



## THE FOLK-URBAN CONTINUUM\*

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**A**N evaluation of the utility of the folk ideal type and its contrast with the urban societal type seems appropriate at this time. Developments in the past two years ambiguously indicate both a decline and a resurgence in the use of the continuum. On one hand, there is Oscar Lewis' critical restudy of Tepoztlán,<sup>1</sup> the community in which Robert Redfield made the initial, tentative formulation of the folk concept.<sup>2</sup> Relevant also is Redfield's own restudy of Chan Kom, in which volume he seems to have abandoned the folk as a conceptual tool.<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand, Redfield and Asael Hansen have become advisory assistants to a new ambitious program of research in Yucatan cast in the folk-urban frame of reference.<sup>4</sup> Armand Winfield of Washington University is also planning to test hypotheses stemming from the continuum in a study of two Missouri communities.<sup>5</sup>

The conceptual scheme is now over twenty years old. Some aspects of it seem still to be

misunderstood and some of the limitations which have become apparent have not yet been adequately stated. It is our purpose to examine the basic propositions of the folk-urban continuum in the light of experience and criticism, in an effort to determine its inherent advantages and limitations for research and theory building.

Briefly stated, Redfield's scheme defines an ideal type, the *folk society*, which is the polar opposite of urban society. The ideal type is a mental construct and "No known society precisely corresponds to it . . ."<sup>6</sup> It is "created only because through it we may hope to understand reality. Its function is to suggest aspects of real societies which deserve study, and especially to suggest hypotheses as to what, under certain defined conditions, may be generally true about society."<sup>7</sup>

The folk type of society is characterized as follows:

Such a society is ~~small, isolated, nonlit-~~ ~~erate, and homogeneous, with a strong sense~~ ~~of group solidarity.~~ The ways of living are ~~conventionalized into that coherent system~~ ~~which we call "a culture."~~ Behavior is traditional, spontaneous, uncritical, and personal; there is no legislation or habit of experiment and reflection for intellectual ends. Kinship, its relationships and institutions, are the type categories of experience and the familial group is the unit of action. The ~~sacred prevails~~ ~~over the secular;~~ the economy is ~~one of status,~~ rather than of the market.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (January, 1947), p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

\* The suggestions of Dr. Werner Landecker led to a more lucid presentation of several sections of this article.

<sup>1</sup> *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> *Tepoztlán, A Mexican Village*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *A Village That Chose Progress, Chan Kom Revisited*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Allen Spitzer, San Francisco College for Women, is director of the American part of the project, of which the Universidad Nacional del Sureste, in Yucatan, is co-sponsor. *Human Organization*, 10 (Fall, 1951), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bierstedt, "Sociological Theory: Work in Progress," *American Sociological Review*, 17 (February, 1952), p. 81.

Redfield concerns himself largely with the folk pole of the continuum. It is the characteristics of the folk society which receive his descriptive attention. These are derived by discovering the common traits of those societies which are least like our own.<sup>9</sup> The definitive qualities of the urban type are then left as the logically opposite ones to those which characterize the folk. Urban society is never actually discussed here as an ideal type and is not explicitly named. Redfield usually refers to it as "modern urbanized society" or some variant of the phrase. Implicit in the use of this pole as an ideal type, however, is the idea that it stands for urbanized society in general and that modern Western society represents the specific case most closely approximating the polar category. The term "urban society" would appear to represent the content of the ideal type more adequately.

The folk-urban continuum developed, of course, from earlier conceptual schemes. Maine, Tönnies, and Durkheim contributed important dichotomies of societal characteristics. Redfield's formulation took elements of these characteristics and others which he saw to be related and put them together as the definitive traits of the polar types. A factor influencing the research work of Redfield was that of concern with empirical method.<sup>10</sup> To this interest must be attributed the fact that he executed, in Yucatan, one of the rare field projects in which a series of communities was selected and studied to test a specific hypothesis. Consistent with the express purpose of the formulation of the ideal type, its characteristics suggested the hypothesis. Concerning the Yucatan study, Redfield writes:

The problem is seen as one of the relation among variables. No one of these is the sole cause of the others, but it is assumed, subject to proof, that, as certain of these vary, so do others. *For the purposes of this investigation* \* the isolation and homogeneity of the community are taken together as an independent variable. Organization or disorganization of culture, secularization, and individualization are regarded as dependent variables. The choice of isolation and homogeneity as independent variables implies the hypothesis that loss of isolation and increas-

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

\* Italics mine.

ing heterogeneity are causes of disorganization, secularization, and individualization. Even if this should be established, it would not follow that these are the only causes of these effects or that these are the only covariant or causal relationships to be discovered in the same data.<sup>10</sup>

Consideration of the data from Yucatan leads Redfield to the conclusion that ". . . increase of contracts, bringing about heterogeneity and disorganization of culture, constitutes ~~one sufficient cause of secularization and individualization.~~"<sup>11</sup> No formal generalization is attempted with regard to the nature of the processes through which the variables affect one another, although the analysis of the data is full of demonstration of their specific interdependence in Yucatan. Comparison of the Yucatan material with that from Guatemala leads Redfield to the final conclusion that ". . . there is no single necessary cause for secularization and individualization."<sup>12</sup>

The pertinent research in Guatemala is that of Sol Tax. It is essentially exploratory in nature—an attempt to discern if, in another cultural milieu than Yucatan, the variables of the ideal type are related in the same way. Tax says Guatemalan societies are "small . . . homogeneous in beliefs and practices . . . with relationships impersonal . . . and with familial organization weak, with life secularized, and with individuals acting more from economic or other personal advantage than from any deep conviction or thought of social good."<sup>13</sup> As trade and commerce were important in Guatemala even in pre-Spanish times, Redfield regards Tax's observations as suggesting that the development of important commerce and a money economy may be another sufficient cause of secularization and individualization.<sup>14</sup> Tax points out that there seem to be two aspects of culture which cut across the dichotomy of the continuum. He finds the Guatemalan Indian "world view" or "mental apprehension of reality" to be folk in character but

<sup>10</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941, p. 344.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>12</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> "Culture and Civilization in Guatemalan Societies," *The Scientific Monthly*, 48 (May, 1939), p. 467.

<sup>14</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 369.

their kind of social relations to be those of the civilized (urban) type.<sup>15</sup>

Turning to other relevant research, Redfield's introduction to the writer's study of a comparatively isolated, French-Canadian community points out that this culture is intermediate on the continuum.<sup>16</sup> (He originally used the term "folk" to indicate this sort of society rather than the polar type, as Oscar Lewis has pointed out.) The Quebec study was not oriented toward any proposition explicitly related to the folk-urban continuum, but the writer agrees with Redfield's further observations that as the folk-like community lost its isolation, through contact with the city, it became more heterogeneous, a market economy developed, and indications of disorganization appeared.

In a subsequent study of Timbuctoo, French West Africa, the writer did try to determine whether or not this densely populated, heterogeneous, non-isolated community showed social disorganization and was characterized by secular behavior and impersonal relationships, even in the absence of influences from Western civilization. As the report of this work is not yet available,<sup>17</sup> the following comments must, for the moment, be taken at their face value as evidence of the author's experience with and involvement in the folk-urban conceptual scheme.

The previous lack of interest, among anthropologists, in the urban pole of the continuum has already been alluded to. This polar type is logically also an ideal type, yet its characteristics have frankly been derived from a consideration of our own society. Further, in the series of Yucatan communities, decreasing isolation was in fact due to increased contact with Western urban civilization. This was explicitly recognized by Redfield.<sup>18</sup> But inherent in the continuum, as a hypothesis-provoking construct, is the idea that increased contact with any dissimilar society, not just with Western urban society, results in change in other variables of the ideal type. The Timbuctoo

study was an attempt to avoid the limitations of the Yucatan research and of relevant rural-urban studies which have also been made in situations of rural contact with cities of Western civilization.

Briefly, the theoretical implications of the Timbuctoo data are that lack of isolation, marked population density and heterogeneity seem to be accompanied by disorganization, secularization and impersonalization, even in the absence of Western influences. The market economy appears as the system which makes possible the basic ecological conditions, holds the diverse cultural elements together, and mediates most relationships among them. Having said this, certain qualifications are immediately required. Evidence of disorganization and of secular and impersonal behavior, is most evident in relationships between members of different ethnic elements of the community. Familial relationships within each group seem to be strong, sacred and personal. Other intra-ethnic relationships are only somewhat less folk-like in character. Any attempt to characterize the whole society, and to compare it with others, highlights the fact that the folk-urban continuum deals with problems of the relative degree of presence or absence of polar characteristics, which vary not only between cultures but within them, and that no adequate methodological techniques exist for operationalizing and quantifying the characteristics themselves. To this point we shall want to return.

Certainly the most adverse comment on the utility of the folk-urban continuum is Oscar Lewis' critique which concludes his restudy of Tepoztlán. Both because this is a restudy of a community analyzed earlier by Redfield and because of the limited amount of research conducted with the continuum explicitly in mind, Lewis' comments deserve careful consideration.

Lewis points out that the folk concept is an ideal type and hence a matter of definition. It is upon its heuristic value that the type and its related continuum must be judged. He makes the following six criticisms of the conceptual framework, with regard to its utility for the study of culture change and for cultural analysis:<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "World View and Social Relations in Guatemala," *American Anthropologist*, 43 (January-March, 1941), p. 37.

<sup>16</sup> *St. Denis, A French-Canadian Parish*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.

<sup>18</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 360.

<sup>19</sup> Quotations extracted from *Life in a Mexican Village*, pp. 432-440.

(1) ~~The folk-urban conceptualization of social change focuses attention primarily on the city as a source of change, to the exclusion or neglect of other factors of an internal or external nature.~~

We would agree that Redfield's writing and research does neglect other sources of change than urban contact. We can not agree that the folk-urban continuum excludes other conceptualization. ~~Most social scientists believe that the evolution of cities and civilizations has resulted from increased cultural interaction and interdependence.~~ The operation of this process is evident in Tax's Guatemalan data and in the Timbuctoo material. However, ~~it would be erroneous to say that even loss of isolation need always be considered the independent variable in change.~~ Any other variable might do, so far as the continuum is concerned. The very consideration of what other characteristics might be so employed leads immediately to the fruitful observation that ~~some of the type traits seem to presuppose others.~~ For example, great heterogeneity in the division of labor requires a large population, while a large population may exist with a relatively unelaborate division of labor.

(2) . . . ~~culture change may not be a matter of folk-urban progression, but rather an increasing or decreasing heterogeneity of culture elements.~~ For example . . . the incorporation of Spanish rural elements, such as the plow . . . did not make Tepoztlán more urban, but rather gave it a more varied rural culture. . . .

The fact that Lewis says "may not be a matter of folk-urban progression" can be taken to mean that homogeneity and the other variables of the ideal type are inter-related only in certain circumstances. His phraseology also suggests an identification of the concepts "folk" and "rural."

While it is possible that homogeneity may vary independently from the other variables, the following excerpts from Lewis' monograph demonstrate that this was not the case with regard to the increase of heterogeneity resulting from the addition of plow cultivation to hoe agriculture in Tepoztlán.

The differences between hoe culture (*tlacolol*) and plow culture are not limited merely to the use of different tools;

each system has far-reaching social and economic implications.<sup>20</sup>

*Tlacolol* is practiced on communally owned land and necessitates a great deal of time and labor but very little capital. Plow culture is practiced on privately owned land and requires relatively little time and labor but considerable capital. In the former, there is dependence almost exclusively upon family labor; in the latter, there is a great dependence upon hired labor.<sup>21</sup>

*Tlacolol* is essentially geared to production for subsistence, while plow culture is better geared to production for the market. It is significant that most families who work *tlacolol* are landless and that *tlacolol* has traditionally been viewed as the last resort of the poor.<sup>22</sup>

[An informant says of Tepoztlán during the Diaz regime,] ". . . The presidents of the municipio, in agreement with the *caciques*, forbade the sowing of *tlacolol* and so the poor had no way of helping themselves. This prohibition was due to the fact that if the poor planted *tlacolol*, the rich or *caciques* would not have the peones during the rainy season to seed their lands. . . ." <sup>23</sup>

. . . in the years immediately following the Revolution, that is between 1920 and 1927, relatively few individuals became *tlacololeros*. The population of the village was still small (the Revolution having reduced the population to about half its previous figure) and there was a relative abundance of rentable land. . . .

In 1927 the municipio lost control of the *tlacolol* lands, which passed to the jurisdiction of the forestry department. . . . With the rapid increase of population in the thirties, the shortage of land became acute and the need for the *tlacolol* land urgent. Many individuals began to open *tlacolol* plots and were fined.

In 1938 a group of Tepoztecas . . . stated that they would open *tlacolol* even if it meant violence and arrest. Following this demonstration the *tlacololeros* were allowed to work without government interference, and the number of *tlacololeros* increased.<sup>24</sup>

. . . one of the crucial problems in Tepoztlán . . . (now is) the rapid increase of population with no accompanying increase in resources or improvement in production tech-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

niques. On the contrary, the increase in the number of *tlacoleros* represents a return to a more primitive type of production in an effort to escape the devastating effects of a money economy during a period of inflation. . . . Although it is helping to resolve the immediate problem, it by no means offers a satisfactory solution. In fact, it increases the problems to be faced.<sup>25</sup>

The writer knows of no better demonstration than that above of the manner in which ~~two tools and their associated techniques form the core of social subdivision within a society.~~ While it would certainly be unjustifiable to attribute the land-use system and its attendant problems in Tepoztlán solely to the co-occurrence of plow culture and *tlacolol*, it is equally unjustifiable to say that they are unrelated. Lewis' material indicates specifically that the ~~introduction of plow agriculture and its co-existence with hoe agriculture is directly related to the phenomena of population density, family cooperation, market economy, group solidarity, and conflicts indicative of social disorganization.~~ What is more, this ~~heterogeneity of technique~~ seems to be related to shifts in the other variables away from the folk and, hence, toward the urban type. Tepoztlán is rural, in that it is an agricultural community, but it has a rural culture which shows definite urban influences and characteristics.

(3) Some of the criteria used in the definition of the folk society are treated by Redfield as linked or interdependent variables, but might better be treated as independent variables. . . .

The argument supporting this statement cites Tax's work and Lewis' own material showing that commercialism is accompanied by little evidence of family disorganization in Tepoztlán. This point is obviously a more generalized statement of that immediately preceding it. The only comment required is to note that ~~the continuum, as defined, does not require that the type traits change at the same rate or that they are all interdependent in the same way in all circumstances.~~ This is implicit in Redfield's statement, ". . . the societies of the world do not range them-

selves in the same order with regard to the degree to which they realize all of the characteristics of the ideal folk society."<sup>26</sup> It is explicit in his comparison of the Yucatan and Guatemala evidence.<sup>27</sup>

(4) The typology involved in the folk-urban classification of societies tends to obscure . . . the wide range in the ways of life and in the value systems among so-called primitive peoples. . . . the criteria used . . . are concerned with the purely formal aspects of society. . . . Focusing only on the formal aspects of urban society reduces all urban societies to a common denominator and treats them as if they all had the same culture. . . . It should be clear that the concept "urban" is too much of a catchall to be useful for cultural analysis. Moreover, it is suggested here that the question posed by Redfield, namely, what happens to an isolated, homogeneous society when it comes into contact with an urbanized society, cannot possibly be answered in a scientific way because the question is too general and the terms used do not give us the necessary data. What we need to know is what kind of an urban society, under what conditions of contact, and a host of other specific historical data.

We should amend two of these statements slightly to bring them in line with the facts before discussing them. Obviously the reduction of "all urban societies to a common denominator" treats them as though they had *something in common*, but not "as if they all had the same culture." Secondly, we see again a confusion between the conceptualization of the continuum and Redfield's research concern with a particular kind of loss of isolation, namely urban contact.

Granted that it is desirable to study the total configuration of a society and the specific historical factors which gave rise to that pattern, limiting our interests to such inquiry produces a methodological and descriptive science, such as linguistics. If we want to develop a social science with general principles applicable to all societies, despite their cultural differences, we are forced to abstract categories of phenomena which are applicable to all cultures.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> "The Folk Society," p. 306.

<sup>27</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, pp. 364-369.

Differences in *ethos* are important in understanding culture, as Lewis says in his discussion, citing the individualism and competitiveness of the Plains Indians. But because the urbanite and the Indian hunter share these features, does this mean we should cease to consider individualism and competition as specifically related to other aspects of urban life? It may also argue that we need to know how and in what circumstances individualism is systematically related to other systems than the urban.

As for the polar types being "catchalls," too generally defined for scientific investigation, Lewis seems to be restating Redfield's remarks:

The problems suggested in that earlier paper defining the types are too comprehensive in scope and too vague in definition to be suitable guides for research. Nine or ten characters, each simply denoted by a phrase or two, are thrown together and called a "type." It is not clear how we are to determine how any particular society partakes more or less of any of these characters. It is not made clear how we are to determine which of these characters is naturally associated with any other. It is necessary to ask many more special questions, and to relate them to particular fact, to define more precise lines of inquiry.<sup>28</sup>

The continuum is an oversimplification, but at least it is a simplification of a mass of data on cultural variation and change. As a rudimentary conceptual device, the continuum requires elaboration—elaboration which will produce a different conceptual scheme. Science does advance by asking the general questions. The crude answers to the general questions are the basis of increasingly more specific inquiry. The real query is, do we have a better initial answer than the folk-urban continuum to the general question of how to account for the similarities and differences observable among societies?<sup>29</sup>

(5) The folk-urban classification has serious limitations in guiding field research be-

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Beals, in his review of Lewis' work, comments, "Even if we cannot define the significant variables satisfactorily, it seems hard to avoid recognition of important differences between urban and non-urban culture and behavior." *American Sociological Review*, 16 (December, 1951), p. 896.

cause of the highly selective implications of the categories themselves and the rather narrow focus of problem. The emphasis upon essentially formal aspects of culture leads to neglect of psychological data and, as a rule, does not give insight into the character of the people. . . .

The new element of critique here is that the continuum is not specifically concerned with psychological variables. This is perfectly true. The continuum does, however, invite the use of any body of theory which can explain the nature of the interrelationships among the variables.

(6) Finally, underlying the folk-urban dichotomy as used by Redfield, is a system of value judgments which contains the old Rousseauan notion of primitive people as noble savages, and the corollary that with civilization has come the fall of man. . . . It is assumed that all folk societies are integrated while urban societies are the great disorganizing force. . . .

To the extent that this is a criticism of Redfield rather than the continuum, we are not here concerned with the argument. This is, in part, the case, for there are no explicit value judgments placed on the polar types in their definition. The organization-disorganization variable, however, does lead to questions of value orientation. The concepts of "function" and what Merton calls "dysfunction," along with the idea of "degree of integration," are all closely allied in this problem. Social scientists do sometimes treat organization, function, and integration as though they were better than disorganization, dysfunction, and lack of integration. Much of our theory about culture change relies upon the belief that people experience conflict as punishing and that they restructure their behavior so as to eliminate the conflict. The fact that culture change often introduces new conflicts gives us pause to consider, but we still use this motivation of conflict-reduction as an essential element in explaining culture change. The basis for such motivation in the non-cultural reactions of organisms is quite clear. The value connotation of "organization" and "integration" seems to be a quality of data, not of the investigator, and as such is not bias.

Quite a different consideration concerning disorganization as a feature of urban society is that this characteristic may not be de-

pendent upon the other variables of the polar type but may be a function of the rate of social change. Such an explanation is consistent with change theory and might explain why ancient urban civilizations seem to have been less disorganized.

The foregoing discussion has introduced many of the sorts of inadequacies which some social scientists have seen in the folk-urban concept. Rather than to continue here piecemeal treatment, further questions will be introduced into any attempted systematic formulation of all of the arguments, with a view to making some judgment as to what the status of the continuum might profitably be in our theoretical thinking.

Criticisms of the folk-urban concept might be classed under three general headings: (1) the problem of lack of fit between the empirical evidence on particular societies and the nature of these societies which one might expect from the ideal type construct, (2) the problem of definition of the characteristics of the ideal types, (3) the limited theoretical insight provided by the continuum.

(1) *The problem of fit.* Redfield deals with the ideal type as a mental construct which will be productive of testable hypotheses concerning society. This construct itself is commonly referred to as a hypothesis. It is the testing of this hypothesis which we here refer to as (the problem of fit) The fundamental hypothesis inherent in the formulation of the ideal type and the related continuum is that "There is some natural or interdependent relation among some or all of these characters (of the ideal type) in that change with regard to certain of them tends to bring about or carry with it change with respect to others of them."<sup>30</sup> Implied also is a general tendency for the characters to change in the same direction.

A. L. Kroeber raises two questions which essentially involve problems of fit.<sup>31</sup> One, which he does not develop, concerns the nature of the characteristics of the neglected, urban polar type. He asks if we can project the urban characteristics "forward into the future to a vanishing point." In other words, how can we conceive of a completely non-isolated, secular, heterogeneous, individual-

istic society? Kroeber's question is also applicable to the folk pole, although somewhat less so. While we might conceive of a completely isolated, sacred, personal, and kin-oriented society, what is a completely small or homogeneous society? These questions do not destroy the rationale of the continuum. They point up the fact that the empirically possible polarities must be located short of the logical extremes. Answers to the problem of what the minimal and maximal societal requisites are in this regard involve important knowledge about the basic nature of society.

Kroeber's other concern is the fact that if culture change is considered as movement along the continuum, it is an irregular progression; sometimes reversing its trend and moving at varying rates. These facts about culture change would only vitiate the continuum if it contended that change is always at the same rate or in the same direction. This it does not do. The fact that the direction of most change along the continuum corresponds with the ethnocentric idea of "progress" also suggests to Kroeber the possibility of bias. The conflict between this point and Lewis' view that Redfield has a value bias in favor of the folk pole makes it apparent that this sort of value judgment is not really inherent in the continuum.

The diffuseness of the hypothesis implied by the continuum is such that many specific cases of lack of fit do not in themselves invalidate the concept. If, considering all known societies, there is shown to be no general tendency for the elements of the type to co-occur, then obviously the ideal type is not valid. So far as the writer knows, no one has claimed that the general tendency does not exist.

There is another problem of fit which became apparent in the studies of Guatemala and Timbuctoo and in the restudy of Tepoztlán. This concerns the fact that the continuum requires that the investigator characterize a whole society as to the degree to which it partakes of each trait of the ideal type. The continuum states that some cultures are more folk-like than others; it admits that some characteristics of a single society may be more folk-like than other characteristics of the same society. What the continuum does not take into account is the fact that a single characteristic varies

<sup>30</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 343.

<sup>31</sup> *Anthropology*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948, pp. 280-86.

in its degree of folkness in different aspects of life in a single society. To ignore this fact in a summary characterization of the whole society blurs differences which are relevant and probably important. This observation seems to imply a need for the addition of some new dimension to the continuum.

(2) *Definition of characteristics.* Attempts to find the degree of fit between actual societies and the ideal type presupposes a precise definition of the characteristics of the type. The definition must be operationalized so that all observers of societies can categorize the cultural characteristics in the same way. Inasmuch as the traits of the ideal type are variables, there must be some way not only to identify them but also to quantify them, or at least to rank the variations of each trait in some consistent fashion.

Widely different societies conceivably might be ranked by judicious rule-of-thumb methods. There is definite evidence, however, that even this procedure is unsatisfactory. The difference between Redfield and Lewis in their conclusions concerning Tepoztlán is in large part attributable to the use of different standards by the two workers. It is even questionable if Redfield and Tax share a common standard, although they worked in close cooperation. Redfield seems to have had some reservations as to Tax's characterization of Guatemalan culture as secular and individualistic with weak familial institutions.<sup>32</sup>

Tax points out that the Indian *municipios* are highly specialized among themselves and in continuous intercommunication.<sup>33</sup> He characterizes each *municipio*, however, as being internally homogeneous.<sup>34</sup> This homogeneity is then used as characterizing Guatemalan societies. The designation of the community pattern as the societal pattern would appear to be legitimate only in instances in which the communities are isolated or in which they are undifferentiated and intercommunity structure is undevel-

oped. The writer would be inclined to regard Guatemalan society as heterogeneous.

The study of Timbuctoo may also be open to different interpretation from that which the writer has made. The attention given to cases of conflict may be seen by others as observer bias. Actually instances of conflict were specifically sought, as they were regarded as indicative of disorganization. There is nothing novel about this approach but it suggests that some scale of conflict indexes should be applied to the whole range of the organization-disorganization variable, instead of using it solely at one pole. Past practice has often been to categorize organization by a "see how well it all fits together" description. This led, for example, to the anomaly of Lewis discovering that there were over a hundred cases of crime in Tepoztlán during the time that Redfield was observing the integrated nature of folk culture there. In his later work Redfield came to recognize four different categories of organization.<sup>35</sup> Disorganization, in the sense of lack of internal consistency, stands as the polar opposite to only one of these. All four need some uniformly applicable and scalable treatment.

Others of the characteristics of the ideal type lead themselves to more explicit handling than has been accorded them. Population size and density are easily metricized. Indices of amount of isolation could be developed on the basis of amount of movement of persons and goods in and out of the community, as well as the amount of mail and mechanical communication. The degree of functional importance of these contacts to the society is less readily dealt with, but this factor is probably more significant than the gross quantity of contact.

The presence of three distinct culture groups in Timbuctoo, and their organization in a ramifying division of labor and class structure, was used as indicative of marked heterogeneity. An itemization of distinctive roles based on kinship, economy, politics, religion, etc., might fruitfully be derived from such data for single numerical comparison with similar material from other societies. Taking population size into account, one would have an index of heterogeneity of roles. It is not suggested that this is the only

<sup>32</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 364; "The Folk Society," p. 308.

<sup>33</sup> "World View and Social Relations in Guatemala," pp. 29-30.

<sup>34</sup> "Culture and Civilization in Guatemalan Societies," *The Scientific Monthly*, (May, 1939), p. 467.

<sup>35</sup> *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, p. 346.



important kind of heterogeneity, but its relevance to degree of individualization and impersonalization is clear.

It should be said in passing that the Yucatan study suffers less from scaling difficulties than the other studies. In the first place, Redfield was familiar with most of the communities studied and his personal definition of the variables could be applied in each case. More important, the communities all presented varieties of traits with a common historical basis. It is relatively easy to judge the significance of traits which have been added to or dropped out of a particular ceremony. It is much more difficult to compare cross-culturally the significance of differences between utterly unrelated *rites de passage*.

The weight of evidence seems to be that, irrespective of the merits of the folk-urban continuum for theory building, the characteristics of the ideal type must be operationalized before relevant theory can be reliably tested cross-culturally.

(3) *The limited theoretical insight.* G. P. Murdock has criticized the folk-urban concept because it does not make use of historical, functional or psychological theory and method.<sup>36</sup> Melville Herskovits antedates Lewis in dissatisfaction with the type categories because they emphasize form rather than process.<sup>37</sup> These criticisms point up accurately the basic nature of the continuum. It does deal with the form rather than with the content of culture traits. As a predictive device it is a weak hypothesis. This doubtless accounts for the fact that Redfield does not refer to it as a hypothesis at all.

It will place the continuum in its proper perspective if we ask what utility remains for it, if it provides little exact fit or predictive value and if no theory concerning function or process is involved. To answer

simply, we can only rephrase Redfield's original exposition. The ideal type is a conceptual recognition of a general tendency for certain formal characteristics of cultures to vary together. The continuum stands as an insistence that social science has something to explain here. Any body of theoretical knowledge in the social sciences can be related to the continuum if it can contribute to our understanding of the processes through which the characteristic traits are interrelated.

We note the Spencerian principle that as population density increases, so does differentiation, i.e., heterogeneity. This principle must be refined by the addition of Durkheim's idea of "social density," or frequency of contact and interchange within a population. This essential intervening variable lends itself not only to ecological treatment<sup>38</sup> but also to socio-psychological considerations of communication. In other words, there are bodies of theory which, when applied to the heterogeneity of population, and size and density characteristics, can go a long way toward explaining the processes through which they tend to vary together.

Probably the most valuable feature of the continuum is the fact that it provides a framework within which various theoretical fields may be integrated to provide greater understanding of the nature and course of culture change. It is clear that such theoretical progress will involve the clarification, refinement, and addition of important variables in such change. Whether or not these developments take place with the continuum specifically in mind, they will, of necessity, have to take into account the cultural facts upon which the continuum rests. It is hardly prophetic to predict that the linear continuum will evolve into a more complex and more insightful construct. The ideal types are useful as a basis for such development.

<sup>36</sup> Review of *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*, *American Anthropologist*, 45 (January-March, 1943), pp. 133-136.

<sup>37</sup> *Man and His Works*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948, pp. 604-07.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Amos Hawley, *Human Ecology*, New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1950, Chapter 11.