

## Anthropology, Culture and Society

Series Editors:

Dr Richard A. Wilson, University of Sussex  
Professor Thomas Hylland Eriksen, University of Oslo

*Land, Law and Environment:  
Mythical Land, Legal Boundaries*  
Edited by ALLEN ABRAMSON AND  
DIMITRIOS THEODOSSOPOULOS

*The War of Dreams:  
Exercises in Ethno-Fiction*  
MARC AUGÉ

*Orange Parades  
The Politics of Ritual,  
Tradition and Control*  
DOMINIC BRYAN

*Identity and Affect:  
Experiences of Identity in  
a Globalising World*  
Edited by  
JOHN R. CAMPBELL AND ALAN REW

*Risk Revisited*  
Edited by PAT CAPLAN

*Women of a Lesser Cost:  
Female Labour, Foreign Exchange  
and Philippine Development*  
SYLVIA CHANT AND CATHY MCILWAIN

*Ethnicity and Nationalism:  
Anthropological Perspectives*  
THOMAS HYLLAND ERIKSEN

*Small Places, Large Issues:  
An Introduction to Social and  
Cultural Anthropology*  
THOMAS HYLLAND ERIKSEN

*Life on the Outside:  
The Tamil Diaspora and  
Long-Distance Nationalism*  
ØIVIND FUGLERUD

*Anthropology, Development and the  
Post-modern Challenge*  
KATY GARDNER AND DAVID LEWIS

*Anthropological Perspectives  
on Kinship*  
LADISLAV HOLY

*Locating Cultural Creativity*  
Edited by JOHN LIEP

*New Directions in Economic  
Anthropology*  
SUSANA NAROTZKY

*Ethnography and Prostitution in Peru*  
LORRAINE NENCEL

*Anthropology of the Self:  
The Individual in Cultural Perspective*  
BRIAN MORRIS

*Anthropology and Cultural Studies*  
Edited by STEPHEN L. NUGENT AND  
CRIS SHORE

*Social Mobility in Kerala:  
Modernity and Identity in Conflict*  
FILIPPO OSELLA AND CAROLINE OSELLA

*Being There:  
Fieldwork in Anthropology*  
Edited by  
C.W. WATSON

*Human Rights, Culture and Context:  
Anthropological Perspectives*  
Edited by  
RICHARD A. WILSON

# POWER AND ITS DISGUISES

*Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*

Second Edition

JOHN GLEDHILL

Pluto  Press  
LONDON • STERLING, VIRGINIA

social order as the birth of capitalism. There are really two issues to examine here. The first is concerned with understanding the differences between agrarian civilization in Europe and other parts of the world, and the reasons for Europe's dramatic global expansion. That can lay the ground for investigation of the second issue: the impact of Western forms of social and political organization on the rest of the world.

At first sight, contemporary global political organization appears extremely diverse, much more diverse, in fact, than economic organization. Yet there are general tendencies. One example would be conflicts between national governments and elites and regional separatist and 'ethnic' movements. It could, and should, be argued that each case of conflict of this kind needs to be *contextualized*, to be placed in its particular historical and cultural setting. The apparent similarity between phenomena may evaporate as we begin to understand that the conflicts not only have different historical causes, but also have different meanings to the groups that organize them. Nevertheless, the way 'ethnicity', for example, becomes politicized in the contemporary world may reflect a subtle universalization of some of the features of the politics of Northern societies to the South, despite the differences which continue to exist between forms of political organization and political cultures.

The importance of this issue becomes obvious if we reflect on the way Northern politicians and media tend to explain modern political and social conflicts in terms of an absence of 'modernity'. 'Ethnic' identifications are often presented as primordial and atavistic, aspects of a 'traditional' social order surviving under the veneer of modernity and reasserting themselves because a given region has not succeeded in achieving the kind of modernity the North has attained. 'Tribalism' is often the term used to mark the 'primitive' characteristics of this form of conflict. The objections to such an explanatory framework are manifold. Firstly, the leadership of 'ethnic' and 'regionalist' movements are generally thoroughly 'modern' politicians vying for power with another elite faction commanding the central state machine, and the symbols which rally popular support to the cause are generally invented or reinvented rather than primordial (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Secondly, both the means and the ends of the conflict centre on 'modern' conceptions of political and economic organization, the achievement of states within states, or political units which possess partial or total autonomy from the existing centre and recognition by other political units as sovereign bodies. The implication of rejecting a view of certain kinds of conflict as indices of imperfect transitions to 'modernity' is that there is a deeper sense in which Western colonial expansion and more recent tendencies towards 'cultural globalization' shape the diverse forms of modern political and social conflict and are, indeed, what underlies the proliferation of 'difference' that seems so integral to modern political processes.

As a prelude to further discussion of this point, we should review what social theorists now argue is peculiar to the modern Western state.

## THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE MODERN STATE

A number of comparative historical sociologists have emphasized the way in which the 'modern state' differs from its predecessors in terms of its 'penetration' of everyday social life (Giddens 1985, Hall 1985, Mann 1986). The governmental apparatus of the kind of state which began to develop in north-west Europe from the sixteenth century onwards affected the day-to-day lives of those it claimed to rule to a far greater degree than even the most centralized non-Western states. Thus Giddens argues that the 'class-divided' societies of the pre-modern era remained essentially *segmental*. As a Chinese proverb puts it: 'the country is great and the emperor is far away'. Imperial China had an elaborate administrative system, but in Giddens's view this type of pre-modern bureaucracy gave the central government far less power over society than that enjoyed by the national states of early modern Europe. Furthermore, Giddens suggests, pre-modern states were not really *territorial*. Imperial governments always claimed to be masters of all they surveyed, but lacked the administrative, communicative and military infrastructures necessary to make that claim a reality. 'Traditional' states had *frontiers* rather than *borders*. The administrative reach of the political centre was relatively low and its control was patchy on the periphery of its domains. The Weberian definition of the state as an institution that possesses a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a territorial domain is therefore appropriate only to the modern European state.

Giddens traces the break away from traditional state forms to the emergence of 'Absolutist' states in Europe. Post-medieval European states were based on centralization of administration and the formation of standing armies, accompanied by a transition from feudal to private property relations. Monarchs consolidated their own power at the expense of feudal aristocracies, which had previously been able to exercise some of the powers of government themselves at the local level, including the ability to tax. Giddens argues that this political transformation created a climate peculiarly favourable to the separation of the 'economic' and 'political' and 'private' and 'public' domains. The apparent 'autonomy' of the political domain and the separation of 'public' and 'private' are central to Western ideas, but products of history, not universals. As I suggested earlier, they constitute ideological representations that need thinking about more critically when it comes to attempting an anthropological analysis of how power relations actually work in the European context.

Giddens argues that a combination of constant warfare between rival states and internal pacification linked to centralization of power produced a kind of 'selective pressure' towards the development of states that had efficient centralized tax systems. This also promoted the development of money economy and credit systems that gave an important impetus towards capitalist development, bolstered by the state's guaranteeing the absolute rights of private property. On this model, the development of a 'capitalist

world economy' centred on Europe which is seen as the motor of Western global expansion by Wallerstein (1974) is only one facet of a European world system developing on the basis of transformations of political and military power. Capitalism, in the sense of merchant capitalism, flows across borders and is 'transnational', but the consolidation of Wallerstein's capitalist world economy is universally accompanied by military force and the state system develops according to its own logic.<sup>3</sup>

This is initially the product of military competition *between* different states which in turn strengthens tendencies towards administrative reorganization and greater fiscal efficiency *within* states. Giddens suggests, however, that the final transition to the modern nation-state depended on the way the internal social pacification process became linked to what he calls 'the consolidation of internal administrative resources'. The military arm of the state, a professionalized army, was now mainly pointed outward, towards other nation-states, whilst internal control was increasingly based on other kinds of 'surveillance' techniques and institutions – a point on which Giddens derives his inspiration from Michel Foucault, whose wider theoretical contribution is discussed in Chapter 6.

In Giddens's view, this development was the result of the emergence of industrialism and a new type of urbanism and relationship between town and country associated with industrialism in the 'core' areas of the European world-system. He argues that the changing nature of internal control in European states was based on processes Foucault (1979) calls 'sequestration'. Foucault is referring to the creation of carceral organizations – prisons, asylums and workhouses. A new social category of 'deviants' is removed from society and *disciplined through training of the body and surveillance* – a

<sup>3</sup> Wallerstein contends that capitalism can only develop where a number of politically independent states organize the 'world-system' division of labour between manufacturing centres and the peripheries which supply them with raw materials. Following Weber (1951), he argues that politically decentralized 'world economies' avoid the overheads of imperial bureaucratic superstructures, permitting reinvestment of profits to sustain continuous growth of production and trade. Wallerstein does, however, argue that the way European societies were structured politically before the sixteenth century is relevant to understanding why their 'world system' escaped subjection to the control of a single, imperial, political centre. This emphasis on the novelty of 'the modern world system' has, however, been contested by Jonathan Friedman (1994). Friedman not only argues that there are fundamental similarities between contemporary economic globalization and cycles of decentralization in the wealth accumulation processes of earlier civilizations (which he also sees as 'capitalist' in a broad sense, derived from Weber rather than Marx), but that the developments that Giddens associates with Western modernity, such as the public-private distinction, individualism and 'control of the subject' through new forms of institutional power, are related to such cycles and have appeared several times before in history in, for example, the Hellenistic, Roman and Chinese worlds. Like Aihwa Ong (1999: 241), Friedman takes Giddens to task for treating nation-state formation processes as autonomous phenomena relative to the economic dynamics of global systems, in an approach that is generally 'atomistic' and contingent when it should be holistic and systemic (Friedman 1994: 224).

transformation of modes of exercising power from the public torture and destruction of the body that had characterized earlier forms of punishment. Giddens, however, regards Foucault's emphasis on prisons and asylums as excessively narrow, emphasizing a more general shift in the sanctioning capacities of the state from the *manifest use of violence* to the *pervasive use of administrative power*.

Firstly, police forces replace the use of troops in everyday social regulation, in conjunction with an elaboration of sanctioning mechanisms of codified law and imprisonment. There is a general extension of surveillance mechanisms into everyday life. Secondly, everyday life is now based on industrialism, so the workplace itself becomes a site of surveillance. Violent sanctions on the part of employers and workers do not disappear overnight, but, in the industrializing nation-states of the core, capitalist employers were not allowed any direct legal access to the means of violence for use against their workers. 'Dull economic compulsion' became their main power resource. In the long run workers had no practical alternative but to accept the disciplines of capitalist wage labour and became habituated to its rules, which came to seem 'normal' and 'natural'. At first, however, they seemed to be quite the opposite, so that capitalism was born in a world of vagrancy laws and workhouses, institutions in which the 'disciplines' of capitalist wage labour were imposed on a recalcitrant dispossessed rural population.

Giddens therefore identifies certain links between industrialism and industrial urbanization on the one hand, and the forms of internal pacification which become characteristic of the nation-state on the other. Of course, the methods used to discipline the vast mass of human beings whose dispossession was the basis for industrialism were a kind of (class and state) violence. The classification of the uprooted poor as 'vagrants and criminals' and their incarceration in workhouses was hardly humane, and physical coercion played an important role in getting people into these institutions in the first place. Nevertheless, in the longer term, the new *mass societies* associated with industrialization were forged on the basis of new technologies of social control that differed in important ways from preceding forms of state power. These new technologies were far more pervasive in people's lives than their predecessors and thus the nation-state overcame the segmentalism of older state forms.

Giddens then proceeds to explain the form of nationalism found in Western industrial societies as a concomitant of the nation-state and industrialism. Once the state achieved an administrative and territorial unity, nationalism, based on a symbolic sense of shared history, culture and language, became a way of lending the administratively integrated unit a conceptual unity. Much of this symbolic unity was fabricated out of 'invented traditions', and Western nationalism for Giddens therefore has a political character. It is also an ideology which lends itself to oppositional movements, particularly where uneven development creates social dislocation in regions within the 'national unit' and claims to administrative sovereignty or autonomy are pressed by

disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, even these oppositional movements are now channelled through the administrative and political apparatus of the modern nation-state regime, through struggles for amendment of national constitutions and legal recognition of the rights of particular national or ethnic groups. As Wilson and Donnan argue in criticizing what they see as an unhealthy tendency for political anthropology to focus on a 'new' politics of identity, privileging the self and its representation, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race, much of this new politics 'would be nowhere without the state as its principal contextual opponent' (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 2). This suggests something about the deeper changes brought about by a 'modern' type of state organization.

#### WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF HISTORICAL DISCONTINUITY

Talal Asad has argued that the contemporary production of social, cultural and political difference on a global scale ultimately rests on the universal 'formation of modern states on European patterns throughout the world' (Asad 1992: 334). Given the variety of contemporary political regimes, it may seem implausible to talk about a diffusion of the modern state form throughout the world, but Asad is pointing to something deeper than forms of government.

He suggests that the crucial transformation in European society came with the notion that there existed a separate legal and constitutional order that the ruler had a duty to maintain, a notion which emerged in north-western Europe in the period from the late thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. This is the historical moment when the word 'state' first comes into general usage. It becomes possible to see the state rather than the person of the ruler as the sole source of law and legitimate force within its territory. With that change emerged the 'citizen' who owes allegiance to the state, of which both he and the politically dominant class were members, together with the distinction between the 'public' sphere and the 'private' sphere, also emphasized by Giddens, which corresponds to the distinction between state and 'civil society'.<sup>4</sup> What is distinctive about this new type of political organization is

4 The notion of 'civil society' plays a crucial role in European theories of politics and is central to the way European thought constructed a negative 'Orientalist' discourse emphasizing the West's superiority to rival civilizations (Said 1978, Turner 1994: 34). Seventeenth-century models of 'bourgeois individualism' defended the political freedom of the propertied individual against the monarchical state, arguing that freedom depended on the existence of a 'civil society' standing between the autonomous individual and the state. The institutions of civil society – churches, guilds, voluntary associations, families and communities – protected the interests of individuals and enabled them to assert their interests against those of the state. Models of 'Oriental despotism' defined non-Western political regimes as ones in which the institutions of civil society do not exist, and a similar argument is often advanced today to explain the absence of democratic governance in countries that allegedly have 'weak civil societies'.

that all groups in society become compelled to pursue their interests 'within the domain organized by the state', through political struggles focused on legal categories. Working-class politics, for example, becomes struggle about labour laws, whilst struggles in colonial contexts often revolve around getting colonial administrations to recognize 'custom' as a legal category.

Within a modern political system, Asad argues, all social issues become *politicized* in this way. Indigenous groups demand the legal recognition of their special status, whilst gender and sexual politics become possible once the law makes it possible for sub-groups of free and equal citizens to acquire certain distinctive rights. Such struggles cannot always be pursued successfully, but it is important that people now attempt to secure rights in this way even in profoundly authoritarian circumstances. Repressive regimes increasingly find themselves forced to justify practices which violate human rights as universally understood. Asad in fact suggests that 'repressive regimes' are states which share the *pretensions* of all 'modern states' to intervene profoundly in the social practices of everyday life but have not succeeded in developing the power infrastructures needed to effect the kind of 'penetration' of social life achieved in the North. They are essentially *weak* states, resorting to physical coercion because they cannot secure their ends through the more subtle and manipulative practices of power associated with Northern 'surveillance' societies.

The modern state does not necessarily function in a way that guarantees 'the greatest happiness to the greatest number'. The deep regulation of social (and personal) life through law can be deeply disadvantageous to particular groups even in a democratic society. In the context of the world colonized by the West, however, what Asad stresses is how the spread of modern forms of power underpins the homogenization of certain understandings of 'modernization' and 'progress', despite the continuing cultural and social differentiation of the global social order:

The West has become a vast moral project, an intimidating claim to write and speak for the world, and an unending politicization of power. Becoming Western has meant becoming transformed according to these things, albeit in a variety of historical circumstances and with varying degrees of thoroughness. For conscripts of Western civilization this transformation implies that some desires have been forcibly eliminated – even violently – and others put in their place. The modern state, invented in Europe, is the universal condition of that transformation – and of its higher truth. (Asad 1992: 345)

Asad's argument remains salient even if the model of state 'modernization' and its relationship to nation-building offered by Giddens turns out to be an inadequate or incomplete account of Western European development, and may be even less applicable to the development of national states outside Western Europe. Considering the processes that led Catalans living on the borders between France and Spain to identify with one country or the other, Peter Sahlins (1998) argued that national identity is not always imposed on

experience of successive state regimes has undermined those systems without replacing them with alternatives that work.

This is, of course, the opposite of what classical anthropology, with its faith in the civilizing mission of the Pax Britannica and the ultimate superiority of the modern liberal state and its institutions, assumed would be the future of colonized peoples. It is also not a particularly good advertisement for the supposed benefits of 'government' in general.

### 3 FROM HIERARCHY TO SURVEILLANCE: THE POLITICS OF AGRARIAN CIVILIZATIONS AND THE RISE OF THE WESTERN NATIONAL STATE

Debates about the 'origins of the state' may seem more relevant to political philosophy than to contemporary political anthropology. Yet it is less obvious that the same can be said about the analysis of the great 'agrarian civilizations', the combination of a stratified, agrarian-based society with one of the world 'religions of the book', such as Buddhism or Islam. The agrarian civilizations of the Near and Far East were world-historical rivals of the Latin Christian civilization of the West, and the multi-ethnic religious communities they established continue to be a force in modern global politics, as Europeans were so sharply reminded by the tragic events in Bosnia in 1993. The European response to the Bosnian problem suggests that the shifting frontier between Christendom and Islam remains salient to the very identity of 'Europe' and 'the West'. The later Kosovo crisis reminds us that that Western Europe's identity is also entangled in the division between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity, a consequence of the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West and its partial survival in the East in the form of the Byzantine Empire. Although Islamic governments ultimately failed to make a decisive collective intervention in the Bosnian conflict, individuals from Islamic countries volunteered for service with the Muslim forces. The presence of nationalist Russian volunteers in the Bosnian Serb forces was followed by the celebrated dash by a Russian column to take control of Pristina airport before the advancing NATO ground forces. Although the motivations of the actors involved in the break-up of Yugoslavia should be sought in the present, and ethno-nationalism is clearly a more general global phenomenon, history, and not simply twentieth-century history, remains important for understanding the deeper meanings with which contemporary actions may be invested (van de Port 1999).

This underscores the point I stressed in Chapter 1, the usefulness of trying to understand 'modernity' at a global, cross-cultural, level. Such a perspective not only sheds light on the contemporary politics of religion but illuminates other aspects of the division of the world into geo-political blocs which are based on essentially similar forms of political and economic orga-

nization but articulate their cleavages through a reassertion of cultural-historical differences. It is true that local conflicts are often ignited by political leaderships pursuing self-serving quests for power and that the past to which their rhetoric appeals may be almost entirely a contemporary fabrication. Yet the generalized social mobilization such promptings can invoke – including the obscene violence which neighbour may come to perpetrate upon neighbour – suggests that the demagogues are unleashing deeper, societal processes. These processes may reflect distinctive popular understandings of society, culture, identity and the meaning of history itself, shaped by the way Western domination has transformed but not erased variations in forms of social life.

This is an area where the analyses of comparative sociology tend to be deficient, although the comparative analysis of agrarian civilizations (including the West) is a field to which the anthropological contribution itself has been limited. Historical sociologists have largely been interested in explaining the 'rise of the West' and accounting for the global hegemony the Western powers achieved. Traditionally, these analyses focused on supposed structural 'blockages' which prevented non-Western civilizations achieving the economic and military 'dynamism' which enabled the north-west European powers to achieve capitalist industrialization and thus create colonial empires founded on military superiority. They are not centrally concerned with non-European agrarian civilizations in their own right, and are prone to emphasize the way such civilizations ultimately 'stagnated' socially and economically in comparison with Europe. Historical sociology remains in danger of perpetuating the intellectual vice known as 'Orientalism' (Said 1978, Turner 1994), in which the West understands 'the East' as an inverse image of its own preoccupations and understanding of itself, reducing the variety and complexity of alien cultural forms to a homogenized 'exotic other': Europeans contrasted oriental 'despotism' with European love of liberty, or juxtaposed the supposed character traits of a standardized Western 'individual' with what were generally, though not invariably, negatively characterized 'oriental' proclivities. For Edward Said, 'Orientalism' was the means by which the imperial gaze created a system of knowledge appropriate to world domination, but as Bryan Turner has noted, there is an equally important sense in which the 'problem' of Orientalism was not the Orient but the Occident. We should not take the assumptions it makes about Western civilization as unquestionable truths (Turner 1994: 34, see also Carrier 1995).

Modern historical sociology is aware of these pitfalls. Nevertheless, a focus on explaining the 'rise of the West' distracts attention from cultural features of non-Western civilizations which do not seem germane to explaining differences in historical development. Comparison of this kind may also involve the use of sociological categories derived from Western experience which embody ethnocentric premises about the way 'societies' in general are structured. Analysis of non-Western agrarian civilizations as 'whole

systems' in their own right is essential because there *are* radical differences between cultural systems at this level.

Louis Dumont (1970, 1986) has argued that the Indian caste system and, with it, the political organization of Indian civilization, cannot be properly understood without recognizing that 'hierarchy' in India is founded on a totally different cultural logic to 'social stratification' in Western societies. Both types of society have social 'inequalities' in our terms, but these 'inequalities' do not have the same meanings to social actors in hierarchic societies as they have for social actors born in societies premised on Western notions of individualism and egalitarianism. The crux of Dumont's argument is that, in India, political power is encompassed by and subordinated to religious status. As we will see later, Dumont's position has been criticized on the grounds that, despite its radical relativism, it actually belongs to a sociological tradition dating back to Marx and Weber – and represents another variant of 'Orientalism' – because it depicts political power in India before colonialism as having less significance for social life than it actually had. Dumont's emphasis on the cultural logic of hierarchy as an eternal principle always present in Indian constructions of power has also been criticized as ahistorical, structuralist idealism. Nevertheless, as we will see in Chapter 7, powerful arguments can be made for its continuing relevance to contemporary politics, once we possess a theory of how historically rooted cultural models can be *reactivated* in a way which influence the behaviour of contemporary actors.

Culture is important. Although it is difficult to see how comparative analysis could be possible at all without assuming we can discuss, say, the relationships between 'classes' and the 'state' in different agrarian civilizations, we need to define what these general terms denote within particular cultural and historical settings: is Japanese feudalism, for example, the same as European feudalism, even if both are at some level of abstraction examples of something similar?<sup>1</sup> The national states which succeeded non-European agrarian civilizations subjected to colonial domination may today *appear* to have Westernized elites and modern forms of political life. At one level *they do*, since Western colonial domination has transformed them profoundly. Yet it may not be possible to explain their contemporary politics without understanding that distinct cultural models of the nature of society, government and the state continue to shape events today and make their

<sup>1</sup> This question has been seen as important because Japan was the only Asian power to make a rapid transition to capitalism. It is tempting to explain this by saying Japan's 'feudal' political organization provided 'structural preconditions' for capitalism otherwise found only in Europe. This argument is demolished by Moulder (1977), who argues that Japan's 'development' can only be explained by her unique place in the evolving world system. Lacking the resources that Western industrial powers were interested in controlling, Japan was coopted as a 'junior partner' in their project of securing military domination of Asia rather than 'peripheralized'.

'modernity' no less modern but still *different* from that of the West. We should also bear in mind that neither modern nor ancient societies have just one culture: we can also identify class and regional cultures of various kinds which may be central to political processes.

#### POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN THEORIES OF EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT

Although the limitations of comparative historical sociology should be noted, I do not wish to disparage its considerable achievements. The new insights modern research has produced into European development offer us a better appreciation of what is distinctive about Western historical experience and redress deficiencies in anthropological thinking. I will focus here on issues germane to problems discussed later in this book, beginning with the relationship between political and socio-economic change in Europe.

Different theorists date the origins of a distinctive European trajectory of development to different historical periods. Some, like Perry Anderson (1974a, 1974b), argue that the role of Roman civilization was crucial to later European development. Others start with European feudalism or emphasize a variety of later historical turning points, such as the geographical expansion of the European world in the sixteenth century, the rise of Absolutist states, or the development of industrial capitalism. Some analyses argue strongly *against* drawing a polarizing opposition between the history of Europe and Asia (Turner 1979). Theda Skocpol's comparative analysis of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions suggests that the political and agrarian structures of the three 'proto-bureaucratic' *anciens régimes* overthrown by these classical social revolutions were more similar to *each other* than France was similar to England (Skocpol 1979). Skocpol argues, however, that the fate of these regimes was determined by the development of an international state system within which they could not compete successfully with more 'modern' powers, echoing the emphasis of others on the European multiple-state system as a driving force in modern history.

Many analyses suggest that it is not adequate to see 'modernity' – defined in terms of individualism, mass society, the modern state and its disciplinary technologies, a notion of historicity as 'progress' and a dominant culture of scientific rationalism – as the product of socio-economic change alone.<sup>2</sup> Giddens (1985) argues that not all features of modern societies

2 Few modern theorists see it as the consequence of unique social changes in Britain, although arguments based on the cultural peculiarities of the English have been advanced by an anthropologist (Macfarlane 1987). Macfarlane's writings on 'English individualism' display at least an elective affinity with neo-conservatism, and form part of a movement in 'revisionist' historiography which argues that nothing truly 'revolutionary' happened in the course of Western development. They remain largely silent on the coercive nature of what I will persist in seeing as fundamental transformations.

derive from the capitalist organization of the production process and capitalist property relations, and that military and political transformation proceeds according to its own, autonomous, logic, although this view has been criticized by anthropologists such as Friedman (1994) and Ong (1999), as I noted in Chapter 1.

Giddens's position is clearly at odds with Marxist emphasis on the 'transition to capitalism' as the key to understanding Western development. 'Orthodox Marxist' theory has its own political dimension, but this is tied to a particular class-based theory of social change. The assumption is that capitalism is the product of class struggle, and that this struggle has two sides to it. In the first place, modern capitalism rests on 'free wage labour' and the mass proletarianization of 'peasants', who are driven off the land and forced to sell their labour power to capitalists. Proletarianization is a precondition for capitalist production as Marx defined it, and the 'pre-history' of capitalism therefore entails a coercive transformation of the 'traditional' agrarian system on the part of the ruling class and the state, since peasants resist being driven from the land and into wage labour. 'Free wage' labour also entails major transformations of the legal system, to guarantee the rights of private property and sanctity of contracts on the one hand, and to dissolve the bonds of personal dependence associated with feudalism on the other. Thus, capitalism implies a second type of political transformation according to orthodox Marxism: until the bourgeoisie have captured control of the state from the landowning aristocracy, they cannot enact the laws required for the full development of modern capitalism. The consolidation of the capitalist mode of production therefore depends on political revolution. Britain's 'bourgeois revolution' is the civil war of the seventeenth century, and France's achievement of modern capitalism was delayed because her 'bourgeois revolution' was not consummated for another hundred years.

This orthodox account is not, however, accepted by all modern Marxist writers. Against the prevailing emphasis on 'rising urban bourgeoisies', Brenner (1982) argued that agrarian capitalism was an essential precondition for industrial capitalism and the product of agrarian class conflict within English feudal society, differing political structures being important mainly as factors influencing the different outcomes of such conflicts in France and Eastern Europe. In almost complete opposition to this approach, another major debate developed about whether Britain ever achieved a full transition to capitalism.

Perry Anderson (1987) and Tom Nairn (1988) argue that Britain's economic decline, and the peculiarities of British class structure, political institutions and nationalism, should be explained in terms of the limitations of the country's capitalist development. The pioneer shift towards capitalism did not produce the large-scale capitalist industry which developed later in France, Germany and the United States. Small-scale industrial capitalism did not achieve full domination over merchant capital. Accordingly, the British 'bourgeoisie' never succeeded in producing a 'bourgeois' state and political

system. The Nairn-Anderson thesis has been robustly criticized by Ellen Meiksins Wood (1991). Wood offers the intriguing counter-argument that the fact that our paradigmatic conceptions of 'bourgeois' society, the modern state and political culture come from Continental Europe, in particular France, simply reveals the top-down, statist, nature of capitalist development in those countries, and the fact that pre-capitalist social property relations persisted in them long after they had disappeared in England, where capitalism took over society much more comprehensively at an early stage. Thus, the absence of a 'modern' state and political culture of the Continental kind in Britain reflects the fact that it was the bourgeoisie that established capitalism there, from below, rather than the state, from above. British culture is therefore the *most* capitalist in Europe.

Wood's argument still leaves Britain as an exceptional case within the overall pattern of European development, however, and it reinforces non-Marxist arguments that analysis of political change in eighteenth-century France in terms of a notion of 'bourgeois revolution' is misconceived, as Skocpol shows in her analysis of the breakdown of the *ancien régime*.

In pre-revolutionary France, wealthy merchants could buy public offices and convert themselves into noblemen. France had a unified upper class, which included both hereditary aristocrats and (pre-industrial) bourgeois, and it was a political revolt against Absolutism by this elite that precipitated the revolutionary crisis. What prompted upper-class calls for 'representative government' – which the elite viewed as government which would conserve their privileges – was the Crown's removal of its exemption from taxes. This policy was dictated by the fiscal crisis caused by the costs of competing militarily with other states which had more dynamic economic systems. France's peasant farmers, burdened by state taxation and feudal exactions from landowners, were not distinguished by their productivity.

At first the conflict pitted wealthy, cosmopolitan aristocrats against poor members of the nobility, who sided with the king because they feared that political 'modernization' would lead to the abolition of the seigneurial dues which provided their comparatively meagre incomes. Yet what started as a political conflict between those at the top of French society was transformed into a social revolution based on class war between landlord and peasant. All French peasants resented the seigneurial regime, but it was especially resented by small-holders, who owned their land, but were still subject to petty aristocratic exactions dating back to the medieval period. Once the peasants saw the state apparatus was too disorganized to repress them effectively, resentment turned to rebellion.

A more 'radical', Jacobin, political leadership did emerge to lead the mass conflicts which developed in both countryside and city, but it was a leadership of 'petty bourgeois' urban intellectuals and professionals, not a rising capitalist bourgeoisie of either the mercantile or industrial variety. The outcome of the French Revolution was broadly favourable to capitalist development: feudal institutions were abolished in favour of a full private

property regime and peasant solidarity collapsed as soon as the small-holders were freed from the seigneurial impositions that had given them common cause with fellow villagers dependent on landlords. Yet it seems necessary to recognize the Absolutist state as an autonomous actor in this historical drama. The immediate problem to be resolved after the revolution was the reconstruction of the state,<sup>3</sup> a process which did not bring France political stability through the whole of the next century.

The case of *ancien régime* France has wider implications. The state in agrarian civilizations cannot be reduced to a simple instrument of ruling-class dominance, because such systems generally involve conflicts between imperial governments and landowning ruling classes. In the case of China, the imperial dynasty ruled through the *literati*, a corps of bureaucrats which was theoretically openly recruited on the basis of ability to pass an examination in Confucian philosophy. In practice the *literati* were generally younger sons or adopted wards of landowning 'gentry' families (Barrington Moore 1969). This made it difficult for the state to achieve its goal of ruling through administrative personnel who lacked autonomous social power and would not fall under the control of regional landlord cliques that might put private interests before those of the empire. Nevertheless, incoming Chinese imperial dynasties frequently took actions designed to reduce the power of the landed upper classes: the Manchus actually abolished serfdom in the eighteenth century, so that emancipated peasants could again become free members of peasant communities paying taxes only to the state itself.

Mann (1986) and Hall (1985) describe the long-term effect of these processes as a 'power stand-off' between ruling class and imperial state. Skocpol's argument that pre-revolutionary France and Manchu China were variations on a theme has much to recommend it at first sight, but Mann has argued that even Europe's 'imperial' states reflected important differences in European conditions in terms of the balance of power between decentralized social (class) power and the power wielded by monarchical states. These differences are central to what he identifies as the special historical dynamic of European societies.

#### A SPECIFICALLY EUROPEAN DYNAMIC?

Mann takes the view that capitalism was a product of the larger European system of civilization, and that England achieved early supremacy simply

<sup>3</sup> Marx himself explained post-revolutionary developments in France, in particular the rise of the populist regime of Louis Bonaparte, in terms of the continuing *weakness* of the capitalist class and continuing resistance of the peasantry to social and economic modernization. This analysis is most trenchantly expressed in Marx (1968), the text which contains his (in)famous analogy between the French small-holding peasantry and 'potatoes in a sack'. Marx himself therefore did not adopt the simple 'bourgeois revolution' model.



because she had 'a certain edge' over her rivals. He differs, however, from many other theorists who share that premise, in arguing that Europe was set on a distinctive course of development from 800 AD onwards, though he shares some common ground with Perry Anderson (1974a). Like Anderson, Mann emphasizes the puny nature of the early medieval state, and stresses the importance of the extreme political decentralization which followed the fall of the Roman Empire: the 'parcellization of sovereignty' and autonomy of the medieval *city* from political control by the feudal landed aristocracy.<sup>4</sup> Both agree that this shaped the subsequent economic development of European societies. What Mann adds to Anderson is the idea that what he calls the 'multiple acephalous federated state system' of Europe created an expansionist economic dynamic in two spheres, the agrarian economy itself, and international trade and commerce, within the special framework provided by the Christian Church (Mann 1986: 395–6).

Christianity is central to Mann's model of this early 'European dynamic', as it is to John Hall's answer to the question of why European civilization was not reunified politically under an imperial state but achieved a dynamic economy under highly conflictive conditions of political decentralization. The Catholic Church, as a transnational organization, provided the framework of pacification required for the development of European trading systems and commerce, and, as a holder of lands and producer of commodities, also played a direct role in reviving and developing economic activity after the Dark Ages. Hall notes that Christianity sought to 'penetrate' lower-class society (Hall 1985: 126), and Mann develops this point in another direction by linking Christianity to the issue at the forefront of Marxist analyses – 'class struggle'.

Mann argues that the extreme decentralization of European feudalism heightened class stratification between lord and peasant, while Christianity intensified the degree of conflict in agrarian class relationships. Here he emphasizes the *contradictory* nature of Christianity. After the early Church reached an accommodation with secular state power, its hierarchy dedicated

<sup>4</sup> In the European context, we associate feudalism with the existence of a landlord class, but Weber defined feudalism in political terms, as a system of domination in which rights to exercise authority are delegated from higher to lower-ranking power holders in return for services of a military or administrative character through a contractual relationship of personal loyalty between lord and vassal. What is granted, the fief, does not have to be rights over land, but could simply be rights to tax free peasant communities or juridical or military authority (Weber 1951: 255–7). European feudalism was particularly decentralized because local elites enjoyed power in the economic, juridical, political and military spheres simultaneously. Sovereignty was not simply decentralized, however, but *parcellized*: different lords held jurisdictions over single peasant villages, so that the peasants could play one master off against another, and some peasants retained 'allodial' tenure of the land, free of overriding claims by landlords. Parcellization of sovereignty left some sectors of feudal society comparatively free of control, and Anderson argues that this gave forces favourable to capitalism a chance to consolidate themselves absent in non-European state systems.

itself to producing an 'immanent ideology of ruling class morale'.<sup>5</sup> Yet Christian doctrine continued to offer an alternative view of the world – a classless ideology which provided a sense of social identity for its socially and culturally heterogeneous congregation. According to Christianity, rich and poor, lord and peasant, stood equal on the Day of Judgement. However much the Church tried to preach obedience to authority, it could never suppress this dangerous popular 'message' – that Christians should seek social improvement in this world, if necessary in opposition to this-worldly authority.

Christianity and a weak state promoted class struggle. Mann argues, however, that lords retained the capacity to outflank peasants organizationally. Peasant rebellions mostly remained localized. So he does not regard Brenner's key process, 'class struggle' between lord and peasant, as the *decisive* source of social change in Europe, but as something sustaining an impetus towards transformation.

The second major aspect of Mann's 'European dynamic' is agrarian. He argues that European expansionism was underpinned by the intensive exploitation of nature, and that peasant farmers made an important contribution to agricultural innovation. Mann suggests that the intensive exploitation of the land was a response to the localism and political fragmentation of Europe – the more extensive agriculture of the Romans would be a reflection of the different political organization of their territorial empire. The problem, however, with arguing that agrarian dynamism characterizes Europe *in general* is that in much of pre-industrial Europe, as in other agrarian civilizations, bursts of agricultural growth were followed by stagnation (Brenner 1982, Wolf 1982).

Nevertheless, Mann's emphasis on the relationship between Christianity and class conflict and the impacts of politico-economic decentralization does seem relevant for understanding why agrarian capitalism emerged for the first time in Europe and not somewhere else in the world. It also leads him towards a theory of how property relations influenced the development of state forms. European civilization saw an unprecedented extension of 'private' property rights. This is not a question of 'private property' in its modern sense – ownership vested exclusively in a single judicial person – but a matter of how far the state could interfere in dominant class appropriation of resources (Mann 1986: 399). The European state had less control in this respect than historical contemporaries like the Chinese and Ottoman

<sup>5</sup> Most empires in history have been cemented together by such elite ideologies, society below the elite level remaining segmentary and often basing itself on a quite distinct value system, including religious practices. In the Chinese case, Confucianism was the ideology of the mandarins, and only interested itself in questions of personal salvation in the later stages of Chinese history, after Buddhism and Taoist mysticism had already largely filled the void it left in popular religiosity.

empires. European monarchies which tried to increase their power over society had to adapt to the unassailable strength of class power. As Hall puts it: 'the European state evolved slowly and doggedly in the midst of a pre-existent civil society' (Hall 1985: 137).

Mann divides the process of state consolidation in Europe into two phases. From the mid-twelfth to later fifteenth centuries, 'feudal' federations are replaced by more centralized territorial states, though these 'national' units were still cemented together by 'particularistic, often dynastic, relations between monarchs and semi-autonomous lords' (Mann 1986: 416). Like Moulder (1977), Mann argues that the primary impetus towards centralization came from international war. Feudal levies were supplemented by professional soldiers, costs escalated and competition forced states to emulate their neighbours. Mercantile activity came increasingly to depend on the protection of states, but the states themselves depended on loans from merchant capitalists to fund their wars, because their powers to tax were still limited. There was thus a symbiosis between the monarchies and merchant capital, and mercantile interests saw state warfare as economically advantageous, adding their weight to demands for territorial expansion coming from younger sons of the nobility denied land under European systems of primogeniture inheritance. Since military expansion was about capturing markets as well as land, state economic policy evolved on the lines known as 'mercantilism', orientating itself towards building up the 'national' economy at the expense of rivals, although European societies were not yet 'nations' in the modern sense of the term as defined by Giddens.

The second phase of state consolidation based on national states began in the late fifteenth century: the lord-vassal chain gave way either to the Absolutist system of bureaucratic administration centred on the Royal Household, or to the 'Constitutionalist' form of government based on representative assemblies. As inter-state military competition intensified, all European monarchies switched to professional armies and permanent tax-collecting machines staffed by bureaucracies. Yet the wealth of the ruling class as a whole remained vastly greater than that of the state.

Mann defines 'Absolutism' as a system in which the monarch rules through a permanent bureaucracy and army, excluding the dominant classes from an institutionalized voice in government, and argues that it was only possible where the state did not need to tax the dominant class. Spain had the bullion of the New World, but still faced a more or less permanent fiscal crisis which forced the Crown to sell public offices to the highest bidder. Whereas the French had a relatively secure agrarian tax base among peasant small-holders, the Spanish imperial state suffered a constant erosion of its tribute-base among the indigenous communities of the New World. By securing the consent of the nobility by refraining from taxing them, and imposing their exactions on lower classes, Absolutist regimes promoted divisions in society, and were ultimately less effective as tax-collecting organizations than 'Constitutionalist' states like England and Holland. This made

them less effective military competitors on the international scene in the longer term. 'Constitutionalist' states fostered the unity of the propertied classes, and Mann describes them as 'organic class-nations', mobilizing the entire fiscal energy of their populations, since the ruling class contributed to state revenues (Mann 1986: 480). This laid the basis for the development of the modern technologies of power discussed in Chapter 1. Hall makes a similar point in contrasting the 'organic' European state with the 'capstone state' of China, though he also notes the underlying similarity between *ancien régime* France and China in this respect (Hall 1985: 138-9).

Mann, however, regards 'Absolutist' and 'Constitutionalist' states as two sub-types of a single, historically distinctive European state form. His argument is based, among other things, on an argument about how French and Spanish Absolutism behaved in their colonial worlds: the fact that Spanish Absolutism could not overthrow private property rights or interfere in the economy as much as an ancient imperial state was demonstrated by its performance in the Americas, where even its own officials would go in for contraband trading in defiance of imperial economic policy. I would accept that the history of the Spanish and French imperial states does reflect the strength of decentralized class power in the European world, but it is worth noting that even eighteenth-century observers were beginning to see the Absolutist regimes as anachronisms which could not survive the challenge posed by more dynamic societies developing in Britain, Holland and North America. In themselves, they were not harbingers of a new world-historical era.

In my view, the 'dynamic' of European development lay, in part at least, in the long-term stimulus to cumulative transformation engendered by the decentralized international system of competing state units. Mann's analysis shows how the extreme political-economic decentralization of medieval European society and the particular nature of Latin Christian civilization underpinned the emergence of a 'multiple acephalous states system' which was both resistant to empire formation and conducive to further transformations of society and polity. Yet 'Europe' has always been characterized by a diversity of state-society relations and political cultures, which is what makes its contemporary unification and even its identity so problematic. Although the European *arena* of civilization made it possible for the first 'modern' national states and capitalist economies to emerge, the structures of many European social formations would, in a different context, have remained inimical to the genesis of 'modern' society. In this sense, Mann's argument for a common European social dynamic leading towards capitalism and beginning in 800 AD has an unacceptably teleological quality.

Mann's entire emphasis on the long-term is rejected by Giddens. Giddens argues that 'progressivist' interpretations of history 'in which the dynamism of the modern West is traced to a sequence linking the Classical world, feudalism and modern societies' underplay the distinctive qualities of 'truly modern' states in comparison with all forms of 'traditional states', including

European ones (Giddens 1985: 83). He focuses his own analysis on transformations ensuing from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Absolutism, and emphasizes the emergence of industrialism, rather than capitalist social property relations, as the key to the development of modern technologies of power. It was industrialized war which produced not merely nineteenth-century colonialism but the global spread of the nation-state form. The experience of industrialized war, and the mass mobilization associated with it, shaped the pattern of *economic* development of Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and Japan in the period between the two world wars. The organization of the economy during the Second World War provided a paradigm for the 'Fordist-Keynesian' restructuring of capitalist economic regulation through state intervention which characterized the post-war years up to the late 1970s (Harvey 1989). War also set the political parameters of the world order which developed after 1945 – not merely the politics of the 'Cold War' but the kinds of political regimes which emerged among the defeated.

Giddens therefore argues that industrialized militarism is another key dimension of 'modernity'. Yet from the perspective of the late 1990s, abandonment of a focus on capitalist social-property relations as a shaper of historical change seems unwise, and there are costs in abandoning the long-term analysis of the distinctiveness of post-Roman European civilization in favour of Giddens's 'discontinuist' model. Mann and Anderson offer important insights into the historical roots of relations between civil society and the state, religion and politics, and individual and society in the European arena.

There are, however, strong objections to any framework which sees 'modernity' as the product of endogenous change taking place within the historical-geographical space that defines 'the West' as 'Europe'. In fact, rather than talk about the 'rise of the West' it might be preferable to talk about the development of 'North Atlantic civilization' in a way that relates developments within Western Europe to the existence of the colonial empires founded by European powers. We can make a distinction between an 'old' colonial world, constructed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and the 'new' capitalist imperialism represented by the nineteenth-century colonial process, in which industrial capitalist centres carved up the world politically in order to create new markets, control areas supplying food for their urban populations and raw materials for industrial processes located in the metropolis, and invested capital in 'modernizing' colonial production to serve the needs of industrialism. One anthropological account of the role of the 'old' colonialism in the 'rise of the West' is provided by the global perspectives offered by Eric Wolf (1982) and Sidney Mintz (1985).

Rather than seeing change on a global scale as resulting from the interventions of an active metropolitan 'core' on a passive colonial 'periphery', Wolf and Mintz both emphasize ways in which developments in colonized regions influenced developments in metropolitan societies, and more complex ways in which changes in different parts of the evolving global

system were interrelated as changes in one area influenced, facilitated or impeded developments in another. As Mintz observes, the colonial world served as a 'laboratory' for subsequent developments in Europe. Though sugar cane originated in Melanesia, and Europeans borrowed the technology for growing and processing it from the Islamic world, Caribbean sugar plantations prefigured the factory system of the Industrial Revolution in the way they organized time and the division of labour (Mintz 1985). This idea of the old colonial world as a 'laboratory of modernity' can, however, be taken much further.

Ann Stoler (1995) has argued that the experience of Europeans in their 'old' colonial territories shaped nineteenth-century ideas about race and sexuality in Europe. Furthermore, she suggests that all the key symbols of modern Western societies, including liberal notions of citizenship and nationalism, were shaped in an historical context of which colonial relations were constitutive, and that this underlies the very concept of 'culture' and the idea of 'Europeanness' itself. There is an obvious relationship between the historical 'invention of the white race' and the Atlantic slave trade, even if racism was reinforced in the United States by the transition to an industrial capitalist economy, as David Roediger argues (Roediger 1994: 64). But Stoler suggests that racial divisions were important for defending general 'European' superiority, given that there were lower-class Europeans in the colonies who needed to be separated in status from 'the natives' and inhibited, as far as possible, from the kind of wholesale miscegenation that would break down racial hierarchy. Within the colonies, racial and class discriminations became blurred: the 'children of the Indies', as the offspring of Europeans and non-Europeans were dubbed in colonial Indonesia, were said to lack the internal controls and 'suitability' for disciplined work required of a citizen claiming a right to participate in a liberal democratic nation (Stoler 1995: 130).

Stoler therefore argues that the evolving colonial social order shaped the way that emerging European bourgeoisies distinguished themselves from the old aristocracies, defined the notion of the rights-bearing free and equal citizen, and subsequently set about disciplining the 'dangerous' new industrial working classes at home. As the case of the Irish demonstrates, the new working classes could themselves be racialized and 'othered' within North Atlantic societies, but Stoler's suggestion is that the 'disciplines of the body' emphasized as the quintessence of modernity in the work of Michel Foucault (1979, 1985) has a colonial dimension linked to 'race' and sexuality that Foucault's own eurocentric argument ignores.

Her argument thus suggests a major criticism of the basic assumptions of the 'rise of the West' discourse. Western European thought came to depict Europe as a 'modernity' bringing civilization and progress to the 'backward and underdeveloped': yet European societies' first colonial territories, in the Americas, Caribbean and Asia, could be seen as the historical laboratories in which the ideas and practices that came to define 'modernity' were first

worked out (Stoler 1995: 15–16). As an ironic and important further twist to this perspective, she cites Timothy Mitchell's observation that Foucault's paradigmatic example of modern disciplinary power, Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, first appeared in the Ottoman Empire rather than Northern Europe (Mitchell 1991: 35).

#### AGRARIAN CIVILIZATION OUTSIDE EUROPE

Taking the silenced contributions of the Islamic world to European development as a cue, I will focus here in particular on the relation between religion and politics, since this is a theme of such contemporary interest as well as a central element in the theories of European distinctiveness we have considered. It will also lead us into areas where anthropologists have contributed centrally to important debates.

I begin by revisiting the case of China, where the endless repetition of the imperial form of government reflected a 'power stand-off' between the state and landlord class. China appears to be amongst the most 'bureaucratized' of pre-industrial states, but the imperial bureaucracy was tiny in comparison with the scale of the empire (Hall 1985: 41). As Weber (1951) observed, the amount of tax revenue siphoned off into the private pockets of that bureaucracy was substantial. The imperial government sought to prevent its administrators from being coopted by the landlord class by rotating them in posts regularly and preventing them from serving in provinces where their families held land. These measures were not conducive to administrative efficiency. Mandarins were often unable to speak the local dialect and became dependent on assistants 'recommended' by the local gentry. The fact that the Chinese *literati* were generally recruited from the gentry class was not, however, a total disaster from the state's point of view. Gentry lineages were large and had problems maintaining their economic and social position. Sending a member into the bureaucracy offered a means of adding to the collective wealth of the kin corporation. The gentry thus benefited from empire, even if they clashed with it over control of the peasant surplus.

Confucianism gave the mandarin class a specific identity which was centred on and ultimately supportive of state institutions, although it could not be relied on to sustain mandarin allegiance to any particular dynasty (Hall 1985: 40). This helped damp down periodic tendencies towards 'feudalization'. Landlords sought to escape state taxation and increase their estates, and sheltered peasants who preferred dependence on a local lord to a rising burden of state taxation, but the dominant class never withdrew their support from the imperial state in the decisive way that brought about the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. Hall lays great stress on the monolithic nature of Chinese elite culture in explaining the persistent re-establishment of an imperial government after bouts of feudalization (*ibid.*: 52). Confucianism did not 'penetrate' Chinese society, but this civilization

knew no struggles between church and state once the mandarins succeeded in suppressing the threat posed by Buddhism. No neighbouring powers threatened Chinese integrity. Nomadic invaders simply took their place within the imperial institutions, and north and south China achieved economic, social and political integration.

This, Wallerstein (1974) observes, converted the imperial state unit into a self-sufficient 'world system', although it is important not to see China as a *closed* system. Despite periodic interventions by the Chinese imperial centre, the coastal cities of south China have two millennia of cosmopolitan history behind them. Access to them by strangers from the sea was considerably easier than overland through the mountains. Guangzhou (Canton), at the head of the Pearl River delta, today at the forefront of China's new capitalism, possesses a mosque that is thirteen centuries old and still serves a small Hui Chinese Muslim community of 6,000 (Ikels 1996: 13). Even when the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) attempted to prohibit sea trade, Chinese merchants continued to build networks throughout East and South-East Asia. When European traders finally arrived in numbers, they had to break into markets encapsulated by a Chinese-dominated trade and tributary system that ramified throughout the region (Ong 1996: 78).

As a 'world system', Islamic civilization appears similar to Christian civilization: no empire ever succeeded in encapsulating the Islamic cultural world within its political boundaries. Yet as an encompassing religious order, Islam appears more totalizing than Christianity. It establishes a framework for the whole of religious and secular life, including the political domain, and is both this-worldly and other-worldly. The last of the world religions to emerge onto the historical stage, Islam, like Christianity, bases itself on a concept of the individual before God. Its social cosmology is therefore distinct from the Hindu-Buddhist hierarchic model of society in which the individual has no meaningful social existence outside collectivities and the part is always encompassed by the whole. Yet it is also distinct from Christianity. The Muslim requires no priestly mediation to approach God and acquire grace and salvation. Islamic stress on the individual's duty to obey the teachings of the Koran, the source of *all* law, gave the scholar-lawyers, the *ulama*, a pivotal political role. The Chinese *literati* and Catholic Church hierarchy both offered ideologies serving the interests of the state, but under Islam, political and religious power could become deeply antagonistic.

The pastoral tribes of Arabia were united by the Prophet Mohammad after pressure from two neighbouring agrarian civilizations, Byzantium and Persia, had awakened a sense of common ethnic identity which the Prophet's vision transformed into the expansionist model of the Islamic community pursuing its holy mission through war (Hall 1985: 86–7). Given the rigorous monotheism and totalizing perspective of that vision, Islamic conquerors did not readily adapt themselves to the existing structures of power in the agrarian civilizations they invaded. Matters were complicated by the charismatic nature of the Prophet's original leadership and the nature of his

social message, which stressed the obligations of the rich towards the poor. Firstly, after Mohammad's death, factional struggles for control of the Islamic community produced the opposition between Shi'ites and Sunnis. Sunnism accommodated itself to the structures of social and political power beyond the Arabian heartland, whereas Shi'ism remained in tension with temporal power by insisting that legitimate successors must be descendants of the prophet, establishing the Shi'ite Islamic community as a community of suffering founded on the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson at the hands of worldly usurpers (Gilsenan 1982: 55–6). Secondly, in Hall's view, the codification of Islamic law, the *Shari'a*, reinforced the potential for conflict between political power and the religious community led by the *ulama*.

The *ulama*, it must be stressed, are not priests. Islam tolerates no mediators between God and the individual: they acquire their authority in society as interpreters of 'the Word as text' (Gilsenan 1982: 31). Hall, following Crone (1980), suggests that it was of vital significance that the codification of Islamic law took place outside imperial Iran and in opposition to the Umayyad caliphate in Syria, in the demilitarized commercial cities of Iraq. The *ulama* were alienated from the political regime produced by the Sunni military ruling class of the caliphate. They defined mainstream Islam in a way which idealized the law of an egalitarian tribal Arab past, endorsed by Allah himself. The accumulation of both secular and religious power was condemned. God's community was to lead a simple life: the caliph should provide only necessary governance and there was no space in this political theory for a wealthy priesthood or parasitic ruling class. Islam was stronger on theories of collective morality than coherent theories of the state (Ayubi 1991).

Urbanized Islamic politico-military elites tried to overcome this menace to the legitimacy of their rule by attempting to incorporate the *ulama* into the state apparatus as a scholar-bureaucrat stratum, but the *ulama* preserved their distance from state institutions, with the exception of the Ottoman case discussed below. They did so, Hall suggests, in part because codification of the *Shari'a* meant 'their doctrinal code had set' and was not susceptible to further modification by revelation (Hall 1985: 90–1). But Hall also offers a second explanation, focusing on how the practice of politics in the classical Islamic world was structured by the continued interaction of urban communities and segmentary nomadic pastoralist tribes which remained the bearers of Islamic culture and the key military force in the Islamic world. In contrast to Europe, where cities raising their own troops or hiring mercenaries were able to defend themselves within what was a 'relatively pacified' environment, the cities of the Middle East faced a tribal hinterland 'capable of great military surges' (ibid.: 93).

The defence of urban civilization depended on the protection that might be secured from one of the Islamic tribal groups of the exterior, but once the protector turned into a ruler, a rising tax burden proved bad for commercial life, and government remained alien to the civil society it governed. As

internal discontent mounted, the *ulama* would withdraw their support from the ruling house, declare it impious, and invite in another tribe to restore Islamic purity. Thus the actual existence of a tribal hinterland around the areas of sedentary life provided the material base for the continuing antagonism of religion and politics, and the cultural unity of the Islamic world beyond the boundaries of any individual state. The classical Islamic world was not simply a world of multiple political centres – like Europe – but one of unstable centres: few regimes lasted even a century.

This theory of Islamic politics is ultimately derived from a 'native' source, the fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Khaldun (Gellner 1981). Gilsenan, however, offers another explanation of the political role of the *ulama* which overcomes an objection to Hall's argument, namely that since the Koran always required interpretation, its potential challenge to despotism and social inequality could be defused. The *ulama* could and did provide dissimulated ideological and moral underpinnings to oppressive political and social relations simply by passing over certain kinds of acts and relationships in silence, as well as by defining acts and relationships as 'Islamic' by specifying how they were to be regulated by the 'eternal law' of God (Gilsenan 1982: 35). What they could *not* do, however, was establish a social *monopoly* on interpretation of the Word of God, because believers did not depend on the *ulama* to perform their religious duties, and holy men did not have to be *ulama*. It was this, Gilsenan argues, which prevented any state taking over the sacred tradition simply by coopting the *ulama* as a corps of *literati*. Cooption seldom suited the *ulama* themselves, and even in modern times, there is always a tension between the universalism of the Islamic religious community and particularistic attempts by states to appropriate Islam for its own ends, such as the construction of nationalism. The *ulama* never became a social class nor even a corporate group, not simply because they were recruited from a broad social base, but because they occupied different structural and social positions in different Islamic states.

Despite the instability of classic Islamic polities, later history did produce three substantial empires, the Safavids in Persia, the Mughal Empire of India, and the Ottomans. One factor which undermined the basis for decentralized, contractualist, Islamic society was military: the adoption of gunpowder. All three empires also formed in areas with a long historical tradition of strong tribute-based states exploiting an agrarian peasantry. Yet the Persian Empire of the Safavids began to collapse in the mid-seventeenth century after the *ulama* withdrew their support from the empire's Iranian-born rulers, when the latter reneged on their undertaking to convert all their subjects to Shi'ite Islam. The Mughal Empire, aligned with Sunnism, adopted the quite different strategy of using *Hindus* as its bureaucracy and indigenous *Rajputs* as its elite soldiers. It began to collapse after late seventeenth-century emperors attempted to create a purely Islamic state (Hall 1985: 106).

The longer-lasting Ottoman Empire is the one case in which the *ulama* were successfully integrated into the state. They were not simply exempted

from taxation, but acquired wealth from land and buildings made over to them as religious endowments which was largely independent of the state. Since these estates were not subject to the Ottoman norm of confiscation by the state on the death of the holder, but could be passed on to heirs, sons of the Ottoman politico-military aristocracy often entered the corps of *ulama* to acquire hereditary property rights (Gilsenan 1982: 38). The alignment between the *ulama* and other sections of the elite was reinforced by their role as tax-farmers, linked to the merchants who sold the peasant grain they collected in kind, and the fact that the highest-ranking *ulama* were members of the military ruling estate. Ottoman *ulama* were loyal to the state and deeply conservative.

Nevertheless, once the empire stopped expanding, at the start of the seventeenth century, a protracted process of decay set in. This was reinforced by European commercial penetration, which induced feudalization in the Anatolian provinces as local notables became estate-owners producing export crops for the world market, property rights in land were transformed, and peasants turned into proletarians (Islamoglu and Keyder 1977). Hall suggests that the *ulama* did not turn against the state, but continued to participate in its politics as an organized faction, along with the military and the court officials. Sultan power declined and lost its autonomy relative to these factional power blocs, but the empire continued, paralysed by the inability of any single faction to impose its will.

Matters were not so clear-cut, however. As the Ottoman state reacted to Western pressure in the mid-nineteenth century by 'reforming' land law and other legislation on Western lines and embracing 'secularization', the *ulama* found themselves able to play a more popular role as providers of subsistence and support for impoverished peasants and rural-urban migrants. Religion was displaced from its close relationship with the state into new areas in which the poor articulated their experiences of capitalist development in terms of the assertion of their own claims to be the true believers and the distorted ideological grid of a demonology of foreigners (Gilsenan 1982: 41-6). Even within the late Ottoman Empire, then, we can discern the development of the populist, fundamentalist, forms of Islam which became an integral part of Middle Eastern life in the twentieth century as these societies have responded to what Ayubi (1991) terms 'distorted capitalist development' and bureaucratic authoritarianism. Kemalism's attempts to create a secular state in Turkey founded explicitly on the principles of Western modernity failed to exorcize Islam - or even the ghost of the Ottoman world as an alternative vision of national identity and dignity - despite continuing commitment to the Kemalist project on the part of the military (Mardin 1993).

If political and religious power were in tension in the Islamic world, there was no question of the *ulama* withdrawing entirely from the political domain. It is often argued that Indian civilization is distinctive because the religious elite, the Brahmins, did withdraw from involvement in politics to

concentrate on organizing society through the caste system, leaving the political domain not merely unstable, but ephemeral. Kingship in India is secularized, and political power is defined as hierarchically inferior to religious authority: religious power and not the state is the source of law.

This kind of split between religious and political power has different implications to that of the Islamic world, since the superior and inferior levels of a hierarchic order are conceived as being interdependent rather than antagonistic. Nevertheless, the hierarchic order established by the caste system appears to be capable of existing without state regulation, prompting Hall to model the classical pattern of Hindu India as one in which politics was 'free-floating' above a stable social order organized by the Brahmins (Hall 1985: 71-2). The Brahmins provided law and the religious services necessary for social reproduction, and mediated where disputes arose between or within castes, but the caste system had a self-regulating quality. Establishing a new political rulership was easy, since the conqueror merely had to set up court and allow society to go on governing itself. Thus Hall characterizes the state in India as a 'custodial state', which could be of variable size and duration, but had little to do because the Brahmins organized society totally and 'penetrated' it to an extent which made further central state intervention redundant. He points out, however, that Indian society was not completely cellular and localistic. The geographically mobile Brahmins possessed a translocal organization more capable of binding 'laterally insulated' peasant communities together than the translocal organizations of rulers and warriors (ibid.: 75). By withdrawing from politics and concentrating on religious control of society, the Brahmins succeeded in limiting the power of the state and other elite groups to transform that society.

Hall cites Geertz's (1980) model of the 'Theatre State' in Bali as a paradigm for the 'custodial state' in Indic civilization in general, arguing that the state was a device for the ritual enactment of the cosmic basis for this-worldly status in hierarchic principles, its 'sound and fury signifying nothing' (Hall 1985: 76). He concedes that Brahmins did, on occasion, have to fight for control of society and play politics. In the third century BC, Buddhism presented a particularly strong challenge, backed by the Mauryan emperor Asoka. Normally, however, they did not oppose political regimes, or possess the power to do so. Their position rested on the hierarchic model in which the superiority of the Brahmins was expressed in their power to legitimate political rulership and the continuity of the hierarchic order as a whole depended on the complementary and mutually supportive relationship between the castes as providers of services. Nevertheless, Hall argues that the instability of political rulership in India resulted from the superiority of Brahmanical power over that of kings, and the level of Brahmanical control over society.

Although Hall is critical of Dumont on some points, he does not challenge his fundamental ideas about the encompassment of political power by religious status. As I noted earlier, however, some anthropologists have

argued that even in India power affected cosmic-ritual status, and that the Dumontian model of caste represents an over-coherent, ahistorical representation of an ideology distant from the realities of political practice. On the basis of an ethnohistorical study of the small kingdom of Pudukkottai in Tamil-speaking south India, Dirks argues that caste was 'embedded in the political context of kingship', and had less to do with Dumont's opposition between purity and pollution than with 'royal authority and honor and associated notions of power, dominance, and order' (Dirks 1987: 7). He suggests that the detachment of caste from politics was actually the work of the British colonial order, which found removing the politics from colonial society not merely convenient, but necessary in order to rule an 'immensely complex society by a variety of indirect means' (ibid.: 8). Dirks suggests that the role of the Brahman reached new heights under British colonial administration. When colonialism stripped kings of their power, the Brahmans were left to develop new models of caste centred on the obsessions with purity and pollution which figure so prominently in the *ethnographic* realities of the caste system which influenced the models of Dumont and others.

Dirks's analysis also bears on the 'Theatre State' model of the Indic polity developed by Geertz and cited with approval by Hall. Geertz attempts to provide a non-eurocentric approach to thinking about the Hindu-Buddhist states of South-East Asia, including Thailand, Burma and Cambodia. He uses his work on Bali to argue that no state in the region can be analysed adequately in terms of Weberian concepts of feudalism or patrimonialism (Bakker 1988). Geertz argues that the 'exemplary centre' at Klungkung had merely ceremonial significance, and that 'the state' consisted of an acephalous band of sovereigns for whom political competition meant disputing an equally ceremonial order of precedence. Myth tells of a decline from a classical model of perfection, but Geertz argues that the 'centre' and the myth of its glorious past is of essentially symbolic significance within the local cultural logic of status and hierarchy, and should not be taken as embodying an historical truth. It is clear, however, that we would expect the Princely State to be reduced to a ritual shell for dramatically enacting an essentially fictional power once kingship had been stripped of any real basis of power by colonial rule.

Geertz is not alone, however, in seeing pre-colonial South-East Asian polities as relatively decentralized. Tambiah (1976, 1985) describes them as 'galactic polities', in which cosmic rulers rule through a coalition of powerful lineages over an ethnically diverse mass of subservient lineages, castes and villages. The periphery of such polities consisted of a more or less autonomous set of small 'kingly' or 'chiefly' domains, and their boundaries were unstable and shifting. Tambiah's model, however, does not necessarily lead us to Geertz's account of Indic politics as pure superstructure or theatre.

In the first place, the principle that power can affect status is hardly controversial in the Hindu-Buddhist world outside India. In Buddhist Sri Lanka, the location of castes in the hierarchy was clearly determined by their rela-

tionship to the king, and Dumont himself conceded that the pure-impure opposition was less significant (Kapferer 1988: 20). Nor are analysts critical of Dumont's formulation of the hierarchic relationship of status and power such as Dirks attempting to reverse the argument and suggest that 'political' and 'ritual' forms of power can be sharply distinguished and separated on Western lines. Both Hinduism and Sinhalese Buddhist ideology present the state as symbolized by kingship as encompassed by religion: *artha*, the sphere of force and self-interest, is encompassed by *dharma*, universal order. It is the job of rulers to ensure that the principles of cosmic harmony are upheld. Political revolts become symptoms of the fragmentation not merely of the kingdom, but of the cosmos itself, a failure of rulership to maintain control over the forces constantly threatening fragmentation and conserve the 'society' constituted by hierarchy. In Sri Lanka, kings can be benevolent restorers of hierarchic order or manifest a demonic, destructive power, when the ordering cosmic principles of hierarchy break down (ibid.: 13). There is clearly no question here of the state being deemed irrelevant to the reproduction of 'society'.

Dirks is, however, arguing a second, stronger thesis. His point is that even in India under pre-colonial conditions states did organize and reorganize society in significant ways, distributing land grants, symbols of power and titles, endowing temples and organizing warfare. These centre-periphery relations were more than ritual and symbolic in nature:

In many of the smaller states in eighteenth century Tamil Nadu between sixty and eighty per cent of all cultivable land was given away to military chiefs, retainers, temples, Brahmans, village officers, priests, servants and artisans. Lands were given away in central and peripheral areas of the state. When insufficient cultivable land was available for such grants, the king gave grants of forest land to be brought under cultivation or embarked upon predatory warfare for honor, fame, booty and new lands. (Dirks 1987: 53)

Dirks therefore challenges the entire notion that political power had a superficial or simply predatory impact on a village society which was largely organized by the holders of religious power.

In Geertz's model, power seems only to exist in its symbolic and ideological manifestations, leaving us dangerously close to the Orientalist 'stationary' model of Asian societies. Relative political decentralization and instability do not necessarily imply that class and property relations and patterns of social reproduction are unchanging or that political power is merely a ritual-ceremonial superstructure without any impact on social life. What these anthropological analyses do suggest, however, is that it is important to conduct in-depth studies of how pre-colonial non-European agrarian civilizations actually functioned, to look at the content and cultural meaning of the relationships of power and domination on which they were based – and to understand them as truly *historical* societies. We cannot understand them adequately simply by asking how their organizational principles differed from

those of Western societies of either the modern or pre-modern period, since one of the most important things we must try to understand is how Western domination changed them.

Colonialism did not simply reduce indigenous forms of power to a theatrical shell of what had gone before. It also redefined 'society' in fundamental ways, forcing people to attach new meanings and practices to old identities, such as 'caste' and 'ethnicity'. If failure to identify these transformations impedes our reconstructions of the pre-colonial world, it becomes doubly problematic when we try to understand the contemporary, post-colonial world. Distinctive cultural structures inherited from the past leave traces in the present, but colonialism also produced strong discontinuities and a restructuring of established institutions, practices and beliefs, the subject of the next chapter.

#### 4 THE POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF COLONIALISM: A STUDY OF DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE

An exclusive emphasis on the transforming power of Western colonial domination can be another way of denying Europe's 'others' a role in history. Indigenous resistance shaped the development of colonial societies, and this is important for understanding differences between post-colonial societies. However, as Roger Keesing pointed out, the topic of 'resistance' is a minefield of conceptual problems (Keesing 1992: 6–10). 'Resistance' at one level frequently seems ultimately to reproduce the 'categorical and institutional structures of domination', and it is often difficult to decide whether to label particular actions by individuals or groups as 'resistance' in the first place. Keesing does regard 'resistance' as a valuable notion, providing it is taken as a rich metaphor, not a precise concept. It illuminates facets of power relations which are easily overlooked because the actions in which relatively powerless people engage are different from the dramatic confrontations that attract the attention of historians and journalists. Such acts of resistance have often been ignored precisely because they are not obviously 'political' in the sense of the term understood by colonial and post-colonial states.

Keesing's work contributed to a larger reaction against both conservative social science and orthodox Marxist models which dismissed various forms of popular struggles as 'millenarian' and 'pre-political' or simply ignored them. Other important contributions come from political science (Scott 1985, 1990), the 'Subaltern Studies' school's writings on the Indian peasantry (Guha 1983), and from the work of diasporic literary critics working in leading universities in the United States, such as Edward Said (1978, 1993), Homi Bhabha (1994) and Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1996, 1999). This latter type of 'post-colonial criticism' or 'cultural studies' writing<sup>1</sup> is relatively unattractive to many anthropologists. Its ideas derive from a variety of fashionable Western theorists (Foucault in the case of Said, Lacan and Bakhtin in the case of Bhabha, and the deconstructionism of Derrida in the case of Spivak). Post-colonial criticism seems more concerned

---

<sup>1</sup> For a sample of writing by important figures in the field, including Frantz Fanon and Chinua Achebe, see, for example, Moore-Gilbert *et al.* (1997).