work, anthropologists are always involved in the active pursuit of methodological comparison, at least to a minimum extent. In our writing, speaking or filming about local or historical contexts, as anthropologists we always address others who come, for the most part, from different contexts. Even a confirmed relativist is involved in such elementary sociocultural translation, which usually involves the use of terminologies from both contexts; of necessity, such 'translation' involves a minimum amount of systematic comparison between them. The false 'us and them' dichotomy is no more than a bad caricature of these hierarchical, power-laden and partially intersecting double contexts of analysis and publication.

Third are the explicit ('strong', in the philosophical sense) or epistemological dimensions of comparison. We hold that, whether or not they acknowledge it, all anthropologists pursue the first two dimensions. By contrast, this third dimension designates a more specific interest in certain anthropological research procedures. This is the domain of explicit comparative inventories – a domain in which a previously dominant, narrow (objectivist and universalist) paradigm has dissolved and become peripheral, while a broad new pluralism of qualitative methods is emerging. This volume begins the exploration of this new comparative pluralism by identifying three main registers within it. One register is the study of *regional variations* within fuzzy, historically shaped boundaries. A second, related set of procedures is the study of *temporal variation and diffusion* that can move along two lines: (1) processes of generational transmission, or (2) historical processes. Finally, *distant or macro- comparison* of a limited number of selected topics represents a third register proposed here.

Differing in this regard from the implicit ('weak', or methodological) dimension, the plurality of explicit ('strong') variants is openly interested in the results of comparative analysis itself. Explicit comparison wants to know if any of these pluralistic comparative procedures might contribute wider (or additional) results and deeper insights than have already been delivered by individual analyses in specific contexts. Implicit comparison therefore leaves the task of explicit comparison either for a later time or for others – but it is not intrinsically opposed to explicit comparison. Likewise, explicit comparison is by no means dismissive of 'weak' comparison, but rather relies on it, requires it and tries to build on it. Without assuming to represent a superior or better path, explicit comparison, if successfully carried out, arrives at results that may yield additional, more extensive, yet complementary insights.

Nevertheless, some tensions between implicit and explicit comparative procedures are inherent and bound to persist, due primarily to the different degrees of abstraction employed in the two approaches. Although, by necessity, any implicit comparison must commit to some unavoidable amount of abstraction, it nevertheless tends to emphasize the specificity of concrete contexts. Explicit comparison, by contrast, inevitably is directed towards some more pronounced (and, at best, careful) abstraction than its 'weak' variant.

A greater or lesser degree of abstraction, then, is part and parcel of the differential in procedures between explicit and implicit (strong and weak) comparison in anthropology. The greater degree of abstraction, however, if carried out in a careful and balanced way through explicit procedures, need not entail radical de-contextualization. On the contrary, this process of more extensive abstraction must go hand in hand with a corresponding self-reflexive theorizing of the very contexts out of which the abstraction is elaborated. This is why we suggest, in this volume, that 'theorizing contexts' is indispensable for any explicit comparison.

The basic, the implicit and the explicit – these three dimensions of comparison make up the core of our argument in *Anthropology, by Comparison*. If anthropologists are simply aware of the comparative element inherent in human cognition; if they appreciate the implicit 'weak' comparative aspect of any kind of anthropological method and practice; or if they explicitly pursue the 'strong', epistemological paths of new, pluralistic procedures: It is *by comparison*, and not without it, that anthropologists will find answers to the questions they ask.

Notes

1 The editors and authors of this volume are sensitive to the use of the terms 'America' and 'American', which we understand to refer broadly to the states and peoples of *all* the Americas – North, Central and South. In keeping with common

practice, however, individual authors sometimes use 'American' to refer specifically to the 'US-American' or 'US' case, and 'America' in reference to the United States of America.

2 Examples of this trend are volumes edited by Robert Borofsky (1994), Daniel de Coppet (1992), Michaela di Leonardo (1998), Richard G. Fox (1991), Adam Kuper (1996) and George E. Marcus (1999).

3 See, for example, the recent debates about the term 'culture' published in *Current Anthropology* (1999) and recent feminist publications such as di Leonardo's *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (1991).

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Part I

Comparison and anthropology's public responsibility