

# Confronting the field: Tylor's *Anahuac* and Victorian thought on human diversity

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## Abstract

Victorian anthropologists have been nicknamed ‘armchair anthropologists’. Yet some of them did set foot in the field. Edward Burnett Tylor’s first published work, *Anahuac, or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*, described his youthful travels in Mexico. Tylor’s confrontation with the ‘field’ revealed significant tensions between the different beliefs and attitudes that Tylor held towards Mexican society. Contrasts between the evidence of Mexico’s history (prior to European contact) and the present-day society of the 1850s led Tylor to see both progress and degeneration in Mexico, both ‘authentic’ culture and deep cultural mixture. In order to show that he was capable of uncovering the ‘authentic’ Mexican society, Tylor portrayed himself as a professional traveller-ethnographer, even though he was an anthropological novice. The embodied confrontation with the physical field also created tensions in Tylor’s relationship to Mexico. Despite Tylor’s mainly ethnocentric vision of foreign societies, his experiences of physically navigating the Mexican land and environment led him towards an empathetic relativism with respect to material culture and social practice. At the same time, his role as a traveller encouraged him to see the field as a fluid entity with no clear boundaries, even as he searched for a bounded and untouched Mexican society amidst cultural mixture. Drawing out the tensions resulting from a Victorian traveller’s confrontation with the foreign field allows for a more balanced engagement with the works of these Victorian scholars of human diversity, which have often been portrayed as naively ethnocentric.

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**Introduction**

In the spring of 1856, a young man boarded an omnibus in La Havana, Cuba. He was presumably feeling a little lost on an island that differed so much from his own native island, Great Britain. Against the wide world of unknown people on the other side of the omnibus' windows, he could brandish his recent experience of travelling across the southern United States, and his reassuring belief in the virtues of his own British civilisation. Perhaps a longing for the familiar led him to start a conversation with another European-looking man on the same omnibus. The man in question happened to be Henry Christy, English and Quaker, just like himself, as well as an experienced collector and traveller, interested in the study of foreign histories and societies. Not long after their meeting, Christy and Tylor left together on a four-month trip to Mexico. Thanks to this coincidental encounter, Edward Burnett Tylor, who would later be called the 'father of anthropology', received his 'anthropological apprenticeship' in Mexico (Marett, 1936: 29).

In this article, I analyse the travel account that Tylor published five years after his expedition in Mexico: *Anahuac, or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern* (Tylor, 1861). *Anahuac* was Tylor's first published work. It follows Tylor's and Christy's journey throughout Mexico, which brought them from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, from the pyramids of Teotihuacan to that of Xochicalco, from Puebla to the top of the volcano Popocatepetl, and to other locations in the region around Mexico City. Besides recounting Tylor's travels, *Anahuac* contains Tylor's views on Mexican people, on the history of the country, and on the great 19th-century problem of the origins of civilisation. My central concern is to show how Tylor's theories and opinions on civilisation, human history, and society were shaped by his initial encounter with Mexico.

The works of Victorian anthropologists such as Tylor have not always been considered worthy of much attention, except for denouncing the assumptions on which they were built. Evolutionist thinkers were preoccupied with tracing the progress of human civilisation through the ages, with British civilisation as the end point of this process (Kuklick, 2008: 55; Kuper, 2003: 359). Evolutionists did not see people living in different parts of the world as culturally different human societies, but rather as 'living fossils', primitive remnants of earlier stages in the universal progress of civilisation (Kuper, 2003: 355, 358). Adam Kuper has called the idea that some societies are primitive leftovers of the evolutionary process an 'illusion': 'It is our phlogiston, our aether' (Kuper, 2005: 10). From this perspective, the main point about these early students of human diversity, including Tylor, is that they were ethnocentric and naïve in their theories (Regard, 2006). The same went for their practices.

Evolutionist thinkers have long been stuck with the nickname of 'armchair anthropologists' (Kuklick, 2008: 56). The expression captures an image of Victorian men comfortably seated in their studies, classifying data on foreign societies without being able to

check the accuracy of their material, wholly reliant on data sent to them by informants living around the world. According to Henrika Kuklick, if some of them travelled to distant lands to observe foreign societies, it was more by accident than by their will (ibid.). Tylor's expedition in Mexico seems a case in point. When Tylor arrived in Mexico, he was only 24 and had no formal training in matters relating to human civilisations. Health reasons, not ethnographic ardour, motivated his presence in Mexico. Tylor had started developing tuberculosis when working in his family's brass foundry. As the younger son of a well-to-do family, he was sent to warmer climes to recover, which explains why Tylor found himself in Cuba and then in Mexico (Larsen, 2016: 15; Sera-Shriar, 2013: 154). Evolutionist anthropologists did not seem to possess a genuine interest in immersing themselves in foreign cultures.

More recently, however, other anthropologists and historians have sought to redress the balance in order better to understand the ideas and practices of 19th-century scholars (see Buckland, 2020; Candea, 2018; Koditschek, 2018; Sera-Shriar, 2013, 2018). Views such as Kuper's tend to obscure the fact that evolutionist arguments were not plucked out of thin air. Evolutionist scholars, spearheaded by Tylor, were engaged in a systematic programme to trace evolution up from 'primitive societies'. They attempted to do that by comparing cultural traits to each other, for example different marriage customs, and trying to understand which of these customs came first in the history of human progress (Candea, 2018: 24–8). Despite Victorian scholars' problematic assumptions, their 'observational practices', such as comparing data and searching for patterns, did not lack sophistication (Sera-Shriar, 2013). As historian Efram Sera-Shriar has argued, evolutionist practices are too easily hidden by the dismissive label of 'armchair anthropologists' (ibid.).

If the studies of Victorian anthropologists have at times been demonised, this may be because of modern anthropology's insistence on fieldwork as the gold standard of methods (Sera-Shriar, 2013). Already at the end of the 19th century, anthropologists started to privilege first-hand experience in order to strengthen the credibility of their observational practices (ibid.: 2). This preference culminated with Bronislaw Malinowski's statement on 'participant observation', where the anthropologist attempts to immerse themselves in the society under study. 'Participant observation' was supposed to be methodologically superior to the studies of Victorian anthropologists (ibid.: 5). The dismissal of Victorian studies of human diversity continued in the postcolonial period, as anthropologists tried to distance their discipline from its imperial history and hence from their Victorian predecessors (ibid.: 7). As Timothy Larsen has put it, 'Anthropologists have an unusually strong tendency to kill their fathers' (Larsen, 2016: 223), especially when ethnographic methods are concerned.

Even if 20th-century ethnographers liked to contrast their immersive methods with Victorian armchair study, not all Victorians rejected direct study of foreign societies. Tylor may have initially travelled because of his fragile health, but the introduction to *Anahuac* suggests that Tylor's travelling in Mexico had at least a post hoc scholarly aim. As Tylor wrote on the first page, 'The author and his fellow-traveller enjoyed many advantageous opportunities of studying the country, the people, and the antiquities of Mexico' (Tylor, 1861: iii). The purpose of Tylor's journey, rather than being only about 'travelling', was portrayed as a self-conscious determination to *study* Mexico

and Mexican people, just as ethnographers might. The key point here is that supposed methodological revolutions in anthropology, inaugurated by figures such as Malinowski, may actually have blurred connections between 19th- and 20th-century anthropology (Sera-Shriar, 2013). The starting point of this article is this ‘rehabilitation’ of Victorian studies of human diversity and the renewed attention to the practices of those early anthropologists.

Recognising that the accounts of evolutionist anthropologists contained problematic assumptions but were also based on thorough observational practices, allows for a more balanced engagement with works such as *Anahuac*. Historians’ views on this travel account, in fact, range from dismissal to praise. On one side, Timothy Larsen has stated that *Anahuac* ‘has justly been ignored as a non-important contribution to anthropology’, since Tylor did not even have a ‘working definition’ for Mexican (Larsen, 2013: 470; 2016: 16). Frédéric Regard has further denounced Tylor’s attitude towards Mexican people as a ‘violent ethnocentrism’, arguing that Tylor erased the suffering and the voices of Mexicans in his account (Regard, 2006). On the other, Sera-Shriar has described *Anahuac* as ‘participant observation *avant la lettre*’, as, according to him, Tylor and Christy were trying to see the world from the perspective of the local population (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 155). In the middle, 20th-century authors such as Robert Marett, John Burrow, and Joan Leopold considered *Anahuac* as a necessary, though perhaps not very noteworthy, stepping stone towards Tylor’s later works (Burrow, 1970; Leopold, 1980; Marett, 1936). *Anahuac* was a ‘trial flight, hardly spectacular’, in Marett’s (1936: 39) words.

Here, I combine these different readings of *Anahuac* to draw out the tensions in Tylor’s writings on Mexico. *Anahuac* was Tylor’s debut anthropological work, but Tylor also presented himself as a professional traveller-ethnographer, expert in the theories on the origins of civilisation. Tylor observed and documented Mexican practices, as Sera-Shriar pointed out, and yet he was not eager to immerse himself in Mexican culture, preferring to keep Mexican customs at bay with his own professed British rationality. While Tylor had a very ethnocentric approach to Mexico, liberally applying his own judgments to Mexican people and the state of their country, this was punctuated by hints of relativist thinking. The picture I want to sketch of *Anahuac* is one in which the professional ethnographer and the amateur gentleman-traveller, the engaged observer and the distant traveller, a relativist and an ethnocentric outlook towards culture, coexisted in tension. Those tensions originated in the confrontation between Tylor, as a Victorian traveller with assumptions and expectations on foreign societies, and his experience in Mexico.

In the first part of this article, I situate *Anahuac* in contemporary debates on the study of civilisation, and I explore how Tylor accepted or rejected competing theories on the origins of civilisation based on what he observed in Mexico. In the second part, I analyse how the mixture of cultures and populations that followed colonisation led Tylor to search for an ‘authentic’ part of Mexican society, untainted by foreign degenerative influences. This search involved presenting himself as a professional traveller-ethnographer who could uncover authentic culture. The third and last part turns to Tylor’s experience of Mexico as a physical and cultural ‘field’, which he got to know by travelling through the country. Through his travels, Tylor conceived of Mexico not

as a stable or bounded society, but as a thoroughly mixed place, with no definite boundaries. For Tylor, unlike for many later anthropologists, there was no clear way to step ‘in’ or ‘out’ of the field. Moreover, Tylor’s contact with the Mexican environment, the physical field, led him, at times, to view Mexican people in relativist terms. Tylor’s ethnographic work was neither entirely continuous with modern anthropology, nor an entirely alien undertaking.

## Between ethnology and evolution

When Tylor published *Anahuac* in 1861, the nascent discipline of anthropology was facing a turbulent time. Older conceptions of human history and ways to understand human diversity were shaken up and replaced by different understandings. Before the 1860s, the dominant framework for the study of non-European people was ethnology, especially promoted through James Prichard’s *Researches Into the Physical History of Mankind* (1813). Prichard was committed to the biblical doctrine of human unity, the idea that all human beings descended from the same source, also known as ‘monogenism’. Because of this main tenet, ethnological studies were mostly ‘diffusionist’: they traced the transmission of customs, artefacts, and people, through linguistic and cultural evidence. Diffusion could prove, if not directly common origin, at least contact between cultures (Stocking, 1987: 50–2). From one initial centre of the human species, people and customs spread far and wide around the world. But by the 1850s, ethnology was accumulating problems.

The project of ethnology was based on the short biblical chronology, according to which the Earth and humankind were only a few thousand years old. This chronology started to be put in doubt as Victorian archaeologists unearthed fossils and stone tools, piling up evidence for the ancient age of the human species (Manias, 2018: 16; McNabb, 2012). In the year between 1858 and 1859, excavations in Brixham Cave, Kent, revealed human tools mixed with the bones of extinct animals, key evidence for proving that Europe had been inhabited by humans in very remote times (McNabb, 2012: 30–6; Stocking, 1987: 50, 73). A much longer chronology for humankind meant that the biological unity of humans was more likely: there was plenty of time for populations to have become differentiated from one another, after their descent from a single source. At the same time, however, it meant that the project of tracing the origin of humans through cultural evidence was only wishful thinking (Stocking, 1987: 75–6).

The revolution in human time was not the only event shaking conceptions of human history and diversity. The theory of natural selection, which became well known after the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859, also contributed to the upheaval. Even though Darwin did not address human origins in the *Origin*, his public decided that Darwin’s theory was very applicable to Victorian questions on humans (McNabb, 2012: 27). The idea that species can come into existence by slow modification of a common stock both reinforced monogenism and relegated the common ancestor of human populations to deep time (ibid.: 30, 36; cf. Koditschek, 2011: 211–14). The debate on the antiquity of humans, combined with Darwin’s theory, pushed the question of human origins in the natural or biological world, away from the reach of ethnology.

For those interested in the cultural study of human history, studying the unity of the human species was not the central problem anymore.

Another question came to the forefront: that of the origin of civilisation (Stocking, 1987: 75–6). If all people descended from a common source, how did the primitive people of archaeological findings transition to the ‘civilisation’ that 19th-century scholars were keen to see around them? To treat this question, evolutionists turned away from a diffusionist framework, adopting a philosophy of progress inspired by the French philosopher Auguste Comte (*ibid.*: 269), who held that human intellect progressed through stages. The development of civilisation was to be explained by lawful, universal processes.

Published in 1861, three years after the Brixham Cave findings and two years after the *Origin*’s publication, *Anahuac* was situated right at the point when ethnological ‘diffusionist’ questions were fading away from the study of human history and were being replaced by ‘evolutionist’ approaches to the origins of civilisation. In *Anahuac*, Tylor attempted to strike a balance between diffusionist and evolutionist perspectives.

Although Tylor is usually placed in the evolutionist school, he was well aware of processes of diffusion, which he carefully discussed in *Anahuac*. This is well illustrated by one of the central episodes in Tylor’s travels, when he and Christy visited the ruins of Xochicalco, an ancient pyramid not far from Mexico City. ‘Ruined and defaced as it is, I shall never forget our feelings of astonishment and admiration as we pushed our way through the bushes, and suddenly came upon it’, Tylor wrote on reaching the top of the pyramid (Tylor, 1861: 184). Besides its size and architecture, what made the pyramid even more intriguing was the unsolved question of who built Xochicalco. Some historians attributed Xochicalco to the ancient and almost mythical population of the Toltecs, which eventually migrated southwards in Central America. But Tylor disagreed with this interpretation. If the Toltecs had built Xochicalco, the architecture and decorative art of Xochicalco would be expected to match that of southern Central America, where the Toltecs had migrated. However, Tylor found many differences between the two artistic styles (*ibid.*: 188–91). These differences outweighed the similarities between Mexican and Central American culture. ‘It is quite true’, Tylor remarked,

that the so-called Aztec astronomical calendar was used in Central America, and that many of the religious observances in both countries, such as the method of sacrificing the human victims, and the practice of the worshippers of drawing blood from themselves in honour of the gods, are identical. But there are several ways in which this might have been brought about, and it is no real proof that the civilisation of either country was an offshoot from that of the other. To consider it as such would be like arguing that the negroes of Cuba and the Indians of Yucatan have derived their civilisation one from the other, because both people are Roman Catholics, and use the same almanac. (Tylor, 1861: 191)

In other words, one had to be careful about inferring common origin from the similarity of traits between cultures. Tylor concluded that there was not sufficient proof to say that the populations of southern Central America and Mexico were closely related. As a consequence, Xochicalco could not have been built by the Toltecs. Tylor’s awareness of processes of diffusion allowed him to evaluate whether a cultural trait indicated a

common origin between populations, or whether it had more likely been transmitted as a result of historical contact. In *Anahuac*, Tylor put his knowledge of processes of diffusion to work for answering questions about the shape of Mexican civilisations.

Tylor was critical of how diffusion had been used by students of human history to explain the origins of civilisation. During a visit to a museum of Mexican antiquities in Mexico City, Tylor saw obsidian stone tools that resembled ancient tools found in Europe. This ‘wonderful similarity’ between tools in different parts of the world had been used by ethnologists to support the argument that ‘this and other arts were carried over the world by tribes migrating from one common centre of creation of the human species’ (Tylor, 1861: 102). But, Tylor added, ‘the argument has not much weight’ (ibid.).

If Mexicans had indeed received their civilisation from another people, it must have been from ‘some very barbarous and ignorant tribe’, some tribe that only knew how to make rudimentary tools (Tylor, 1861: 103). Otherwise, that tribe would have also have transmitted knowledge of iron working, which, however, was absent in Mexico. If Mexicans had indeed received their civilisation from an ignorant tribe, how could Mexican people, when encountered by the Spanish, display advanced knowledge in such disparate areas as astronomy, gardening, and trading? As Tylor wrote, ‘We must admit that the inhabitants of Mexico raised themselves, independently, to the extraordinary degree of culture which distinguished them when Europeans first became aware of their existence’ (ibid.). As for the stone knives, they might indeed have received them from the Old World, but ‘we must regard their civilisation as of independent and far later growth’ (ibid.: 104).

The evidence of ancient civilisations in Mexico showed Tylor that explanations of the origin of civilisation based on diffusion were not enough. The development of civilisation in human history had to involve independent invention and independent progress. Diffusion could explain the spread of cultural traits at a local level, such as the similarities between Mexican and southern Central American cultures, but greater developments in civilisation could better be accounted by independent invention. From this point of view, the evolutionist hypothesis that societies obey a law of progress and that they independently advance through stages of civilisation does not seem that far-fetched. The law of progress could explain the independent invention of cultural practices in Mexico and elsewhere. Victorian anthropologists did not always belittle foreign people: as Tylor pointed out, different people had the capacity to ‘raise themselves’ to civilisation. In turn, this implied that there were no absolute or qualitative differences between people. All humans shared the same psychic nature, the ‘psychic unity of mankind’, which is anthropology’s fundamental doctrine (Larsen and King, 2018).

Despite Tylor’s sympathising with ideas about independent invention and universal progress, these views did not sit entirely well with all he observed in Mexico. Imagining that societies follow a unidirectional line of progress, with European societies furthest along, was easy when considering small-scale societies, which used tools not that dissimilar from those excavated by archaeologists. Those societies could be imagined as past stages of a progressive evolutionary process. But Mexico upset Tylor’s and Christy’s assumption about the progression of civilisation. Mexico was full of the ruins of grandiose cities and monuments, evidence of a now extinct ‘immense ancient population’

(Tylor, 1861: iii). Visiting Mexican ruins, Tylor admitted that the size and extension of the remains far exceeded what he and his companion had previously imagined:

When we left England, we both doubted the accounts of the historians of the Conquest, believing that they had exaggerated the numbers of the population, and the size of the cities, from a natural desire to make the most of their victories, and to write as wonderful a history as they could, as historians are prone to do. But our examination of Mexican remains soon induced us to withdraw this accusation, and even made us inclined to blame the chroniclers for having had no eyes for the wonderful things that surrounded them. (Tylor, 1861: 147)

Tylor's expedition in Mexico forced him to reassess his assumptions, and to view the Mexican past from a humbler perspective. Centuries before the height of the British Empire, at a time when non-Western societies should have been little more than 'savages', Mexico flourished through spectacular ancient cities. Travelling Victorians did not necessarily look at the world through arrogant or conquering eyes (Buckland, 2020: xviii), in part thanks to their confrontation with foreign histories.

Mexico's powerful past was, however, in ruins, which indicated decline from that grandiose past. To explain the decline and disappearance of past Mexican civilisations, Tylor brought in a process of 'degeneration'. Tylor viewed Central American populations as the 'degenerate descendants' of a more glorious people (Tylor, 1861: 189). Positing processes of degeneration was not uncommon for 19th-century scholars, who sometimes believed Europeans too were degenerating (Beasley, 2010). Tylor himself believed in the overall progress of civilisation, but, according to him, this progress was dotted by the degeneration of particular populations. Tylor's belief in the decline of Mexico informed not just his views on the history of civilisation, but also his vision of present Mexican people.

## Finding the 'authentic' Mexican

The admiration that Tylor felt towards the past glory of Mexican civilisations was proportionate to the indignation and disgust he often betrayed at witnessing the present conditions of Mexico. *Anahuac* can be read as the story of how Tylor attempted to reconcile Mexico's mighty past with his observations of the country in the 1850s. This dual interest in past and present is reflected in the title of Tylor's account: *Anahuac, or Mexico and the Mexicans, Ancient and Modern*. *Anahuac* was the ancient name for the valley of Mexico, and without doubt, Tylor preferred Mexico's past to its present.

Mexico had gained independence from Spain in 1821, but the following decades saw strong political turmoil. Under Spanish rule, few British people had been able to access the Mexican interior (Sera-Shriar, 2018: 73). After independence, when they became able to travel through Mexico, they did not like what they saw. In 1856, when Tylor visited Mexico, the general Santa Anna had just been overthrown by liberals, and political stability was still a long way off. Tylor deplored the precarious state of the country. The new government was weak, soldiers deserted and plundered, robbers regularly assaulted diligences, and corruption reigned everywhere (Tylor, 1861: 19–20, 171). In Tylor's perception, Mexico was a 'lamentably disturbed Republic' (ibid.: iii).



Tylor thought that Mexico's chaotic state ultimately stemmed from the Spanish Conquest of Central America. He described how Cortes, having defeated the 'desperate obstinacy' of the Mexicans, resolved upon the 'utter demolition' of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City (Tylor, 1861: 40). Having succeeded at the task, the Spanish enslaved the Mexicans and forced them to rebuild the city in Spanish style. According to Tylor, they also proceeded to cut down forests, turning Mexico into an arid land (ibid.: 45). Besides the destruction inflicted by the Conquest, Spanish domination also left Mexico with enduring problems to reckon with. In what may be viewed as an early critique of extractive colonialism, Tylor noted that Mexican wealth did not profit Mexico, but Spain. Mexico remained a colony where the Spanish came to make profit, only to return to their own land afterwards (ibid.: 128).

More than Spanish rule, however, Tylor was bent on criticising another leftover from the Spanish invasion: the Catholic Church. Born and bred in a Quaker family, Tylor disliked the opulence of the Catholic Church, not to mention the devotion and beliefs it fostered (Larsen, 2013: 470; 2016: 17). Tylor blamed almost every negative aspect he saw in Mexico on the influence of the Church. Mexico was in debt because the Church cost incredible sums of money, people were ignorant because the Church did not favour education aside from religious indoctrination, and the justice system was corrupt because of priests' special privileges. To top it off, Tylor added, the beliefs promoted by Catholicism were irrational and harmful. He described ironically the cult of the Lady of Guadalupe, an icon of the Virgin Mary, and the miracles associated with her figure:

The great miracle of all was the deliverance of Mexico from the great inundation of 1626... The picture was brought to the Cathedral in a canoe, through the streets of Mexico; and between one or two years afterwards the inundation subsided. Ergo, it was the picture that saved the city! (Tylor, 1861: 123)

According to Tylor, Catholicism, as a direct inheritance of the Spanish Conquest, had contributed to the decline of Mexicans.

The Spanish invasion also had bodily consequences for Mexican populations. As Tylor exclaimed in *Anahuac*, 'I have never noticed in any country so large a number of mixed races' (Tylor, 1861: 308). He identified three main 'races' in Mexico: Spanish, pure Mexican, and Negro. The mixture between them had produced 25 'varieties', on top of over 150 pre-existing 'tribes' (ibid.). When writing about Mexican people, Tylor employed many different terms referring to racial mixtures, including 'Mexican', 'Mexican Indian', 'Spanish American', 'mestizo', and 'half-breed'. This proliferation of terms may give the appearance that Tylor 'did not even have a working definition for Mexican', as Larsen has commented (Larsen, 2013: 470; 2016: 16). But Tylor viewed Mexico as a thoroughly mixed place. Mexicans included 'both the nearly white Mestizos and the Indians of pure race' (Tylor, 1861: 47–8), and all of the people in between. For Tylor, achieving a single precise or 'working' definition for 'Mexican' was simply impossible.

Following a rather popular belief in the Victorian era, Tylor thought that racial mixing caused decline (see Beasley, 2010; Esposito and Nieves-Delgado, 2018). 'Pure Mexican Indians', according to Tylor, were extraordinarily strong, could resist wounds that would

kill a European (Tylor, 1861: 48), and did not get yellow fever (*ibid.*: 320). Their demeanour was grave and silent (*ibid.*: 47). By contrast, mixed people, the 'mestizos', were hot-blooded and excitable, and prone to violence (*ibid.*: 48). Racial mixing also did not favour those of Spanish origin. As Tylor described Mexican higher-class ladies, he wrote that 'the mixture of Aztec blood' had 'detracted from the beauty of the Spanish race' (*ibid.*: 51). For Tylor, mixing between 'races' weakened the original 'pure' races, and produced a 'half-breed' population with questionable traits.

Tylor viewed the inheritance of the Spanish, which consisted of an impoverished country, the Catholic Church, and extensive population mixing, as responsible for the 'decline' that Tylor observed among Mexicans. 'This people, who rose in three centuries from the condition of wandering savages to a height of civilisation that has no equal in history ... have remained, since the Conquest, without making one step in advance', Tylor commented bitterly (Tylor, 1861: 85). The Spanish Conquest had stopped the progressive development of Mexicans, and had even reversed its course, since, according to Tylor, Mexicans had forgotten most of the innovations brought by their ancestors. Tylor noted disparagingly how Mexicans irrigated their patches of maze by carrying pots of water, whereas ancient Mexicans had used water canals that still criss-crossed the country's fields (*ibid.*: 86).

Faced with what he saw as a degraded Mexican present, Tylor seems to have resolved to draw out the irrational customs that contributed to Mexico's decline. Throughout *Anahuac*, Tylor chastised irrational behaviour and beliefs, calling 'nonsense' the popular idea of an 'earthquake season' during which earthquakes occurred more often than at other times of the year (Tylor, 1861: 67). Tylor's denunciation of irrational beliefs was not limited to Mexico. After dismissing earthquake beliefs, Tylor compared them to British almanacs that attempted to predict the weather by looking at moon phases. 'How long will it be before we get rid of this queer old astrological superstition?', he lamented (*ibid.*: 67). These questions point to what Tylor would later formulate as one main aim of ethnography: to identify the cultural traits that had become 'harmful superstition', and to 'mark these out for destruction' (Tylor, 1871: 410). In this way, the ethnographer would eliminate the obstacles that stood in the way of civilisation. For Tylor, anthropology was 'essentially a reformer's science' (*ibid.*). Tylor's reformer spirit emerged in his confrontation with Mexico.

In particular, Tylor found 'harmful' those practices originating from foreign influence. Tylor was concerned with distinguishing an 'authentic' Mexican past from 'inauthentic' Spanish Catholic influence. Writing about a procession of pasteboard figures in Mexico City at Easter time, Tylor remarked that all were copies of the European procession figures of 'Polichinello' and 'Pan': 'They were always trying to conceal the old idea, and could do nothing more than distort it. We could see through their flimsy pretensions to originality, much as a schoolmaster recognises the extract from the encyclopaedia in his boys' essays' (Tylor, 1861: 50). This remark infantilised Mexican people by reducing them to the role of disobedient children who could not help but copy European practices. Mexicans were, in Tylor's words, 'always copying but never developing anything' (*ibid.*: 51). It was as if the grand Mexican past had disappeared forever, replaced by cheap copies of Spanish practices. But, in Tylor's perception, not all had been lost.

Even though Tylor viewed Mexican people as the ‘degenerate’ descendants of a glorious empire, Mexico’s past endured at least through the countless ruins and objects that had survived the Conquest. One of Tylor’s and Christy’s main aims in their travels in Mexico was the examination of ruins and ‘antiquities’, what we would now call archaeological objects (Tylor, 1861: iii). The ‘chief points of interest’ in *Anahuac*, which Tylor listed in the introduction, mainly concerned material objects, such as the drawings and descriptions of obsidian knives, ‘more ample than any previously given’ (ibid.). Tylor was an antiquarian before an anthropologist (Burrow, 1970: 244).

Often, before leaving a Mexican town, Christy and Tylor held what he termed a ‘market of antiquities’: native people would bring them ancient objects, which they would buy from them (Tylor, 1861: 148). In Tylor’s ethnocentric view, Mexicans were incapable of appreciating their country’s past, and were therefore eager to sell what they considered worthless old objects, while the educated British traveller appreciated their historical value. A similar thing went for the modern objects that Tylor witnessed ordinary Mexicans using. After describing a man using an ‘acocote’, a gourd for collecting aloe milk, Tylor cheerfully added: ‘we bought the old man’s acocote, and carried it home in triumph, and is it not in the Museum at Kew Gardens to this day?’ (ibid.: 91). British travellers sifted through the past and present of countries such as Mexico, snatching what they considered to be worthy additions to the world’s history, and adding them to imperial institutions such as museums and botanic gardens.

But Tylor did not limit himself to finding ‘authentic’ antiquities. Faced with the mixture of populations and customs he saw in Mexico, he searched at length for genuine, untouched, pre-Conquest Mexican customs and people. His delight was evident when he described visiting a ‘real old-fashioned Indian market’ (Tylor, 1861: 50), where people spoke no Spanish, or seeing a tree that, according to him, was worshipped ‘long before the discovery of America’ (ibid.: 215). The culmination of this search came with his visit of what he saw as a ‘genuine unmixed’ Indian community, where ‘white influence has never been much felt’ (ibid.: 200). In practice, it is highly unlikely that this community had remained untouched by the Spanish colonisation of Mexico. So-called ‘native communities’ in Southern and Central America were given shape by the Spanish colonial bureaucracy (Wolf, 1982: 145). Tylor’s own mention of a church in the community should have alerted him to the fact that his ‘genuine unmixed’ society had hardly remained isolated from Spanish influence (Tylor, 1861: 200). The fact that he only casually mentioned this detail shows how strong his desire was to find an authentic native community, even in the face of contradicting evidence.

Tylor’s will to uncover ‘authentic’ culture may have related to a quest for a ‘wholeness’ that Victorian travellers did not find in their own culture (Buzard, 1993). In the 19th century, images of ‘traditional society’ were imbued with a sense of nostalgia, as those societies were seen as genuine, harmonious, integrated, all qualities that had faded away from modern society (ibid.: 9). Tylor’s description of his ‘genuine unmixed’ community focused on the simple life and self-sufficiency of its members. Describing the neat gardens and plain houses, he stated: ‘Everything seemed clean and prosperous, and there was a bright sunny look about the whole place; but to Englishmen, accustomed to the innumerable appliances of civilised life, it seems surprising how very few and simple are the wants of these people’ (Tylor, 1861: 200). This

harmonious Mexican society contrasted not only with ‘inauthentic’ Spanish Mexico, but also with the British lifestyle. For Tylor, this community was ‘whole’ because he saw it as isolated from Spanish influences, and because of his fetishised vision of a simple and harmonious community life.

In turn, this vision of ‘traditional society’ as ‘whole’ may have influenced Tylor’s articulation of culture concepts. In *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871, Tylor famously defined ‘culture or civilisation’ as ‘that complex *whole* which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’ (Tylor, 1903[1871]: 1; emphasis added). In this definition, the cultural ‘whole’ appears as a conglomeration of different domains, but also echoes Tylor’s view of the community he visited during his travels in Mexico: a self-contained whole, implicitly isolated from disturbing external influences.

Travelling through Mexico in search of the genuine Mexican society invested Tylor with a parallel concern: that to affirm his difference from other travellers. In the introduction, Tylor insisted on the fact that he and Christy travelled by horseback through the country, emphasising between the lines their difference from Europeans, who travelled in stagecoaches (Tylor, 1861: iii, 316). This may seem to represent an early interest in an immersive form of fieldwork. Sera-Shriar underlined how Tylor dismounted from his horse to engage directly with Mexican objects and people (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 156). Yet reading *Anahuac* shows that Tylor and Christy actually used stagecoaches very often, which, according to Regard, was a way of seeing the ‘native’ without being seen, an essentially unequal and removed form of cultural contact (Regard, 2006: 117). Rather than indicating a profound difference from other travellers, Tylor’s insistence raises the question of why he wanted to demarcate his travel experience from that of other Europeans.

The answer may be found in a perceived connection between travelling and access to authentic culture. In the 19th century, the perception that travelling was becoming more accessible gave rise to attempts to distinguish who could have an authentic cultural experience (Buzard, 1993). Travellers started opposing themselves to another type of people who travelled: tourists. According to self-defined travellers, tourists were unable to make contact with the way of life of the people that they encountered. Only the traveller that went ‘off the beaten track’ could uncover the authentic culture of places (ibid.: 6). Visiting Mexico City, Tylor wrote with a note of impatience, ‘We have not come all this way to see Spanish architecture and great squares, but must look for something more authentic’ (Tylor, 1861: 47). The ability to find the authentic was not granted to the tourist-traveller, who was content with seeing easily accessible places such as Mexico City. Tylor needed to affirm his place among ‘adventurous’ travellers, not among superficial tourists, in order to demonstrate that he could access ‘authentic’ Mexican culture.

Although Tylor did not use the word *tourist* in *Anahuac*, he often underlined his difference from a less worthy category of traveller. Writing about the help that he received from their friends in Mexico, he mentioned that he and Christy ‘were enabled to accomplish much more than usually falls to the lot of travellers in so limited a period’ (Tylor, 1861: iii). In another case, Tylor openly showed his dislike for the tourist industry. After describing the spontaneous interest and hospitality of Mexican people, he noted that ‘travelling here is very different from what it is in a country on which the shadow of Murray’s

handbook has fallen' (ibid.: 105). 'Murray's handbook' referred to *Murray's Handbooks for Travellers*, a popular guidebook series. In this context, 'Murray's handbook' stood for a planned, marketable, 'tourist-like' type of travelling, which Tylor wanted to escape by travelling in Mexico.

Still, in many ways, Tylor was comparable to the tourist-traveller that he disliked so much. As the son of a well-to-do British family, and with the added reason of his health, Tylor could afford leisurely trips abroad (Larsen, 2016: 15). Throughout *Anahuac*, he drew comparisons between Mexican sceneries and famous tourist sites in Europe, such as when he compared a hilly landscape to Nice in France (Tylor, 1861: 144), or when he saw bridges 'as steep as the Rialto' (ibid.: 136–7). Tylor may have made these comparisons to sketch a picture of Mexico for his well-travelled readers, but at the same time, they betrayed Tylor's presence in the cohorts of British tourists roaming Europe.

Precisely because he was not so different from other traveller-tourists, Tylor needed to create a privileged persona of a professional traveller-ethnographer. In *Anahuac*, Tylor wished to contribute to the debates surrounding ethnology, but his wish came in the context of a growing split between mere travellers and those who travelled for scientific aims, as scientific disciplines became increasingly professionalised (Rubiés, 2002: 257–8). When he travelled through Mexico, Tylor was at the very inception of his career as an anthropologist. Tylor harboured an early interest in human history, perhaps inherited from his older brother Alfred's passion for geology and archaeology (Stocking, 1987: 157). But since he did not attend university, Tylor had no formal education in any discipline (Larsen, 2016: 14–15). He probably acquired much of his knowledge on antiquities and on human history thanks to Henry Christy, experienced collector and traveller. He also had the opportunity to deepen this knowledge during the five years that came in between Tylor's expedition and *Anahuac*'s publication. And yet, at no point in *Anahuac* did Tylor mention this aspect of his relationship with Christy, nor did he frame his travels in Mexico as a learning experience. His discussions on the origins of civilisation were always written as if he already possessed extensive knowledge on ethnology at the time of his travels. In *Anahuac*, the 24-year-old Tylor and the older, experienced Christy stood on the same level.

Tylor's strategies to set up a professional persona of ethnologist seem to have paid off: when it got published, *Anahuac* was considered as one of the most up-to-date British accounts on Mexico (Sera-Shriar, 2018: 74). One of the reasons for Tylor's success as an anthropologist may be that, from early on, Tylor behaved like a professional (Burrow, 1970: 235). Tylor's concern with finding 'authentic' Mexico, untainted by Spanish Catholic influence, came hand in hand with his claim of belonging to a superior category of traveller.

## Experiencing the field

Tylor's self-presentation as a professional traveller and ethnologist did not reflect his actual qualifications for the role. But *Anahuac* also shows that Tylor's method – travelling through the country – had important consequences for how he understood the 'field' of Mexico. In modern anthropology, the field is a debated concept. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have argued that the field supports a dualism between the field and

urban areas, the local and the global, the 'other' and the self (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Talking about the field also implies that a field is a bounded entity that can be entered and exited at will. In *Anahuac*, however, Tylor invalidated many of the dichotomies that plague the modern concept of field.

Despite Tylor's obsession with finding the 'authentic' Mexican society, *Anahuac* differs from many 20th-century ethnographies, in that it did not focus from the start on a supposedly self-contained society. Functionalist ethnographers have been accused of ignoring the links of societies with other parts of the world, and of representing societies as isolated, pristine units, ripe for the analysis of the anthropologist (Wolf, 1982: 14). It is true that small island societies, such as those studied by Malinowski, may have shown less cultural mixture than Tylor's Mexico (Malinowski, 1922). But the ethnographer's style of travelling may have played an even more important role. Ethnographers like Malinowski spent months or years living in a fixed place, while Tylor travelled through Mexico. The more Tylor travelled, the more he became aware of extensive cultural connections, from the diffusion of architectural and artistic styles between ancient populations, to the present mixture of Mexican and European people. Although Tylor was concerned with uncovering pristine societies, finding the authentic was a process, not a given. The process involved sifting through Mexico's mixed environment. Tylor's travelling put him in a prime position to observe connections between cultures and populations.

Moreover, unlike later ethnographies, *Anahuac* does not show a clear passage 'in and out' of the field. The idea of 'entering' or 'exiting' the field rests on the artificial idea that cultures belong in discrete and separated places (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 35). Yet *Anahuac* does not even start with Tylor's arrival in Mexico, but with an account of his departure from Cuba, with a description of Cuba and of another island he visited on the way to Mexico. At the time, Cuba was a hub of the network of people and knowledge that spanned the globe. Slaves came from Africa to Cuba, other slaves left for the American continent, while businessmen and travellers arrived from Europe. Tylor did not shy away from pointing out those interconnections. He described, for example, the Chinese crew of the ship they were about to board for Mexico, and denounced the system by which Chinese workers were lured to Cuba to be exploited as slaves (Tylor, 1861: 12–13). Even though Tylor's and Christy's travelling to Mexico had a target in the form of the ruins of Central American civilisations, Tylor did not see himself as an ethnographer on the way to study 'X' society. He saw himself as a traveller, part of the networks of people and culture he described. Through his role of traveller, Tylor invalidated the trope of a bounded field that one entered and exited as one crossed a line on the floor.

In one of the final remarks of *Anahuac*, Tylor explained that, after visiting Mexico, Christy continued his expedition in the western plains of the United States. There, Christy had an encounter that showed how loose were the boundaries of Mexico:

He was in Iowa City ... out in the prairie States of the Far West. As he stood one morning in the outskirts, among the plank-houses and half-made roads, there came a solitary horseman riding in. Evidently he had come from the Mexican frontier, a thousand miles and more away across the plains.... By his face he was American, but his costume was the dress of old

Mexico, the leather jacket and trousers, the broad white hat and huge jingling spurs. His lazo hung in front of his high-peaked saddle, and his well-worn serape was rolled up behind him like a trooper's cloak. As he approached the town, he spurred his jaded beast, who broke into the old familiar paso of the Mexican plains. 'It was my last sight of Mexico', said my companion. He saluted the horseman in Spanish, and the well-known words of welcome made the grim man's haggard sunburnt features relax into a smile as he returned the salutation and rode on. (Tylor, 1861: 325–6)

Mexico continued to be present even 'a thousand miles and more' away. In *Anahuac*, Tylor reported interconnections that showed how fluid were the contours of Mexican society.

Examining the field that Tylor found himself in allows to elucidate another tension in Tylor's account: that between an ethnocentric and a relativist perspective. Tylor had little idea of cultural plurality. Although he acknowledged that civilisations could have independent origins, he did not grant the status of 'civilisation' to contemporary Mexican society, arguing instead that it was the product of decay and admixture. His definition of culture was of a single 'culture or civilisation', which fit the belief that civilisation progressed through stages, eventually culminating in something similar to British society. This belief in the inferiority of almost all societies, compared to Britain, is reflected in his relationship with Mexican people.

Tylor's attitude towards Mexicans has been described as 'sociologically incurious' (Burrow, 1970: 245), in the sense that Tylor did not seem interested in understanding the present functioning of Mexican society, nor the present viewpoint of its people. In line with this remark, Frédéric Regard has argued that Tylor denied Mexican Indians their own voice, essentially reducing them to animals (Regard, 2006). It is true that Tylor rarely described the Mexican people he encountered and the exchanges he had with them. In the limited cases he did, he did not identify his interlocutors with a name, except for the servants he and Christy hired for their journey. This attitude probably stemmed from the fact that Tylor found almost all Mexican practices and Mexican people irrational or childish, and regarded Mexico as a non-functioning country, barely above the level of complete chaos. Sera-Shriar's claim that Tylor attempted to 'see the world through the eyes of the local population' seems out of place (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 155). Tylor simply did not view most Mexicans as individuals with an identity and interior life worth engaging with.

The only Mexicans that Tylor described more at length were the people who hosted him and Christy during their travels. In the introduction to *Anahuac*, Tylor wrote that he drew upon the 'local knowledge and experience of their friends and entertainers' (Tylor, 1861: iii). Sera-Shriar has interpreted this statement as a sign that Tylor based himself on local Mexican knowledge and experience (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 155). However, the sources of that 'local knowledge' were not ordinary Mexicans, but the higher-class gentlemen upon which Tylor and Christy mostly relied for their hospitality. Tylor liked to stress that these people had some connection to British civilisation, which elevated them from other Mexicans. For example: 'We dined that day with Don Jose de A., who, though Spanish-American by birth, was English by education and feeling' (Tylor, 1861: 51). Clearly, Tylor preferred when his hosts were English in one way or the other.

Moreover, Tylor believed that Mexican Indians were fundamentally dishonest. When he visited a Mexican prison, he remarked that the prisoners did not look like thieves, just like ordinary Mexicans. His conclusion? All Mexicans had the seed of criminality in them (Tylor, 1861: 246). Mexico's only hope was in an influx of immigrants from what Tylor considered to be morally higher countries. British immigrants, especially, could improve the character of the Mexican population. Describing a mining village founded by Cornish miners, he wrote, 'The Cornish miners ... have worked quite perceptibly upon the Indian character by the example of their persevering industry, their love of saving, and their utter contempt for thieves and liars' (ibid.: 82). As other British travellers in Southern and Central America, Tylor believed that Mexico could not reach stability without interference from a Western power (see Leask, 2006; Esposito and Nieves-Delgado, 2018). At the end of *Anahuac*, he decreed that Mexicans were 'people incapable of governing themselves', and that only the imminent absorption in the United States of America could bring stability to the country (Tylor, 1861: 328–30). All in all, from Tylor's point of view, the vast majority of Mexicans possessed no individual or political agency.

This extremely ethnocentric perspective was, however, in tension with hints of relativist thinking. Tylor did not have a fully fledged relativist perspective, but he occasionally realised how particular conditions of life explained or even justified individual and cultural behaviours. If Mexicans were such a dishonest people, it was not because they had always been that way, but because the Spanish invaders, by conquering and enslaving them, had fostered the 'vices of dissimulation and dishonesty' (Tylor, 1861: 80). (The Catholic Church, of course, also had a hand in that.) The situation was not much better in England: 'We must not judge these Mexican labourers as though we had a very high standard of honesty at home', Tylor warned his readers. 'That we should see workmen searched habitually in England, at the doors of our national dock-yards, is a much greater disgrace to us ... for to expose an honest man to such a degradation is to make him half a thief already' (ibid.: 81). Degrading conditions, not the essential nature of people, bred dishonesty.

In several cases, Tylor put himself in the shoes of the people he observed, and found that he would have been guilty of similar behaviour if subject to the same conditions. Talking about the market for stolen goods in Mexico, he mentioned that deserters often sold their uniform there. 'I would do the same myself', he declared, noting that soldiers were condemned to serve one political adventurer after another, were half-starved, and not paid except for a licence to plunder (Tylor, 1861: 171). Being confronted with harsh conditions of life made Tylor extend empathetic understanding towards the people subject to them.

Most moments when Tylor showed a relativist perspective seemed, however, to stem from Tylor's embodied experience of the field as a different physical environment. At the start of *Anahuac*, Tylor described the hot climate of the islands around Cuba, and the leisurely life of their inhabitants, both white and black. Rather than accusing these people of laziness, as would perhaps be expected of the Victorian traveller with British capitalist mentality, Tylor found that 'hard work in the climate of the tropics is unnatural', and that the lifestyle of the people suited the climate (Tylor, 1861: 11). The hot climate was one more reason why slavery and forced labour were unjustified: 'I think no unprejudiced observer can visit the West Indies without seeing the absurdity of expecting the



free blacks to work like slaves', Tylor asserted (*ibid.*). Experiencing physical conditions on his own skin made Tylor understand the relative value of foreign people's way of life.

Once in Mexico, Tylor continued to describe how the people's lifestyle suited their surroundings. He mentioned coming to appreciate the local diet of corn tortillas and pulque, a drink made from agave plants (Tylor, 1861: 38). Other reflections concerned the style of Mexican saddles, or the breed of Mexican horses, all, according to Tylor, ideally suited to travelling through the country (*ibid.*: 163–6). Tylor even described adopting 'ranchero' clothes, comprising a wide hat and large 'serape' blanket, used by the lower classes of Mexicans. But as Tylor stated, 'for walking and riding under a fierce sun, they are perhaps better than anything else' (*ibid.*: 168–9). The different environment that Tylor found himself in for several months motivated a relativist perspective on the most practical aspects of Mexican culture.

In Victorian times, 'going native' by adopting local customs could be viewed as beneficial for Britons living in foreign places (Brantlinger, 2011: 80). By putting on ranchero clothes, Tylor showed his readers that he was unprejudiced enough to discern useful Mexican customs, and combine them with his otherwise 'superior' British qualities. Yet as Tylor looked and acted more like a Mexican, he also had experiences that may have contributed to his relativist perspective on Mexicans. Once he had adopted the lower-class Mexican clothes, he realised how 'tabooed' these were among Mexico City's upper classes. One evening, as he tried to enter his friend's house enveloped in his serape, he could not get past the guard dog. Needless to say, the dog had shown no animosity towards him when he was wearing European clothes (Tylor, 1861: 169).

The experience of coming to understand local culture for its suitability to its environment was not unique to Tylor. The diaries of Franz Boas, written during the year he spent with the Inuit of northern Canada, also show a growing appreciation of Inuit material culture. Whereas young Boas was initially disgusted by the uncomfortable appearance and the smell of igloos, living and travelling in an extremely harsh environment led him to appreciate the comfort and practicality of his hosts' way of life. Boas ended up asserting that 'feelings of comfort and discomfort are really quite relative', as well as stating that Europeans had no right to look down on Inuit people (Boas, 1883, in Cole, 1983: 28, 33). Boas would go on to develop the key relativist idea that there is no fundamental difference in human ways of thinking (Kuper, 2003: 361), and that one should therefore try to understand differences in customs instead of dismissing them. Boas' perspective was rooted in the German anthropological tradition, which already proposed relativist ideas on culture (Bunzl, 1996). Nevertheless, it is significant that Boas formulated his first relativist remarks while he conducted fieldwork in one of the harshest environments an ethnographer could visit.

In *Anahuac*, Tylor, too, asserted his belief in the 'psychic unity of mankind', by stating that 'human nature is similar everywhere' (Tylor, 1861: 208). Although he did not push his relativist ideas as far as Boas, he believed that a stable human nature, combined with particular conditions, gave rise to customs and situations that were understandable even to foreign eyes. Boas' and Tylor's experiences suggest that experiencing a very different environment may lead one to at least a basic form of relativist thinking, as Tylor did with respect to Mexican practical adaptations to the environment. Of course, Tylor's strong ethnocentrism in other matters shows that experiencing foreign conditions was not

enough to develop a fully relativist perspective. Tylor's belief in the psychic unity of mankind coexisted with his idea that human societies progressed through stages, with some being more advanced than others. Still, as a physical place as well as a cultural one, the field shaped the thought of ethnographers.

## Conclusion

*Anahuac* shows how a Victorian traveller such as Tylor adapted his vision of human history based on his confrontation with Mexico. Seeing evidence from Mexico's past, such as archaeological objects and ruins, led Tylor to believe that societies progressed through independent invention and evolution. Choosing to believe in linear progress was not simply due to evolutionists' arrogance or ethnocentrism. In Tylor's eyes, universal progress was the most reasonable alternative when answering the question of the origin of human culture. Granted, this theoretical solution reflected a strong belief in the superiority of British civilisation, but it also meant that the progress made by different cultures had to be viewed as an independent achievement. Moreover, this optimistic view of progress was not always solid (see Betts, 2020). Confronting Mexico's history and present society put Tylor face to face with what he saw as 'degeneration'. As much as Victorians delighted in imagining universal progress, the opposite process of decline always lurked nearby.

Even though the 'degeneration' of past Mexican civilisations did not fully support Tylor's views on the progress of civilisation, Tylor could show how Mexican degeneration was not complete. The golden veins of old Mexico still ran through the coarse stone of 'inauthentic' culture. Tylor thought he could draw out the remnants of a grandiose past by pointing out to anything that was not, in his view, 'authentically' Mexican. This was no mean feat in a place that Tylor himself viewed as mixed, both in terms of 'races' and in terms of customs. But even in this mixture, Tylor thought he could discern the 'pure Mexican Indian' and Mexico's ancient customs in the midst of 'inauthentic' Spanish Catholic influence. He sought in 'untouched' societies the sign that degeneration through cultural and population mixture was not complete. For a traveller such as Tylor, decline and corruption stemmed from mixture, while progress could be achieved only through authenticity and purity. Progress and degeneration, mixture and authenticity, coexisted in tension.

As Tylor sifted through Mexico in search of the authentic, he needed to demonstrate to his public that he was up to the task. At the time of his travels in Mexico, Tylor was an aspiring antiquarian and ethnologist of 24, with little education in the field, except that provided on the spot by Henry Christy. Both he and Christy behaved quite similarly to the other Europeans who travelled in Mexico, taking stagecoaches and enjoying the hospitality of wealthy Mexicans. Yet in *Anahuac*, Tylor attempted to construct a persona of professional traveller-ethnographer, distinct at once from unenlightened tourists and from people inexperienced in ethnological matters. In that, Tylor was similar to later anthropologists such as Malinowski, who made a point of distancing himself from Europeans living in foreign places, such as missionaries or colonial officers, and from anthropologists who 'failed to get off the veranda' (Stocking, 1992: 55). Creating ethnographic personae allowed scholars to claim access to 'authentic' culture, even as these personae did not

necessarily match the ethnographers' behaviour. Those artificial ethnographic personae may explain why the gap between methodological schools (between 'armchair anthropology' and immersive fieldwork, for example), has sometimes appeared greater than it was.

As Tylor attempted to shape himself into a particular type of traveller, his travelling experience, in turn, shaped his vision of Mexico, in ways he was perhaps not entirely conscious of. Being part of a network of travellers led Tylor to observe and report interconnections between Mexico and other parts of the world, and to represent the 'field' as a fluid environment with no hard boundaries. This changed with the shift to static and immersive fieldwork. The ethnographic knowledge that 20th-century ethnographers produced on foreign societies relied on a well-delineated field, which was often purged from European actors or equally 'inauthentic' elements (see Wolf, 1982). Unlike Tylor, they did not have to look for the authentic in the middle of mixture, because they already portrayed the societies they visited through an aura of authenticity.

Tylor's experience of the field also impacted his view of Mexican people. Tylor looked down on ordinary Mexicans to the point of not engaging with them other than to dismiss their supposed irrationality and infantilism. And yet, as he adapted to the Mexican environment and to Mexican culture, Tylor was forced to understand the perspective of Mexican people and some of their struggles. From this point of view, both Sera-Shriar's assertion that Tylor tried to see the world from the perspective of Mexican people (Sera-Shriar, 2013: 155) and Regard's claims that Tylor considered Mexicans as barely above the level of animals (Regard, 2006), seem exaggerated. Tylor was undoubtedly ethnocentric, but this attitude was punctuated by relativist remarks.

In my analysis of *Anahuac*, I have drawn out tensions between diffusion and independent advancement, progress and degeneration, mixture and authenticity, amateur and professional, ethnocentrism and relativism, bounded field and fluid society. Some of these tensions concerned Tylor's beliefs on history and civilisation. Other tensions related to Tylor's own role and attitude towards Mexico. All of them originated from the confrontation between Tylor, a Victorian traveller, and Mexico, a physical place and a society with its own history. Acknowledging these tensions results in an image of Victorian travellers not just as naively ethnocentric scholars, and not as benevolent observers either, but as agents with an outlook that got challenged as they confronted foreign societies. In that, Victorian anthropologists were no different from the generations of ethnographers that came after them.

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