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"All too often, concepts come burdened with the connotations and implications of the past contexts that gave rise to them. Hence a periodic review of our stock of ideas is neither an exercise in antiquarian nostalgia nor a ritual occasion for rattling the bones of our ancestors. It should be, rather, a critical evaluation of the ways we pose and answer questions."

Eric R. Wolf *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World.* (2001), p. 321

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

This study explores the connection between culture and power by providing a critical review of theorising about the two domains, in particular in the field of Cultural Anthropology. Usually, the domains of culture and power are studied by different academic disciplines. For studying power one would think first of all of Political Science. Then in the second place Sociology and, for instance, Public Administration. After all, processes of power pervade social life and institutions, or to say it differently, there are many social and institutional aspects to power. But what about culture and cultural aspects of power? We enter here into a complicated terrain, which yet may be very relevant today.

However, it can be questioned why exactly culture and power are thematised. Is it justified to assume that there exists an underlying connection between the two? And if so, is that a particularly relevant connection and how vital is it in view of present-day discussions about culture? The claim of the present study is that the answer to these questions should be positive and that exploring the connections between the two domains is vital to understand the workings of culture today. To show the importance of the issue of culture and power it may be convincing at this point to describe two events in recent history which show ways in which relations of power, and maintenance of power, may be much more 'cultural' in nature than one would expect. The examples could even suggest that there are vital cultural underpinnings of power which tend to become visible exactly when power is threatened. Let us look at the two examples.

The first example concerns a curious episode in the history of the West African country Guinea-Bissau. In the autumn of the year 1984, the southern part of Guinea-Bissau was startled by the news that mad Balanta women were causing a lot of unrest and tensions in the region[1]. The excitement started when a young woman suddenly received messages from the most important god in the Balanta cosmology. At that moment, she was in a critical situation caused by a grave disease and the death of her only child. The woman was obeying god, recovered, got pregnant, gave birth to a son, and then appeared to have healing gifts. Other women with health problems tried to find relief from her. They are also said to have extraordinary abilities after following the advice of the divine medium. A wave of rumours was spreading across the South of Guinea-Bissau. The women, dressed in white clothes and the group of followers of the woman healer, was growing and developing into a movement of women and some men, who received commandments from god which were shaking Balanta society to its most fundamental cultural and social foundations. The movement even created national repercussions when the government was realising itself that something

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[1] Balanta is the name of the big ethnic group living North and South of the river Geba estuary in Guinea-Bissau.

quite unprecedented was going on. The Vice-President of the country, a Balanta, visited the South and was introduced to the women. Rumours of witchcraft were cropping up and state functionaries expressed their concern about possible political implications of the movement. National and regional politicians tried to keep the movement under control. This did not work. The movement was expanding even to the North of the country. In November 1985, suddenly, a number of Balantas throughout the country were arrested on a charge of plotting a coup d'état. Among them was the Vice-President. In a trial some vague accusations sealed his fate. Together with three other Balantas he was sentenced to death and executed. A female practice of healing embedded in a cultural movement ended up in a confrontation with the state with dramatic consequences.[2] Cultural innovations can apparently threaten state rule in unexpected ways.

Not only in Africa, cultural movements and religious-spiritual events can have unexpected consequences to the ruling political power. In the mid-1960s, a Dutch counterculture movement called "Provo" focused on challenging the authorities by using non-violent strategies. Examples of non-violent actions that provoked the police were the handing out of currants and sweets and the organisation of exhibitionistic "happenings" which attracted massive crowds in Amsterdam. Provo very quickly had become the national media's top story, mostly due to overreaction by the city administration, which treated the movement as a serious threat. Provo gained world prominence through its protests at the royal wedding of Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands in April 1966. The week after the wedding, a photo exhibition was held documenting the police violence. The guests at the exhibition were attacked by the police and severely beaten. In June, after a man passed away during a protest march, it seemed as if a civil war was about to erupt in Amsterdam. By the middle of 1966, repression was out of control. Hundreds of people were arrested every week at these "happenings" and demonstrations. A ban on demonstrations caused them to become more popular. Finally, in August 1966, a congressional committee was established to investigate the crisis. The committee's findings resulted in the Police Commissioner being dismissed. In May 1967, the mayor of Amsterdam was "honourably" given the boot, after the committee condemned his policies. Shortly after these events, the Provo movement liquidated itself. These counterculture actions in Amsterdam appeared to be precursors of events which would happen in Paris in May 1968. Here university students pleaded for a more open and free contact between male and female students in student houses by interrupting the speech of a minister who was inaugurating a new swimming pool. His denigratory reaction gave cause to large-scale creative and non-violent demonstrations which also attracted other socio-cultural movements and in no time manifested as labour strikes all over the country. The country was completely paralyzed for several weeks. At a certain moment the President of the country even considered his resignation and only new elections could stop the explosion of wide-spread social dissatisfaction made clear by student happenings.[3]

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[2] Joop T.V.M de Jong *A Descent into African Psychiatry* (!987), pp. 76-83: For a short description of politics in Balanta society see Hans Schoenmakers *Old Men and New State Structures in Guinea-Bissau* (1987).

[3] Kees Schuyt & Ed Taverne *Dutch Culture in European Perspective. 1950: Prosperity and Welfare* (2004), pp. 362-365; Bob Groen & Leopold de Buch *De verbeelding aan de macht. Revolutie in een industriestaat* (The imagination to power. Revolution in an industrial state) (1968), pp. 10, 19, 67, 80-84.

In both examples social, economic and political factors may be identified and be advanced to explain the crises. However, it cannot be denied that cultural aspects were at the centre of what happened. The examples given can be read as extraordinary situations which suddenly expose the cultural foundations of power constellations. Cultural aspects, which under normal circumstances, remain hidden.

The main issue of this study is to trace the ways in which the linkages between culture and (political) power have been theorised. In social life, cultural phenomena and power constellations are often amalgamated, to become an apparently inextricable tangle. The two examples show the importance of cultural factors in changing social and political relationships in societies. At the same time, these short sketches raise many questions about the exact character of the relation between culture and political power. Therefore, it is important to unravel the complicated linkages between culture and power and to throw light on the hidden connections between the two domains.

Why is the issue of the strong connection between culture and power important? And why is it not sufficient to leave the question of complicated power relations in society to the field of Political Science and Sociology? In the first place, culture is a topical subject in the speeches of politicians and in political debates today. It is difficult to pick up a newspaper or watch a discussion programme on television without references to culture. In this context, culture is mostly seen as a territory-bonded, essentialist and timeless entity. Politicians, as well as opinion-leaders in newspapers and on television, use the concept, for example, to make newcomers understand good and proper that they have to adapt themselves to the (national) culture of the country in which they intend to live. Mostly, the concept of culture is used in this rather specific way and even given a narrow and scary nationalistic interpretation. In the second place, culture is seen by many political scientists as too vague a concept. When it comes to investigating political issues and developments, researchers mostly prefer to analyse power relations in a social, economic or administrative context. Political theorists of this style are looking to power as being embedded in structural relations maintained by a force of one kind or another. It is certainly not self-evident to include culture in studies on politics or to think about culture in terms of power relations. But even when political scientists introduce culture in their studies, one can question the way they use the concept. Often they refer also to a slightly old-fashioned and essentialist interpretation of the concept. A remarkable example is Samuel Huntington's influential essay in Foreign Affairs (1993) *The Clash of Civilizations?* in which he argues that in this new era of global history the fundamental sources of war will not be in the first place economics or ideology, but culture. He distinguishes several world civilizations as the highest cultural groupings of people with the broadest level of cultural identity and integrated on the basis of the world religions.[4] It seems that Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz in their book *Culture Troubles. Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning* (2006) are right: political sciences are not very well equipped to integrate cultural aspects of political power in their studies. The relatively young academic discipline of Political Science is very much oriented on the analysis of Western political systems and grounded in developmental assumptions

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[4] Samuel Huntington *The Clash of Civilizations?* (1993)

pointing to a linear form of modernisation resulting in Westernisation. Political Science is strongly influenced by the positivistic statement that the validity of scientific research lies in the testing of hypotheses and, therefore, recognisable operational concepts and measurements with universal claims are used. Culture is considered as a too vague concept in this context. This bias has resulted in a reluctance to see cultural factors as an important category.[5]

The entanglement of culture and power asks for some unravelling on both domains. To discover the hidden power relations and political dimensions of cultural settings and the cultural nature of power and its institutions we need at least a conceptual apparatus and framework receptive to these types of questions. Therefore, it is necessary to begin this study with an exploration of the concept and theories about culture. Introducing the concept of culture in the analysis of power relations and maintenance of power requires a clear and usable delineation of the term. At first sight, the concept of culture is indeed rather broad and vague. Referring to its most general description – culture is the way of life of a society –, the late Groningen professor in Social Philosophy Lolle Nauta sighed that it was difficult to invent something that will fall beyond the scope of the concept and cited an English colleague who complained that culture is like air: it is everywhere but it is impossible to catch it.[6] Indeed, this interpretation of the term culture seems to be too open.

Taking into account the two exemplary events showing the cultural underpinning of political power on the one hand, and, on the other hand, noting that politicians and political scientists apparently are not very interested in the possible connections between the two domains one wonders whether in the social sciences, and anthropology in particular, much attention was paid to this problematic relationship. After all, if social sciences have never been defined in a relationship then why should politicians refer to it? Therefore, an exploration of the history of theorising about culture and power will be the guideline of this study.

   The perspective on (political) power, thus, will be cultural. This does not mean, however, that a culturalist perspective will be defended.[7] It only means this particular explorative study will have a strongly anthropological perspective because this academic discipline is dealing pre-eminently with culture since its birth in the second half of the nineteenth century. It will become clear that the culture-power linkage is analysed in different ways when theorising about culture.

Before explaining the design of this study, first a few words about the concept of power. In the context of this study, it is sufficient at this point to define it as a social relationship focused on the capacity and the intention of an individual or a group to dominate another

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[5] Patrick Chabal & Jean-Pascal Daloz *Culture Troubles. Politics and the Interpretation of Meaning (*2006), pp. 6-20.

[6] Lolle Nauta *De factor van de kleine c. Essays over culturele armoede en politieke cultuur* (The factor of the small c. Essays on cultural poverty and political culture) (1987), p.7.

[7] A culturalist perspective in the sense that an unequivocal notion of the concept applies to all situations, regardless their historical and socio-political environment. The culture concept can never provide the key explanation to behaviour or political action.

individual or group. Political power is concerned with public interests and is oriented towards the exercise of authority in a country, society or organization. Of course, when planning and doing research, it will be necessary to distinguish different levels of the exercise of power reaching from the authority of parents in family life to dictatorial force on state level penetrating daily life in a society. Researchers have to take into account that in daily life one can experience a rich variety of how power is exercised ranging from persuasion to violence. However, through the presentation of history in the main lines of the concept of culture and the discussion of the work of twentieth-century scholars like Geertz and Wolf, it will be clarified that the use of power and political behaviour (in all its varieties and nuances) cannot be analysed satisfactorily without describing and analysing the historical and constantly changing cultural context.

To conclude this introduction, the design of the study will be briefly explained. The main theme of this study – the issue of the connections between culture and power – is presented as a short history of anthropological thinking. This is an ambitious undertaking within the space of relatively few pages. Anthropology has a long history and is rich in theoretical approaches and professional traditions. The perspective of the culture-power linkage forces us to make choices, especially regarding the most recent history of Anthropology. In order to substantiate the perspective of this study, a brief overview of the early history of the concept of culture will be presented in chapter one. During the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe, philosophers in France, Germany and Scotland shared certain basic ideas, such as the belief in rationality and the quest to discover the universal principles that govern humanity, nature, and society. In this context, the idea of culture (and the related term civilization) came into being to describe the history of humanity. Most of the philosophers included political aspects in their views on human history. Special attention will be paid to the work of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder who gave a special turn to the thinking about culture influencing its debates until today.

In chapters two and three, the changing perspectives on culture and political power during the nineteenth century will be discussed. Some hold a universal view on the development of humanity, others defend the thesis concerning the rich variety of cultures and the uniqueness of each culture. Chapter two describes the rise and elaboration of a general and universalist theory; of the evolution of human culture and civilization. There are also different perspectives on the function of power structures in the evolution of human societies. Some scholars try to identify an evolutionary line of the development of structures of authority. Others are inclined to de-emphasize the role of governing institutions in the analysis of cultural forms and focus on the spirit and autonomous force of cultural phenomena. Chapter three deals with scholars who contested the evolutionist view on culture and emphasized the diversity of human societies and tried to explain the variety of existing cultures. Especially in Germany, researchers have focused on the existence of an enormous variety of different cultures. They were not inclined to trace a universal line of development in the variety of cultures. Also the rise of cultural nationalism will be discussed. During the nineteenth century, defenders of the thesis of the variety of cultures also inspired an intellectual movement which linked the idea of the existence of different cultures to specific geographical areas, territories and nations. This cultural nationalist school of

thinking was extremely outspoken about the role of power in the shaping of cultural communities.

In chapter four, the focus is on the rise of the science of Anthropology in universities. The founding fathers of this academic discipline - Edward Tylor and Franz Boas - are the central persons in this story. Both scholars synthesized the knowledge about culture and power accumulated since the eighteenth century.

Then, a short evaluation of the varying interpretations of the concept during the first half of the twentieth century will be presented in chapter five. In this period, Anthropology as a science of culture came to flourish as a fully-fledged academic discipline. The coming of age of Anthropology went hand in hand with the publication of a wealth of empirical studies and theoretical debates about the essence and the interpretation of cultures. The two great traditions which blossomed in modern Anthropology - the Boasian school of Cultural Anthropology and the British school of Social Anthropology - could not conceal, however, some weak points in this new science of culture. The strong focus on non-Western societies caused a tendency of thinking about culture in terms of differences where they did not exist, to homogenize and to essentialize cultures, and not pay enough attention to change and conflict. Several critics even explained that the culture concept was expressing timelessness, holism, consensus, continuity and obfuscated power relations. Moreover, it will also be described how the entry of the science of culture into universities meant a narrowing of this discipline. The need for professionalization in the upcoming social sciences led to specialization and to a separation of Anthropology from other disciplines. The separation between the study of cultures and political philosophy caused ethnologists and anthropologists to devote less attention to power structures.

Chapter six of this study, attention will focus on the remarkable rise of a special branch in Anthropology specializing in politics, namely Political Anthropology. Political Anthropology contradicts by definition the criticisms that Anthropology is not paying attention to power and politics. However, it will also become clear that the focus of Anthropology on small-scale societies dimmed the view on processes of colonial state formation. The impact of these state structures on the life of the people in villages was not seen or underestimated. Moreover, there was almost no interest in the desire for national independence among people living in the studied small societies. Until the seventies of the twentieth century, Political Anthropology was working with a limited concept of power.

In chapter seven, a particular version of the concept will be discussed: culture as a system of meanings. This view on culture came up since the seventies of the twentieth century and still is very influential today. During the stormy period of the late sixties and the seventies, when fundamental critics were voiced against Anthropology and its key concept and this academic discipline was even considered as an instrument for Western domination of "The Third World", the anthropologist Clifford Geertz proposed limiting the broad concept of culture to its immaterial aspects. This way of redefining the concept proved to be fruitful with respect to including politics and processes of state formation in studies of basic and major cultural phenomena in society. During the eighties, the factor of (political) power even came to the fore in essays about culture.

One of the scholars who departed from the proposition that it was impossible to investigate and discuss culture without including the factor of power was the anthropologist

Eric Wolf. His work will be the subject of discussion in chapter eight. Wolf coupled culture and power as the two domains giving shape to the organisation of life in society. In his view culture is the result of unequal social relations and characterized by structures of power.

Finally, in chapter nine, a theoretical framework to study power, politics, state formation and state reform from a cultural perspective will be discussed. The framework synthesizes the main findings of the historical review of the development of the concept of culture in the sense of taking into account the achievements of centuries of theorising on culture and excluding its obvious weak points. Innovations introduced by scholars like Geertz and Wolf open exciting perspectives on the study of fascinating and fundamental relationships between culture and power.

I   Early History of the Concept of Culture

During the European Enlightenment the idea of culture was formulated in terms of the cultivation of man's capacities. The Enlightenment is an era of economic, social and intellectual changes (about 1650 – 1800) marking the rise of a self-confident middle-class – the citizenry or bourgeoisie – out of the feudal societies of the Middle-Ages. The old stratified society of clergy, aristocracy, and ordinary people began to change when cities began to grow and became prosperous through the activities of the citizenry. Until then, life in European society was dominated by the Roman Catholic Church who proclaimed and preached humbleness with respect to Divine Salvation. Pope, cardinals, bishops, and parochial priests oriented the life of the people on the Hereafter with much theatrical wealth. The Church also sanctioned the aristocracy as God's appointed administrators of land. The aristocracy protected its own position as well as the Church with armies and demonstrated its secular hegemony in society with as much wealth as the Church itself. The citizenry emancipated itself from this social order by its own increasing wealth. This emerging class began to understand that it was possible to build another society and to challenge the existing social order. Philosophers gave this new view of life a voice and presented a reconstruction of the history of mankind along the perspective of progress based on increased rationalisation and control over nature. In this context, philosophers not only introduced the term culture but they also developed the idea of civilization to indicate a distinct stage of development in human history. The ideas of culture and civilization were closely related.

The Enlightenment and the introduction of the conceptions of culture and civilization

The opinions of the increasingly influential social class of the citizenry were expressed by a group of intellectuals; the *philosophes* in France and rationalist philosophers in countries like Germany and Scotland. These intellectuals contested religious spiritual authority, dogmatism and intolerance and they attacked aristocratic absolutist dominance as well as censorship, economic and social restraints. They promulgated new ideas about the rational capacities of man and about progress in the history of mankind.

In this context, the word "culture" was introduced into the European languages. In Latin the word culture is linked to words like "agriculture", "cultivate" and "cultivation". Mostly, the Romans used the word *cultura* in the meaning pertaining to tilling the soil. The philosopher Cicero formulated the idea of educating man into a social and political being also in terms of *cultura animi philosophia:* philosophy is culture of the mind. Initially,

"culture" in the sense of cultivating the soil was also used in fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe, but gradually the metaphoric meaning of culture as human development was used as well. Raymond Williams locates the term culture in this sense in the work of several seventeenth-century philosophers in his *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983). Among them is Thomas Hobbes, one of the founding fathers of modern political theory.[8] Raymond Williams explains that the word culture as understood in the German language, was used in the sense of becoming "cultivated" or "civilized" and as a description of the universal process of human development or "civilization".[9]

The history of the development of the idea of culture parallels the development of the conception of civilization. The Enlightenment-philosophers introduced the idea of civilization to describe the environment in which citizens are living and working. Civilization was the opposite of nature perceived as the environment of the animals. In sixteenth century France, the word *civilité* which was derived from the Roman *civic* (citizen), signified decent civil behaviour. The verb *civiliser* was used to indicate the process of reaching the status of *civilité*.[10] A process which is comparable with the cultivation of the mind expressed in the conception of culture.

Raymond Williams notes in his etymological study of the words "culture" and "civilization" that "culture" is one of the most complicated words in the English language. One of the reasons given is its relationship with the word civilization.[11] Different meanings gradually evolved, and some characteristic differences in the use of the two words arose in the Enlightenment philosophy in the then important European countries. The sociologist Norbert Elias (1897 - 1990) compares the development of the German notion of culture (*Kultur*) and the French and English ideas of civilization. The French Enlightenment was very interested in the development of a universal history of mankind in terms of the civilization process. German philosophers preferred to develop a cultural history (*Kulturgeschichte*) of mankind. In the French tradition, civilization was conceived of as a complex whole encompassing political, economic, religious, technical, moral and social facts. Civilization is progressing and transcends national boundaries. In contrast, the German concept of culture is connected in space and time. German philosophers on culture separate intellectual, artistic, and religious facts from the political, economic, and social phenomena. According to Elias, these different visions on the history of man were developed in different social environments in Germany and France. The concept of a universal civilization appealed to the dominant classes in imperial states like France and England, while the concept of culture reflected the problems of German intellectuals defining themselves in a nation constantly changing its political and spiritual boundaries.[12] In German philosophy a contrast, even an

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[8] Raymond Williams *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983), p. 87; Ton Lemaire *Over de waarde van kulturen. Een inleiding in de kultuurfilosofie* (On the value of cultures. An introduction into the philosophy of culture) (1976), p.37.

[9] Raymond Williams (1983) , p. 89.

[10] Raymond Williams *(*1983*),* p. 57; Ton Lemaire (1976), pp. 55-56; A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), pp. 15-16; Robert H. Winthrop *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* (1991), p. 33.

[11] Raymond Williams (1983), p. 89.

[12] It is interesting to see, according to Elias, that in Germany the term civilization was mainly used at the royal court of the state of Prussia.

antithesis between the concepts of *Kultur* (culture) and *Zivilization* (civilization) arose. Terms like *Bildung* (education) and *Kultur* tend to draw a sharp distinction between the purely spiritual sphere and the political and economic sphere which are included in the term civilization.[13]

The Enlightenment thinkers were highly interested in investigating the history of mankind. They were inspired by travel reports of the explorers and early anthropological descriptions of peoples living at the far ends of the world. In particular, the discovery of the Americas (the New World) and the descriptions of the American Indians ("Amerindians") as "noble savages" or as "natural humans" stimulated the investigations on the origins of humanity. In the context of the development of a universal history of mankind, French thinkers advanced an explicit second meaning of the word *civilité* expressing the highest possible standard of human behaviour as compared to the customs of the rural areas and with even wilder societies, like the primitive or barbarian world. The substantive *civilisation* in fact expressed the valuation of the different stages of human development and in the eighteenth century French intellectuals began to conceive the outlines of a universal history in which savagery led to barbarism, and barbarism to civilization. There was a tendency to understand these histories of mankind in terms of ranking the collective ways of life such as hunting and gathering or pastoralism as inferior or superior.[14] Sankar Muthu in his book *Enlightenment against Empire* (2003) refers to the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) as one of the first to explore the meanings and implications of a "savage existence" of man. De Montaigne proclaims this existence represents the earliest stage of human history. This idea about "savagery" and human history became a focal point in several philosophies of history during the eighteenth century.[15]

An interesting and influential French philosopher who presented a universal line on the development of human societies and an overall vision about the coherence between societies, its laws and governments, is Charles Montesquieu (1689 – 1755). In his book *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) he tries to make the history of man intelligible.[16] The historical reality appeared to the philosopher in the form of an almost limitless diversity of morals, customs, ideas, laws and institutions. Inquiry can make clear the underlying causes and make possible the classification of the diversity of manners, customs and ideas into a small number of types. An important notion in *The Spirit of the Laws* is that the types of governments are a consequence of the way in which rule is exercised, which in turn is due to the entire complex of political and social groupings and institutions.[17] Montesquieu starts from the idea that humans have the desire to live in society and from this emanates the need for rules and laws necessary to organize life. The exercise of power, thus, is an integral factor in society and starts with the establishment of paternal power. Political power concerns the relation between those who govern and those who are governed.[18]

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[13] Norbert Elias *The Civilizing Process. The History of Manners* (1936/1978) Vol. I , pp. 4-5, 26-27, 38.
[14] Sankar Muthu *Enlightenment against Empire* (2003), pp. 16, 83.
[15] Sankar Muthu (2003), p. 16.
[16] French title: *De l'esprit des lois* (1748).
[17] Ann M. Cohler "Introduction" to Charles Montesquieu *The Spirit of Laws* Edited and translated by Anne Cohler (1989), p. xxii.
[18] Charles Montesquieu *The Spirit of Laws* (1989), Book I, chapter I *On laws in general*, pp. 7-8.

Montesquieu also investigates the relationships between social organisations and structures and the forms of government. He distinguishes three types of government, republic, monarchy, and despotism.[19]

With respect to the ways of life or modes of subsistence, Montesquieu distinguishes between savage and barbarian peoples and characterizes the former as small scattered groups ("nations"), usually hunting, which cannot unite and the barbarians, mostly pastoral people, as small "nations" able to unite. These peoples are contrasted to those who cultivate their lands, use money and are ruled by civil laws. These are the civilized "nations".[20] Montesquieu explains the variety of human societies as determined by climate and soil conditions as well as social and economic conditions and he states:

> *(Laws) should be related to the physical aspect of the country; to the climate (…); to the properties of the terrain, its location and extend; to the way of life of peoples, be they plowmen, hunters, or herdsmen; they should relate to the degree of liberty that the constitution can sustain, to the religion of the inhabitants, their inclinations, their wealth, their number, their commerce, their mores and their manners…[21]*

Montesquieu considers religion and "the general spirit of the nation" as strong influences on the organisation of the collective life. The general spirit of a nation can be seen as a powerful quality which a given collectivity acquires over a period of time. This spirit is related to a nation's way of life and sustains a political regime.[22] In other words, according to the French sociologist Raymond Aron (1905 – 1983), the general spirit of a nation is what we call nowadays "culture".[23]

Montesquieu's ideas about the development of human history and the organization of the different ways of life appeared to be influential. According to Christopher Berry in his book *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (1997), the Scots captured universalism in the idea of "civilization". In their works, several Scottish thinkers demonstrate their debt to Montesquieu and his *The Spirit of the Laws.*[24] Berry characterizes Scottish Enlightenment philosophy as a remarkable combination of moral philosophy and political economy. Man as a social being was the main focus and Scottish thinkers did not take this fact for granted. They tried to establish empirically this central statement. Classical literature and ethnographic reports are important sources for them. The comparison of the savage world with the study of the contemporary world of "civilized" Scotland and Europe in general gave a comparative perspective to the empiric and scientific study of the history of mankind. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers also tried to find the underlying basic universality of diverse practices and customs. Following and further elaborating Montesquieu, the Scottish

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[19] Charles Montesquieu (1989). Book II, chapter II *On the nature of the three varieties of governments,* pp. 10-21.
[20] Charles Montesquieu (1989), Book XVIII *On the laws in their relation with the nature of the terrain*, pp. 290-291. The term "nation" in 17th century French (and English) has another meaning than nowadays. The Dutch translation of Montesquieu's text is using here *stammen* (tribes) instead of "nations".
[21] Charles Montesquieu (1989), Book I, p.9.
[22] Charles Montesquieu (1989), Book XIX, chapter 4, p. 310.
[23] Raymond Aron *Main Currents in Sociological Thought I* (1965), pp.19-20, 29-30,37,46.
[24] Christopher J. Berry *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (1997), pp. 6-7.

intellectuals were interested in the causes of social diversity. According to Berry, the Scots were adherents of the "four-stages theory" and he refers to the intellectual work of philosophers like Adam Ferguson (1723 – 1816) and Adam Smith (1723 – 1790) to demonstrate this orientation. Adam Smith mentioned four distinct phases in the history of mankind: hunting, pasturage, farming and commerce. The role of property is crucial and is manifested in the ideas about ranks and subordination in society and ideas about government and authority.[25] In this way, the factor of power is unambiguously introduced in the views on human history.

The conception of culture in German philosophy: the work of Johann Gottfried Herder

As is explained by Norbert Elias, German philosophers used the term culture to describe the variety of forms of life and differences between peoples when discussing the history of mankind. At the same time, culture was often used in contrast to civilization.[26] Sankar Muthu supports Elias' interpretation and refers to the work of Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 – 1803). With respect to Kant, he confirms that the philosopher used the German word *Kultur* (culture) in its meaning of the cultivation of man's natural capacities.[27] However, there was a decisive change of the use of the word culture in the work of Johann Gottfried Herder.

Looking at the historical development of the concept of culture, the ideas of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744 -1803) have been very influential. A twentieth-century philosopher like Isaiah Berlin sees him as the leader of the "revolt" against (French) rationalism and the trailblazer of modern notions of nationalism.[28] Herder tends to evoke ambivalent feelings to many present-day intellectuals. Michael Forster states that Herder has been often neglected by modern philosophers because of his undeserved bad name with cosmopolitans for his "nationalism".[29] However, the tide is turning and the historian John Zammito even portrays Herder as playing a vital role in the emergence of modern Anthropology in his book *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (2002).[30]

Johann Gottfried Herder is in every respect a contemporary of the eighteenth- century intellectuals discussed above. He is one of the many thinkers, who, during this century, tried to compare cross-culturally, particular values, ways of life, practices and institutions within different societies. He is committed to the idea of freedom and the workings of reason and tries to relate human unity and human diversity. And like most of his colleagues, he is very much opposed to the power of the absolutist state which limits the freedom of people to make their own choices. He also denies the right of (European) states to subject and colonise other peoples in the world and to interfere in their ways of life. In this way, he is anti-

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[25] Christopher J. Berry (1997), pp. 47, 77, 79, 93-94.

[26] Norbert Elias *(*1936/1978), pp. 5, 38.

[27] Sankar Muthu (2003) p.175. Other references to Kant's vision on culture on pages 133, 144.

[28] Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder. Two Studies on the History of Ideas* (1976), p.145.

[29] Michael N. Forster, *Herder's Importance as a Philosopher.* Website of the University of Chicago, Dept. of Philosophy (not dated). Article retrieved from internet on 2-05-07.
http://philosophy.uchicago.edu/faculty/files/forster/HerdersImportance.pdf

[30] John H. Zammito *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (2002), University of Chicago Press .

imperialistic before the term ever existed.[31] Herder's philosophy of history and his political philosophy are characterized by a number of themes which define his ideas about culture and the exertion of power.

<u>Herder on language</u>
Herder stated that a core feature of human nature is the ability to reason and that language is the catalyst of reasoning. Thought is essentially dependent on, and bounded by, language. One can only think if one has a language and one can only think what one can express linguistically. Meanings or concepts are identical with uses of words.

> *The very first stage of conscious awareness, however, could not emerge without man's spontaneous ability to put his thoughts into words; nor could the mind connect a chain of thoughts without a chain of words. Hence all processes of the mind of which we are consciously aware involve the use of language. The former is indeed inconceivable without the latter.[32]*

Herder believes language to be an essential part of the natural growth of consciousness and human solidarity which rests on communication between men. Through language human life is fundamentally social and plural. Every human on the globe possesses language. Reason is always shaped by the contingencies of the particular language that is formed by one's social background. Therefore, according to Herder, human knowledge is contextual: "Language expresses the collective experience of the group."[33] Each language expresses a particular way of seeing and feeling, a distinct perception of the world, together with a certain manner of responding to its challenges.[34]

> *What a treasure language is when kinship groups grow into tribes and nations! Even the smallest of nations in any part of the globe, no matter how underdeveloped it may be, cherishes in and through its language the history, the poetry and songs about the great deeds of its forefathers. The language is its collective treasure, the source of its social wisdom and communal self-respect.[35]*

And:

> *In short, variations in language among nations are not wholly, or even mainly, attributable to such* external *circumstances as climate or geographical distances, but largely to* internal *factors such as dispositions and attitudes arising from relations*

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[31] Sankar Muthu (2003), pp. 210, 257.

[32] Johann Gottfried Herder *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1772) In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture. Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard (1969), p.157.

[33] Quoted in Berlin, (1976), p.169. Further references on Herder's philosophy of language: Michael N. Forster, *Johann Gottfried von Herder* Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2001), p. 5. Retrieved from internet 24-4-2007. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/herder/ ; Michael N. Forster *Herder's Importance as a Philosopher* p. 3. Retrieved from internet 2-05-2007; Sankar Muthu, (2003), pp. 228-229.

[34] F.M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity and History* (2003) ,pp. 3-4.

[35] Johann Gottfried Herder *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1772) In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture. Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard. (1969), p.165.

> *between families and nations. Conflict and mutual aversion, in particular, have greatly favoured the emergence of language differentiation.*[36]

F.M. Barnard summarizes Herder's view on language as both the medium through which man becomes conscious of his inner self and the key to understanding his outer relationships. Language unites man with, but also separates him from others. By means of language he is able to enter into the world of thinking and feeling of his ancestors, but he also is modifying this inheritance, enriching it by language.[37]

<u>Herder on (kinship)groups, people, and nation</u>
One of the crucial ideas of Herder's philosophy is the notion of the individual belonging to a group. To belong to is not a passive condition, but a social activity to be a member of a group and to think and act in a certain way, in the light of particular goals, values, and perspectives on the world. To think and act is to belong to a group and to speak, move, eat and drink, make music and dance in the group's way of life. Or, in short, as Isaiah Berlin says, to share qualities which are not shared with other groups. The individual is inescapably a member of some group and consequently expresses, consciously or unconsciously, the aspirations of his group.[38] In addition, Herder's thinking is based on his belief of the individual being embedded in a larger whole that forms the environment or framework of a person's existence and development. He identifies this "whole" with shared institutions, a composition of a great variety of smaller wholes as self-regulating units. These constituent parts are (or should) not be held together by a dominant central power, but by cooperation. It is essentially human to actively participate in groups and to forge one's own collective forms. This notion of an individual belonging to a group and of groups associated in institutions is further elaborated into the idea of belonging to a *Volk* (people) and a nation. Herder identified the *Volk* as people, who by their own choice, share a feeling of independence and ability to provide for their own livelihood together. In addition to this vision, Herder saw the nation as an extended family. The nation is not a replacement of families, clans or other kinship groupings, but a continuation of these social units. A nation in this sense is not imposed from above but based on energies emanating from within, shared meanings and sentiments which form a people's collective soul. It is a configuration of self-sustaining groups and associations. A nation is a collectivity bound by spiritual ties and cultural traditions. Guided by this model, Herder denied the need of a permanent central authority. Combined with Herder's philosophy of language, it is clear that humans are from the beginning creatures of a particular society with a particular language. Humans are what they are by their embeddedness in a distinctive cultural and social environment.[39]

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[36] Johann Gottfried Herder *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1772) In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture. Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard. (1969), p.167.
[37] F.M. Barnard *Introduction* to "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture (1969), p.22.
[38] Isaiah Berlin, (1976), pp. 195, 201.
[39] F.M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (2003), pp. 27, 38, 45-46.

Herder on culture

Language, community and culture are concepts inextricably interwoven in Herder's thinking.[40] "Language is always a function of the general culture."[41] Language embodies the living manifestations of historical continuity and the personal processing of the traditions. The terms "tradition", "learning", and "education" are crucial in this context. Traditions are transferred by education but at the same time reinterpreted. The world is not a given in which individuals are passively embedded but where humans involve themselves by creating their physical and social environment.[42]

> *It must be evident by now that the principles underlying this philosophy of history are as simple and unmistakable as those underlying the natural history of man. They are* tradition *and* organic powers. *All education arises from imitation and exercise, by means of which the model passes into the copy. What better word is there for this transmission than tradition? But the imitator must have powers to receive and convert into his own nature what has transmitted to him (…). Accordingly, what and how much he receives, where he derives it from and how he applies it to his own use, is determined by his own receptive powers. Education, which performs the function of transmitting social traditions, can be said to be* genetic, *by virtue of the manner in which the transmission takes place, and* organic, *by virtue of the manner in which that which is being transmitted is assimilated and applied. We may term this second genesis, which permeates man's whole life,* enlightenment, *by the light it affords to his understanding, or* culture, *in so far it is comparable to the cultivation of the soil.*[43]

Herder does not make a distinction between the spiritual and material manifestations of culture. Both are integral parts of tradition and the transmitting process between the generations. He insists, furthermore, on the point that there is no single standard of culture. The difference between enlightened and unenlightened or cultured and uncultured peoples is relative and a matter of degree.

Herder, like other Enlightenment-philosophers, is interested in the existence of different cultures. He had read a wide range of ethnological studies and travel reports and came to the conclusion that diverse cultures existed even in one nation. He also knew the classification of the different cultures proposed by several of his colleagues. Herder was certainly influenced by Scottish Enlightenment thinking about the history of mankind, but Herder was not convinced of their model of unilinear progress and the importance of commercialisation in historical development. He wanted to have an open eye for the varieties of human excellence. He posed that the uniqueness of each people is more striking in its spiritual form than in its material aspects.[44]

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[40] F.M. Barnard *Introduction* to "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture (1969), p.18.

[41] Johann Gottfried Herder *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1772) In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture." Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard. (1969), p.151.

[42] F.M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality etc.* (2003), pp. 119-120; Alfred Kroeber & Clyde Kluckhohn (1952), p. 39.

[43] Johann Gottfried Herder *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (1784-91). In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture". Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard. (1969), p.313.

[44] John H. Zammito *Kant, Herder and the Birth of Anthropology* (2002), pp.333-334.

> *It is customary to divide the nations of the world into hunters, fisherman, shepherds and farmers, not only to determine accordingly their level of cultural development, but also to suggest that culture as such is necessary corollary of a given occupation or mode of life. This would be most admirable, provided the diverse modes of life were defined in the first place. Since these, however, vary with almost every region and for the most part overlap, it is exceedingly difficult to apply such a classification with accuracy.*[45]

Herder stated that every historical period or civilization possessed a unique character of its own. He opposed the thesis that each civilization is forerunner of a next and higher one. It is not possible to work with linear conceptions of historical change and progress as well as comparisons among peoples. Herder substantiates the diversity and incommensurability of civilizations at every level of human life. But it does not lead to the idea of assigning essentialist characteristics to specific peoples and historical periods. On the contrary, the particularity of different times and places, in conjunction with the constant movement and transformation of ideas, practices, and institutions is inconsistent with intrinsic qualifications of peoples.[46]

In view of the diversity and complexity of the modes of life that developed throughout human history and existed side by side at the same time, Herder mostly thinks in terms of cultures in plural instead of culture in general. This thinking about cultures in the plural appeared to be a decisive turn in the theorising about culture in the nineteenth century, in particular in Germany. In Herder's philosophy of history, central questions concern the variety of humankind and the impossibility of setting cross-cultural criteria available to measure and to judge the ways of life of various people. He concluded that all humans possess culture and one cannot judge one set of cultural practices by the standards of another. Summarizing, Herder rejected linear conceptions of historical change and he cautioned against relying uncritically upon the standard division among hunters, pastoralists, and agriculturalists. His reluctance to draw easy conclusions from the comparison of civilizations and his rigorous defence of the plurality and the uniqueness among the various existing ways of life was expressed in terms of a relativistic view inhibiting the idea of framing on a general history of man.[47]

Herder's thinking and theorising on cultures in the plural comes close to what he writes about peoples and nations. In this context, Herder uses terms like "spirit of the people" (*Geist des Volkes* or *Volksgeist*) and "national spirit" (*Nationalgeist*). But Herder is – according to Isaiah Berlin – not interested in nationality, but in culture, in the total experience of peoples. He attacks political centralization and recognizes the aggressive

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[45] Johann Gottfried Herder *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (1784-91). In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture". Translated, Edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard. (1969), p.302.

[46] Isaiah Berlin, (1976), pp. 145, 208; F.M. Barnard, (1969), pp. 219, 224.

[47] Isaiah Berlin (1976), pp. 181, 195 is confirming Herder's use of culture in plural as well as F.M. Barnard, *Introduction* to "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture (1969), p.24. Barnard repeats this statement in *Herder on Nationality etc*. (2003), pp. 119, 134, 143. However, Sankar Muthu , (2003), p. 224 states that Herder finally did not use the plural with respect to the word "culture". John H. Zammito (2002) refers on page 332 to Herder's interest in the conditions in which the construction of consciousness is embedded and thus carrying him inevitably to a theory of cultural difference.

potentialities of nation states.[48] As is already said, Herder's starting point is the human being and his language capacity. Looking to this human being, he attributes a consciousness of imperfection as a characteristic that produces a permanent form of self-questioning which, in turn, leads to a desire for change. Having the capacity of language gives humans the possibilities to reflect and to set a mental horizon to try to overcome imperfection. Herder sees man's sense of imperfection and his capacity to reason as the foundation for the emergence of human culture and the formation of distinctive national identities. The emergence of nationhood, the feeling of togetherness and solidarity, is seen as the coming into being of a collectivity bound by spiritual ties and cultural traditions.[49]

<u>Herder on political power</u>
Herder's vision on political power is strongly interwoven with his ideas about man as a social being endowed with the capacity of language and the ability of reasoning. Moreover, he thinks that the acceptance of a common sovereign power has to be based on a shared common culture. Such a common culture is also called *Volk* (people) or nation. According to Herder, it is through language that the individual becomes aware of his self-hood and at the same time of his nationhood. A collective political identity should be based on this converging individual and collective identity or common culture. In Herder's "*Volk*-state" there is no single focus of power because government is not vested in a permanent administrative authority. The *Volk*-state is a territorial unit in which men conscious of sharing a common cultural heritage are free to organize their lives within a legal framework of their own making. It is the area of a nation's political self-determination and at the same time the social framework within which various individuals, groups and institutions operate and co-operate. Government is co-operation. The institution of central power constitutes not the beginning but the collapse of politics. Central power reflects social decay and political bankruptcy. F.M. Barnard characterizes this vision on political power as "anarcho-pluralistic."[50]

> *The natural state of man is society. He is born and brought up in it, and his emerging impulses lead him to it during the years of adolescence. Words which are associated in his mind with the most tender feelings are father, mother, son, brother, sister, lover, and friend;(…) The first forms of government arose out of these natural social relationships. They were, essentially, family rules and regulations without which human groupings could not persist; laws formed and limited by nature. We could regard them therefore as representing* natural government of the first order. *It is the most basic political organization, and has proved the most lasting if not the best.*[51]

On these foundations of society, it is up to man to build a higher organizational structure if reason or need is calling for it. This can be all kinds of *ad hoc* arrangements like leadership

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[48] Isaiah Berlin (1976), pp. 181,183.
[49] F.M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality etc.* (2003), p. 48.
[50] F.M. Barnard *Introduction* to "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture (1969), pp. 7-8.
[51] Johann Gottfried Herder *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (1784-91). In: F.M. Barnard "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture". Translated, edited and with an Introduction by F.M. Barnard. (1969), pp. 317-318.

during hunting or the election of community judges. Herder is very much opposed to hereditary government because there is no reason to think that wisdom or justice (character traits needed for leadership and government) are hereditary. Only war can bring hereditary government. If nations fall asleep and allow their fathers, leaders and judges to govern over them, for example because of fear of their power and wealth, and endow them with a "hereditary sceptre", the result will be a monopoly of power and the right of the stronger.[52] Herder believes that it is possible to overcome the dynastic government style and to institute the *Volk*-state. He described this transformation process in terms of the decay of the centralized power (conducted in his time by an aristocratic élite) on the one hand, and growth from below of increasing popular participation on the other hand.[53]

Herder neither provides a clear delineation of the domain of culture nor a definition of the concept. He uses the words "culture", "people", and "nation" interchangeably. He also uses the term culture to attribute several meanings to it to describe his thinking on human beings shaping their own environment. Moreover, he uses the term in the German meaning of *Bildung* or spiritual education and in the sense of the process of the steady realization of "humanity" (*Humanität)* or cultivating humanity by (spiritual) education resulting in increasing enlightenment (*Aufklärung)*. In other words: Enlightenment is culture or the process in which man is moulding himself more and more in the course of history as a rational human being.[54] Herder's pluralist, relativist and process-oriented approach paved the way for a modern notion of the concept of culture in plural. He, moreover, connects this linguistic and educational interpretation of culture with strongly anti-authoritarian views on centralized power. He believes in the force of self-determination when it comes to politics.

Like Johann Gottfried Herder, almost all Enlightenment-philosophers are simultaneously political philosophers. They reflect on how to arrange collective life and the economic system by establishing and further elaborating political institutions. They developed ideas about justifying or criticizing particular forms of the state, they showed that individuals have certain inalienable rights and explained how state structures distribute a society's material resources among its members or usurp it. In an interesting article, the political scientist John Keane demonstrates how political philosophers of the Enlightenment were very much focused on the question of the legitimacy of justifying might and right, political power and law and discussed the duties and rights of citizens. Their concern was the limiting of state power and they investigated the state institutions in relation to pre-state situations and the non-state sphere. In this context they developed the conception of the civil society. Thus, Enlightenment-philosophers developed different perspectives on state – (civil) society relations. Philosophers like Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1677) and Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) considered the state as the negation of nature which was highly unstable, anti-social and in a permanent condition of war. The state received the mandate to use power and violence to dam natural instability and functioned as a security state. John Locke (1632 - 1677), Immanuel Kant and Adam Ferguson and other Scottish thinkers stated that natural rights

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[52] Johann Gottfried Herder *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (1784-91). In: F.M. Barnard (1969), pp. 318-321.
[53] F.M. Barnard *Introduction* to "J.G. Herder on Social and Political Culture (1969), p. 8.
[54] Ton Lemaire (1976)*,* pp. 52-54.

have their own basis in human social life and the role of the state can only be one of securing and strengthening them. Civil society can be regulated by the state and vice versa. The function of the state is not to replace nature but to guarantee citizen's freedom and equality. These philosophers were thinking in terms of a constitutional state, thereby challenging the idea of absolutism. According to Keane, it was the American political philosopher Thomas Paine (1737 – 1809) who, was the first to give the theme of civil society a central place in the thinking about the state. In this vision, the state is nothing more than a delegation of social power for the common benefit of society. Prior to the state, there existed natural networks of reciprocal interests and solidarity to promote security and peace. Civil society is a continuation of this situation and the more perfect civil society is, the more it regulates its own affairs and the less it needs to delegate power to the state.[55] It is clear that Johann Gottfried Herder shares this thinking. Like Paine, he defended the idea of a restricted state and he was convinced of the force of self-regulation by people in societies to organise their own life.

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[55] John Keane *Remembering the Dead: Civil Society and the State from Hobbes to Marx and Beyond.* In: John Keane "Democracy and Civil Society" (1988), pp. 34-46.

II   Human History as an Evolutionary Scheme

The Enlightenment heralded a new era in scientific thinking in Europe. On the one hand, thinking dominated by religion and theology was abandoned and scholars began to see human reason as an instrument to fathom their world. On the other hand, the Enlightenment gave the initial impetus to the reconceptualization and quantitative explosion of scientific knowledge in the nineteenth century, as well as to new institutional structures of science and the applications of these sciences such as their practical relevance to medicine, technology and industry. In this context, an increasing need arose to test philosophical theories about human history with methodological principles used in other scientific disciplines. In particular, it was hoped that the natural sciences could offer a sound foundation for the study of human societies. Biology was a highly inspiring discipline for the formulation of evolutionist models in historical science. The French biologist Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744 - 1829) was an early proponent of the idea of evolution in accordance with natural laws. He defended the view that animal species can be ordered by placing them on a continuum between plants and man. According to Lamarck, once nature formed life, the arrangement of all subsequent forms of life was the result of time and environment interacting with the organization of organic beings. From the simplest forms of life, more complex forms emerged naturally. These ideas were initially presented in 1809 in Lamarck's major theoretical work, *Philosophie Zoologique* (Zoological Philosophy).[56] Enlightenment-philosophers who discussed the successive stages of human history already referred to the progressing capacities of human reason. During the nineteenth century, ideas about progress, development, and evolution became keywords in scientific discourses, in particular in the rising social sciences. The publication of Charles Darwin's book *On the Origins of Species* in 1859 had a revolutionary impact upon the scientific foundations of evolutionistic thinking about the history of mankind. The book challenged again the Christian world view and caused a variety of intellectual and ideological debates. Although Darwin was unconcerned with human development, his theory opened new perspectives to intellectuals interested in the origin of man and his human history. A range of questions having to do with the physical evolution of humankind, the evolution of human capacity for culture, the history of the varieties of the human species, and the history or evolution of human civilization

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[56] Aaron Hanson *Jean-Baptiste Lamarck* Emuseum. Minnesota State University. Retrieved from internet, 19-09-2007. w*ww.mnsu.edu/emuseum/information/biography/klmno/lemarck_jean.html*; David Clifford *Jean Baptiste Lamarck, 1744-1829,* Cambridge University 2004.
http://www.victorianweb.org/science/lamarck1.html. Retrieved from internet 19-09-2007.

became a challenge.[57] In any case, the struggle for life became one of the focal points in the study of human evolution and, with it, issues like conflict, force and power.[58]

The evolutionist character of culture

The ideas about progress, development and evolution in natural sciences and the rising social sciences became the most important key concepts in the study of the history of mankind in the nineteenth century. The opinions of Enlightenment-philosophers raised more and more questions. Opponents and defenders of the idea of universal and successive stages of civilization came to the conclusion that a more scientific approach should substantiate philosophical views on human history. It is interesting to notice how some scholars tried to find evidence for the progressive development of human history through the analysis of the rules for marriage and of laws regulating life in the different societies. Representatives of this group of researchers are the Swiss lawyer Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815 – 1887), the Scottish lawyers Henry Maine (1822 - 1888) and John Ferguson McLennan (1827 – 1881), and the American lawyer and early anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1818 -1881). These researchers tried in different ways and with different theoretical perspectives to develop a "scientific method" and to analyse social evolution in the light of kinship structures, rules for marriage and the development of laws.[59]

Also in Germany, the idea of the evolutionary tendency of human history was influential. But apart from the conceptions of civilization and society, German scholars continued exploring the term culture to describe the historical heritage of humankind. One of the first persons who proposed a scientific approach of the study of culture was Gustav Klemm (1802 -1867). He was a librarian in Dresden who brought together an impressive ethnographic collection. To describe this collection, Klemm wrote a ten volume *General Cultural History of Humanity* (1843-1852). The American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) refer to him as the person who used the word culture in a modern way for the first time. They quote ten descriptions and definitions of culture which can be understood as if they were formulated in the first half of the twentieth century. Klemm described culture as manifested in "customs, arts and skills, domestic and public life in peace or war, religion, science and art"[60] Gustav Klemm also wrote a *General Science of Culture* (1854) and with these two sizeable works he had much influence on the work of Edward B. Tylor, one of the founding fathers of modern academic anthropology (see below). An interesting aspect of Klemm's intellectual work is his references to the various stages of culture, from primitive up to the stage of European culture. He also wrote about the progress of culture. Until then, stages of evolution were mainly discussed in relation to the conception of civilization.[61]

Generally speaking, two "schools of thinking" can be distinguished with respect to the theme of the history of mankind. On the one hand, there are researchers who postulate that

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[57] George W. Stocking Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), p. 146.

[58] R. Jon McGee & Richard L. Warms *Anthropological Theory. An Introductory History* (1996), p. 8.

[59] Thomas H. Eriksen & Finn Sivert Nielsen *A History of Anthropology* (2001) , pp. 18, 22; Theodore M. Porter "The Social Sciences". In: David Cahen (ed.) *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences. Writing the History of Nineteenth-Century Science* (2003), p. 258.

[60] A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, (1952), p.45.

[61] A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn (1952), p. 44; Ton Lemaire (1976), p. 65.

the history of man can be traced as a succession of increasingly complex ways of life leading to civilization. On the other hand, there are researchers who defend the thesis of the rich variety of cultures and the uniqueness of each culture. At the same time, there were two types of scholars. First, there were the intellectuals who researched carefully the existing literature, historical sources and collected ethnographic materials and thus strived for a reconstruction of the development of the history of man with the help of scientific methods. The most important representative of this process was Edward B. Tylor. Secondly, a group of scholars who left their desks from time to time during long periods and set up their own empirical research and carried out their own fieldwork. An example of this last group of researchers was the American Lewis Henry Morgan. These two leading pioneers in the rising science of Anthropology also represent another interesting phenomenon in the study of culture and civilization: it became less obvious to investigate the factor of power. Morgan is an example of those scientists interested in the research of power relations and state formation. Tylor and others were hardly interested in these social aspects of human history. In other words, political power and the state was a less self-evident theme in the study of human history than it was in the thinking of most Enlightenment-philosophers.

In the United States of America, Lewis Henry Morgan (1818 – 1881) was the most important representative of thinkers who believed in the existence of universal evolutionary stages of cultural development. Morgan is seen as one of the founders of scientific Anthropology and was one of the first who defined the principles of fieldwork. Lewis Morgan was educated as a lawyer and had been fascinated by Indians since his youth. He lived with the Iroquois Indians for some time and was adopted into one of their clans. His main contribution to the history of human cultural development was the study of kinship systems. For Morgan, kinship was primarily a line of approach to the study of social evolution. He enlarged his knowledge about Indian kinship structures by sending a questionnaire requesting information about kinship systems to consular officials, missionaries, and scientists around the world. Combined with his own field research, this resulted in a collection of data from 139 different groups in North America, Asia, Oceania, as well as ancient and modern Europe. His aim was to trace the connections between systems of kinship and to "explore their progressive changes as man developed through the ages of barbarism."[62] Morgan inferred different social relations from these distinct kinship systems, and then arranged them on a continuum from the most primitive to the most civilized. He also linked family structures to property. He posed that the rise of rights was related to the transition to a lineal kinship system with nuclear families. Morgan's interest in the historical development of "ancient society" reached further than only the evolutionist lines of kinship systems. In his *Ancient Society* (1877), he outlined the evolution of human society from primitive times to the Victorian era which he considered the height of human civilization. His scientific account of human history was illustrated with examples of developmental stages drawn from various cultures. In the Preface, Morgan makes clear his basic assumptions:

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[62] Quotation from Morgan (1871) in: Jerry P. Moore *Visions of Culture. An Introduction to Anthropology* (1997), pp. 32, 34.

It can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all tribes of mankind, as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization. The history of the human race is one in source, one in experience, one in progress.

It is both natural and a proper desire to learn, if possible, how all these ages upon ages of past time have been expended by mankind; how savages, advancing by slow, almost imperceptible steps, attained the higher condition of barbarism; how barbarians, by similar progressive advancement, finally attained to civilization; and why other tribes and nations have been left behind in the race of progress – some in civilization, some in barbarism, others in savagery. It is not too much to expect that ultimately these several questions will be answered.[63]

Morgan divided his book into four parts: (1) The growth of intelligence through inventions and discoveries; (2) The idea of government; (3) The growth of the idea of the family; (4) The growth of the idea of property. In Part One, successive periods of human history are described: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Morgan also indicates these periods as "successive arts of subsistence" and he proposes subdivisions for each period. Interesting is that Morgan writes that "each of these periods has a distinct culture and exhibits a mode of life more or less special and peculiar to itself". He, furthermore, states that developments in food production and technology are the basis of changes in social relations.[64] Part two contains the highest number of chapters to illustrate the complex evolution of kinship systems to government by creating descent groups and then social structures like tribes, confederations, and political societies. His basic thesis with respect to the evolution of government is that the earliest form of government is founded upon persons and personal relations. Morgan gives numerous examples from his own fieldwork and from the questionnaires he sent to all remote corners of the world to illustrate varieties and developments in this form of government. The second form of government is founded upon territory and property and can be called a state. He traces back this form of political organisation to Ancient Greece.[65]

Morgan's thesis that human evolution proceeded from advances in social organisation based on changes in food production and technology and that social progress was correlated with specific changes in family structure was highly inspiring to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.[66]

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1895) believed that Morgan's *Ancient Society* supported their theory of social evolution. Marx analysed human societies in terms of the conditions of production. He developed, together with his colleague Engels, an

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[63] Lewis H. Morgan *Ancient Society. Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (1877). *Preface by the Author.* p. 1 Retrieved from internet 19-12-2007: http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/morgan-lewis/ancient-society/ch26.htm

[64] Lewis H. Morgan (1877), *Part One: Chapter One: Ethnical Periods,* p.2.

[65] Lewis H. Morgan (1877), *Part Two: Growth of the Idea of Government. Chapters One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Nine, Ten.* (The chapters of the internet version of Morgan's book are numbered each time beginning with 1.)

[66] R. Jon McGee & Richard L. Warms (1996)*.* p. 8; *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol. 8 (1994), p. 321; Thomas H. Eriksen & Finn S. Nielsen*.* (2001) , p. 19.

evolutionary theory with respect to human history and he focused on, and gave primacy to the analysis of the material conditions of life. The first book where Marx and Engels included in their political writings an analysis of the evolution of human history and of "pre-capitalist social formations" is *The German Ideology* (1846).[67]

> *Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to **produce** their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life. (…) This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of expressing their life, a definite **mode of life** on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with **what** they produce and with **how** they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.[68]*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels use the word "consciousness" with respect to the system of meaning, ideas, opinions, and beliefs, through which the world is apprehended. Like other evolutionists, the two political philosophers believed that history followed a specific, scientifically knowable path. This path was tied to modes of production and the necessary forms of property associated with each of these following each other in historical order.[69] In *The German Ideology* they sketch the sequence of pre-capitalistic forms of ownership as follows: (1) tribal ownership (subdivisions: hunting and fishing; the rearing of animals; simple agriculture); (2) ancient communal and state ownership; (3) feudal or state ownership. The idea that private property and exploitation are just two sides of the same coin is a central proposition in this sketch of human history.[70]

It is important to realise that Marx and Engels described pre-capitalist societies not as an aim in itself but to show how capitalism and its institutions have been produced by history. Moreover, and interesting in the perspective of our explorations in the history of the conception of culture, the two philosophers and social activists wanted to show how beliefs and values which organise society are produced by the history of the successive ways of life.

> *The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental*

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[67] Published in a complete version only in the 1930s.
[68] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels *The German Ideology* (1846/1970), p. 42. Original markings in the quoted text.
[69] Maurice Bloch *Marxism and Anthropology* (1983), pp. 24-26, 29.
[70] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (1846/1970), pp. 43-46; Maurice Bloch. (1983), pp. 24-26.

> *production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas etc. (…).*[71]

With these statements, Marx and Engels come close to a description and understanding of culture as a system of meanings which is related in a very complex way to the materialist base of society. Both political philosophers seem to follow the German tradition of distinguishing between economy and politics on the one hand, and culture on the other hand (see below). Later on, Marx posed that society consists of infrastructure and superstructure, respectively referring to the material resources and the division of labour, and the ideational systems: religion, law, and ideology.

> *In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, one the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.*[72]

Karl Marx elaborated further his ideas about pre-capitalist societies (modes of production) in *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (1858), part of a series of notebooks titled *Foundations (Grundrisse).* These notebooks were written to prepare his main work *Capital (Das Kapital)* published in 1867. In *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations,* Marx tried to understand what kind of social relations and institutions exist in societies not moulded by capitalism. He analysed social progress in pre-capitalist societies in terms of the interaction between man and nature. This can be illustrated with terms like social division of labour, the forces of production (land, technology to master nature), the production of surplus, property and class struggle. Marx also explored specific pre-capitalist social formations in Europe and mentioned a Germanic and a Slavonic mode of production. But these references are rather vague. The introduction of the Asiatic mode of production was more innovative. Marx did not believe anymore - like in *The German Ideology* - that there was only one scheme of evolution which could be applied to the whole history of mankind. He took into account that historical development might have followed several different paths in different places. Most evolutionist thinkers about the history of man believed that peoples had to go from one stage to another through a fixed sequence of stages.[73]

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[71] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels (1846/1970), p. 47.

[72] Karl Marx *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) Edited by M. Dobb and translated by S.W. Ryazankaya. (1970), pp. 20-21.

[73] Eric J. Hobsbawm *Introduction* to Marx Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations (1964), pp. 11-12, 32-33, 43; Maurice Bloch (1983), p. 37.

Marx and Engels were eager to base their theories about the historical development of capitalism also on the findings of the rising "cultural sciences" Ethnology and Anthropology. With respect to "primitive society" their thinking was very much influenced by Lewis Morgan's book *Ancient Society*. Marx died before he could publish a book on this subject. Engels used his notes and based his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) on Morgan's main work. Engels' book basically is a presentation of Morgan's *Ancient Society*, certainly when the course of historical development of the family and kinship systems is explained; chapter two of Engels' book. In this chapter, the origin of private property is related to the historical development of monogamy in the marriage rules. Engels also used the work of Bachofen to illustrate the dramatic changes in marriage rules and the rights of women by the introduction of herding and agriculture.[74] An interesting aspect of Engels' book is the linking of changes in sexual relations and marriage rules to wider economic contexts and the development of political structures. Also with respect to the evolution of state structures Engels follows Morgan.[75]

Most of the above mentioned work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels was not published during their life and, therefore, was not influential in the nineteenth century. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that they became an important source of inspiration to anthropologists who were critical about the state of the art in the discipline at that time.

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[74] Friedrich Engels *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884/1972), pp. 95-120, 138; Maurice Bloch (1983), pp. 54-57.
[75] Friedrich Engels. (1884/1972), p. 147, chapters 3 and 4.

III   Human History as a Mosaic of Cultures

The evolutionist approach was contested by some scholars who preferred to focus on the diversity of human societies and tried to explain the variety of existing cultures. In Germany, intellectuals became very interested in building up a history of mankind by studying customs and institutions in their own German cultural history and in ethnographic literature. According to George Stocking Jr. - a distinguished historian of nineteenth-century Anthropology – the term "culture" was used in Germany during the period when in France and Scotland the term "civilization" received its modern meaning. At times these were used as synonyms, but usually "civilization" was associated with material progress and social organisation, while "culture" mostly was referring to moral and aesthetic manifestations of the human spirit. The specific character of German thought on human cultural development goes back to Johann Gottfried Herder according to Stocking.[76]

As is described in chapter one of this study, Herder advanced his statements about cultural pluralism, historical specificity, and cultural incommensurability as a critical response to the homogenizing tendencies in the work of French and British philosophers who saw humanity as progressing toward civilization. Herder accepted the basic unity of mankind, but saw it expressed in difference rather than sameness. This vision dominated German thinking about culture and the emergence of German Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology as scientific disciplines in the second half of the nineteenth century.[77] It is important to state here that the rise and further development of German Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in this period became very influential in the shaping of modern Anthropology and the thinking about culture in general. This influence is obscured by the twentieth-century dominance of Anglo-American and French anthropological theorising and by the floating away of German Anthropology with the drift of Nazi movement after the First World War.[78] Historians of the science of Anthropology like George Stocking, Adam Kuper, Matti Bunzl and Klaus-Peter Koepping have revived the interest in this almost forgotten German tradition.[79] Like George Stocking, Matti Bunzl mentions Johann Gottfried Herder as

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[76] Georg W. Stocking Jr. *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), p. 20.

[77] In Germany , the terms Ethnology and Anthropology stand for cultural anthropology and physical anthropology respectively. See: Matti Bunzl & H. Glenn Penny *Introduction: Rethinking German Anthropology, Colonialism and Race.* In: H. Glenn Penny & Matti Bunzl (eds.) "Worldly Provincialism. German Anthropology in the Age of Empire" (2003), p. 1. In this section the terms ethnology and anthropology will be used in the sense of cultural anthropology.

[78] Matti Bunzl & H. Glenn Penny "Introduction: Rethinking German Anthropology, Colonialism and Race". In: H. Glenn Penny & Matti Bunzl (eds.) *Worldly Provincialism. German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (2003), pp. 2, 11.

the most important eighteenth-century source of inspiration to German Ethnology and Anthropology. However, he refers to the brothers Von Humboldt as other important nineteenth-century stimulating personalities to the development of a new science of culture. Adolf Bastian is an interesting representative of the German Anthropology of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The brothers Von Humboldt

Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1767 – 1835) work encompasses the areas of philosophy, literature, linguistics, history, anthropology and political thought as well as statesmanship. During his education, he was introduced to the principles of the French Enlightenment, but he was deeply impressed by the critical views of Kant and Herder on the universal history of mankind. Following Herder, he advocated the intensive study of a particular nation in its political, religious, and domestic aspects in order to grasp its national character. According to Wilhelm von Humboldt, each individual *Volk* (people) had a distinct character which was expressed in the totality of its outward manifestations: traditions, customs, religion, language, and art. He allocated the term *Kultur* (culture) to the great artistic and literary achievements of individuals and peoples. He intended to present sound evidence for his scientific statements by proving them via rigorous procedures, like a natural scientist does for his statements about nature. He tried to find regularities underlying the variety of human existence by the inductive approach of the historian. Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed a comparative anthropology encompassing the entire world, but he focused himself on studying what he called the leading peoples and their historical trajectories. On the one hand, he stated that the characters of peoples could not be measured by an external standard because of their unique characteristics, on the other hand he posed that some peoples reached a higher state of self-realisation that could serve as a model for other people by formulating an ideal of spiritual education (*Bildungsideal*). Von Humboldt not only influenced the development of Anthropology and historiography, but also the rise of "folk psychology" *(Völkerpsychology)* in the second half of the nineteenth century. The object of this new discipline was the working of the spirit or genius of a people (*Volksgeist*). As already mentioned in this study (see page 15), this idea originated from Herder and Humboldt saw the spirit of a people as the unifying psychological essence shared by all members of a people and the driving force of its historical trajectory. Von Humboldt also pioneered in the comparative study of non-Indo-European languages. He thought that language was the defining element in human life and that studying languages would lead to an understanding of humanity in all its aspects. In this context, he studied the Basque language, American

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[79] George W. Stocking Jr. *Victorian Anthropology* (1987); George W. Stocking Jr. *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition (*1996)*;* Adam Kuper *Culture: the Anthropologists' Account* (1999); H. Glenn Penny & Matti Bunzl (eds.) "*Worldly Provincialism. German Anthropology in the Age of Empire"* (2003); Matti Bunzl *Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition. From* Volksgeist *and* Nationalcharakter *to an Anthropological Concept of Culture.* (1996); Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundations of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983)*.*

Indian languages and Southeast Asian languages. All empirical investigation of languages culminated in the analysis of the relation between language and national character.[80]

Wilhelm's younger brother Alexander (1769 – 1859) developed a deep interest in natural sciences and after his basic education at home together with his brother, he studied mining in Freiburg. After several years of working in the German mining sector, he succeeded in setting up an expedition to the Spanish colonies in Latin America. He travelled from 1799 to 1804 and produced an extensive work on American geography, zoology, botany and he wrote down numerous ethnological observations. With this work, he was at once one of the leading naturalists of his time. Even more successful was his five-volume masterpiece *Kosmos* published in the period 1845-62. His scientific method to analyse nature was induction and reasoning. He started with a thorough description of the physical reality of nature or, in other words, "with the physical history of the world and its physical geography, combined with a description of the regions of space and the bodies occupying them".[81] Alexander von Humboldt explicitly drew the analogy between his approach and the historical sciences. His main concern was natural history and physical geography, but he referred many times to the anthropological aspects of his findings. His travel reports are full of demographic and economic data and contain some descriptions of cultural phenomena.[82]

Adolf Bastian (1826 – 1905)

The work of the brothers Von Humboldt influenced the development of the natural and the historical sciences in Germany. In particular, the emphasis on the relationship between geography, history and anthropology was inspiring for many intellectuals. Adolf Bastian was one of them. He studied empirical data to underpin philosophical theories on the development of human history. Adolf Bastian was educated in law, biology and medicine and in 1851 he became a ship's doctor. Since then, while travelling around the world, he devoted his life to the study of the history of mankind. He spent more than twenty years of his life abroad studying different cultures and collected an impressive number of ethnographic artefacts. During his travels, he tried to document the diversity of human life through empirical research and direct observation. His extensive three-volume work *Der Mensch in der Geschichte* ("Man in History" - 1860*)* is dedicated to Alexander von Humboldt, who read drafts of the text just before his death in 1859.[83] Bastian played an important role in the development of German Ethnology; he became the president of the association of geography and, together with his colleague Rudolf Virchow, who was like Bastian, a medical doctor and a leading anthropologist, he founded the Museum for Ethnology in Berlin based on his own collection of ethnografica. Bastian was influential during his age and even

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[80] Matti Bunzl *Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition. From* Volksgeist *and* Nationalcharakter *to an Anthropological Concept of Culture* (1996), pp. 19-20, 22, 28, 29, 32.

[81] Quoted in Matti Bunzl *Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition. From* Volksgeist *and* Nationalcharakter *to an Anthropological Concept of Culture* (1996), p. 38.

[82] Matti Bunzl (1996), p. 40.

[83] Matti Bunzl (1996), p. 48.

anticipated some trends of thinking about culture in the twentieth century, like cultural relativism. He is remembered as one of the pioneers of the concept of the "psychic unity of mankind", the idea that all humans share a basic mental framework. According to this theory, the cultural traits, beliefs, folklore and myths of different ethnic groups are essentially alike. They differ only in form because of the geographical environment. Thus, all humans share certain elementary patterns of thought, so-called "elementary ideas" (*Elementärgedanken*). Geographic location and historical background create different local elaborations of the "elementary ideas"; these he called "folk ideas" (*Völkergedanken*). He also formulated the concept of "geographical provinces", a homogeneous environment, conditioning a relatively uniform cultural setting and producing "folk ideas". Bastian, furthermore, envisaged a connection between psychology and cultural history by making ethnology the basis for the finding of psychological laws of the mental development of groups in diverse environments. These laws could also serve to unravel the complex culture history of ancient and modern civilizations.[84]

> *Our aim is therefore to start with the simplest layers of man's social thought, namely those elementary ideas of tribal societies which appear in each, albeit veiled in historically and geographically inspired clothing as folk ideas. Such ideas constantly recur and are open to constant rearrangement by and in each culture.[85]*

Folk ideas are the expressions of the collective consciousness of an ethnic group. The folk ideas are, so to say, the world views of a particular group, a tribe, or a community of several tribal groups in a particular geographical area. According to Klaus-Peter Koepping, for Bastian the term "idea" encompasses not only ideas and representations of oral and written language, like poetry, myths, legends and historical accounts, but also actions, thoughts, customs, rituals, legal codes including customary law, material objects, feelings and attitudes to life. Or, in other words, the term "idea" covers a whole world view, a patterned way of life or what Edward Tylor called "culture".[86]

Folk ideas are the visible and therefore the primary objects of ethnological research. The material objects collected by Bastian could be seen as one of the forms of expression of these folk ideas, just like - for example - myths and legends.

Bastian was strongly influenced by Herder's views on the uniqueness of ethnic groups and their specific spirit expressed in language which permeates such ethnic groups. He rejected the unilinear evolutionist idea of progress:

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[84] Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983), p. 12; The New Encyclopedia Britannica, (1994) Vol. I, *Adolf Bastian,* p. 950.

[85] Adolf Bastian "The Folk Idea as Paradigm of Ethnology". In: Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983), p. 172

[86] Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983), p. 30.

> *No factual evidence exists for the postulate of an uninterrupted and constant progression in the evolution of culture, a regularly ascending line from lower to higher stages (…).*[87]

However, Bastian, also believed in the psychic unity of mankind and his research was aimed at assembling an index or statistic of ideas which would show that the same number of psychological elements circulates in regular and uniform rotation in the heads of all people. In a way, Bastian's thinking on culture was contradictory. On the one hand, he attempted to demonstrate that all cultures have a common origin, from which they have branched off in various directions. On the other hand, he was strongly rooted in the German tradition of research which focusses on the specificity of human cultures as inspired by Herder.[88]

Also, Bastian's ideas about political and state power with respect to the social life of people seem somewhat contradictory. According to Koepping, Bastian, on the one hand, blamed the ruling elites throughout history for keeping the masses in ignorance and submission. On the other hand, he was a defender of private property and the power of the state and he considered revolutions as a derangement of the collective mind. He looked forward to an era of a shared natural morality grounded on scientific principles that could guide the state as well as its individual subjects. However, considering material objects imbued with ideas he also was looking to weapons as expressions of underlying elementary ideas. He, for example, was also well aware of the power of the priestly class in religions which aims at preserving the foundations of the social order. About religion he wrote:

> *In the religious ideas which were developed over centuries, we can always see the specific genius or folk character of a people, because these religious ideas bear the direct imprint of a people's mental activity.*[89]

He referred to the structural relations between the state and the "priestly class" in many societies which led to the protection of those values which were considered essential by the state, like property rights, state ceremonies, along with the preservation of fertility and manipulation of sexual desire. Bastian, for example, identified many historical and current cases of disciplining activities by the state with respect to the sexual behaviour of the members of a society. "When the state, in fostering moral decency, began to consider fertility symbols, it had the rites for procreation moved from the market-place into the inner chambers of temples.[90]

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[87] Adolf Bastian "On Cultural Evolution". In: Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983), p. 167.

[88] Adolf Bastian "On the Similarity of Mental Operations, Primitive and Civilized". In: Klaus-Peter Koepping (1983), p. 180; George W. Stocking Jr. *Race, Culture, and Evolution. Essays in the History of Anthropology* (1968), p.152; Thomas Hylland Eriksen & Finn Sivert Nielsen (2001), p. 21 ; Matti Bunzl (1996), p. 49.

[89] Adolf Bastian "The Emergence of Diverse World Views". In: Klaus-Peter Koepping (1983), p. 189.

[90] Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983), pp.97-98; Adolf Bastian "The Emergence of Diverse World Views"*.* In: Klaus-Peter Koepping (1983), pp. 191-192, 211-214.

Adolf Bastian was a prominent representative of German nineteenth-century thinking about culture. Instead of the creation of evolutionary hierarchical models, these scholars promoted worldwide field research that would support the thesis of the diversity of human cultures. At the same time, they wanted to define those aspects of human life that were truly universal. It was a pre-eminently liberal and anti-racist way of thinking which was strongly opposed to biologically based theories of human differences. During the last decade of the century, shifting national and international contexts caused a transformation from this liberal approach to a more narrow concern with the specific characteristics of a nation. This nationalistic approach was popular in intellectual circles promoting ideas about the connections between culture, language, people, and territory. This intellectual orientation was adopted by political activists, who were involved in struggles for recognition of regional and ethnic identities and were even striving for independence. In fact, these nationalist movements emphasized the importance of a nation-based approach of the history of cultures, while the anthropology based on Herder's legacy focused on the immaterial and spiritual aspects of cultural phenomena.

Culture and nationalism

In nineteenth century Germany, there was more than only the scientific desire and need to underpin philosophical discourses about culture and civilization with scientific research methods. Indeed, on the one hand, scholars were elaborating on the Enlightenment ideas about the history of mankind; on the other hand they were using and testing new methodologies to investigate human societies. However, there were also non-scientific developments that affected scientific thinking about culture and human history. The political climate in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century was quite favourable to a critical review of Enlightenment thinking, in particular its French version. The French Revolution of 1789, the Terror, and in particular the Napoleonic expansion and occupation of European countries not only evoked violent anti-French political reaction but also put the intellectual work of the *philosophes* in a bad light. All kinds of protagonists of anti-Enlightenment ideas, a varied whole of rebellious responses to the straightjacket of rationalism laid the foundation for a relativist mode of thinking. Herder's first efforts to analyse the language and the way of life of each people in terms of expressions of its inner genius and its characteristic *Volksgeist* (spirit of the people) were broadly accepted in Germany, and later also in other European countries. In some intellectual circles, the German style of philosophizing in terms of cultural differentiation transformed to a nationalistic anti-French reaction. Benedict Anderson explains in his fascinating book *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991) the cultural roots of nationalism and he refers to the increasing interest in the study of languages as an important factor for the rise of nationalism in Europe. There were numerous intellectual associations all over the continent and Britain studying folk tales, epic traditional poetry and folk songs and these associations were also busy with publishing grammars and dictionaries, as well as journals promoting the standardization of national languages and literature. Anderson even talks about a lexicographic revolution setting fire into smouldering nationalism. Whereas nineteenth-century German ethnologists and anthropologists were interested in studying the plurality of

German dialects and cultures in their own polycentric nation – besides their interest in exotic cultures - several East-European intellectuals combined the study of the cultural development of the different peoples living in the Austrian Empire with nationalist political mobilization. These politically interested intellectuals used the term culture to refer to the inherent link between person and nation. In Anderson's terms: the inextricable alliance of humans with a nation as "an imagined political community".[91] Initially, the rediscovery of vernaculars, oral literature and folklore caused a wave of romantic love for the pure, simple and innocent peasant population all over Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century. It was a pre-eminently cultural movement without much in the way of political intentions. Very gradually this cultural movement was taken over by political activists in several regions. From the 1860s onwards, rapid industrialization led to intensifying competition between European states and the European superpowers France, Germany and Britain were searching for new markets in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Emphasizing essential national characteristics went hand in hand with the political ambition to expand economic and cultural influence all over the world. An aggressive imperialism strengthened, on the one hand, national pride and, on the other hand, mutilated or even destroyed local communities and cultures overseas.[92] The anti-imperialistic ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment-thinkers were suffocated in nineteenth-century ideas of the superiority of European cultures.

It is difficult to define the term nationalism because of its highly emotional and normative loading and its strong including and excluding force. In general, nationalism can be described as the belief that everyone by nature belongs to a people and that, therefore, one should place the power and the welfare of one's own people and country above all other social relationships and above all other countries and peoples. The question: "what exactly is a people?" has led to endless debates in which factors like language, culture and historical experiences have always played a central role. Moreover, a strong "we-feeling" is appealing to basic sentiments. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the universalistic interest of Enlightenment-thinkers in the ways of life of other peoples was transformed, placing a specific attention on the differences between the peoples. Herder's metaphor about people as living organisms with their own inner genius was further elaborated and popularized. His references to language as expressions of the spirit of the people became an important criterion to define the inner affinity of a community. Language and spirit of the people gradually became considered as essential characteristics. Nationalistic oriented intellectuals tended increasingly to the defining of specific communities and distinguished them from other communities. A "living organism" became classified according to its language, defining people as German, Roman, Slavonic, and so on.[93]

The idea of culture as a term to describe the nature of man and his social environment in a historical perspective was not only narrowed down to the classifying of peoples according to the historical development of their language and the related specific spirit. The

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[91] Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism* (1983), pp. 5-6, 12, 36, 70-76.

[92] H.W. von der Dunk *De verdwijnende hemel. Over de cultuur van Europa in de twintigste eeuw* (The Disappearing Heaven. About the Culture of Europe in the Twentieth Century) (2000), p. 32.

[93] H.W. von der Dunk (2000), pp. 18-20.

conception of culture became also increasingly mixed up with idea of the nation, and later on with nationalism as a political ideology. The word nation originates from the Roman languages and originally means birth and descent. This meaning changed in the course of time and in the seventeenth century the word was used to describe a more or less autonomous group like in Charles Montesquieu's book "The Spirit of Law" where he, for example, refers to savage peoples living in "scattered nations."[94] The term, thus, described a way of life and not so much a territorial unit. In this respect, the word "nation" resembles the word *Volk* (people) in the Germanic languages. According to Eric Hobsbawm, the concept of "nation" received a new political meaning since the 1830s, when increasingly the terms "nation", "people", and "state" became interchangeable.[95] The political reconstruction of Europe agreed upon by the victorious conservative governments at the Congress of Vienna (1814/15) after the Napoleonic wars strongly influenced nationalist sentiments. However, the initial romantic nationalistic ideas about peoples, vernaculars, "national" languages and nations, developed slowly but surely, into models, concepts or blueprints of "the" independent national state – imagined realities in the words of Anderson.[96] The idea of the merger of the nation and the state became an important theme in new nationalist political movements. Even German anthropologists began to move from a humanistic perspective on the plurality of cultures to a more narrow concern with the specificity of nations in the last decades of the nineteenth century. They began to engage in debates which lead to a fundamental rearticulation of anthropological theory. They embraced increasingly a "people specific" or "national character" orientation inspired by the various struggles for freedom inside Europe and in Latin America. German anthropologists turned gradually to a more limited mechanical concern for location and the comparison of distinct cultural groups. Moreover, they became increasingly involved in debates on colonial politics.[97]

The idea of the nation as a well-demarcated community is an ideological construction and, by definition, this construct is linked to political power because it brings together a cultural group and the state. A nation is pre-eminently a cultural concept and nationalism originated as a cultural and social movement which coupled the cultural (or ethnic) group with a state. From the beginning of the rise of nationalist movements, the cultural component was merged with the political. Ernest Gellner in his famous book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) even starts with stating that "Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."[98] Emphasizing the political aspect of nationalism, however, cannot hide its cultural character.

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[94] See above, chapter I, page 9–10.

[95] Eric Hobsbawm *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality* (1990), pp. 18-23

[96] Benedict Anderson (1983), pp. 80-81.

[97] Matti Bunzl & H. Glenn Penny "Introduction: Rethinking German Anthropology, Colonialism and Race". In: H. Glenn Penny & Matti Bunzl (eds.) *Worldly Provincialism. German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (2003), pp. 17-19.

[98] Ernest Gellner *Nations and Nationalism* (1983/2006), p.1.

IV   The Birth of a Science of Culture

In this lively century of discourses about human history as an evolutionary scheme, a mosaic of cultures, or as a conglomerate of national cultures a new science of culture   emerged. The rise of this science of culture was part of a broader scientific development during the nineteenth century in which several social sciences demarcated research fields as a consequence of a gradual redefinition of the methods and intellectual content of social knowledge.   Initially, natural sciences and the rising social sciences were not sharply separated. It was still a matter of an overlapping problematic, in particular with respect to what was indicated as biological and social thinking. Theodore Porter, a historian specialized in the history of sciences refers to scholars like Jean Baptiste Lamarck, Charles Darwin, Henry Spencer, and Alexander von Humboldt who represent a large group of intellectuals who investigated nature and society as interconnected fields of study.[99] Moreover, present-day historians who study the origins of the different modern social sciences like sociology, psychology, ethnology and anthropology, political sciences and economy with references to founding fathers in the nineteenth century mostly discuss the same scholars: Charles Montesquieu, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Karl Marx. They all mention celebrities like Ėmile Durkheim and Max Weber either as nineteenth-century sociologists or marking the transition to modern twentieth-century social sciences. This claiming of the same founding fathers by the different (academic) social disciplines shows that the delineation of social science indeed was hardly a point of discussion during most of the nineteenth century.[100]

The rise of the science of culture can be initially characterized as a science of man and its evolution from nature to civilization. Gradually, the idea of the variety of cultures also enters scientific discourses about the history of mankind.

The rise of Anthropology

In the midst of the emerging social sciences, there gradually developed a specific discipline called Ethnology, Anthropology (social, cultural) or *Völkerkunde* focusing on the history of mankind. In the capitals of the powerful European nations, special scientific institutes were

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[99] Theodore M. Porter "The Social Sciences". In: David Cahan (ed.), *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences. Writing the History of Nineteenth-Century Science* (2003), pp. 254, 267-268, 268-271; David Cahan "Looking at Nineteenth-Century Science: An Introduction". In: David Cahan (ed.) (2003), pp. 4, 10.

[100] See for example Timothy Raison (ed.) *The Founding Fathers of Social Science.* (1969); Raymond Aron *Main Currents in Sociological Thought I and II* 1965-67; Theodore M. Porter & Dorothy Ross (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Science. Vol. 7. The Modern Social Sciences* (2003).

established to stimulate and finance research and to initiate debates about those research results. In 1859 the *Societė d'Anthropology de Paris,* in 1863 the Anthropological Society of London, and in 1869 the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* (Berlin Society of Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory) were established. Each institute published its own journal and published books were translated. In Germany, even regional governments established institutes in, for example, Leipzig, Hamburg, and Munich.[101] According to Adam Kuper, four broad research programmes were set up by these institutes. Although the programmes were designed separately, they also had a great deal in common. Researchers generally read the same literature and consulted the same travel reports. In some cases institutes could finance research activities or they could acquire subsidies from governments. Summarizing, there was a programme on the origins of humanity, on the differences of mentality reflecting cultural variation (mainly studied by the Germans), on the progress in human rationality (among others Tylor; see below), and a programme on the origins of civil institutions (among others, Main, McLennan, and Morgan; see chapter three).[102] Apart from the establishment of these institutes ethnological museums were also set up to exhibit collected artefacts. For example, the founders of the Berlin Society of Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory, Rudolf Virchow and Adolf Bastian, established the Royal Museum for Ethnology in Berlin in 1886. The two institutes were closely linked. Moreover, members of the Berlin Society of Anthropology initiated *Völkerkunde* (Ethnology) as an independent discipline into the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Berlin.[103] Adolf Bastian became the lecturer of the first full-scale course in Ethnology in the 1880s. Later on he was also appointed honorary professor. Although he did not excel as a teacher, he could enthuse students and during his lecturing period he recruited the first generation of trained professional ethnologists. Among these young professionals was Franz Boas who became one of the founding fathers of modern anthropology.[104]

In the 1880s, courses in Anthropology or Ethnology were being offered not only at the University of Berlin, but also at universities in France, Britain and the United States. Although the subject could still cover an immense range of issues, it was gradually accepted that anthropologists started more and more to focus on the study of non-western societies and people to discover the origins of mankind or to describe their cultures because they were about to disappear.[105]

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[101] Adam Kuper "Anthropology" In: Theodore M. Porter & Dorothy Ross (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Science. Vol. 7. The Modern Social Sciences* (2003), pp. 354-255; Woodruff D. Smith *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920* (1991), pp. 100-102.

[102] Adam Kuper (2003) *,* pp. 356-357.

[103] *Völkerkunde* was replacing Ethnology as the general term for Cultural Anthropology. Woodruff D. Smith (1991)*,* p.101.

[104] Woodruff D. Smith (1991)*,* pp. 102, 104; Klaus-Peter Koepping *Adolf Bastian and the Psychic Unity of Mankind. The Foundation of Anthropology in Nineteenth Century Germany* (1983), pp. 11, 118.

[105] Adam Kuper (2003), pp. 354-355.

Founding fathers of modern Anthropology: Edward Burnett Tylor and Franz Boas

Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917)
Looking back on the nineteenth century with its discussions and debates about culture and civilization, it is striking that there was not a strongly felt need to define the two terms in a more exact way. Apparently, philosophers and social scientists understood each other without major problems when using broad and undefined conceptions. It was only in 1871 that the English social scientist and anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor formulated a clear definition of the concept of culture for the first time. Tylor knew the work of German ethnographers like Adolf Bastian and welded together elements of German, French (in particular Auguste Comte) and Scottish thinking about the historical development of human society to what he called a "science of culture".[106] The first sentences of his main work *Primitive Culture* (1871) are as follows:

> *Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is 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. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind, in so far as it is capable of being investigated on general principles, is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action. On the one hand, the uniformity which so largely pervades civilization may be ascribed, in great measure, to the uniform action of uniform causes: while on the other hand its various grades may be regarded as stages of development or evolution, each the outcome of previous history, and about to do its proper part in shaping the history of the future.[107]*

In the opening chapter of *Primitive Culture,* he also makes clear his ambition to establish a positive and empirical study of human history by formulating a definition of what culture is and, at the same time, basing the concept on an underlying evolutionary order.

> *In carrying on the great task of rational ethnography, the investigation of the causes which have produced the phenomena of culture, and of the laws to which they are subordinate, it is desirable to work out as systematically as possible a scheme of evolution of this culture along its many lines.[108]*

For the first time, the terms culture and civilization are equated. Civilization was for Tylor, like most other evolutionist thinkers, the highest stage of human development which began in savagery and moved to barbarism. His purpose was the establishment of a progressive sequence of stages in the evolution of mental phenomena. *Primitive Culture* is a contribution into the reconstruction of the mental, intellectual evolution of mankind and Tylor analysed cultural phenomena in terms of progressive development.[109]

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[106] Ton Lemaire (1976), p.64.
[107] E.B. Tylor *Primitive Culture* (1871/1958) I, p.1.
[108] E.B. Tylor, (1871/1958), I, pp. 20-21.
[109] George W. Stocking Jr. *Race, Culture, and Evolution. Essays in the History of Anthropology* (1968), pp. 73, 79.

Just like the work of other evolutionists, Tylor's scientific reconstruction of the mental progress of man is based on at least two hypothesises.[110] First, he accepted the idea of the "psychic unity of mankind" which was put forward in such a strong way by the German ethnologist Adolf Bastian. This principle was the foundation of Tylor's proposition of the cultural unity of mankind and the evolutionary and progressive view on the successive stages of civilization. Differences in culture express the different stages in development, the degree in cultural development. Secondly, he stated that the existing primitive cultures of his time could be compared with the cultures of pre-history. This comparative method was used by most evolutionist social scientists of the nineteenth century. Tylor proposed his own interpretation of this method by reconstructing earlier stages of cultural evolution by studying "survivals". He writes:

> *Among evidence aiding us to trace the course which the civilization of the world has actually followed, is that great class of facts to denote which I have found convenient to introduce the term "survivals". These are processes, customs, opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved.[111]*

Tylor believed that virtually everything in contemporary society that did not have a function was a survival from a previous stage of cultural evolution. He applied the comparative method to reconstruct the outlines of development in the major areas of spiritual culture and thus arguing that general laws of culture could be derived from the study of survivals.[112]

> *On the strength of these survivals, it becomes possible to declare that the civilization of the people they are observed among must have been derived from an earlier state, in which the proper home and meaning of these things are to be formed; and thus collections of these things are to be worked as mines of historic knowledge.[113]*

Tylor presented several chapters full of examples of survivals in European civilization and he was continuously arguing that these surviving forms or relics from the past are helpful in reconstructing the course of man's development. Although he certainly was interested in technology and the material aspects of culture, Tylor collected mainly survivals from the mental history of man. In the second part of his book, he pointed to the phenomenon of animism (the belief in spiritual beings innate in all natural objects) as the oldest form of religion. There he outlined a developmental sequence of religion that began with animism, evolving into polytheism, and finally developing to the highest form of religion, monotheism.[114]

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[110] Ton Lemaire (1976), p. 69.
[111] E.B. Tylor (1871/1958), I, p.16.
[112] R. Jon McGee & Richard L. Warns *Anthropological Theory. An Introductory History* (1996), p. 7;George W. Stocking Jr. *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), p.162.
[113] E.B. Tylor (1871/1958), I, p. 71

Edward Burnett Tylor can be seen as an important synthesizer of ethnological knowledge of his time. Because of his version of a science of culture he is considered by many social scientists as one of the founding fathers of the science of Anthropology. Other than a journey to Mexico in the 1850s, Tylor never did field research. He did not believe it was necessary for him as an anthropologist to be involved in data collection – the work of ethnologists - but to compile, organise and classify the data. He established Anthropology as an academic discipline when he became the first Professor of Anthropology at Oxford University in 1896. However, while characterizing Tylor as a synthesizer of different "schools" of (evolutionist) thinking about the history of mankind he also has to be mentioned as a scholar who had almost nothing to say about the factor of power in the development of culture. He only referred indirectly to power aspects in his extensive discourses about the stages of development.

> *The principal criteria of classification of civilization are the absence or presence, high or low development, of the industrial arts, especially metal-working,(…), the extend of scientific knowledge, (…) the condition of religious belief and ceremony, the degree of social and political organization, and so forth.[115]*

Describing survivals in culture, elements such as witchcraft, magic powers and occult sciences, Tylor is not investigating the possibility of the use of these cultural phenomena to discipline groups of people, although he recognised the force of religion and its priests. He clearly did not adopt the statements about the power of a "priest class" by his German colleague Adolf Bastian. He simply stated that magic does not have its origin in fraud and he just went on with reconstructing the origin of this particular element of culture. Apparently, Tylor not only appreciated the German term culture and equated it with civilization; he also followed the tendency of some German scholars studying culture to de-emphasize the role of power, politics, and governing bodies in the shaping of human civilization. In this way, he taught a whole generation of students of Anthropology without preparing them to pay attention to questions of power and politics in culture.

Tylor's "classical" definition of culture continued to be the most current one for more than thirty years. Apparently, there was no great need to debate his definition. However, the dominant paradigm of the evolutionist character of culture was not shared by everyone engaged in the historical studies of human cultural development. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a shift occurred in the conception of culture. This reorientation can be followed quite clearly via the work of Franz Boas.

Franz Boas (1858 – 1942)
Franz Boas was born in Germany and studied physics and geography at the universities of Heidelberg and Bonn, before completing a doctorate in physical geography at Kiel in 1881. Through his studies in geography he was also introduced to historical geography and this

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[114] E.B. Tylor *Primitive Culture. Part II Religion in primitive culture* (1871/1958; George W. Stocking Jr *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), p. 192; Ton Lemaire (1976), p.72.
[115] E.B. Tylor (1871/1958), I, pp. 26-27.

discipline inspired him to learn more about the interrelation between humans and their environment. One of the motives to undertake an expedition to the Arctic in 1883-84 was to investigate physiological and psychological mechanism such as the relationships between situational factors and the perceptions of people in the rather uncomplicated environment of Baffinland in northern Canada, the natural habitat of Eskimos. In his diary, some of the later formulated statements about culture are expressed:

> *Is it not a beautiful custom that these "savages" suffer all deprivation in common, but in happy times when someone has brought back booty from the hunt, all join in eating and drinking.(…) The more I see of their customs, the more I realize that we have no right to look down on them. (…) We have no right to blame them for their forms and superstitions which may seem ridiculous to us. (…) As a thinking person, for me the most important result of this trip lies in the strengthening of my point of view that the idea of a "cultured" individual is merely relative and that a person's worth should be judged by his "civilization of the heart".* [116]

Striking in this passage is the strongly relativistic view on his own cultural background comparing this with the culture of the Eskimos. Later on in his career, this view will be formulated in terms of a cultural relativistic position. Boas started, according to George Stocking, a journey from physics to ethnology. His affinity with the tradition of historical geography impelled him toward a holistic, affective understanding of the relationship of man and the natural world. At the same time, he developed a life-long firm belief in the importance of an empirical approach to the study of human behaviour and an aversion to premature generalisations.[117] On his return to Germany, Franz Boas became very influenced by Adolf Bastian, serving as his assistant at the Royal Ethnographic Museum in Berlin. Boas' work became "folk-psychology" – observing the psychic life of each *Volk* (people) - like Bastian's comparative psychology of *Völkergedanken* (folk ideas). Therefore, the culture of primitive people had to be studied according to strict historical methods.[118] In 1886, Boas returned to Canada, this time to study the life of the Kwakiutl Indians in British Colombia during a period of three months. Boas became connected with the ethno-linguistic group of the Kwakiutl with whom he did most of his anthropological work during his whole professional life. In 1887, he published a short and lively written report of his fieldwork in the *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* in which not only became clear that he was shifting from geography to the study of culture but was also elaborating the first basic principles of how to carry out research by field work and collecting tales, stories and myths.[119] Following Bastian, he was looking to folk tale and myth as characteristic expressions of the folk ideas of a people.

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[116] Quotation in George W. Stocking Jr. *Race, Culture, and Evolution. Essays in the History of Anthropology*(1968), p.148.

[117] George W. Stocking Jr. (1968)*.,* p. 140, 142; Ton Lemaire (1976), p. 85.

[118] George W. Stocking Jr. (1968), p. 152; Matti Bunzl "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition. From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture". In: George W. Stocking Jr. (ed.) *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic. Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition* (1996)*,* p. 60.

It will be necessary to define clearly what Bastian terms the elementary ideas, the existence of which we know to be universal, and the origin of which is not accessible to ethnological methods. The forms which these ideas take among primitive people of different parts of the world, the "Völker-Gedanken", are due partly to the geographical environment and partly to the peculiar culture of the people, and to a large extend to their history.[120]

In 1887, Boas moved definitely to the United States to New York and continued his career in Geography, Ethnology and Anthropology. At that time, American thinking on the history of humankind was dominated by evolutionism. The intellectual heritage of Lewis Henry Morgan (deceased in 1881) was still very influential. The German tradition of thinking about the culture of peoples introduced by Franz Boas appeared to be quite a heavy confrontation with the evolutionist establishment. The very year he arrived in the United States he criticized on epistemological grounds the system of how of ethnographical artefacts were exhibited in the US National Museum which were arranged according to the evolutionary paradigm. Also in 1887, "The Study of Geography" was published in which he, again, introduced some basic German debates in the United States. Boas argued that Geography has to be historical.[121].

   One of the most important merits of the work of Franz Boas was his critique of unilineal evolutionism. His education in Geography and his historicist view on cultural phenomena, as well as his relativism and holistic perspective on the culture of peoples made him reject evolutionist schemes. His fieldwork confirmed his belief in the evolution of the culture of peoples as an historical problem in the sense that one must distinguish for each group what was original and what customs were borrowed. Boas' approach focused attention on the fundamental historicity of cultural phenomena as well as on the historical processes which conditioned them. Around the turn of the century, he developed a systematic critique of nineteenth-century evolutionism. Shifting attention from the features common to all human development toward the differences between the ways of life of people led to the analysis of each culture separately. The singular "culture" of the evolutionists became the plural "cultures" of modern thinking about the histories of the different peoples.[122] Boas' critique on the assumptions of evolutionism was elaborated in a period of about ten years and was summarized in 1896 in his essay "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology". His arguments were mostly developed in relation to the study of folklore and through a statistical study of the distribution of folktales.[123] Later on, in his "The Methods of Ethnology" (1920), the essential intellectual foundation was laid for the modern pluralist and

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[119] Franz Boas "A Year Among the Eskimo" ((1887). Reprinted in: George W. Stocking Jr.(ed.) *A Franz Boas Reader. The Shaping of American Anthropology 1883-1911* (1974), pp. 44-55.

[120] Franz Boas "The Growth of Indian Mythologies" (1895). In: Franz Boas *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1966), p. 435.

[121] Franz Boas "The Study of Geography" (1887). Republished in George W. Stocking Jr. (ed.) *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic. Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition* (1996), p. 11; George W. Stocking Jr. (1968)*,* p. 154; Matti Bunzl (1996)*,* p.55.

[122] George W. Stocking Jr. (1968)*,* pp. 204, 206, 211-212.

[123] George W. Stocking Jr. (ed.) *A Franz Boas Reader. The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (1974), p. 129.

relativist view of culture, with its characteristic rejection of racial hierarchies and biological determinism, and the focus on the body of traditional meanings that condition the behaviour of every individual growing up in a particular cultural environment.[124] In "The Method of Ethnology" he wrote, for example, that evolutionism

> *…presupposes that the course of historical changes in the cultural life of mankind follows definitive laws which are applicable everywhere, and which bring it about that cultural development, in its main lines, is the same among all races and all peoples. This idea is clearly expressed by Tylor in the introducing pages of his classic work "Primitive Culture". As soon as we admit that the hypothesis of a uniform evolution has to be proved before it can be accepted the whole structure loses its foundation.[125]*

And

> *…the history of human civilization does not appear to us as determined entirely by psychological necessity that leads to a uniform evolution of the world over. We rather see that each cultural group has its own unique history, dependent partly upon the peculiar inner development of the social group, and partly upon the foreign influences to which it has been subjected. There have been processes of gradual differentiations as well as processes of levelling down differences between neighbouring cultural centres, but it would be quite impossible to understand, on the basis of a single evolutionary scheme.[126]*

Boas' conception of culture was influenced by his studies of languages. Reviewers of his work note the influence of Wilhelm von Humboldt.[127] Arriving in the U.S., he joined the then leading ethnologists who were studying Indian languages. But here again, scholars mostly tried to discover evolutionary lines from complexity to simplicity in language. In this context, Indian languages were seen as occupying the lowest stage in a progressive development eventually culminating in English. Boas, however, intended to study languages from the point of view of their inner systematisation. Franz Boas was searching for the origins of culture in an extended "text" criticism of the oral literary materials of the Indians and introduced the method derived from the studies of classical philology in Europe. He focused on the study of myths and folklore because they reflected the peculiar character and history of the people.[128] In Boas' view cultural customs should be examined from three perspectives: environmental conditions, psychological factors, and historical connections. The best explanations of cultural phenomena were to be found by studying the historical development of the societies in which they were discovered.[129] Boas' thinking about the

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[124] George W. Stocking Jr. *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), p. 287.

[125] Franz Boas "The Methods of Ethnology" (1920). In: Franz Boas *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1966), p. 281.

[126] Franz Boas (1920), p. 286.

[127] Matti Bunzl (1996), p. 63.

[128] Matti Bunzl (1996), pp.63-68; George W. Stocking Jr., *Race, Culture, and Revolution. Essays in the History of Anthropology* (1968), p. 223. Contrary to the European situation, in America oral literature had first to be collected before a text analysis could be applied. There were almost no written documents and ethnologists were supposed to collect literary materials from the "primitives".

[129] R.J. McGee & R.L. Warms, *Anthropological Theory. An Introductory History* (!996), p. 128

concept of culture grew gradually out of his fieldwork and his interest in the process of acculturation. Initially, his notion of culture stemmed from the German humanistic tradition and was associated with the idea of progressive accumulation of the characteristic manifestations of human creativity: art, science, and knowledge.[130] However, there were also the German notions about *Volksgeist* (spirit or genius of a people), *Völkergedanken* (folk ideas), and Herder's conception of history in terms of the embodiment of the human spirit in ethnic forms.[131] Boas showed that the behaviour of all men, regardless of race or cultural stage, was determined by a body of behavioural patterns passed on from generation to generation through education (enculturation). Or, in other words, buttressed by the particular cultures in which they lived. He was also interested in economic life, social organization and customs with respect to birth, marriage, and death, but he focused on mythology and folklore (the total mass of traditional matter present in the mind of a given people at any given time). Continuing to build on the German tradition, Boas thought that folklore was reflecting the spirit or genius of a people. Folklore embodied the values of a people. For example, in the folklore of the Eskimos one could find a clear insight into passions that move Eskimo society. The mythology of each people embraced its whole concept of the world, its genius. Thus, according to the historian of anthropology George Stocking, Boas equated folklore (and mythology) with culture.[132]

Boas was looking to culture as a whole but, at the same time, his studies and most of his published research results and essays are dealing with separate cultural phenomena. He was the first to acknowledge this point:

> *Here we are compelled to consider culture as a whole, in all its manifestations, while in the study of diffusion and of parallel development the character and distribution of single traits are more commonly objects of inquiry. Inventions, economic life, social structure, art, religion, morals are all interrelated.[133]*

However, Boas also struggled with the problem of the integration of the elements and the wholes. Whether he is describing the geographical spread of matrilineal or patrilineal organized clans, the components of folk tales in the different regions of, for example, North America, the appearance of geometrical and representative art styles, or the different ways of believing in life after death, time and again Boas showed that there is no evidence for a unilinear evolutionist development model and the only solution is to investigate these cultural phenomena as historically elaborated and diffused.[134] Even when he describes

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[130] George W. Stocking Jr. (1968), p. 201.

[131] George W. Stocking Jr. (1968), p. 214. Boas' thinking on cultural diversity was fundamentally anti-racist. As a son of Jewish parents he experienced racist attitudes in Germany and it was one of the reasons to emigrate to the U.S. His whole life, he agitated against racism and opposed racial scientific theories. Paradoxically, much 19th century racial and nationalistic thinking was derived – mainly undeserved – from Herder's philosophy. Boas defined "the genius of the people" in other terms than nationalist and racist traditions did.

[132] George W. Stocking Jr. (1968), pp. 223-225.

[133] Franz Boas "The Aims of Anthropological Research" (1932). In: Franz Boas *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1966), pp. 254-255.

[134] See for example, Franz Boas "The Limitations of Comparative Method of Anthropology" (1896); "The Methods of Ethnology" (1920); "Evolution or Diffusion" (1914); "The Aims of Anthropological Research" (1932). In: Franz Boas *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1966).

"The Social Organization of the Tribes of the North Pacific Coast" (1924), Boas focuses on the study of complex social and cultural forms like secret societies, cannibal dancers, clans, winter ceremonies, or the world of spirits in terms of mutual borrowing between tribes and historical development and not so much in terms of the organization of the villages and societies.[135] Boas is well aware of this methodological problem:

> *The dynamics of existing societies are one of the most hotly contested fields of anthropological theory. They may be looked at from two points of view, the one, the interrelations between various aspects of cultural form and between culture and natural environment; the other the interrelation between individual and society.[136]*

In this context, it is interesting to look to Boas' vision on power relations with respect to culture. Was Franz Boas interested in power? The answer can be yes, but apparently not in a structural way. His article "The Social Organization of the Tribes of the North Pacific Coast" is an example. Essays like "The Growth of Indian Mythologies" (1895), "The Ethnological Significance of Esoteric Doctrines" (1902) and "The Religions of American Indians" (1910) are other examples. In the first article, he took a close look to the mythologies of the Indians of the North Pacific Coast and his favourite group the Kwakiutl. Boas not only showed in this article how cultural forms like tales, legends, and myths are disseminated and borrowed between the tribes along the coast, but also that they reflected to a certain extent how the societies of the tribes are organized. About legends of the Kwakiutl he wrote:

> *The social customs of the tribe are based entirely upon the divisions of the tribe, and the ranking of each individual is the higher – at least to a certain extent – the more important the crest legend. This led to a tendency of building up such legends.[137]*

Legends were built up to tell the community how the ancestor of the division of the tribe came from heaven, out of the earth, or out of the sea and how this ancestor encountered certain spirits and by their help became powerful. This spirit became the hereditary guardian spirit of the tribe leader.

In the second, very short essay "The Ethnological Significance of Esoteric Doctrines" Boas referred to the development within the tribes of small groups of priests or chiefs who are charged with certain ceremonies. In these societies arose secret doctrines which systematized the heterogeneous mass of beliefs and practices. Boas recognized the power of a professional group upon the thinking of people under the stress of a dominant idea.[138] Indeed, this is a completely different view on phenomena which were seen by Tylor as survivals to reconstruct an evolutionary scheme. Also when Boas looks at religion he acknowledged the societal impact of religious concepts and activities. In an overview of "The

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[135] Franz Boas "The Social Organization of the Tribes of the North Pacific Coast". (1924). In: Franz Boaz *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1966), pp. 370-378.

[136] Franz Boas "The Aims of Anthropological Research". (1932). In: Franz Boas *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1966), p. 255.

[137] Franz Boas "The Growth of Indian Mythologies". (1895). In: Franz Boas (1940/1960), p. 432.

[138] Franz Boas "The Ethnological Significance of Esoteric Doctrine". (1902). In: Franz Boas (1940/1960), pp. 312-315.

Religions of American Indians" (1910), he stated that religions concern the individual and the social group, such as the tribe and the clan. This means that the belief in magic powers influences the personal life of a human being. At the same time, the whole concept of the world, - condensed in mythology - enters to a very great extent into the religious concepts and activities of a community. Religion is closely associated with the social structure of the tribes and the ritualistic side of religion can be understood only in connection with the social organization of the Indian tribes. In cases where the clans have definite political functions, we see that the position of officials and their functioning are closely associated with religious concepts. The head of a clan is considered to be the representative of the mythological ancestor of the clan and as such is believed to be endowed with superior powers. Many of the political functions are closely associated with what Boas termed "priestly functions".

> *The religious significance of social institutions is most clearly marked in cases where the tribe, or large parts of the tribe, join in the performance of certain ceremonies which are intended to serve partly a political, partly a religious end.*[139]

Franz Boas was focused on culture as a whole and on how the different cultures developed. He considered language to be an important factor integrating cultural elements. On the one hand, he was a restless searcher for the general laws of the integration of cultural elements; on the other hand, he observed that "It is our general experience that attempts to develop general laws of integration of culture do not lead to significant results."[140] He was aware of the interrelations between economic and political conditions and culture. However, as an heir of the "German school of thinking" about culture, he was also inclined towards focusing on the immaterial aspects of culture. Maybe because of these slightly contradictory positions, Boas finally was reluctant to formulate a definition of culture or a theoretical model of the integration of cultural phenomena into a whole. His student and later on his successor as professor in Anthropology, Alfred Kroeber mentions that Boas hesitated to formulate a definition of culture. Only when he was seventy-two years of age did he give one:

> *Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the products of human activities as determined by these habits.*[141]

In fact, it was – according to Kroeber and Kluckhohn - a descriptive definition, like Tylor's definition, and not very different from the formulation of his evolutionist colleague.

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[139] Franz Boas "The Religion of the American Indians" (1910). In: George W. Stocking Jr. *A Franz Boas Reader. The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (1974), p. 266. In this context, Boas is also referring to secret societies, esoteric doctrines and the use of masks during special rituals and ceremonies.

[140] Franz Boas "Some Problems of Methodology in the Social Sciences" (1930). In: Franz Boas *Race, Language and Culture* (1940/1960), p. 267.

[141] Quoted in A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn *Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952), p. 82.

Franz Boas played an important role in bringing Ethnology and Anthropology into academia. He began lecturing at Columbia University in 1896, and in 1899, he became its first full professor of Anthropology, a position he held for 37 years. Boas greatly influenced American Anthropology, and taught and inspired a generation of anthropologists, notably Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Alfred Kroeber. During the first decennia of the twentieth century, his arguments for detailed studies of particular societies were widely accepted as well as his plea for holism. Cultures were integrated wholes, according to his opinion. But his life-long interest in field research and collection of empirical data as well as continuously inspiring his students to do the same made him sceptical about the possibility of formulating laws. Finally, Franz Boas did not articulate a theory about the relationship between cultural elements and cultural wholes. He demolished the evolutionary framework, designed methodologies for the investigation of specific cultures, introduced cultural relativism, opposed racism and referred to the relationships between individuals and societies and between cultural elements and cultural wholes. But he never really answered the question *how* cultures became integrated wholes.[142] Consequently and despite his interest in hierarchical and power relations, he never elaborated a clear vision on the relationship between power and culture.

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[142] Jerry D. Moore *Visions of Culture* (1997), pp. 50-51.

V   Boasian Cultural Anthropology and British Social Anthropology

The new discipline of Anthropology developed from a kind of "philosophical anthropology" in the eighteenth century to the empirical discipline of the late nineteenth century.[143] The richness of ethnographic reports published since the first European voyages of discovery combined with the growing interest in the history of human society stimulated a scientific study of the available data along with a more scientifically structured collection of materials and writing of reports. In this context, Edward Tylor - synthesizer of ethnological knowledge of his time - created a "science of culture or civilization". Franz Boas gave this new academic discipline an empirical base by promoting fieldwork and developing appropriate methods.

However, the development of knowledge and discourses about the history of mankind to a science of culture and then to Anthropology also meant a narrowing of the subject of the discipline. The strong relation between Ethnography and Anthropology resulted gradually in a specific orientation of the new science of culture to the study of non-European societies. In other words, the need for professionalization in the rising social sciences was leading to specialization and thus to a separation from other disciplines like sociology and economy, and also from historical sciences and philosophy.

It was striking that in the first half of the twentieth century, British Anthropology, in general, did not follow Tylor's orientation on culture but became sociologically based because of its orientation on the concept of society. In the United States Tylor's evolutionism was rejected but his focus on culture was widely accepted. In the American approach, culture is a far wider concept than society and consists of everything that humans have created, including society. Accordingly, two main schools of thinking about culture developed in the first half of the twentieth century. In Boasian Cultural Anthropology arose a tendency to see culture as an all-embracing concept including all social facts and behaviour. The factor of power became an inclusive part of the cultural construction of a society and was often not discussed systematically. In British Social Anthropology, however, the orientation was on social order and this implied a special interest in social forces like political power to achieve societal coherence.

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[143] The Enlightenment-philosopher Immanuel Kant lectured anthropology at his university in Königsberg, Germany. According to Kroeber & Kluckhon, (1952), p. 42 it was something like philosophical anthropology. Kant used ethnographic data in his lectures.

The all-embracing concept: the Boasian tradition

Since Boas, the academic world came to see culture in the first place through its diversity. His plea for empirical research to substantiate theoretical statements was followed by his talented students, and their students. Their fieldwork resulted in the accumulation of ethnographic data and fascinating descriptions of cultures throughout the world. Participant observation, based on learning of the local language spoken in the investigated society, became the most important empirical tool in Anthropology. This resulted in the availability of an abundant number of studies. The rise of fieldwork and the orientation on local perspectives, however, also caused a contraction or limitation of the empirical horizon. This happened on two levels. First, only small-scale societies ("primitive societies", "traditional societies" or "peasant societies") could be covered by one anthropologist during a limited period. The studies obtained the character and form of an ethnographic monograph, a report of an ethnographic reality observed by the ethnologist or anthropologist. It was as if the days of searching for the great connections in time and space were over. Boas and his successors like Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Alfred Kroeber and Edward Sapir believed that the laws governing culture could be discovered only through the study of as many different cultures as possible. Only from comparative analyses of these studies would it be possible to formulate general laws of culture.[144] The anthropologist Stanley Barret, reviewing this period of production of numerous ethnological and anthropological studies summarizes the theoretical problem as follows: the Boasian notion of the unity of the human race (the psychic unity of mankind) as the connecting factor between societies was replaced by culture. Each way of life was thought to represent a distinctive culture and the countless variety demonstrated the possibilities to be human.[145] The Dutch anthropologist Wim van Binsbergen writes that it became a habit to identify each ethnographical monograph with "a culture". There existed almost as many cultures as monographs and each culture was modelled on the book: limited, internally integrated, consistent and unique. In other words: a holistic entity.[146]

In this context, it is understandable that the number of definitions of the concept of culture increased considerably. Anthropologists observed and analysed their societies from different perspectives. They stressed specific aspects of the different cultures and they often formulated their own well-matched definition of culture. In 1952, the American anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn counted 169 definitions of culture since the first one of Edmond Tylor in 1871. They made a good attempt to classify these definitions. They distinguished six categories: descriptive (for example, Tylor's definition), historical (those with an emphasis on tradition), normative (with an emphasis on rules or values), psychological (with an emphasis on learning or habit), structural (with an emphasis on pattern), and genetic (a kind of residual-category). Kroeber and Kluckhohn ascertain that the definitions are not really differing in a fundamental way and they summarize that the

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[144] Wim M.J. van Binsbergen *Culturen bestaan niet. Het onderzoek van interculturaliteit als een openbreken van vanzelfsprekendheden* (Cultures don't exist. The study of interculturality as a break of axioms) (1999), p.8; Jerry P. Moore *Visions of Culture. An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (1997), p. 66.

[145] Stanley R. Barret *Culture meets Power* (2002), p. 3.

[146] Wim M.J. van Binsbergen (1999), p.9.

common meaning is that of a set of attributes and products of societies, and therewith of mankind, which are "extrasomatic" and transmissible by mechanisms other than biological heredity.[147] In fact, Kroeber, one of Boas' students, translated and replaced the different meanings of culture by his own definition. He regarded culture as "extrasomatic" and thereby "superorganic" because it could only be explained with reference to a level of understanding above that of the individual organism. Kroeber saw culture less as a product of individual human beings and more as developing independently from the individual members of society.[148]

But there was also a second level of limiting the horizon of the study of cultures. In the United States, two leading social scientists, the sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902 - 1979) and the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber (1876 - 1960) proposed to define the boundaries of the Sociology and Anthropology. Anthropology was given the task of studying patterns of values, norms, ideas, knowledge and religious systems that shape human behaviour and the artefacts produced through that behaviour.[149] In this context, anthropologists demonstrated a strong tendency to describe and analyse all social facts and social behaviour as culture. Society became culture. Investigation and analysis of social relations was left to sociologists. As a consequence, (political) power was seen an inclusive part of the cultural construction of a society and, was for the most part, not discussed systematically.

Thus, during the first decades of the twentieth century, not only an empirical approach (through field work and participant observation) became the way to study culture, but also a holistic view to relate and integrate the different domains of culture such as history, ecology, economy, religion, kinship and family life and political organization. A standard ethnography included a chapter on each of these domains and an explanation of the cultural whole. The attention for the factor of power in these studies was varying and connected with the specific perspective introduced by ethnographers and anthropologists. This means, for example, that in a study by Margaret Mead focusing on how adolescence is expressed in Samoa society power relations are described only implicitly while the fieldwork of Robert Lowie among Indians of the Great Plains inspired him to publish *The Origin of the State* (1927) which is seen as a precursor of modern Political Anthropology. Both anthropologists were students of Franz Boaz.[150]

The functioning of society: British Social Anthropology

Although the term culture was defined for the first time by a British anthropologist, the concept did not become very popular in British Anthropology. In England, an influential anthropologist like Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881 – 1955) strived for an Anthropology based on the principles of natural sciences and he rejected historical sciences as an explanatory method to analyse human societies. In his view, Anthropology should concern itself with the search for universal laws of human behaviour in the same way as the natural

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[147] A. L. Kroeber & C. Kluckhohn (1952). pp. 80 etc., and p. 283.
[148] A. L. Kroeber "The Superorganic" (1917). Reprinted in A.L. Kroeber *The Nature of Culture* (1952), pp. 22-51.
[149] Eric R. Wolf *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (1999), p. 3; Adam Kuper *Culture. The Anthropologists 'Account* (1999), p. 53.
[150] Margaret Mead *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928); Robert H. Lowie *The Origin of the State* (1927); Georges Balandier *Anthropologie Politique* (1991), pp. 14-15.

sciences. Radcliffe-Brown referred to, among others, Montesquieu, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim as his inspiring predecessors.[151] He translated the ideas about (social) organism, functions and (social) structure of these theorists to his own version of Anthropology and called it "social anthropology as the theoretical natural science of human society, that is, the investigation of social phenomena by methods essentially similar to those used in the physical and biological sciences."[152] Although he used also the term "culture" in the early years of his career, he rejected the concept later on. He dismissed "culture" as a vague abstraction.

> *Let us consider what are the concrete, observable facts with which the social anthropologist is concerned. If we set to study, for example, the aboriginal inhabitants of a part of Australia, we find a certain number of individual human beings in a certain natural environment. We can observe the acts of behaviour of these individuals, including, of course, their acts of speech (…) We do not observe a "culture", since the word denotes, not any concrete reality, but an abstraction, and as it is commonly used a vague abstraction.[153]*

In the Introduction to his book *Structure and Function in Primitive Society,* first published in 1952 to assemble a series of earlier written essays, he justifies his opinion again:

> *In a particular society we can discover certain processes of* cultural tradition, *using* the *word tradition in its literal meaning of handing on or handing down. (…) In complex modern societies there are a great number of separate cultural traditions. (…) In the simplest forms of social life the number of separate cultural traditions may be reduced to two, one for men and the other for women.[154]*

Radcliffe-Brown used the term "culture" in the sense of socialization, the way of learning to live in a society. He was interested in society as a whole, in the structure of societies. The components of social structures are human beings occupying a position in a social structure. Social relationships constitute the social structure and are determined and controlled by norms, rules or patterns. In his view, the established norms of conduct of a particular form of social life can be referred to as "institutions".[155] A crucial concept in Radcliffe-Brown's theory is the term "function".

> *The concept of function applied to human societies is based on an analogy between social life and organic life. (…) If we consider any recurrent part of the life-process,*

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[151] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses.* (1952/1971), *Introduction,* pp. 1,5-6,7; 176.

[152] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "On Social Structure". (1940) Reprinted in: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses* (1952/1971), pp. 188-204.

[153] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "On Social Structure". (1940) Reprinted in: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses.* (1952/1971), p.190.

[154] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "Introduction" to *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses.* (1952/1971), pp. 1-14.

[155] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "Introduction" (1952/1971), pp.9-10.

> *such as respiration, digestion, etc. its* function *is the part it plays in, the contribution it makes to, the life of the organism as a whole. (…)*[156]

And:

> *To turn from organic life to social life, we examine such a community as an African or Australian tribe we can recognize the existence of a social structure. Individual human beings, the essential units in this instance, are connected by a definite set of social relations into an integrated whole. The continuity of a social structure, like that of an organic structure, is not destroyed by changes in the units. Individuals may leave the society, by death or otherwise; others may enter it. The continuity of structure is maintained by the process of social life, which consists of the activities and the interactions of the individual human beings and of the organized groups into which they are united. The social life of the community is here defined as the* functioning *of the social structure.*[157]

Related to his conception of "function" in terms of the contributions which different components of society make to the composition of the whole society, Radcliffe-Brown pays attention to social sanctions. In all communities there are certain modes of behaviour which are usual. These social usages have behind them the authority of the relevant society and are therefore sanctioned. In Radcliffe-Brown's words, a sanction is a reaction on the part of society or of a considerable number of its members to a mode of behaviour which is thereby approved (positive sanctions) or disapproved (negative sanctions). In any given society, sanctions form a more or less systematic whole which constitute what he calls the machinery of social control.[158] Radcliffe-Brown was well aware of the political dimensions of functions and social sanctions and defined political organization in terms of the establishment and maintenance of social order (see next chapter).

Alfred Radcliffe-Brown was, together with Bronislaw Malinowski, (1884 – 1942) certainly one of the most important designers of what is called the functionalist school of thinking in Sociology and Anthropology. In Anthropology, both scholars emphasized different aspects in the investigation and the analysis of societies. Malinowski's method was based on extensive in-depth fieldwork which supported his analysis of the functions of cultural institutions which meet the basic physical and psychological needs of people in society.[159] Malinowski had less difficulty with the concept of culture than his colleague. However, whereas the work of Malinowski – in particular his field research – is still very interesting, Radcliffe-Brown's theoretical inheritance is heavily criticized as being naïve and following a rigid adaptation of physical and biological principles. John Beatty, who followed some of his courses, admires Radcliffe-Brown for being an excellent teacher and a clear and systematic thinker with a brilliantly lucid and incisive style of exposition. For this reason, he became an

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[156] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "On the Concept of Function in Social Science" (1935). Reprinted in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses.* (1952/1971), pp. 178-179.

[157] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "On the Concept of Function in Social Science" (1935). Reprinted in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses.* (1952/1971), p. 180.

[158] A.R. Radcliffe-Brown "Social Sanctions" (1933) Reprinted in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society. Essays and Addresses.* (1952/1971), pp. 205, 208.

[159] R. Jon McGee & Richard L. Warms *Anthropological Theory. An Introductory History* (1996), p.154.

influential anthropologist and some of his ideas are still well worth studying. Beattie mentions among other things the fields of kinship research and of social control.[160]

The most criticized issue in functionalist thinking indeed was the organic analogy and the rigid use of abstract models as if they were empirical realities. This way of thinking was rejected by most students and younger followers of Radcliffe-Brown. They understood that the concept of society is a relational and not a substantial one. The only concrete entities present in social situations are people and social anthropologists (and sociologists in general) study how these people are related to one another in various institutionalized ways. Thus, the subject-matter of Social Anthropology became the institutionalized social relationships and the systems into which they may be ordered. Almost all functionalist principles of early Social Anthropology were under fire by the younger generation anthropologists. John Beattie's *Other Cultures* (1964) is an influential example of this criticism. The title of the book was provoking in the world of functionalist Social Anthropology and Social Anthropology in general. Beattie brought back to Social Anthropology the idea of culture. He defined Social Anthropology as the study of man in his relationships with other people in living communities. On the one hand this means studying social relationships which are standardized, institutionalized, and therefore characteristic of the society being investigated. On the other hand, while studying social relationships social anthropologists have "to take account of the ideas and values that are associated with them, that is, of their cultural content."[161] He writes:

> *For human beings have cultures, systems of belief and values which are themselves powerful determinants of action (…). Unlike other animals, men live in a symbolic universe (…). This is why social anthropologists have been largely concerned with what is commonly called culture, which includes such data as people's religious and cosmological ideas, and have not restricted themselves to a behaviourist description of social relationships considered simply as such.*

And:

> *Essential to the subject (*of social anthropology – H.S.) *at the present day is the conviction that no social institution can be adequately understood unless it has been empirically investigated, and unless it can be comprehensibly related to its living social and cultural context.[162]*

Comparing Boasian Cultural Anthropology and British Social Anthropology, one can wonder if the concept of culture was not formulated too broadly on the one hand, and if the concept of society as a functional system of social relationships and social structures was not defined too rigidly on the other hand. In the second half of the twentieth century, anthropologists of the cultural and social "school" came to realise that it was not very fruitful to deny each other's key concept. They came to the conclusion that from an analytical perspective it would be very helpful to separate culture and society in order to define both concepts as

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[160] John Beattie "A.R. Radcliffe-Brown". In: Timothy Raison (ed.) *The Founding Fathers of Social Science* (1969), pp. 179,181.

[161] John Beattie *Other Cultures. Aims, Methods, and Achievements in Social Anthropology* (1964), pp.12–13.

[162] John Beattie (1964), p. 13.

clearly as possible. In the context of the theme of this study – the linkages between culture and power - the shift from culture to society in British Anthropology meant a step forward. Power was again back in the limelight as an important social relation influencing daily life in a society.

VI   Culture, Society and Politics: The Rise of Political Anthropology

Of course, anthropologists knew the work of important social scientists, historians and philosophers who were already discussing structures of power and processes of state formation. But they also tended to stress the differences between the existing cultures and their power structures and they supposed those theories concerning (political) power already developed in the West could not be applied in non-western small-scale societies. An explanatory theory concerning the role of power in culture was not yet developed in Anthropology. When it comes to broadening our understanding of the role of power in human societies, Social Anthropology made substantial contributions, more than Boasian Cultural Anthropology. Cultural Anthropology did not have a good story about how power relations influence the organisation of society and the cultural system. Social Anthropology, on the other hand, was better equipped to analyse power and its influence on the organisation of society.

The rise of Political Anthropology has definitely changed the scene with regard to the focus on power in the work of anthropologists. Political Anthropology studies the political thinking and behaviour of human beings in their communities. The anthropological study of politics is devoted to understanding how and why power and authority operate in human societies.[163] In the second half of the twentieth century, the focus of the "science of culture" shifted more explicitly in the direction of the question of how power relations influence society and culture. Apparently, the social and political unrest all over the world during the 1960s and 1970s inspired social scientists to change perspectives and to orientate their studies more explicitly on power relations.

Political Anthropology

Reviewers of the short history of Political Anthropology distinguish several periods of development taking place in this new academic discipline.[164] Firstly, they indicate a number of precursors including Montesquieu (1689 – 1755) as certainly the most important philosopher inspiring anthropologists who are interested in politics and the rise and the functioning of states. He influenced among others the American Lewis Henry Morgan

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[163] S. Lee Seaton & Henri J.M. Claessen (editors) *Political Anthropology. The State of the Art* (1979) p. 7; Ronald Cohen "Political Anthropology". In: *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (1996), p. 963; George Balandier *Anthropologie Politique* (1991; 2e édition), p. VIII.

[164] S. Lee Seaton & Henri J.M. Claessen (1979)*,* p.10; Ronald Cohen (1996)*,* p.965*;* Joan Vincent "Political Anthropology". In: *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (1997), pp. 428-434; George Balandier (1991)*,* pp. 7-18.

(1818 – 1881) who is seen as one of the earliest anthropologists who combined an evolutionist vision on the development of human history with a great attention for political organization of societies. Morgan followed Montesquieu in projecting the evolution of societies through the three stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization. He studied in detail the complex evolution of kinship systems to government by sketching the sequence of descent groups, tribes, confederations, and finally political societies. According to Morgan progress from clan organization to the establishment of political society took place on the basis of territory and property.[165]

The publication of the book *African Political Systems* (1940), edited by the British anthropologists Meyer Fortes (1881 – 1955) and Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1902 – 1973), is seen as the start of modern Political Anthropology, the second phase in the history of this discipline. The book is a collection of eight studies (including contributions of the two editors) and written from the functionalist perspective. This perspective is substantiated and strengthened by a *Preface* by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. In this *Preface*, Radcliffe-Brown, on the one hand, underlines the principles of his thinking by arguing again that Social Anthropology, as a natural science of human society, should systematically investigate the nature of social institutions. On the other hand, he states that political institutions are an aspect of the whole society and intimately related and interdependent with other aspects like economic institutions and kinship.[166] Moreover,

> *Every human society has some sort of territorial structure. This structure provides the framework, not only for the political organization but for other forms of social organization also, such as the economic, for example.[167]*

Radcliffe-Brown suggests that studying political organization means the researcher has to deal with the maintenance or establishment of social order within a territorial framework, by the organized exercise of coercive authority and through the use or the possibility to use physical force. He continues with identifying the development of law in society, more in particular the use of repressive justice, the origins of criminal law and laws to regulate conflicts. He is also interested in the establishment of the recognition of certain persons having the authority to act as arbitrators. Summarizing, in his view, the defining of the political structure in a society means one has to look for a territorial community which is united by law or the settlement of disputes. Finally, these investigations lead to the study of the origin and nature of the state.[168]

Radcliffe-Brown's forceful statement about the intimate relation between political power and other social relations and social institutions meant a fundamental shift in the

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[165] Lewis H. Morgan *Ancient Society.* (1877), *Part One: Chapter One: Ethnical Periods Part Two: Chapter One, Two, Three, Four, Five.* Retrieved from internet 19-12-2007 (The internet version of *Ancient Society* does not have page numbers).

[166] M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) *African Political Systems* (1940) *Preface* by Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, p. xi – xii.

[167] M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) *African Political Systems* (1940) *Preface* by Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, p. xiv.

[168] M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) *African Political Systems* (1940) *Preface* by Professor A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, pp. xiv, xvii – xviii, xxiii.

anthropological analysis of power in society. Power was not seen any more as one of the possible social relationships in society but it could also be investigated as a crucial and decisive social phenomenon which shapes society. This position is demonstrated in all case-studies of the book. Radcliffe-Brown and the two editors of the book formulate a number of principles concerning politics and Political Anthropology. The book raises themes still important today but are in themselves also controversial (see below). The most remarkable and enduring contribution to the theory of political organization and state in *African Political Systems* is Fortes' and Evans-Pritchard's distinction between societies with and without central authority or government. The two scholars state that societies with a state have centralized authority, an administrative machinery and judicial institutions, or in short a government. In these societies, cleavages of wealth, privilege and status are correspondent to the distribution of power and authority. Stateless societies lack these characteristics and do not have sharp divisions of rank, status or wealth.[169] Fortes and Evans-Pritchard present a list of variables to correlate with the presence of state structures. These variables include population size, differences in modes of livelihood (cultural heterogeneity) and environmental conditions. These variables determine the dominant values of the peoples and strongly influence their social organizations, including their political systems.[170]

The publication of the book *African Political Systems* and the birth of Political Anthropology as a new branch of the "science of cultures" paved the way for studying society as a powerful construct. The book not only definitely proved the existence of indigenous states in Africa but, also, that public power does exist in stateless societies. These societies were organised in terms of lineages or specific kinship groups which can trace their descent explicitly. The lineage system performed political functions and was also the principal base for social equilibrium. In other words, these societies showed capacities for political decision-making. The case studies show clearly the functionalist principles of the "classic" period of Political Anthropology. Functionalist analysis posits that all political systems must perform a certain number of functions in order to survive. Rule-making, rule-enforcement and rule adjudication are some of these functions. As the two editors state in the Introduction, a relatively stable political system in Africa presents a balance between conflicting tendencies and between divergent interests. The government of an African state consists of a balance between power and authority on the one side and, obligation and responsibility on the other.[171]

The cradle of Political Anthropology stands in the school of functionalist thinking. The new branch of Anthropology grew successfully and a steady stream of studies was published on the day-to-day functioning of non-Western political structures, particularly in Africa. Functionalism provided Anthropology with a model for the comparative study of political systems. The theoretical principles of *African Political Systems* were further elaborated to include village councils, age groups and the like. Power and authority was tied to kinship, residential organizations, religious institutions and to the geographical and ecological environment. Methods of fieldwork were improved and refined and the discipline became a

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[169] M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) *African Political Systems* (1940), *Introduction,* p. 5.
[170] M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) (1940), *Introduction*, p. 8.
[171] M. Fortes & E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.) (1940), *Introduction*, pp. 11-12.

real empirical social science. However, from the beginning, the functionalist principles were also heavily criticized. The most fundamental criticism is that it offers a static image of social systems and its political organization. Individual components of a political system might adapt to changing circumstances, the system as a whole remains in equilibrium. The political structures are reconstructed and isolated from their colonial contexts. Functionalist political anthropologists were even accused of serving the colonial administrations.[172]

As a consequence of this criticism, the second editor of *African Political Systems,* the anthropologist and early functionalist Edward Evans-Pritchard changed several of his views. He became, for example, a convinced defender of recasting Social Anthropology into Social History.[173] This position was diametrically opposed to Radcliffe-Brown's thesis that historical sciences cannot explain the functioning of societies. Also Lucy Mair (1901 – 1986), a student of Malinowski, included historical analysis in her comparative study *Primitive Government* published in 1962 and focusing primarily on the nature and the functioning of government among "peoples of simple technology.[174] Her book can be seen as a follow-up study of *African Political Systems.* She builds her argument on field research in East Africa (in particular, Uganda). Her analyses show that not only history offers valuable insights in the origin and functioning of political organizations and states in "primitive societies", but also a decisive role is played by the means of subsistence. In her view, changes in the modes of subsistence are related to many changes in political systems. Her main interest is to investigate "the types of government which primitive peoples developed for themselves, and to follow this out we have to transfer ourselves in imagination to a past before their countries were brought under foreign control."[175] Mair follows Radcliffe-Brown in his functionalist approach of studying political organizations and the importance of kinship structures and the sacral aspects of leadership within these organizations. Contrary to Radcliffe-Brown, she uses a historical approach and her extensive descriptions of East-African peoples with and without a state are in fact historical studies. She concludes also with a chapter about what happened to the "primitive political systems" after they became subjected to the foreign colonial authorities.[176] So, her work was already less static and more historically oriented than the work of one of the godfathers of functionalism. Moreover, she was serious in investigating the social embedding of power structures in other sectors of society.

A new phase of theoretical development in Political Anthropology had begun. Attempts to arrive at deeper insights into the nature of political systems were welcomed as a fruitful academic contribution in the study of human societies. The functionalist principles, however, also caused heavy criticisms. Therefore, new approaches were introduced. Historical and economic perspectives on power and political organizations showed the complexity of social components in society. In addition, new theoretical perspectives such as "structuralism", "dynamic structuralism", and "transactionalism" have broadened the scope of analyses of political power and state formation. These theoretical orientations introduced a process

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[172] George Balandier (1991), p. 22; Ronald Cohen "Political Anthropology". In: *The Encyclopaedia of Cultural Anthropology* (1996), p. 965.

[173] Jeremy D. Moore *Visions of Culture. An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (1997), p.161.

[174] Lucy Mair *Primitive Government* (1962), p. 9.

[175] Lucy Mair (1962), p.31

[176] Lucy Mair *(1962),* pp. 19-20, 251 – 278.

approach to the study of systems or structures of social and power relations.[177] Although the concept of culture was not very popular in Social Anthropology and early Political Anthropology, there gradually arose more sensitivity to the cultural dimensions of public power. The French political anthropologist George Balandier observes that political anthropologists are apparently not able to get around the factor of culture.[178]

Over a very short period, Political Anthropology became a fully-fledged and respected branch of Social Anthropology. One can even say that Political Anthropology brought back the factor of power to the heart of society and reluctantly also to culture. However, political anthropologists continued to study processes at the level of the local, indigenous political relationships and systems in small-scale non-Western societies and presented an image of a more or less well-balanced conglomerate of political communities headed by a colonial authority. The political struggles of African and Asian leaders and their supporters to obtain national independence from colonial dominance and oppression were seldom or never the subject of study. Finally, anthropologists were accused of collaboration with the colonial governments and, therefore, the presentation of a distorted image of the cultural, social and political reality in African and Asian societies.

Politics and changing perspectives in Anthropology

The rise of Political Anthropology shows that in academic studies of cultures and societies the perspective on what was seen as really important in the formation and organization of human societies was changing in the direction of public and political power. Anthropology was not the only academic discipline paying increasing attention to power. The birth of the new disciplines of Political Sciences, Marxist analyses and, later, Cultural Studies as well as feminist and postmodern social criticism were other signs of shifting theoretical frameworks which include attention to issues such as inequality, hegemony and exclusion. These changes occurred during a period of social unrest and turmoil in many parts of the world. Therefore, some notes on recent historical developments can help in clarifying the renewed attention to power in social sciences in general and in Anthropology in particular since the second half of the twentieth century.

In the course of the 1960s, social and political unrest arose in Western Europe and in the Unites States as well as in their regions of influence in Asia, Latin America and Africa. The post-war reconstruction in Western Europe was almost completed and a young critical generation was ready to take over the lead and to break open a society dominated by a hard-working no-nonsense generation who was mainly focused on the restoration of war damages and the building of consumption societies. In the United States, the Vietnam War (1965 – 1973) caused increasing social agitation which in turn also enraged the European protest generation. Anti-imperialist ideas strengthened the protests against the war in Vietnam and against colonial dominance in Asia and Africa, expressing its solidarity with the independence movements in the "Third World". Also the academic world was influenced by these social and political troubles and with respect to Anthropology the involvement of

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[177] S. Lee Seaton & Henri J.M. Claessen *Political Anthropology. The State of the Art* (1979), pp. 12-14; George Balandier *Anthropologie Politique* (1991; 2e edition), pp. 19-26.
[178] George Balandier (1991), pp. 40- 41.

anthropologists in the Vietnam War and in the running of colonial systems was heavily criticized.

Independence in Africa appeared to be unavoidable but in most anthropological studies no sign or indication was given for this coming political landslide. On the contrary, Anthropology continued to focus on small-scale societies called "traditional" or even "primitive" and sketched an image of a balanced functioning of these societies within colonial structures. Anthropologists, in general, did not anticipate independence in their professional representations. The accusation that anthropologists even contributed to the maintenance of colonial dominance and supported the colonial governments might be exaggerated in many cases, but, the following remark in the Editor's Note of the book *African Political Systems* is exemplary: "We hope that this book will be of interest and use to those who have the task of administrating African people."[179] In this context, it is understandable that independence came as a shock for anthropologists. Subsequently, Anthropology has been pronounced dead by some leftist anthropologists. They understood the growing hostility in the new independent countries towards Anthropology. The South-African anthropologist Archie Mafeje was one of the few who referred to the misconceptions of colonial anthropology as a reaction to Western cultural and intellectual imperialism. Mafeje mentions books like *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973*)* as the British contribution to self-criticism and the book *Reinventing Anthropology* (1974) as the American answer on anthropologist's involvement as CIA agents in the Vietnam War.[180] Anthropology became a suspect academic discipline at African universities and several institutes for higher education in the newly independent countries did not offer the discipline anymore. To Archie Mafeje and his critical and radical colleagues in Europe and the United States, the dilemma was to reject Anthropology or to reinvent the discipline. Mafeje and his critical colleagues participated initially in ideological, political and intellectual deconstruction of anthropology and oriented themselves on what economics, sociology, social geography, political sciences, philosophy and history told about Africa. Furthermore, these scholars were inspired by (neo)-Marxist thought-categories.[181] The political turmoil in Africa not only led to a popularity of neo-Marxist theoretical orientations mainly based on work of Marx and Engels which was never published during their lives and was rediscovered in the twentieth century. Anthropology also became characterized by a large variety of theoretical perspectives since then. Unlike the previous periods when a few theoretical positions dominated the field, the 1970s and 1980s have been characterized by a multiplicity of theoretical points of view. A strong orientation on what happened in the processes of the formation of the new states was, however, attracting many social scientists.

Independence came in waves across Asia and Africa. In Africa, the first wave commenced in the 1950s and came to a peak between 1960 and 1965. The second and more violent wave began in 1974 and brought independence in Lusophone Africa and Zimbabwe. Social sciences studying Africa became confronted with the display of power and the frequent

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[179] Editor's Note to *African Political Systems* (1940), p. viii.
[180] Archie Mafeje *Anthropology in Post-Independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-redefinition* (2001), pp. 34, 35, 37.
[181] Archie Mafeje (2001). p. 55.

occurrence of conflicts. In all socio-economic sectors as well as in the domains of politics and state formation processes of centralization and consolidation of power occurred with strong authoritarian and even repressive overtones. The first years of independence of the new countries were accompanied by systematic efforts on the part of the new state leaders to overcome the constraints of the colonial legacy by reorganizing public institutions and by concentrating power at the political centres. During the 1970s and 1980s, the public administration institutions, the coercive apparatus, the legal structures and political institutions were further elaborated.[182] Not Anthropology or its younger offshoot Political Anthropology dived into the study of these exciting developments, but Political Sciences. This discipline arose during the Second World War and developed in the context of the ideological struggle between East and West. A decade later, the new discipline attempted also to set up a conceptual framework that would encompass the political systems of the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa. Political science and comparative politics introduced to the study of African politics the grand theories also used in the other social sciences. Naomi Chazan and her colleague-authors distinguish different approaches to the study of African politics in *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (1992). The first studies of African politics and African nationalism were written mostly from a modernization perspective. In political terms, modernization implied institutional expansion, the rationalization of the government apparatus, and power concentration. A second approach was influenced by theories of dependency and underdevelopment and tried to explain why modernization did not remove the extreme poverty in Africa and the lack of socio-economic progress in the newly independent countries. This approach assessed politics as a reflection of global and economic relations. Finally, a statist view came into vogue. In this approach, the African state is viewed as a primary motor force behind social and economic development. More than other approaches, this school of thinking placed political factors at the centre of investigation and study.[183] The political scientist Martin Doornbos looks with a somewhat different perspective to the academic debates about politics and state formation in Africa. According to him, key themes about state power and capacity and about national identity and unity have largely defined the debate about the nature and role of post-colonial states. He distinguishes three academic debates. In the late 1960s, the concept of "political penetration" was seen as the important task of the new states to intervene in society and to establish a powerful presence with the aim of bringing socio-economic progress. A second debate seriously challenged the policy-oriented search for appropriate interventions by discussing the dominant and exploitative role of the new bureaucratic bourgeoisie working in the state structures. The third debate was dominated by a sceptic and even pessimistic view on what was achieved in Africa after years of discussions about transformations and obstacles. Authors pointed also to the limits of socialist development policies as an alternative to the modernization strategies. A fiercely discussed statement was that African states were too weak and soft to overcome the constraints to achieve rural development,

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[182] Naomi Chazan, Robert Mortimer, John Ravenhill, Donald Rothchild *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (1992) , pp.6 -7, 46 -47, 54.
[183] Naomi Chazan etc. (1992), pp.15 – 22.

and thus to generate widespread prosperity. In the words of Goran Hyden: the state did not have the capacity to "capture the peasantry."[184]

Doornbos' view on the academic discussions about the African state shows already more interest in what is happening in society than in the state per se. His affinity with the Political Anthropology approach is clear when he discusses the shifting perspectives on the relations between state and society from the latter part of the 1980s onwards. He clarifies the complex relationships between the changing orientations of the international donor organizations from the ineffective and unsuccessful "overdeveloped states" to regionally or even locally oriented non-governmental organizations. This shift of orientation was accompanied by a shift in theoretical positions; academic debates about the "relative autonomy of the state" were replaced by debates on "good governance", "civil society", "democracy"., and "multi-partyism". Doornbos also points to the increasing interest for what he calls the "non-state sphere". The academic attention to what was happening in society also brought about a pervasive overvaluation of the state in the development process.[185]

This overview shows clearly that Anthropology, and more in particular Political Anthropology, was discredited by leaning too much towards the established order of colonial authority. By doing this, Anthropology in general missed the point of the call for independence that was living in the minds of the investigated people as well as their struggle to shape their identity and to modernize at the same time. Initially, Political Sciences filled this gap and focused on the formation of new states and the political processes taking place in these states. Scholars inspired by (neo-) Marxist theories introduced Political Economy into their studies of societies in the Third World and referred to unequal economic change, class relations, dependency and underdevelopment as factors of frustrated progress in the lives of the oppressed. However, as explained above, it was striking how much the research on state, politics, society, and development was focused on the state, on the seat of power and the politicians who occupied it, on state institutions and the nature of state intervention. The relationships between the state and society remained quite unclear in a lot of studies by political scientists. There is only one important exception to this relative neglect of what happened in the daily lives of people on grassroots level in the 1950s – 1980s period. The French neo-Marxist "school of analysis" developed the concept of "articulation of modes of production" in order to understand how African village communities experienced colonial exploitation and violent conflicts in the independent states. Anthropologists, historians and some political scientists designed a theoretical framework which linked the (pre-capitalistic) modes of production of villages with the capitalist way of producing in the home countries of the colonial authorities or, after independence, to the capitalist world system. Anthropologists like Pierre-Philippe Rey and Claude Meillasoux described with plenty of ethnographic data in which way the domestic (household) production of lineage family groups became incorporated in broader colonial and post-colonial (capitalistic) economic structures and how these village communities were

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[184] Martin Doornbos "The African State in Academic Debate: Shifting Perspectives" (1990) Reprinted in Martin Doornbos *Global Forces and State Restructuring. Dynamics of State Formation and Collapse* (2006), pp. 53–56. Doornbos is quoting Goran Hyden's famous statement about "the uncaptured peasantry" in *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania. Underdevelopment and Uncaptured Peasantry* (1980).

[185] Martin Doornbos 1990/2006), pp. 56 -65.

influenced by changing relationships within the socio-economic and political domain at the local, regional and state levels. Rey emphasized the process character of the articulation of modes of production and showed that capitalistic production principles could not always dominate the local ways of production.[186] Particular to these studies, an analysis of the socio-economic structures was the starting point of the description of the unequal relationships and power relations.

Not only global social and political unrest were responsible for framing the shifting theoretical orientations in the evolving Social Sciences. The feminist movement on the one hand and the rise of new academic studies like Cultural Studies on the other, brought about innovative theoretical perspectives. Feminism showed how systems of (male) domination are sustained by discourses which reinforce authority and misrepresentation. Cultural Studies – mainly oriented on Western industrial and post-industrial societies and developed at British universities from the 1960s onwards – identified the dichotomy between the so-called "high" or "elite" culture and "low" culture as related to unequal social relationships and the striving of dominant groups to enforce their conceptions of culture. Cultural forms are related to class and power structures. Culture is laced with power and power is shaped by culture. Stuart Hall (1932-), one of the founders of Cultural Studies in Britain refers to the combination of the study of symbolic forms and meanings with the study of power as always having been at the centre of this approach. Cultural Studies looked at culture in the context of the social relations in which it occurs and asked questions about the expressions of power.[187]

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[186] Pierre-Philippe Rey *Les Alliances des Classes* (1973), pp. 135, 138, 165; Claude Meillassoux *Femmes, Greniers et Capiteaux* (1975), pp. 147, 168. In fact, these neo-Marxist anthropologists further elaborated ideas and concepts of Marx's writings on pre-capitalist modes of production. See chapter II of this article. Apart from that, these authors did not assume anymore of evolutionist principles.

[187] Peter Osbourne & Lynne Segal "Interview with Stuart Hall: Culture and Power". In: Rodolfo D. Torres, Louis F. Mirón, and Jonathan Xavier Inda (eds.) *Race, Identity and Citizenship: a Reader*. (1999), p. 390.

VII   Culture as a Web of Meanings: the Work of Clifford Geertz

One of the most influential books in the social sciences of the last quarter of the twentieth century was certainly Clifford Geertz' *The Interpretation of Cultures* published in 1973. As has been sketched in the preceding chapter, in that period a lot of criticism arose in the academic world about the role of anthropologists and their discipline in preserving colonial systems. Not only the focus on the local was criticized, several anthropologists even began to doubt the usefulness of the concept of culture because of its vague and concealing conceptual framework. Then, the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz introduced a new interpretation of the concept which was to become very popular in all social sciences. His definition of culture is probably the most quoted one since the classical definition of Edward Tylor dating from 1871. In fact, he proposed a more powerful, narrow, and specialised concept to replace Tylor's famous "complex whole":

> *The concept of culture (…) is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.*[188]

Clifford Geertz (1926 – 2006) started his work as a researcher in the new "Third World" that emerged after World War II. The United States supported the independence of the European colonies in Asia and Africa. And like the United Stated did in post-war Europe, financial and economic aid to the former European colonies was accompanied by social science research in the hope that it would contribute to the creation of a better world. Geertz entered Indonesia in 1952 as a member of an interdisciplinary research group funded generously by Ford Foundation and not yet burdened by the anti-colonial behaviour against Western functionaries. Independence movements had transformed former colonial subjects into new national citizens. Conflicts between groups were reconfigured and the new government exerted its influence in society in many ways. In the context of such transformations the idea of functionally integrated societies as described by Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard was difficult to maintain. The anthropologist's role changed from studying isolated small-scale societies to working in communities and institutions in developing countries.[189] Like other colleagues of his generation of ethnographers and anthropologists he moved from classical studies of small-scale societies to the analysis of the large, complex, rapidly changing societies of Asia and Africa. The politicians were calling on economists and political scientists

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[188] Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), pp. 4 and 5.
[189] Jerry P. Moore *Visions of Culture. An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists* (1997), p. 239.

for help with analysis and planning. These social scientists were in turn impatiently searching for explanations for the cultural obstacles to progress. New questions were being posed. Is there an indigenous platform for rationalization and modernization? Would the peasant order disintegrate as economic changes eroded old loyalties? Could different ethnic and religious traditions be accommodated in one society?[190] Geertz' book *The Interpretation of Cultures* is a collection of essays in which these themes return and placed in an overall perspective of the new formulation of the concept of culture as a web of meanings. The description and explanation of the concept is repeated in different tonalities in many places in the book, but time after time the key terms are: system of symbols and meanings.

> *In any case, the concept of culture to which I adhere (…) denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.[191]*

Geertz describes a symbol as an object, an act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception. The conception is the symbol's "meaning." Symbols are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experiences fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgements, longings, or beliefs.[192] Symbols are carriers of meaning, and meanings are socially established. In other words: "Culture consists of socially established structures of meaning."[193]

Geertz points to several key elements of the concept in defining it as described above. First, the concept of culture is semiotic and instrumental to how people communicate with each other about life. Culture is an ordered system of symbols and meanings in terms of which people define their world and express themselves. Second, meanings are rooted in social structure. Cultural and social aspects of human life are mutually interdependent factors. Third, the analysis of culture is the art of interpreting the meaning of symbols.

With respect to the symbolic character of culture, Geertz focuses on how symbols operate as vehicles of culture. An example of his vision on culture is the essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" published in *The Interpretation of Cultures.* The author describes the deep psychological identification of Balinese men with their roosters. They spend an enormous amount of time with their birds, grooming them, feeding them, discussing them, and trying them out against one another in cockfights. Cockfights and all kinds of customs and attitudes around this game reflect ordinary, everyday experience in a comprehensive way by presenting it in terms of acts and objects which have had their practical consequences removed and been reduced to the level of sheer appearances where their meaning can be more powerfully articulated and more exactly perceived. Nobody is killed or humiliated, hierarchical relations among people remain unchanged and the wets are not redistributing income. What cockfights achieve, however, is catching up on themes like death, masculinity, rage, pride, loss, beneficence, and changing and ordering these

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[190] Adam Kuper *Culture. The Anthropologists' Account* (1999), p. 83.
[191] Clifford Geetrtz (1973), p. 89.
[192] Clifford Geertz (1973), p. 91.
[193] Clifford Geertz (1973), p. 12.

themes in an encompassing structure. Geertz deciphers the various symbolic meanings of the cockfights for the Balinese and how these various levels of meaning function as a metaphoric whole and how it influences their lives.[194]

In the essay "Ritual and Social Change: a Javanese Example" Geertz explores the relationships between cultural and sociological processes. He indicates first the failure of British functionalism and American cultural anthropology to analyse these processes. His statement is that both these domains of culture and the social environment should be distinguished. At the same time he shows they are indeed interdependent. Acknowledging this relationship enables a wider view on the modes of integration of the two domains. Geertz sketches the distinction between the culture and social system, "the former as an ordered system of meaning and symbols, in terms of which social action takes place; and (…) the latter as the pattern of social interaction itself.

> *Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then but different abstractions from the same phenomena. The one considers social action in respect to its meaning for those who carry it out, the other considers it in terms of its contribution to the functioning of some social system.[195]*

Such distinctions become important in the description of the Javanese funeral when changing associations between symbols and political parties create dissonance in the integration of culture and disrupt the organization of society. The syncretic mix of Islam, Hinduism and indigenous animism characterizing peasant religion in Java, has been increasingly upset during the twentieth century by rising conservative Islamic religious nationalism on the one hand and secular Marxist nationalism on the other hand. These differences were epitomized at a specific Javanese funeral when the Islamic religious village leader refused to carry out ceremonies because a political poster was stuck on the door of the family of the deceased person. An incongruity between the cultural framework of meaning and the pattern of social interaction was created by the mixing up of religious and socio-political processes with emotional chaos as a consequence.[196]

The two essays also demonstrate Geertz's way of working as an interpreter and analyst of cultural systems. He is very much concerned with symbolic analysis from the actor's viewpoint. He states that the proper method of symbolic analysis is "thick description" which is what anthropologists are doing when they break down ethnographic information, sorting through layers of significance to derive the meaning from the native's perspective. According to Geertz, ethnologists try to position themselves within the same cultural context as their informants. This actor-oriented perspective is fundamental to studying cultural symbols and to examining the world view of people in a society. Ethnologists and anthropologists try to read the codes of the symbolic system as a literary text. Perhaps, Geertz' most remarkable statement in this context is that anthropological writings are constructions of other people's

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[194] Clifford Geertz (1973), pp. 412 – 453.
[195] Clifford Geertz (1973), pp. 144-145.
[196] Clifford Geertz (1973), pp. 147, 169.

constructions. The ethnographer inscribes social discourse. He or she writes it down. In doing so, the ethnographer turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconstructed. Analysing cultures is interpreting a text (or fiction), is guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses.[197]

Geertz was not afraid of studying large-scale institutions such as the new developing states in the "Third World". In doing so, he was looking with a cultural perspective at the process of state formation and distinguishing between the cultural, social and political domains. In his "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", he investigates how people desire to be recognized and their search for an identity (primordial sentiments) is publicly acknowledged and articulated with acting on the demand for social and economic progress and a more effective political order (civil politics). Geertz defines primordial sentiments as "givens" of social existence defined by culture, for example kinship relations, being born into a particular religious community, or speaking a particular language. The insistence on the recognition of primordial relations and, at the same time, the will to be modern and dynamic (the demand for civil politics) tend to diverge. According to Geertz, much of the political process in the new states pivots around a heroic effort to keep them aligned. In modernizing societies, where the traditions of civil politics have only a short history and are still weak, and where the possibilities for an effective government are poor understood or not well developed, primordial attachments tend to be repeatedly proposed as preferred bases for the location of autonomous political units. The primordial foci around which these sentiments tend to crystallize are: assumed blood ties, race, language, region, religion and custom. Geertz emphasizes the need for research, a political ethnography to investigate how primordial ties become politicized and reflected in patterns of primordial diversity and conflict. He thinks it probable that the tensions between primordial sentiments and civil politics cannot be entirely dissolved and favours an "integrative revolution" to appease the two processes with one another as a political normalization of primordial discontent.[198] It is interesting to understand that Geertz does not conceive these sometimes strong primordial sentiments and the demand for civil rights in a direct opposition to one another like the theoretical dichotomies "tradition" and "modernity" (and so on) in classical sociology. The history of the development of primordial sentiments on the one hand, and, on the other hand, civil politics does not consist of the expansion of the one at the expense of the other. The tendency to interfere with one another in the new states stems from the disruptive forces of the mid-twentieth century. Their clash, says Geertz, is an outcome of the contrasting sorts of transformation that traditional political institutions and traditional modes of self-perception undergo as they move along their separate ways toward modernity.[199]

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[197] Cliffort Geertz (1973), pp. 6 – 10, 14, 19 – 20.
[198] Clifford Geertz (1973), pp. 258-260, 262, 276-277.
[199] Clifford Geertz (1973), p. 308.

In the essay "The Politics of Meaning" Geertz tries to unravel the connection between culture and politics:

> *Culture is (…) the structure of meaning through which men give shape to their experience: and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principle arenas in which such structures publicly unfold.[200]*

A country's politics reflects the design of its culture. Between the stream of events that make up political life and the web of beliefs that comprise a culture it is difficult to find a middle term. The question is how to trace out the sociological links between cultural themes and political developments. Geertz tries to find out more about the complex network of relationships between both domains by exposing a number of case studies carried out in Indonesia. His starting point is

> *(…) to trace out the sociological links between cultural themes and political developments, rather than to move deductively from the one to the other. Ideas – religious, moral, practical, aesthetic – must (…) be carried by powerful social groups to have powerful social effects; someone must revere them, celebrate them, defend them, impose them. They have to be institutionalized in order to find not just an intellectual existence in society, but, so to speak, a material one as well.[201]*

Geertz states again that the violent conflicts that ravaged Indonesia in the second half of the 1960s are not so much clashes of opposed mentalities – traditional mysticism versus modern pragmatism etc. - but a struggle to create an institutional structure, the establishment of political institutions within which opposing groups can safely contend. The process of social change and modernization and of state formation is no simple progression from "traditional" to "modern", but, in Geertz words, a twisting, spasmodic, unmethodical movement which can turn as often toward repossessing the emotions of the past or disown them. People in Third World countries are torn between conflicting sentiments: to remain themselves (or in other words, to defend their identities) and to keep pace with the twentieth century (to demand for civil politics). According to Geertz, there exists a strong tension between cultural conservatism and political radicalism at the nerve of new state nationalism. Accommodating the new contemporary world requires a continuous redefinition of where people (peasants, lawyers, Christians, etc.) have been, where they are now, and have yet to go. As soon as these images of group history, character, evolution and destiny emerge they are contested.[202]

In another article published in *The Interpretation of Cultures* the themes of "traditional" and "modern" return in reflections on the structures and functioning of traditional states and in which way they are related to new states.[203] In "Politics Past, Politics Present: Some

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[200] Clifford Geertz (1973), p. 312.
[201] Clifford Geertz (1973), p. 314.
[202] Clifford Geertz (1973), pp. 315, 319-320.
[203] Clifford Geertz "Politics Past, Politics Present: Some Notes on the Uses of Anthropology in the Understanding of New States." (1967). In: *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), pp. 327-341.

Notes on the Uses of Anthropology in the Understanding of New States", Geertz again pleads for an analytical separation of the cultural ambitions of traditional states and the social environment in which those cultural ambitions are realized. Subsequently, he wants to answer the question what in fact are the relationships between the behaviours of the institutions of the new states and their traditional political institutions. This approach should avoid misleading propositions about contemporary states as captives of or as completely escaped from, their past. Geertz' argument is that ethnography of actual traditional polities must separate the ambitions of rulers, the ideas and ideals which pull them on toward some end, from the social instrumentalities by means of which those ends are sought.[204]

Clifford Geertz breathed new life into the concept of culture. His writings offer a coherent notion of culture by defining it as the domain of symbolic communication. Understanding culture is to interpret its symbols. His description of culture became unprecedentedly popular in all other social sciences. Most criticism referred to his methodology of understanding cultures. The idea of viewing a culture as a literary text is going too far in the eyes of several critical reviewers of Geertz's work. He is insufficiently clear about what the methods are by which these so-called texts are identified and read. The direct reduction of the ethnographer's observations, interviews, and various secondary accounts to a text remains a problematic point, as well as the absence of criteria for judging text interpretations. In other words, there is no specifically explained methodology in Geertz' "guessing at meaning'.[205]

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[204] Clifford Geertz (1973), pp. 338-339.

[205] R. Jon McGee & Richard L. Warms *Anthropological Theory. An Introductory History* (1996), p. 432; Adam Kuper *Culture. The Anthropologists Account* (1999), pp. 108-111.

VIII   Pathways of Power: the Work of Eric Wolf

About two decades after the launch of the redefined concept of culture by Clifford Geertz, the editors of the book *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (1999) stated that a new interest in culture had swept over a wide range of academic disciplines during the 1980s and 1990s, while before that time, only Anthropology seemed to be associated with studying culture. This "cultural turn" is seen as mainly inspired by the idea of culture as a system of meanings.[206] Another decade later, this interest in culture remains in full force. The anthropologist Eric Wolf occupies an interesting position in this debate about culture as a system of symbols and meanings. He prefers to hold on to the broad concept of culture which applied before Geertz. But he takes a new step by merging culture with power.

The work of the American anthropologist Eric Wolf (1923 – 1999) is characterized by his intense interest in the issue of power. This is reflected in the book *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* published in 2001, two years after his death. The book is a collection of twenty-eight essays written during his life as an anthropologist, preceded by an introductory "Intellectual Autobiography" and each essay is briefly commented on by the author. The manuscript of the book was completed just a few days before his death. Sydel Silverman, his wife and editor of the manuscript could finalise and publish the book on the basis of detailed notes.[207] In his short "Intellectual Autobiography", Wolf sketches his long-life interest in "peasant questions", the development of identities and nationhood as political expressions, and powerful pulls on ecological and ethnic processes. He studied modes of peasant organizations as coalitions and associations and he explored the roles of friendships, kinship, and patron-client factionalism. The political turmoil during the 1960s inspired him to think more systematically about peasant participation in political violence. During the 1970s, Wolf became more and more interested in the influences of global politics on socio-cultural entities. It became clear to him that each mode of production required an ideological definition of who may do what to whom in the operations of the way of producing. This interest was translated into aspirations to study and analyse more explicitly asymmetrical power relations. This theme also became the subject of his second last book *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* published in 1999.[208]

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[206] Victoria E. Bormel & Lynn Hunt (eds.) *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (1999), pp. 3 -5.

[207] Eric J. Wolf with Sydel Silverman *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (2001), Preface by Sydel Silverman pp. IX-X.

[208] Eric R. Wolf with Sydel Silverman (2001), pp. 5-9.

Eric Wolf addresses the theme of the intertwining of culture and power in a remarkable and pioneering way in his last two books. The problem of the entanglement of culture and power is the central theme of the book *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*, but already addressed to and investigated in earlier work. Wolf's latest book *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* provides insight in to how his ideas on this central theme developed during his life.

In the "Preface" of the book *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*, Wolf immediately makes clear what his main assignment is: seeking a way out of the impasse in the social sciences with respect to the question of the relationships between culture and power. In his view, anthropologists have relied heavily on notions of cultural coherence (culture as a whole) without paying much attention to power structures. Other social sciences, however, look to structures of dominance without attention to the specificities of cultural configurations. Human sciences, apparently, are unable or even unwilling to come to grip with how cultural configurations intertwine with considerations of power.[209] Wolf has another complaint about Anthropology and the Humanities. In the 1960s he emphasized "anthropology's role in bridging science and the humanities bringing a multidimensional understanding of what it is to be human: the most scientific of the humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences." He expressed the hope that the interdisciplinary character, built into Anthropology, would give rise to a new synthesis. In his intellectual testament *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (2001) he states that such a synthesis had not taken place.[210]

Wolf's critical mind is also reflected in the vision on the concept of culture in Anthropology. His criticism is related to his concern about the assumption that culture is a bonded entity and the insistence on the homogeneity of this bondedness.[211] Wolf expressed this concern in a Lecture at Princeton in 1982, published as an article in 1984 and reproduced in Pathways of Power.[212] The argument in the article "Culture. Panacea or Problem?" is that in Anthropology, until the middle of the twentieth century, culture was seen as an integral possession of a people, organized in a coherent and bounded society. Functionalism assumed internal coherence through linkages within an organic whole and a clear boundary of such an organic whole. This central tenet of culture as a bounded and coherent whole was widely acknowledged, although many anthropologists were aware of the fact that many of the studied entities owed their development to processes that originating from outside these societies. Even the diffusionists – anthropologists who investigated the spread of cultural items - (among others Boas) were thinking in terms of cultures as integrated systems. As the second half of the twentieth century saw a marked widening and deepening of the relationships across the globe, concepts like culture and society were becoming increasingly pressured to adapt to the globalization of the world. In place of separate and static, clearly bordered units, anthropologists had to deal with

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[209] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. ix.
[210] Eric R. Wolf with Sydel Silverman (2001), p. 11.
[211] Aram A. Yengoyan "Foreword: Culture and Power in the Writings of Eric R. Wolf" in *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (2001), p. xiii.
[212] Eric R. Wolf with Sydel Silverman (2001), pp. 307-319.

dismantled cultural sets. Wolf shows not only his critical gaze on the limiting, bordered concept of culture; in his article published in 1984 he identifies connections between culture and power structures. This is expressed in the ways of mobilizing social labour which gives a characteristic directionality to the formation and propagation of ideas. In kin-ordered communities the deployment of labour is based on symbolic understanding of what binds or distinguishes kin groups. In societies based on the collection of tributes, the deployment of labour and the exercise of power entail symbolic distinctions between tribute takers and tribute payers and symbolic understandings of what binds the two together.[213]

Before elaborating more on Wolf's views on the relationships between culture and power, it should be noted that he was also very critical of the concept of society in the work of sociologists and functionalist anthropologists. In a 1985 Lecture entitled "Inventing Society", he stated that – whatever the particular approach taken in defining the concept – the guiding notion was that collective life made up a whole, a totality, or even a system. Wolf demonstrates how the concept of society is an invention, that concept has a history and a function within a specific context, in a particular part of the world. The problem is that the concept sets itself up as an eternal verity and an enduring essence. Wolf, in contrast, advocates thinking about phenomena in flexible and open-ended ways, relationally, both in terms of relations engendered or constructed.[214]

The book *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (1999) can be seen as a further elaboration – or even the final completion – of Wolf's ideas about culture and power. With respect to the concept of culture, the most interesting aspect of the author's vision is that he not only rejects the "closed" and bordered version but he also shows his intention to defend a broad description of the concept. Wolf confirms that since Geertz, culture is mainly seen as a system of meanings. He acknowledges Geertz' emphasis on how understandings are "envehicled" in symbols, in the course of social action. But according to Wolf, Geertz is not telling us *how* we have to think about symbolic vehicles. "Do some have more bearing on the exercise of power than others? Are some more resistant and enduring, others more evanescent and secondary? How are they "carried" into social life and by whom? How and in what context are they foregrounded, reproduced, and amplified?"[215]

Wolf wants to make clear that his point of departure is the question about the structure of systems of symbols and meanings, cultural schemas, or mental constructs. He, moreover, wants to know how they came into being and what role these cultural structures played in founding and sustaining the differential powers and the consequent inequalities resulting from it. Wolf carries forth the idea that cultural forms are always intrinsically connected to the domain of public power and how it is expressed both through the state and its ensuring bureaucracies and as a sense of togetherness, which is the basis for any social structure.[216] Overlooking the history of Anthropology and the use of the concept of culture, Wolf sets down – as is already said – that for a long time anthropologists have not paid attention to

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[213] Eric R. Wolf with Sydel Silverman (2001), pp. 305, 309, 312, 316.
[214] Eric R. Wolf with Sydel Silverman (2001), pp. 321, 323, 333.
[215] Eric R. Wolf *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (1999), p. 60.
[216] Aram A. Yengoyan "Foreword: Culture and Power in the Writings of Eric R. Wolf" in *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (2001), p. x

how culture played a role in formulating power and underwrote the effects of such power.[217] Nevertheless, and despite all other critical observations about the concept, Wolf wants to maintain and redefine it. He wants to abandon old views of culture as expressions of the inner spiritual force animating a people or a nation, as well as the idea of constituted wholes centred on certain fundamentals. He writes:

> *What comes to be called "culture" covers a vast stock of material inventories, behavioural repertoires, and mental representations, put in motion by many kinds of social actors, who are diversified into genders, generations, occupations, and ritual memberships. Not only do these actors differ in positions from which they act and speak, but the positions they occupy are likely themselves to be fraught with ambiguity and contradiction. As a result, the persons who occupy them may be required to act and think in ambiguous and contradictory ways.* [218]

And
> *There may be no inner drive at the core of a culture, but assuredly there are people who drive it on, as well as others who are driven. Wherever possible we should try to identify the social agents who install and defend institutions and who organize coherence, for whom and against whom. And if culture was conceived originally as an entity with fixed boundaries marking off insiders against outsiders, we need to ask who set these borders and who now guards the ramparts.[219]*

Here, Wolf points out that ideas of culture are not simply shared, but evolve, as unifying efforts of dominant groups who use and enhance cultural material as a means of establishing borders and determining how those borders are guarded from outsiders. Whatever is eventually expressed as cultural homogeneity must be understood as the way these symbols and structures are controlled by dominant groups and ruling powers, which, in turn, perpetuate their domination by manipulating these ideas.[220]

It is time to focus on Wolf's approach to the issue of power. He opens his discourse by stating power is best understood as an aspect of all relations among people. In other words, thinking of power in relational terms has the advantage that it allows us to see power as an aspect of many kinds of relations. He, then, distinguishes four ways in which power is woven into social relations: (1) the power of potency or capability inherent to an individual; (2) power as the ability by the individual to impose his will in social action upon another; (3) tactical or organizational power through which individuals or groups direct or circumscribe the actions of others within determinate settings; (4) structural power, organizing the

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[217] Eric Wolf (1999), p. 26-29. Wolf interprets the concept's early history as an opposition between Reason and Culture. He emphasizes the conservative tendencies in opposition to Enlightenment ideas about reason, progress, and change and refers to the dangers of the "first flickering of the relativistic paradigm that later unfolded into the key anthropological concept of culture." (p.27).

[218] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 66.

[219] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 67.

[220] Aram A. Yengoyan, "Foreword: Culture and Power in the Writings of Eric J. Wolf" in Eric R. Wolf with Sydel Silverman *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World*, (2001), p. xv.

settings and specifying the direction and distribution of energy flows. Wolf mentions Marxism and the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) as his main sources of inspiration for his thinking about structural power. In Marxian terms, the manipulation of energy flows refers to the power to deploy and allocate social labour. Foucault's concern are the structural relations that governing consciousness.[221]

Wolf tries to understand the problem of power and the interplay between power relations and cultural forms by focusing on ideas and ideologies. Ideas are constructed models or mental constructions of the world and its workings. They give a layout of the features of the world and they seek to render it amenable to human use. "In doing so, they play a part in bringing people together, or – alternatively – in dividing them. Both cooperation and conflict invoke and involve plays of power in human relationships, and ideas are emblems and instruments in these ever shifting and contested interdependencies."[222] Next, Wolf distinguishes between ideas and ideology. Ideas cover the entire range of mental constructions in public representations and all human domains. Ideology suggests unified schemes or configurations developed to underwrite or manifest power. Building up and developing ideas (ideation) is different from the development of ideologies. On the one hand, one has to investigate how ideas come to be linked with power, on the other hand how ideologies become programmes for the deployment of power.[223] Ideas and systems of ideas acquire substance through communication. Communication is generating, sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal messages. Both modes of communication provide vehicles to convey ideas but messages have first to be cast into appropriate cultural and linguistic codes. Wolf continues with recalling his statement that all social arrangements, including those of communication, involve relations of power. So, ideas and idea-systems are often monopolized by power groups.[224]

Wolf acknowledges that the stock of inherited concepts in Anthropology and the other social sciences have been contested in the past. Legacies are always problematic. Some concepts can still be used, others are no longer helpful. The inheritance has to be sorted out to answer new undertakings and challenges. In the discipline of Anthropology, the concept of culture is a striking example of a term disputed since the second half of the twentieth century. In the context of the key theme of the book, *Envisioning Power*, the concepts of "idea" and "ideology" also have a history. Shifts in the meaning of the concepts are spelled out in the chapter "Contested Concepts" and Wolf suggests that tracing out the history of concepts shows they can still incorporate intellectual and political efforts that reverberate in the present. By placing sets of opposing arguments in their social context is to see them intertwining. Phenomena once set apart by absolute distinctions can yield to more integrative understandings. The conclusion is that it becomes necessary to make the inherited concepts more flexible and operational and, at the same time, hold on to the

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[221] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 4-5. Wolf gives not much explanation about his intellectual inspiration on this point. In *Pathways of Power. Building an Anthropology of the Modern World* (2001) the elaboration of this thinking can be traced in several republished articles. See for example "Facing Power. Old Insights, New Questions" (pp. 383-397), a lecture delivered in 1989 and republished in this collection of essays.

[222] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 3-4.

[223] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 4.

[224] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 5-6.

relational value of the concepts of culture, idea, ideology and power. Relational approaches are especially important when ideas are studied. The aim must be that the investigated mental constructs (ideas) will not be divorced from their historical and physical contexts.[225] This approach is the guiding principle in three case studies whereby Wolf analyses the entanglement of ideas and power, the interplay of power relations and cultural forms by focusing on the structure of ideologies and how ideologies perpetuate a form of control and domination that the ruling classes and elites utilize as the basis of their power. In ideologies, ideas and power come together. As an anthropologist, Eric Wolf believes "that theoretical discussions need to be grounded in cases, in observed streams of behaviour, and in recorded texts."[226] The three case studies are: the Kwakiutl society, the Aztecs and Hitler's Germany.[227]

Kwakiutl society

The Kwakiutl became famous in anthropological literature through Franz Boas, the founding father of American Anthropology. The Kwakiutl live on the northwest Pacific coast of Canada, along the northern coast of Vancouver Island. There is a wealth of data and information available about this people, the oldest records dating from the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century some reports on the Kwakiutl were composed by different persons, mainly traders and functionaries of the colonial government of British Colombia. The bulk of what we know about the Kwakiutl comes from Franz Boas and his assistants and students. Boas visited the Kwakiutl for the first time in 1886 and for the last time in 1930. Boas' data, materials and writings have served as starting point for new field studies and new interpretations in the twentieth century.[228] Eric Wolf presents his interpretation of the wealth of existing information about the Kwakiutl with the issue of the connections between power and ideas as a guiding principle.

   Wolf starts by stating that a lot of sources of information about the Kwakiutl refer to dramatic changes in the lives of this people since the first contacts with Europeans and, more in particularly, since the introduction of capitalist economy in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. The foundation of Fort Rupert by the Hudson Bay Company in 1849 was a decisive moment in the transformation of the subsistence economy of the Kwakiutl. A demographic disaster coincided with the introduction of the money economy and repeated epidemics and infectious diseases continued to affect an immunologically defenceless population. A catastrophic loss of population put severe pressures on the Kwakiutl social and cultural system. This system was organized around carefully delineated "chiefdoms" leading a complex and stratified society without state structures. Kwakiutl society was characterized by rank, hierarchy, descent and succession interconnected with transfers of ceremonial titles and privileges on marriage and with the ritual distributions of wealth. These ritual giveaways were called *potlatches* (see below)*.* These events were

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[225] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 21-22, 64, 67.
[226] Eric R. Wolf (1999, p. 3.
[227] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 69-273.
[228] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 70-73. Among the interpretations of Boas' materials, Wolf mentions Boas' student Ruth Benedict with *Patterns of Culture* (1934) as the most famous and controversial.

accompanied by recitations, dances and performances that connected Kwakiutl society and in particular its chiefs, to the supernatural world in past and present.[229]

The cosmological world of the Kwakiutl predestined the chiefs as first-born in a line of first-borns tracing their descent back to the founding ancestor of the constituent parts of Kwakiutl society. Chiefs were the representatives of the supernatural founders of the society. The cosmological dimensions of chiefdom made the Kwakiutl chiefs managers of the productive resources of the group and gave them positions of rank in society. The importance of the positions occupied by the chiefs and nobility was endorsed by the supernatural bestowal of name giving. The chief obtained by this bestowal an ancestral spiritual power which was further strengthened by the ability to mobilize sorcery against enemies. In general, the Kwakiutl cosmological world is composed of myths and narratives which reiterate recurrent themes in the genesis and further development of chiefly power. These themes focus on the change from chaos and disorder to an order of structured distinctions. Also about the emergence of distinctions among animals and humans, as well as the transactions between animals and humans and ancestors, and the chiefly role in these transactions.[230]

The Kwakiutl divided their year into two seasons; namely that of the period of spring and summer, then the fall for hunting and gathering food and the sacred period of winter when supernatural forces entered the community and simulated their presence in the ritual performances of "Winter Ceremonial." In the Winter Ceremonial the chiefly class and nobility sought access to the spirit power through dramatic encounters in which a spirit kidnaps and consumes a person who will be initiated and in so doing grants him supernatural powers. The person then was released back into normal life and was transformed by this experience. The performances were accompanied by dances and ritual ceremonies.[231]

An important component of the chiefly festivals and ceremonies during the sacred winter time was the *potlatch.* A *potlatch* was a gift-giving festival, organized by a chief or by someone of a lower-ranked noble family. The *potlatch* was accompanied by singing and dancing, sometimes with masks. Many guests were invited and during the festival large amounts of gifts were gathered to honour the noble host. The central feature lay not in lavishing expenditure but in the display and affirmation of privileges and in the transfer of valuables in the presence of witnessing guests. The chief, in turn, redistributed gifts. The custom of these giveaways clustered around important moments of social and cosmological transformations. Wolf characterizes the *potlatch* as the ability of chiefs to acquire objects of wealth and to give them away in displays of the powers of one's name (given by the ancestral spirits) not only as a political and economic fact but also as transactions with supernatural power.[232]

Wolf's interpretation of the data about the life of the Kwakiutl, and in particular about the position and role of the chiefs is not only guided by the issue of the connections between power and ideas. He thinks that important social, political and cultural phenomena were also

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[229] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 69, 76-77, 82.
[230] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 88, 92, 95, 101, 105.
[231] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 105.
[232] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 112, 119.

transformed by the historical fact that the Kwakiutl society became incorporated into the capitalist money economy since the second half of the nineteenth century. "Whatever we know of Kwakiutl society and culture must therefore be visualized in the context of destabilizing demographic and political economic pressures emanating from the larger encompassing system."[233] The advance of the money economy offered opportunities to lower-rank members of society and stimulated a process of individualization. In some occasions the sitting chiefs favoured newcomers, at other times they tried to ruin the prospects of aspirants. The cosmological understandings of the position of chiefs were reconfigured into a political ideology emphasizing the role of the chiefs, even as their material control of their world diminished. The on-going reduction of the population weakened the position of the chiefs. Raiding and warfare were discouraged by the government and by traders who preferred stability to their trading activities. In this context, the *potlatch* changed from an institution among other institutions to confirm the status of chiefs to a central and all-encompassing institution. There occurred a transition from smaller to larger *potlatches* and a change in the nature of the goods distributed. According to Wolf, chiefs fought a losing battle, since their cosmological weapons could not ward off the further penetration of capitalism. Yet, paradoxically, their fight enabled the *potlatch* to survive even when outlawed by the Canadian authorities.[234]

The Kwakiutl case material shows the efforts of a chiefly elite trying to retain and fortify its power against the forces of the penetrating capitalist economy and the intrusive politics of the colonial government and later on, the Canadian government. In this struggle a central role was played by ideology, ideas drawn together into a coherent configuration, which served to underwrite and manifest the power of the title-holding chiefs. Wolf suggests that the anthropological data and texts from Boas' time as well as later portray the political project of a class of former power holders under conditions of decline. Although the chiefs lost the struggle to retain their traditional position and holds on resources and labour, their efforts to do so through the control of ritual, myth-histories and ceremonial festivals had lasting effects. They helped to preserve an extended and complex cultural heritage that is still kept alive by, among others, artists. Since the 1960s, *potlatches* have again been held publicly on Vancouver Island. At stake is no longer the maintenance of a cosmology that authorized and legitimized the hierarchically organized world of the Kwakiutl and their chiefly elite, but the movement of a population to reassert its cultural identity as a prerequisite for political recognition under the Canadian law.[235]

The Aztecs

The Aztec society and state dominated Central Mexico from the early fifteenth century until the Spanish conquest in 1521 and it emerged out of the disintegrating Toltec domain (north of nowadays Mexico-City) from about 1200 onwards. The Aztecs, or Tenochca as they are more correctly named, entered the Valley of Mexico as a composite component of the Toltec society centred around the city of Tula. The Tenochca brought along a Toltec model of

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[233] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 79.
[234] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 80, 95, 113, 122.
[235] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 123, 130-131.

political-cosmological order, including its solar cults and sacrifice by heart excision. From the earliest times they were successful cultivators as well as traders and in the valley they managed to maintain themselves. The Tenochca were not only cultivators but also formidable warmongers. In 1428, they defeated the Atzcapotzalcan, then a rising power in the valley. Being heirs of state-building peoples in the Toltec domain, the Tenochca started to construct their own full-fledged state in the valley. They constructed the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan and employed Toltec themes in their own political and cosmological representations. The victorious generals and their companions appropriated rights to lands, labour and tribute payment in the defeated Atzcapotzalcan domain and in this way created a resource base outside Tenochtitlan. Moreover, the Tenochca constructed hydraulic systems to control water supply and set up a transport system with thousands of canoes. This enhanced control of the valley through hydraulic cultivation and the improvement of transport unified the basin and provided the ecological and economic basis for further expansion.[236]

The state building process meant the construction of a capital (Tenochtitlan), the building of temples, the reorganization of society, the reconstruction of calendric records, and the definition of a cohesive ruling elite and a royal lineage, interconnected by ties of kinship and affinity. Tenochca state became an increasingly centralized state headed by a *tlatoani* ("speaker" or paramount ruler). The ruler assumed new attributes like a golden headdress and golden bracelets, special clothes and turquoise ornaments and taking position upon a throne. Nobles also wore special clothing and headdresses. The inhabitants of the Tenochca state were called "Aztecs" by outsiders.[237]

The Tenochca rulers and their noble spokesmen and priests rearranged the stock of cosmological ideas at their disposal to explicate their specific role in wielding power over people. Many elements of the cosmology were shared by other American Indian groups and they were sometimes very old, like human sacrifice.[238] The paramount ruler (*tlatoani*) became a sacralised person. When he spoke or acted, he did so as a representative of the gods. He was addressed as a god. Above all, the ruler was the chief military commander and one of his first obligations following his installation was to go to war, return victoriously, and bring back enemy prisoners to be sacrificed and to be food for the gods.[239] Mythological texts narrated the creation of the cosmos and defined the roles and tasks of the gods and the humans. Calendric records and astronomy gave control of time in the hands of the ruling elite as a major instrument of social control and ordering human activities in space and time. The Tenochca formulated a myth of the new age in which they legitimized their right to dominate – and therefore the need for warfare - and rights to levy tributes. The birth of the new age – called the fifth cycle of the sun - created by the gods included the obligation to perform rituals and to sacrifice humans to honour the gods.[240]

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[236] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 137, 139, 141-143.
[237] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 139, 144, 146, 148.
[238] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 160-161.
[239] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 147, 149-150.
[240] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 162, 164-165.

Aztec or Tenochca society consisted of hierarchically ranked classes running from the nobles at the top, commoners (including cultivators, fisherman, and craft workers), merchants, and slaves on the lowest level. Aztec/Tenochca cosmology underwrote the hierarchy of the social relations. The gods, nobles, commoners, merchants, and slaves were arranged in carefully graduated series, each group with appropriate rights and obligations. The Aztec state developed in the course of a century from a marginal group of Toltec people to a supreme and centralized political force. The crucial turn in the rise to dominance was the rebellion against the ruler of Atzcapotzalcan which placed royal and divine power in the hands of a paramount ruler and a small noble class of military. The new rulers rewrote history and new myths and narratives retold how the gods sacrificed themselves to cause the new age of the Fifth Sun to rise. The hierarchical order of the classes was connected with a divinely ordered structure.[241]

Wolf mentions that the explanations of the custom of human sacrifices by the Aztecs contradict each other. He takes the view that these sacrifices are to be seen in the context of symbolic representations embedded in the dynamics of power. The Aztecs or Tenochca comprehended the cosmos as a manifold of positive and negative forces. To deal with these forces they employed calendric orderings, forms of ritual, offerings and human sacrifices trying to bring the forces into conjunction with human ends and the establishment of the centralized state. The intensification of human sacrifices are to be understood in the context of the cosmology in which violence was a creative and transformative capacity and was part of the imperial ideology. Public rituals and human sacrifices celebrated the role of the state in maintaining the cosmos.[242]

The Aztec empire was destroyed in 1521 by Spanish troops. The Aztec cosmology and the ritual and ceremonial complex to confirm the cosmos were replaced by the organizations and ideas of the Catholic Church. However, the memory of the Aztec or Tenochca power and ideology persisted in stories and performances. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 gave rise to the view that the country should draw new energies from its cultural roots in preconquest Mexico. Even Mexican immigrant communities in the United States today use Tenochca emblems to decorate the walls of meeting places to underline Mexican cultural identity in a strange environment.[243]

National Socialist Germany

In this study of National Socialist Germany (1933 -1945) Wolf focuses on the ideas that guided the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) and its leaders through its trajectory to central power and then to catastrophe. Wolf's purpose is to show how the ideas of the national-socialists related to particular social, political and economic arrangements of the past and how they were rearranged. He sketches the rise of the NSDAP in the 1920s as an anti-Marxist, anti-Semitic and anti-democratic political party which was also against certain aspects of capitalism.[244] The sequence of the events that led to

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[241] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 178-188, 189.
[242] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 191, 193-194.
[243] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 195.
[244] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 197, 200.

catastrophe are placed in the context of German history. Wolf gives a broad overview of this history which consisted of – in the terminology of National-Socialism - the First *Reich* (*e*mpire) (962-1806), the Second *Reich* (1871-1918) and the National Socialist Third *Reich*.[245] With respect to Germany until the rise of National Socialism, Wolf emphasizes two recurrent themes: first, the proliferation of social distinctions and the emergence of status honour as a common feature within German society, and secondly, the cultural fragmentation and particularism of the German lands, principalities, knightly domains and cities.[246]

The emphasis on social distinction and status in German society resulted in the bonding of social groups in a system of abilities and disabilities defined within the multiple lands and principalities but typical and prevalent throughout the German region. This social configuration not only defined the boundary between aristocrats and commoners, but also between Christians and Jews. Local particularism in the German region stimulated the loyalty of the inhabitants to their native soil but it also frustrated political unification. Out of this complex cultural and political environment arose the state of Prussia which was to become the pivot for German unification in the nineteenth century.[247]

Although people were impressed by the political unity around the royal court in France and philosophers were influenced by the French Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic occupation of the German lands also caused a direct challenge to German political parochialism and codes of social honour. On the one hand, the idea that the Germans were one common people (a *Volk*) became popular. On the other hand, Germany remained parcelled in many small states. The idea of one *Volk* (people) was built on a long German tradition that defined the people as a phenomenon of nature, a natural given, a mystical force. This idea also gave power to the rise of anti-Semitism. Increasingly, anti-Semites formulated distinctions between the *Volk* and the Jews, not on religious or social lines but in terms of race. Finally, the German states were united under the leadership of Prussia and its political leader Otto von Bismarck in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This new unified Germany (the Second *Reich*) is portrayed by Wolf as an aristocratic, militarized bureaucracy, bringing together the *Volk* community. This state collapsed at the end of World War I in 1918.[248]

The loss of World War I and the ensuing economic, social and political turmoil and confusion led to the rise of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) under the leadership of its *Fűhrer* (leader) Adolf Hitler. A sophisticated propaganda emphasized and combined ideas and political statements about a new strong *Reich,* unifying the German *Volk* including the working class and excluding the Jews, strong leadership, the recapture of territorial losses and the cessation of towering reparations payments to the victorious Allies, attracted many people and the party experienced a dramatic growth. In the elections of 1933, the NSDAP won 37,3% and as a result of political negotiations Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of the new government. Soon after, a fire in the Parliament provided the opportunity to refer to an

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[245] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 204-222.
[246] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 203.
[247] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 204, 206.
[248] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 208, 210, 213, 218, 268-269.

external threat – the Soviet Union – and Hitler was given dictatorial powers to deal with this danger.[249]

The ideas behind the Nationalist Socialist movement date back to the period preceding World War I. These were the above mentioned concepts of the Germans as a *Volk,* society as a ordered hierarchy of distinctions, the need to incorporate nationalist labour organizations and strong leadership. Hitler and his henchmen and collaborators forged an ideology out of these fragmented ideas. National Socialism was presented as a heroic effort to restore the broken world and to make it healthy and vital. Hitler added the notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (community of the people) to this complex of ideas, not only unifying the German territories but also embracing Germans everywhere. This view was grounded in a cosmology portraying the world in a scenario of strife where the strong were rewarded and the weak destroyed. This meant that the enemies inside and outside the German territories had to be contested. The enemies within were the socialists, communists and the social groups that threatened the racial purity of the German *Volk*: Gypsies and Jews. The ideology of National Socialism was conveyed to the inhabitants of Germany by the oratory talent of the *Fűhrer* Hitler and some of his close comrades. The mass assemblies at which they proclaimed the national-socialist ideas and political statements resembled religious revivalist gatherings. The function of these meetings was to make the lonely individual feel part of a greater community. A messianic mood prevailed at these meetings inspired by Hitler's transcendental messages. He placed himself and the party in a self-aggrandizing setting in relation to Nature, God and Providence.[250]

Imposing this ideology implied a programme of endless control, training and vigilance to develop the master race that would eventually dominate in the cosmic struggle. Struggle was the basis of all achievement and in this struggle the ultimate enemy was the Jew. Connected to struggle, the ideas of strength and hardness as an aristocratic, military quality created a wartime ethos of unprecedented brutality and extraordinary cruelty. This resulted in World War II and the industrial killing of the Jews.[251]

Wolf's interpretation of the National Socialist ideology points out that it is best understood as a movement akin to ghost dances and "cargo cults".[252] The ideology is played out in the cultural space, rather than in the political domain. The National Socialist movement and its ideology can also be seen as "millenarianism" because the movement believed in the coming of major transformations in society, after which all things will be changed, based on a one-thousand-year cycle. The Third *Reich* was always referred to as a millennial empire. The ideology offered to establish a world order that put the Germans at the top of civilization. However, this could not be achieved without struggle and war. Warfare was a matter of ideology. The struggle would require, generation after generation, the natural selection of new candidates for mastery, possessed of the will to dominate and

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[249] Eric R. Wolf (19990, pp. 219-226.
[250] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 229-232, 269-271.
[251] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 237, 249, 254, 271.
[252] In anthropological literature a cargo cult is defined as a religious practice that has appeared in many traditional pre-industrial societies in the wake of interaction with technologically advanced cultures. The cults focus on obtaining the material wealth (the "cargo") of the advanced culture through magic and religious rituals and practices.

legitimize their claims to rulership through waging war. The ideology was, according to Wolf, in the grip of a vicious circle requiring the obsessive repetition of the murderous struggle.[253]

Finally, national-socialist Germany was defeated by the Soviet-Union and the Western allies. Wolf concludes, however, that National Socialism has not disappeared from the world. In the face of international finance and commerce and corporations, public policy is being challenged by demands for privatization including means of violence acquired by armed entrepreneurs linked up with mafias, able to employ extra-legal force in operations that can range from drug trade to clearing people off land. These violence-prone situations favour the emergence of quasi-military solidarity groups sensitive to National Socialist ideas.[254]

In the final analysis, Wolf summarizes and compares the three cases, but he emphasizes at the same time how they remain incommensurate as historical manifestations. They do not conform to a common social type or common denominator. In each case, the regnant ideology had its roots in a distinctive prior cultural history. Moreover, the use of ideology in the three societies had profoundly different effects in the operational world.[255] However, distinct as the three cases are, they can be analysed on the level of how ideas intertwine with power around the pivotal relationships that control social labour. He writes:

> (…) structural power engendered ideas that set up basic distinctions between the organizers of social labor and those so organized, between those who could direct and initiate action to others and those who had to respond to these directives. The dominant mode of mobilizing labor set the terms of structural power that allocated people to positions in societies; the ideas that came to surround these terms furnished propositions about the differential qualifications or disqualifications of persons and groups and about rationales underlying them.[256]

The three cases presented were societies under increasing stress and they were in crisis. The response to stress and crisis entailed the development of an ideology. These ideologies were carried forward by the elite and were fashioned out of pre-existing cultural material. They addressed the character of power in society, specifically the power that structured the differentiation, mobilization and deployment of social labour, and they rooted that power in the nature of the cosmos. Kwakiutl chiefs and Aztec royals had special relations with the gods, animals and plants and used rhetorical skills to depict cosmological orders to underline their powerful positions. The moralizing discourses and myth-histories were allegorical accounts used to project hegemonic values to govern a whole cultural world. Such an imaginary world was also created by the national-socialist movement in Germany and its leader Adolf Hitler. National-socialist ideology reinterpreted nineteenth-century ideas about the German *Volk* and called for the rearmament of the national will to be the strongest in the world and to fight the internal enemies (Jews and Gypsies) and start a war against Eastern and Western enemies. All three cases illustrate the role of chiefs and leaders by their

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[253] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 197-198, 271-272.
[254] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 273.
[255] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 279.
[256] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 275

relationships with a supernatural or imaginary world, in the cases of the Aztecs and National Socialist Germany, ideological rhetoric extolled sacrifices and warfare. [257]

These three cases illustrate how the elite formed a power base in cosmological terms. Power thus depended not only on the organization of production and society but also on relationships with imaginary elements and being projected beyond the tangible experience into metaphysical worlds. Wolf acknowledges that it is not easy to understand and explain a ruler in the cultural structure of imaginings. "These imaginings postulate cosmologies; cosmologies, in turn, articulate with ideologies that assign to the wielders of power the role of mediators or executors on behalf of larger cosmic forces and grant them "natural" rights to dominate society as delegates of the cosmic order." Wolf concludes that power is enhanced by rooting it in primordial cosmological arrangements.[258]

Finally, Eric Wolf returns to a consideration of culture and of the way power is implicated in cultural ideas. He recalls the conflicting discussions about the concept of culture since its introduction in the period of Enlightenment. Wolf argues for preserving the notion of culture in spite of all these conflicting views and ambiguities because it refers to a level of human practices and discourses covered neither by progressive universalism nor by retrograde parochialism.[259] He concludes his study on culture and power by pleading again for a broad and flexible, open-ended concept of culture that is connected to power.

> *It is precisely the shapeless, all-encompassing quality of the concept that allows us to draw together – synoptically and synthetically – material relations to the world, societal organization, and configurations of ideas. Using "culture", therefore, we can bring together what might be otherwise be kept separate.[260]*

He continues by referring to people as acting materially upon the world and producing changes in it. Changes which can affect their ability to act in the future. People also make and use signs that guide their actions upon the world and upon each other. In this process they deploy labour and understandings and cope with power that both directs that labour and informs those understandings. When action changes indeed both the world and people's relationships to one another, they must reappraise the relations of power and the propositions that their signs have made possible. These activities can be separated out analytically. Wolf writes:

> *If we want to understand how humans seek stability or organize themselves to manage change, we need a concept that allows us to capture patterned social flow in its multiple interdependent dimensions and to assess how idea-dependent power steers flows over time. "Culture" is such a concept.[261]*

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[257] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 274-278
[258] Eric R. Wolf (1999), pp. 283-284
[259] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 287.
[260] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 289.
[261] Eric R. Wolf (1999), p. 289.

The strength of Wolf's theoretical reflections and considerations on culture is its structural connection to power. His anthropology is not focusing anymore on cultural diversity but on the organization of diversity. In the presented case studies we are confronted with societies under stress in which the dominance of elite groups is explained in ideological terms. However, it is not always clear how a specific ideology mobilizes political support across a diverse range of social groups, organizations, and religious institutions and authorities. In two of the three cases (the Aztecs and National Socialist Germany) we have to conclude that the combination of excessive and outright violence with hegemonic power eliminates oppositional movements and ideas. We are not thoroughly informed about how competing social groups and movements are struggling for ideological dominance. Nevertheless, Wolf's *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* is an important book in a historical period characterized by several political scientists and politicians as "the end of the era of ideologies". Indeed, we see quite the opposite happen with the rebirth of ideological competitors for structural power. Balkan nationalism in the 1990s, religious fundamentalism, right-wing populism, for example, are the precursors of a new era of ideological competition.

IX   Contested Meaning-making in the Cultural Arena: Concluding Observations

Culture and power in the shaping of Anthropology

The concept of culture has a long history. In this study, a journey has been undertaken through the history of the development of the concept. It was also a search into the relationships between culture and power. The journey was made through several historical periods up to the present. Although it was not possible to visit in a nutshell all interesting places in the history of theorising about culture and power it became clear that the issue of the relationship between the two domains is complex and problematic. During the various historical periods, different visions on culture and its connection with power have been developed. The term culture (and the related term civilization) came into being in the European Enlightenment period as a conception, a general idea about the evolution of the ways of life of people. This conception was loaded with new meanings during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Through history the conception of culture developed to a more specific idea or a concept that functioned in the academic world as an instrument to analyse the ways in which people interpret and organize their lives. The different meanings attributed to the concept during this journey were not so much replacing each other, but were added to the previous ones. In the different historical and cultural contexts, some of these meanings received a different emphasis.

Generally speaking and despite all different views, there has been and still is also consensus on some general and important aspects of the concept. Anthropologists looking back to the history of their key concept mention several common opinions or hypotheses as Adam Kuper calls these shared opinions. The range of conceptualizations which are not very much disputed, runs from culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation, to culture as a matter of ideas and values, a collective cast of mind.[262] The most general and most common anthropological description of culture is indeed: the way of life of a people. Culture also can be characterized as the whole of material and immaterial forms in which a society is recognizing itself.[263]

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[262] Adam Kuper *Culture. The Anthropologists' Account* (1999), p. 227; William H. Sewell Jr. "The Concept(s) of Culture". In: Victoria E. Bonnell & Lynn Hunt (eds.) *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (1999), p. 40; Ward H. Goodenough "Culture". In: *The Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* (1996), p. 292-293; R. Williams *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), pp. 92. Culture is still also used in the sense of a general process of spiritual, intellectual, esthetical and technological development or, in other words, a process of increasing civilization.

[263] H.J. van der Dunk *De verdwijnende hemel. Over de cultuur van Europa in de twintigste eeuw* (The Disappearing Heaven. About the Culture of Europe in the Twentieth Century), 2000, p. 10.

The historical overview of the development of the concept of culture shows that attention for the aspect of power varied. However, in the early history of the concept of culture, the interest of Enlightenment-philosophers in the role and functioning of power was unmistakable. The point of view about man as a rational thinking being, emancipating from nature and creating his own world by developing and educating his capacities was reflected in terms like "civilizing", "cultivating", "education" and "enlightenment". These terms expressed the process of emancipation and empowerment of the emerging citizenry. All Enlightenment-philosophers were at the same time political philosophers. They reflected on how to arrange collective life and the economic system by establishing and further elaborating political institutions. In the nineteenth century, thinking about power in the context of culture was less obvious than in the previous century. In the course of the century, evolutionism became an important trend in the thinking about culture and civilization. Apparently, the key tenet of evolutionary thought that the history of humanity could be described as progress towards increasingly complex forms of societies was not leading to a structural investigation of the role of power in these evolutionary processes. As has been explained in chapter two, evolutionist scholars like Morgan, Marx and Engels were interested in the development of power structures. Tylor, one of the founding fathers of the new science of culture Anthropology, had almost nothing to say about power in the context of culture. The paradigm change in the new science of culture from evolutionism to cultural or historical particularism initiated at the end of the nineteenth century, opened new perspectives to study culture and power. This paradigm change brought not only Herder's legacy into the limelight again by emphasizing the importance of studying each culture in itself, but the multiplicity of cultures should also be understood as distinct and to be studied as integrated ways of life. The vision on cultures as integrated wholes opened the possibility to investigate structures of power in the context of cultural constellations. However, it appeared to be still very difficult to describe and analyse the relationship between the domains of culture and power. It is remarkable to note that the founding father of modern Cultural Anthropology Franz Boas never really answered the question *how* cultures became integrated wholes. Consequently and despite his interest in hierarchical and power relations, he never elaborated a clear vision on the relationship between power and culture. It can be stated – with some exaggeration - that only in circles of nineteenth-century cultural nationalism a specific structural relationship was created between the culture of a given people, its territory, nation building and state formation. In this context the concepts of culture, people, nation and state became strongly related to each other. This subsequently led to a closed and essentialist definition of culture which caused new problems in the analysis of modern, complex societies.

So, given the fact that the short historical journey through the landscape of anthropological thinking about culture and power has proven the existence of a relationship between the two domains, why was and is it so difficult to analyse the network of these relations?

Culture and society

To answer the question of the problematic relationships between culture and power, it is worth taking a closer look at the history of anthropological thinking on culture and power in the twentieth century. As is outlined in chapter five, until the seventies of the twentieth century, two great traditions have been developed in modern Anthropology. The first one is the Boasian tradition, which used as its central explanatory concept "culture". Culture was seen as a coherent whole of traditions handed down from the past to the present. In this very broad sense, the concept refers not only to the whole range of human activities which are learned and transmitted from generation to generation, also the physical products of human activity are included under the term "material culture". Thus understood, Cultural Anthropology obviously covers an exceedingly broad field, including men's kinship systems, social relations, production system and social institutions. Society itself is seen as part of culture and all behaviour is treated as being cultural. Culture can only be understood in its own context. Thus, power, power constellations and the maintenance of power are essentially culture. The problem, however, was that this holistic view did not give an answer as to how the different elements of culture were linked to each other to become an integrated whole. Was the production system the integrating factor in the culture of a people or its religious system? Was the existing power constellation the derivate of the production system or the reflection of the religious system? The concept of culture was too rough, too vague, too broad and comprehensive, therefore not sensitive enough to answer these questions.

The second tradition or school of thinking in Anthropology started from the idea that human beings live in societies and these societies have to be seen as totalities. British Social Anthropology succeeded in propagating the concept of society as a far more concrete term than "culture" by defining it as an integrated functional unit. Accordingly, Social Anthropology composed studies aimed at describing and analysing particular systems of social relations such as economy, law, domestic life, politics or religion and in this way giving priority to the organizational basis of social life. When it comes to broadening our understanding of the function of power in human societies, Social Anthropology made substantial contributions, more than Boasian Cultural Anthropology. Cultural Anthropology did not make a good contribution to how power relations influence the organisation of society and the cultural system. Social anthropology, on the other hand, was better equipped to analyse power and its influence on the organisation of society. However, Social Anthropology was sidestepping the discussion on the concept of culture and, in fact, passing over two hundred years of theorising about culture and civilization. Steering clear of the concept of culture and replacing it by the concept of society does not help very much in clarifying the problematic relationships between culture and power.

The rise and growth of Political Anthropology strengthened the pursuit of more knowledge about the powerful organization of the social life of human beings. Political Anthropology stands for an interesting renewal of an academic discipline aimed at studying man in his social environment and no longer veiling the fact that the exercise of power is a crucial factor in the regulation of social relationships between people and the organization of social institutions. However, the classic studies of Political Anthropology tended to record

the non-Western political institutions and organizations as more or less isolated systems. And, to Political Anthropology the same applies as to Social Anthropology: it did not contribute much to clarify the relationships between culture and power.

The investigations into the relationships between culture and power were at a dead end. The opposition between society and culture proved to be artificial and troublesome. It appeared to be difficult to formulate distinguishing concepts and, apparently, scholars of the cultural and social branch of Anthropology did not yet have the courage to step over their own shadow. This situation was reinforced because of competition and rivalry between closely related academic disciplines. As has been described in chapter five, in the United States, the two most influential social scientists Talcot Parsons and Alfred Kroeber, respectively sociologist and anthropologist set out the boundaries between the two disciplines and fields of research.[264] The disadvantage of this sharp delineation between the two domains, though not followed by all social scientists, was that culture was studied as an autonomous system to be investigated for its own sake. During the second half of the sixties and during the first half of the seventies, the dissatisfaction with this situation increased continuously and the critique of the short-sidedness of Anthropology became increasingly severe. In particular, the idea of culture as a small-scale, bonded entity structured through socio-economic and political institutions and held together as a self-contained "whole" was heavily opposed.[265] The concept appeared to be literally and figuratively frozen in the eyes of the critics. It was during this intellectual stalemate that Clifford Geertz came along with a solution by proposing a new definition of the concept of culture.

Culture as a process of meaning-making

The concise description of culture by Clifford Geertz was widely accepted and not only in Anthropology. With his work, Geertz stimulated his own generation and new generations of social scientists to face the fact that culture is rooted in society and although culture and society are different domains they are nevertheless very much related to each other. The sometimes obsessive tendency of cultural anthropologists to see everything as culture and of social anthropologists to reject the concept of culture as useless because of the unscientific nature of the term, appeared to be an invitation to formulate essentialist ideas about culture and society. The heritage of nineteenth-century cultural nationalism strengthened these ideas about closed, territory-bonded and language-based cultures, in particular outside the academic world. Geertz' innovation opened up the deadlock between culture-oriented and society-oriented social scientists on the one hand, and, on the other hand, his definition of culture kept in touch with the intellectual history of Anthropology. The greatest benefit of the new vision on culture is the concept's open character. At the same time, and as a consequence, most social scientists emphasize the process-character of culture. Today, anthropologists are interested in studying culture as an orientating complex of symbols and meanings for people, a spiritual guideline to organize their social

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[264] Eric R. Wolf *Envisioning Power. Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (1999), pp. 1-3; Adam Kuper *Culture. The Anthropologists Account* (1999), pp. 68-69.

[265] Susan Wright "The Politicization of "Culture" (1998) In: *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 14, no.1, pp. 7-15.

environment and to distinguish themselves from others. It belongs, apparently of old, to humans to give names to objects in their environment, to their fellow men, and also to the relations in which they organise themselves. Basic aspects of life have to be brought under control and this happens, among other things, through naming. It is a strong psychological striving for acquiring confidence and safety in a complex and confusing world. Members of a local group give their social network a name and they give names to groups outside their own group. Humans are continuously busy with distinguishing, selecting, arranging, interpreting and evaluating. This including and excluding is both the source and outcome of thinking and acting within the framework of a collectivity.[266] It is really a process of meaning-making. This quality of humans does not result in the essentials of a culture but it is a characteristic pattern which is recognizable in most or even all aspects of the culture, a network of connected ways of thinking and acting which can be empirically reconstructed.[267]

It is very clear that this approach to the concept of culture – culture is an open system or network of more or less coherent connected symbols and meanings – is more narrowly defined than the older concept of the holistic, integrated whole of beliefs, values, norms, customs and productive structures. Or in other words: meaning-making is a more specific activity than participating in a way of life which includes also the input of labour to organize the physical life of the community.

Culture, power and contested meaning-making

Geertz's approach to culture makes clear that the complex system of symbols and meanings and the society in which the system is rooted appear to be caught in an on-going dialectic in which each, in a sense, constitutes the other within the practices of human activities. The historian William Sewell Jr., reflecting upon the anthropological concepts of culture used in contemporary academic discourse explains his commitment to the process-oriented approach in the following way. What things are in the world are never fully determined by the symbolic net thrown over them. This also depends on their pre-existing characteristics, the spatial relations in which they occur, their relationship with power with which they are invested, their economic value, and the different symbolic meanings that may have been attributed to them by other actors. He agrees with Geertz' statement that culture has a semiotic structuring principle different from the political, economic, or geographical structuring principles also influencing human life. Even if an activity is almost entirely determined by, for example, overwhelming disparities in economic resources, those disparities would still have to be translated in a way meaningful in action according to a semiotic logic. When an impoverished, unemployed worker has to accept a job from the only manufacturer in the region he (or she) is not simply submitting to the employer, but entering into a culturally defined relation as wageworker. On the other hand, the cultural dimension is also autonomous in the sense that the meanings that make it up are not only influenced in

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[266] Arie de Ruijter *De multiculturele arena* (The Multicultural Arena) (2000), Inaugural speech University of Tilburg, p. 1.

[267] Sjaak Koenis, *Het verlangen naar cultuur. Nederland en het einde van het geloof in een moderne politiek.*(2008) (The Desire for Culture. The Netherlands and the End of the Belief in Modern Politics), pp. 169-170.

the context in which they are used, but they are also shaped and reshaped by a multitude of other contexts. Thus, the worker enters into a relationship of wageworker that carries certain recognized meanings, but also a meaning of independence from the employer and of solidarity with other workers.[268]

So, it is time to draw some conclusions from the recent history of discussions about the content of the concept of culture: (1) the narrowing of the concept to a system of meanings opened the way (again) to study culture as the symbolic and mental representation of a society and linked to society in a multiple and complicated way; (2) the demolition of culture as an integrated, essentialist whole opened the way to study culture as meaning-making and as a pre-eminently social process. It is the merit of Clifford Geertz that he has made this breakthrough possible.

But how is the factor power introduced – or should we say reintroduced - in this anthropological story about culture? As is showed in this study, the interest in power, politics and state formation was established definitely by Political Anthropology. The self-criticism of anthropologists and in turn the critique of other academics on their work and the formulation of the key concept arising in the 1970s and continuing by fits and starts in the 1980s and 1990s, resulted in giving the floor to power as another perspective to analyse complicated societal processes. According to Stanley Barret in his study *Culture meets Power* (2002), many anthropologists even faced the dilemma of making a choice between culture or power.[269] Until far into the 1990s, the attacks continued on the misleading implications of the anthropological concept of culture because of its veiling of power relations, but in the course of the 1980s several anthropologists and historians began already to articulate culture and power in a structural way. The current views on culture as a more or less open, flexible system of meanings implies attention to how patterns of power relations and social resistance sustain or can change dominating cultural representations. Besides Geertz, one of the most interesting authors who explored the possibilities to save the concept of culture is the anthropologist Eric Wolf. He merged the concept of culture with power. As is explained in chapter eight, he appreciates the innovations by Geertz but his orientation on culture is formulated in terms of the historical process of continuous construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of cultures. In his view, these processes are related to processes which are operative in wider fields like the ecological environment, society, economy and politics. He is not rejecting the broad concept of culture, he defines culture as an open, flexible and operational instrument and he appreciates the "relational value" of the concept. The capacity of the concept to bring together different sectors of social life – ideas, social organization, material relations – that otherwise might be seen as separated is a fundamental force of culture.

It is now possible to draw two new conclusions: (1) the most innovating contemporary idea about culture is the linking of power to culture; (2) power can be seen as a connecting factor

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[268] William H. Sewell Jr. *The Concept(s) of Culture* (1999), pp. 48, 51.
[269] Stanley Barret (2002), pp. 46-47.

between what is happening in the domain of social relations and social institutions on the one hand, and the domain of symbols and meanings on the other hand.

These statements need some clarification. If we look to the more narrow definition of culture, it becomes clear that the web of meanings is certainly not a neutral complex of mental schemes. The various social actors, as discussed by Eric Wolf, who are in turn reclassified into genders, generations, occupations and ritual memberships have their (slightly) different views of the surrounding reality and thus can have different practices of acting. These definitions of reality are partly overlapping, partly contrasting. This becomes very clear when newcomers enter society. But also when a new generation growing up in a society develops a different view on the existing social structures. In other words, the different actors in society with their different life histories, different visions and different interests are continuously negotiating about the assigning of meanings. Meaning-giving is a social process, a dialogue and taking place in the context of power relations. Constructions of the reality are shaped in the context of power relations. Organizing social life implicates the assigning of social positions to persons and groups and the pertaining rights and duties. Power is intrinsically related to arranging life, and thus with co-ordinating and subordinating, with including and excluding. This has everything to do with the power of imposing a vision of the symbolic world through principles of division.[270] In other words, culture in this sense is a contested process of meaning-making. The contest is about the meaning of key terms and concepts which structure and justify social relations. How are these concepts and ideas used and contested by differently positioned actors who draw on local, national, and global links in unequal relations of power? Who has the power to define? How are other ways of thinking to be blamed or ridiculed? How are institutions used to make meanings authoritative?[271]

The charm of the narrow concept of culture introduced by Geertz is clearly its transparency and analytical capacity to distinguish between the different domains in society. Wolf has made clear that the old version of the concept of culture as an integrated whole does not comply anymore with the realities of the modern global world. There was and still is a need to transform the concept and to make it more flexible and operational. Wolf is not rejecting the material aspects of culture. His broad and open concept of culture covers a vast stock of material inventories, behavioural repertoires, and mental representations, put in motion by many kinds of social actors. These social actors occupy different positions, maintain unequal relations to each other, and act and think differently. They can have different perceptions of their environment. This open concept is inevitably connected with power. The broad and open concept of culture together with its relational value can break down the classical dividing lines between the domains of economy, politics, and social constellations. This is important when ideas, patterns of norms and values, and ideologies are studied because these mental constructs should be described and analysed separately from their historical, social, and their physical or geographical contexts.

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[270] Arie de Ruijter (2000), p. 2.
[271] Susan Wright (1998), p. 4.

Society can fruitfully be depicted as a cultural arena.[272] Society can be conceived as configurations of interest groups and actors who negotiate the right of assigning meanings or try to impose on others their definition of the surrounding reality. So, culture results from an asymmetrical relation of forces between different actors and groups. This means that cultures can be contradictory or, put in another way; cultures have the capacity to enclose contradictory meanings. It is also possible to describe cultures as loosely integrated entities, consisting of different spheres of activities like agriculture, trade and industry, religion, and kinship and their related cultural forms. There are centrifugal and integrating forces and tendencies going on within and between the different domains. Political power and state formation can be integrating forces, together with religion, communication media and business corporations. These institutions are relatively large in scale, centralized, and wealthy. Individuals and groups within these institutes make use of the considerable resources to order meanings.[273]

Meaning-making takes place in a cultural arena. It is a process imbued with power. The power of culture is its force and ability to influence the social domain and its different spheres of activities as well as the relationships between people.

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[272] I am borrowing this statement in a slightly different form from the Dutch anthropologist Arie de Ruijter (2000), p. 3.

[273] William H. Sewell Jr. (1999),. pp. 53-56.

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