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Chapter 3: Beyond political culture

Anthropology and Political Science: Culture, Politics, and Democratization

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Culture is a dimension of all social interactions since as humans we always traffic in meaning. Thus it should not be understood as a separate domain of human activity, contrasted for example with politics or economy (Norton 2004, Sewell 2005:156). Social interactions, the basic units of society, have a strategic dimension and hence can be usefully modeled as political or economic games. But they also have a communicative dimension and thus can be studied as semiotic events or processes. Events are studied semiotically when the researcher focuses on actors' actions as they generate, communicate or interpret meaning. Political scientists and other students of politics are particularly interested in meanings of political events, objects, institutions, and personages.

There are many definitions of culture. It is thus difficult to achieve a coherent understanding of what it is exactly that culture "does" in the individual and collective life of humans. Putting aside many important debates and distinctions we will signal several basic issues and proceed to outline those that are of central importance to students of the relationship between politics and power on the one side, and culture on the other. Since the authors of this volume are both trained and practicing anthropologists and political scientists, we illustrate the advantages of combining both fields through a comparative analysis of our own work which focuses on the relationship between politics and culture.

Our primary concerns are with problems of legitimacy and with processes of identity construction and democratization.

Ironically, although political science borrowed the concept of culture from anthropology, significant contemporary perspectives in anthropology challenge the utility and integrity of the concept, and either avoid the term culture or bracket it with quotation marks to signal its problematic nature (Brightman 1995). Postmodern approaches deconstruct political culture by defining all cultural phenomena in terms of domination and contestation for power. Many practitioners of cultural studies use euphemisms for culture to explore the relationship between power and the imaginative expression of culture (Aronoff 2001). We believe, however, that the concept is still useful, although when it is used it needs to be clearly defined.

One of the key decisions that must be made by any student of culture and politics is the maximally clear delineation of the role of culture and its elements as causal factors (co)determining human behavior.¹ There seems to exist two major options: humans are seen either as creatures driven by some universal, species-given (instrumental) rationality or as “prisoners” of their specific culture (or several cultures to which they are exposed), which provides them with cultural scenarios that dictate appropriate forms of behavior in a given situation or circumstance (Geertz 1973:250). In the former case, cultural forms are merely tools that are employable according to the calculations driven by separate, *a-cultural* logic (the nature of this logic is, of course, a matter of debate). In the later, the

¹ Discussion on how culture, or its elements, cause behavior is extensive. We are assuming here that such elements of culture as norms, values, scenarios, schemas, etc. cause human behavior. How this is happening is partially discussed below. There is a parallel discussion in political science on the role of ideas as causes of human behavior. See, for example, Lieberman 2002, Berman and McNamara, Blyth 2007 in *Neoliberalism: National and Regional Experiments with Global Ideas* (Routledge 2007), edited by Ravi Roy, Art Denzau, and Thomas Willet.

very logic that dictates choices and helps to rank preferences is culturally constructed although a given actor may be unaware of its existence or unable to articulate its underlying rules. The actual attributes of culture, including such rules are hotly debated. There exists therefore a sharp contrast between what Coleman and Elster call *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus* (1989:99). A major anthropological theorist, Marshall Sahlins, devoted much of his career to the analysis of this ostensibly unsurpassable dichotomy; it is the main topic of his *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) and it still preoccupies him in his latest major work, *With Apologies to Thucydides. Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (2004).

As is the case with other major dichotomies that emerged in the history of social sciences, this one is also a useful albeit preliminary classificatory device. It helps us to realize that the dominant trend in today's political science (including comparative politics) is founded on the assumption of universal rationality, however minimally it is defined (McCarthy and Meirowitz 2007:6, Clark, Golder, Nadenichek Golder 2009:359),² while most cultural anthropologists these days subscribe to some version of cultural relativism, that is assume the existence of culturally transmitted scenarios that provide actors with models of behavior appropriate for specific (classes of) situations. In a useful overview of the history of comparative politics, Munck proposed to call the post-1989 period as "the second scientific revolution" that brought to the fore game theory and rational choice theory. The latter "is seen as a unifying theory, which can integrate

² "For almost all of our purposes, it is sufficient to define rationality on a basis of two simple ideas: (1) Confronted with any two options, denoted x and y, a person can determine whether he does not prefer option x to option y, does not prefer y to x, or does not prefer either. When preferences satisfy this property, they are *complete*. (2) Confronted with three options x, y, and z, if a person does not prefer y to x and does not prefer z to y then she must not prefer z to x. Preferences satisfying this property are *transitive*. Roughly speaking, our working definition of rational behavior is behavior consistent with complete and transitive preferences" (McCarthy and Meirowitz 2007:6).

theories about action in different domains, precisely because it is not held to apply to any specific domain of action” (2007:53). Nor does it apply exclusively to any specific society, we may add.³ There are of course, comparativists, who either reject the universalizing claims of this “new science” or, at least, try to test the boundaries of rationality and investigate the relationship between the rational, normative, and/or semiotic regulation of human behavior (Laitin 1986; Scott 1998; Wedeen 1999, 2008; Chabal and Daloz 2006; Rochon 1998; Cruz 2005; Ross 2007). The issues are complex and their expositions lies beyond the scope of this work, but we will return to some of them while briefly discussing the work of David Laitin, who proposed an ingenious solution to the dichotomy between rational instrumentalism and culturalism in his *Hegemony and Culture* (1986).

Within political science, “cultural” approaches to the study of politics derive from the legacy of Montesquieu and de Tocqueville who viewed politics and governance as cultural constructs. In this tradition the definition of the political and the location of its boundaries are framed as fundamental cultural problems. As Chabal and Daloz argue, culture is “the matrix within which that which we understand as political action takes place. In other words, the field of politics itself has to be examined within its appropriate cultural milieu, as it were” (2006:21).⁴ By contrast, the political scientists who participate in the “second scientific revolution” are influenced by a tradition that views politics as a neutral adjudicator of conflicts including those in the realm of culture. This approach is founded on an assumption that politics – including the politics discernible in the cultural

³ Gary Baker takes an extreme ‘rationalist’ position: “Combined assumptions of maximizing behavior, market equilibrium and stable preferences, used relentlessly and unflinchingly... provides a valuable unified framework for understanding *all* human behavior” (1976: 5, 14).

⁴ Wight asks the key question: “how can we explain political participation independent of the conceptual and semiotic space that constitutes the political and participation?” (2004:296).

realm – is basically governed by the same set of universal mechanisms (rules or laws) in all locations, regardless of the specific cultural or social context; it is perhaps best exemplified by Harold Lasswell (1960) who defines the study of politics as an inquiry into who gets what, when, and how.⁵ Its most influential recent form is game theory.

Students of the relationship between politics and culture are faced, therefore, with several choices. First, they have to stake a position in the debate between proponents of *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus*. Second, they have to decide how they prefer to theorize the workings of cultural factors that can be seen either as *constraints* of human behavior or as *resources* that can be deployed in achieving behavior's goals. Laitin traces back the first option to Max Weber, the second to Jeremy Bentham (1986:12). Third, they have to make a methodological decision concerning the nature of data they need to collect. Here they have, roughly, two choices: they can either collect information on attitudes via surveys or interviews or engage in the interpretation of actions and/or texts. The first approach, *psycho-social*, is traditionally seen as *the* method of studying (political) culture in political science. Its most illustrious representatives are Almond and Verba (1963) and Ronald Inglehart with his World Values Survey. The second approach, *semiotic*, has been developed outside of political science, mostly in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, feminism, and history (Aronoff 1989; Kertzer 1988, Johnson 2003:93; Sewell 2005). For most of the practitioners of this approach, it is the study of not just semiotic systems but primarily of *semiotic practices*, particularly those that contribute to the exercise of power, staking out authority, attempting to claim legitimacy, or establishing cultural hegemony. Not surprisingly, therefore, several political scientists have made a strong case that this kind of study is also indispensable in their discipline

⁵ Lasswell's work is so original and extensive it bridges both traditions.

(Aronoff 1989; Wedeen 1999, 2002; Yanov and Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2006; Chabal and Daloz 2006).

Homo sociologicus versus homo economicus

One key difference between *homo sociologicus* versus *homo economicus*, derived from economic anthropology, was introduced in the opening chapter: while the latter is construed in a monolithic fashion as a creature of reason, the former is seen as a complex being driven by emotions, norms, and habits, but also as an actor enacting available cultural scenarios. Here, we want to discuss various conceptualizations of *homo sociologicus*, particularly the distinction between what we call *homo habilis* (defined below) and *homo symbolicus*. We will argue that the latter is compatible, at least in some of its versions, with *homo economicus*.

One conceptualization of *homo sociologicus*, associated most clearly with Pierre Bourdieu, is founded on the observation that humans act in the world according to the rules of *practical logic* that they learn through action and emulation, but also creatively adjust and develop according to the practical demands of life.⁶ Bourdieu uses many custom-made concepts, such as *habitus*, field, social capital, etc, that he designed to produce a model of the human being not as the over-intellectualized, calculating

⁶ Another influential conceptual clarification comes from Coleman, who writes: “There are two broad intellectual streams in the description and explanation of social action. One, characteristic of the work of most sociologists, sees the actor as socialized and action as governed by social norms, rules, and obligations. The principal virtues of this intellectual stream lie in its ability to describe action in social context and to explain the way action is shaped, constrained, and redirected by social context. The other intellectual stream, characteristic of the work of most economists, sees the actor as having goals independently arrived at, as acting independently, and as wholly self-interested. Its principal virtue lies in having a principle of action, that of maximizing utility” (1988:S95). Coleman proceeds to find a fruitful combination of both “streams” by developing an original conception of “social capital.”

individual, but rather as a historically specific “agent” who is “trapped ... ‘within the limits of his brain,’ as Marx said, that is within the limits of the system of categories he owes to his upbringing and training” (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992:126). Older and simpler theories belonging to this school of thinking emphasize the orientation of human behavior toward *values* and focus on the fact that humans usually act according to *norms* enforced by sanctions. March and Olsen (1989) see here “a logic of appropriateness” that they contrast with the “logic of consequentiality” underlying game theory. From the point of view of the logic of appropriateness, “action is based more on identifying the normatively appropriate behavior than on calculating the return expected from alternative choices” (1989:22).

The second version of sociological theory, not entirely divorced from the first, tends to construe *homo sociologicus*’s actions as performances guided by *cultural scenarios* (scripts, models, schemas) encoded in symbols, discourses, texts, rituals, etc. The study of culture, conceptualized in this approach as a repository of scripts constituting together a massive regulatory mechanism, is seen as a necessary component of the study of *causes* of human behavior. We can call the model of human being prevalent in the first school of thinking as *homo habilis*; in the latter – *homo symbolicus*. These two conceptualizations share some assumptions (for example, a belief that human actions are poorly understood without taking into consideration cultural factors, conceptualized either as norms or as cultural scripts), but each is founded on a different set of concepts, employs different theoretical metaphors, invokes different images, and refers back to different intellectual traditions.

All components of culture can be seen, therefore, as having both cognitive and normative dimensions. The former describes and explains phenomena and the latter justifies them and informs the actors how and why they should behave. Whereas the analytical distinction between the two is the basis for various conceptual categories, in reality their appearance in the “ideal” forms is rare. Most manifestations of culture combine both dimensions in varying degrees. At the analytical level rational modes of thought are usually associated with the cognitive dimension of political culture and nonrational (for example, habitual) modes relate to the normative. Political scientists whose work represents the “second scientific revolution”, including some students of political culture, assume the rationality of political actors and essentially ignore the nonrational dimension, with notable and important exceptions.

Much depends, of course, on how “nonrationality” is conceptualized. In studying non-rational components of human behavior scholars can emphasize emotions (Elster 1996, Petersen 2002), norms, or culture seen as a “tool kit” of cultural scenarios (Swidler 1986). In the latter conceptualization, rationality and culture do not need to be seen as incompatible (Johnson 2002, O’Neil 1999), a theme of an important yet somewhat forgotten debate in cultural anthropology (Hollis and Lukes, eds. 1982, Skorupski 1976). For example, game theory is built on an assumption that humans are rational in the sense that their actions are driven by the logic of calculation and strategizing. “Put simply, rational behavior means choosing the best means to gain a predetermined set of ends. It is an evaluation of the consistency of choices and not the thought process, of implementation of fixed goals and of the morality of those goals” (Morrow 1994:17). There is no necessary connection between this assumption and a specific

conceptualization of the range of choices actors face (O'Neill 1999:259-62). This range can be defined "materialistically" or "economically" as is done when actors' calculations are reconstructed in terms of (class) interests or economically established preferences. But it can be also defined "culturally." Faced with a set of cultural scripts that are applicable in a given situation, actors may still consider strategically which particular script, out of the limited cultural repertoire available to them, should guide their behavior at the subsequent stages of the interaction modeled as a game. In other words it is perfectly feasible to see *homo rationalis (economicus)* and *homo symbolicus* as one; but it seems difficult if not impossible to think of humans simultaneously as *homo rationalis* and *homo sociologicus*. It is enough to invoke Bourdieu's decisive rejection of rational choice theory as a useful analytical tool (1992:122-28). There exist, of course, extreme situations, whereby actors are familiar with only one specific script of action applicable in a given situation; there is no choice here, but it does not mean that the behavior is irrational or nonrational. It is rather, a-rational, as no calculation is possible

Culture as a constraint versus culture as a resource

Yet the vision of culture as merely a "tool kit" out of which actors can pull cultural scenarios at will is not entirely satisfactory. For every instance of culture's malleability whereby its elements are strategically manipulated to fit the demands of the situation and provide an actor with strategic advantage, it is easy to invoke an example of cultural molding, a situation in which the actor's action is not calculated but rather is

based on a more or less unreflective repetition of a “time-honored,” culturally transmitted, and socially enforced “habit.”

David Laitin addressed this dilemma head on in his 1986 book *Hegemony and Culture*. Studying the role of the Sharia law and the conflict between Christianity and Islam in the Yorubaland in Nigeria, Laitin realized that he needs to account for two, seemingly contradictory cultural processes. On the one hand “culture orders political priorities” of individuals, but on the other politically-motivated individuals can manipulate culture, for example when “cultural identity becomes a political resource” (1986:11). Some scholars focus on the first process and thus treat culture as a *constraint* (Weberian tradition most prominently represented by Geertz – according to Laitin), while others emphasize culture as *resource* in what Laitin sees as a “neo-Benthamite” line of thinking propounded by game theorists. But after delineating sharply both dimensions of culture’s “Janus-faced” character, Laitin decides to look for a theoretical tool that would allow him to conceptualize the dialectical game of constraint and resource that seems to constitute the basic mechanism of culture’s workings. His solution is the Gramscian concept of *hegemony* that he amends and then masterfully applies to the Yoruba situation. We will discuss the concept of hegemony below.

The dilemmas Laitin deals with, the oscillation of culture between being resource and constraint, is related to the time-honored debate in the social sciences between structure and agency. Social structures can be conceptualized as “slow processes of long duration” (Southall in Vincent 1986:115). In sociology and anthropology the structure-process or structure-action dichotomies have been replaced with new, more complex and “dialectical” conceptualizations of the social: critical realism (Archer 1995),

theory of structuration (Giddens 1984), or the theory of practice (Bourdieu), to name just the most influential. It may prove to be productive, thus, to assume that “culture” *behaves* in the same way as “structure;” its principal mode of existence could be then called the *process of cultururation*. The immutability and/or malleability of culture (or better: its components) should not be assumed *a priori*; it must be demonstrated empirically in each instance. Sometimes cultural elements change so slowly that they seem to be immutable (Pye 1985:20); sometimes they change faster than their structural (institutional) context.

Swidler’s 1986 essay on the role of cultural factors during unstable periods demonstrates in a very illuminating way how this phenomenon can be theorized.⁷ The phenomenon of culture as a primary causal force in history during specific periods has been emphasized within the “new cultural history” (Hunt, ed. 1989); “new cultural sociology” (Somers 1995); “new social movements” school (Larana, Johnston, Gusfield, eds. 1994). It is critical to remember that the role of cultural factors in history *fluctuates*: sometimes they can be treated by actors as malleable resources and thus act as engines of social change, sometimes they “feel” like immutable constraints that either resist change or at best reluctantly “follow” other factors (Swidler 1986; Goldstone 1991:446; Hall 1993:48; Szporluk 1990).

Psycho-social versus semiotic conceptualization of the elements of culture

At least since the publication of Almond and Verba’s *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (1963) the dominant approach to the study of

⁷ Swidler’s ideas are supported by Sider, who -- in Joan Vincent’s words -- “formulates a notion of culture as a particular active force at moments of formation and transformation” (1986:115). See also John Hall (1993:48).

the relationship between culture and politics in political science has not only been based on the assumption of a-cultural universality of political mechanisms; it has also relied heavily on the methodological tools associated with the behavioral revolution: surveys of attitudes. In this approach culture is defined as “psychological orientations toward social objects” (1963:14) while its building blocks, “psychological orientations” or “attitudes” are seen as propensities of individuals to perceive, interpret and act toward a particular subject in particular ways” (1963:13). Accordingly “the term political culture ... refers to the specifically political orientations – attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system” (1963:14-15). Almond and Verba then propose a distributive view of political culture: “Political culture of a nation is the particular distribution of patterns of orientations toward political objects among the members of the nation” (1963:14-15). In this tradition, culture figures often in the form of “cultural variables” that either intervene between, say, independent variables capturing some elements of the economic situation and such dependent variables as political behavior or co-generate the studied result.

Within the post-behavioral approaches, at the broadest level, political culture refers to the meanings attributed to politics, not to “political values” or attitudes toward political objects studied in surveys. It constitutes the socially constructed and tenuously shared meanings which pertain to political objects (leaders, political systems, governments, parliaments, etc.). Such approaches favor semiotic, rather than distributive psycho-social conceptualization of culture a la Almond and Verba. Ann Swidler’s representative definition of culture is:

Culture consists of such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life. These symbolic forms are the means through which ‘social process of sharing modes of behavior and outlook within [a] community’ (Hannerz, 1969:184) take place (1986:273).

A useful definition of political culture in this tradition is offered by Gamson, for whom: “a nonredundant concept of political culture refers to the meaning systems that are culturally available for talking, writing, and thinking about political objects: the myths and metaphors, the language and idea elements, the frames, ideologies, values, and condensing symbols” (1988:220).⁸

This line of thinking leads sometimes to more decisive formulations of constructivism, according to which political objects are, at least partially, constituted by the meanings with which actors endow them. For example, a person cannot act as a “voter” until s/he has attributed a specific meaning to the practice of “electing” and is consequently able to engage in the required performance of a cultural script entailed in a complex social institution called “elections.” A person does not become a “subject” of royal authority until s/he has some notion of “kingship” and its prerogatives and is thus able to perform a social role of the “royal subject.” Without being able to participate in a network of meanings spawned around “royalty,” a person can obviously be a subject of royal power, but not royal authority (if we understand authority, following Weber, as

⁸ Baker (1990:4-5) offers a similar definition. For him political culture is the “set of discourses or symbolic practices” by which “individuals and groups in any society articulate, negotiate, implement, and enforce the competing claims they make upon each other.” Hirschman describes his goal in *The Rhetorics of Reaction* thus: “Hence my decision to attempt a ‘cool’ examination of surface: discourse, arguments, rhetoric, historically and analytically considered. In the process it would emerge that discourse is shaped, not so much by fundamental personality traits, but simply by the imperatives of argument, almost regardless of the desires, character or convictions of the participants” (1991:x).

legitimated power). Therefore, a subject can accept or grant “royal legitimacy” only after grasping (understanding, decoding), even if only at a rudimentary level, the “meaning” of this concept. The situations whereby meanings function to endow or challenge legitimacy of political institutions, offices, and procedures of a polity are of particular interest to the students of politics.

It is, therefore, obvious that the analysis of the relationship between culture and politics does not need to be limited to examining the continuity or discontinuity of certain syndromes of attitudes and their impact on other areas of social, economic, or political life. Also, reconstructing and interpreting discourses, as well as explaining their genealogies, logics and functions is only a partial task. Our analytical and theoretical lenses should be focused on a *dynamic interplay of attitudes (psycho-social dimension), discourses (semiotic dimension), and institutional settings within which this interplay transpires and where power is actualized (power dimension)*. Discourses developed by the elites are usually addressed to wider audiences; their explicit or implicit aim is to shape attitudes in order to achieve politically desired results (generate support, mask political failures, etc.). Their acceptance is however constrained or facilitated by the pre-existing attitudes of the addressees. Both attitudes and discourses are therefore resources for or constraints of various power games.

We have introduced three pairs of oppositions that help to organize our thinking about the relationship between culture and politics. Do these distinctions constitute historically meaningful clusters? They seem to do so. A combination that characterizes the older conceptualizations of political culture is: (1) based on the model of *homo sociologicus* (emphasis on habit) in which (2) culture is seen as a constraint on human

behavior that is (3) studied mostly through surveys of attitudes or preferences (a psychosocial model). The newer conceptualizations are founded on: (1) the model of *homo symbolicus* (sometimes combined with *homo rationalis*), who often treats (2) culture as a resource that (3) needs to be studied semiotically as a text or an ensemble of texts that need to be interpreted. Interpretation can be seen as the scholar's only task, but at least since Max Weber most students of the relationship between politics and culture attempt to combine it with causal explanation.⁹

Key concepts of political culture after the cultural turn

Symbols and signs

Following Max Weber, Clifford Geertz suggests “that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun,” and proceeds to treat “culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning” (1973:5). Symbols are the threads from which the web of culture is spun. It is usually posed that whereas signs are unambiguous, symbols lend themselves to a multiplicity of interpretations, their referents are less clearly separated from the symbolic vehicles, and they evoke strong emotional reactions. The meanings of symbols and texts are interpreted through reason and/or intuition, but in most cases interpreters follow the rules that can be rationally reconstructed and whose results can be intersubjectively tested. Susanne

⁹ For a careful analysis of the reasons and consequences of switching from the “old” (psycho-social) to “new” (semiotic) concept of culture in political science see Johnson 2002, 2003.

Langer (1942) distinguishes between *discursive* and *presentational* symbols. Discursive symbols are more conscious and rational, relying on language. Presentational symbols are wordless, unconscious, and appeal to the senses through nonrational visual forms. They are grasped simultaneously as integral objects of total reference. Sherry Ortner's (1973) distinction between *elaborating* and *summarizing* symbols is similar. The latter, deriving their power primarily from their emotional resonance, tend to be sacred (in the broad sense) and received as objects of reverence. The national flag is treated with such reverence as to constitute a fetish in American civil religion. The Western Wall in Jerusalem, a place of sacred centrality in Israeli political culture, and the Black Madonna of Czestochowa in Poland constitute powerful summarizing symbols. Elaborating symbols, work in the opposite direction. They provide vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, thereby making them comprehensible, communicable, and translatable into orderly action. Given their cognitive nature, they play a more dominant role in ideology. *Root metaphors* have conceptual elaborating power. Their value derives from providing categories for comprehending order in the world. "Exile" from and "Return" to the "Holy Land" provide the root metaphor of Zionism – the dominant discourse (master narrative) of Israeli political culture (Aronoff 1989). *Key scenarios* are specific guides that provide maps for socially valued action. The Horatio Alger myth is such a guide to achieve the idealized American success story.

Figure 1: Types of Symbols

Author	Type of symbols	
	Conscious, Rational, Cognitive	Nonrational, Visual, Emotional, Sacred
Langer	Discursive	Presentational
Ortner	Elaborating: Root metaphor Key scenario	Summarizing

Myths

Myths are narratives that rely primarily on the nonrational for their emotive power. Ernst Cassirer (1946) contrasts mythical thought (*mythos*) with rational thought (*logos*). He suggests that mythology precedes history. (Contemporary critical scholarship identifies mythical elements even in academic history.) The perspective of mythology as based more on intuition than analytic thought views it as a magical and mystical form used to create coherence in a chaotic world. Cassirer’s portrayal of myth in the *Myth of State* (1946) as an expression of an irrational Manichaeian struggle between the forces of light and darkness is strongly influenced by Hitler’s fascist Germany. In this context myth is seen to satisfy the need to immerse individuality in the whole as the social fabric appeared to unravel – an escape from freedom by immersion of self in a collective identity.

But Cassirer also works with an idea that myth is a form of language, however “distorted.” He quotes with approval a great classical scholar of mythology, Max Muller, who wrote:

Mythology is inevitable, it is natural, it is inherent necessity of language, if we recognize in language the outward form and manifestation of thought; it is in fact the dark shadow which language throws upon thought, and which can never disappear till language becomes entirely commensurate with thought, which it never will (Cassirer 1946b:5).

Cassirer, writing after the Holocaust and other tragedies of World War II, is particularly sensitive to the dangerous tendency of language to serve as a tool for producing illusory fictions that can legitimize the most unsavory constellations of power. But others, writing about less “dangerous” topics, such as fashion, mass culture or pulp fiction also emphasize the close relation between myth and language. For example, Roland Barthes, construes myth as “a type of speech” that has a tendency to subvert the language and prevent its users from achieving clarity. But he also points out perhaps the most important political function of myth: “giving a historical intention a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal” (Barthes 1982:130-1)

Bruce Kapferer (1988) stresses the destructive and dehumanizing potential of forms of nationalism based on religious myths in a comparative analysis of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka and Australian nationalism. He argues that the reduction of the multiplicity of meanings inherent in myth to only “one truth” is what gives this type of nationalism its totalitarian ideological form. Myths present more lucid and compelling images than do more abstract principles. The more compelling the image, the more powerful the myth's appeal. Ideas which first appear in fantastic mythical form become real intellectual property only when discursive language rises to their expression.

Langer (1942:202) notes “the first inquiry as to the literal truth of a myth marks the change from poetic to discursive thinking.”

Figure 2: Logos versus Mythos

Characteristics of Logos Contrasted With Mythos (Cassirer)	
Logos	Mythos
Rational, Analytical, Theoretical	Intuitive, emotional, magical, mystical

Joseph Campbell distinguishes four main functions of myth. The *mystical* provides for the realization of wonder and mystery. The *cosmological* reveals the nature of the mystery. The *sociological (political)* supports and validates the social order. The *pedagogical* guides individuals through life crises from childhood, through adulthood, and death. Gilbert Cuthbertson (1975) suggests three basic themes of political myths: (1) myths of *order* justifies political authority and social stratification, (2) myths of *obligation* formulate an ethical order that delineates individual, group, and leadership responsibilities, and (3) myths of *freedom* seek liberation from tyranny, natural or social boundaries, or demonic forces. He divides political myths into five categories: (1) *messianic* myths fuse religion and politics, (2) myths of *legitimacy* and social establishment validate the established order, clarify legality and community, and transform power into authority, (3) *iconoclastic* myths challenge the social order. They aim to undermine authority and replace it with an alternative, (4) *moral* myths aim to give an ethical education of citizenship as in the work of Plato and of Confucius, and (5) *historical* myths dissolve barriers of time and search for continuity by giving meaning to

the present by linking it with the past or with the future (as in utopias). As Christopher G. Flood (1996:33) observes: “Myth can disclose the meaning of a group’s spatial and temporal sense of itself.” In reality many myths contain elements of more than one of these characteristics.

Henry Tudor (1972) stresses the dramatic narrative form of political myth that lends itself to the production of make-believe. He claims that the awareness of incoherence or absurdity endemic in practical existence inspires the demand for a morally coherent world which is the stuff of which political myths are made. Despite the dramatic structure political myth is used in practical argument.

Political myths that endow power with legitimacy are constantly challenged by iconoclasts who call into question and undermine them thereby tearing the hegemonic web of cultural meanings. Old truths are constantly reinterpreted as political realities change, and new cultural traditions are invented by myth-makers who repair the web and drape emergent groups with the mantle of authority. Because a myth makes hidden connections between disparate ideas based on unspecified premises, public discourse in mythical form is relatively immune from rational criticism that points out its logical contradictions or evidence which disconfirms it. When such a pattern of discourse effectively dominates a polity, it is a powerful force constraining political change. Yet, political myths also play crucial roles in times of crisis and can be used – especially in rituals through which myths are enacted – to achieve even revolutionary change.

Ritual

Ritual antedates the evolution of society, religion (Robertson 1889; Bell 1997:4), and language, and is their cradle (Langer 1942). Langer suggests that it is “primarily an articulation of feelings, a complex, permanent attitude...[it] yields a strong sense of tribal or congregational unity, or rightness and security” (1942:153). Ritual’s primary achievements are morale, i.e., giving a sense of common purpose. “They are part of man’s ceaseless quest for conception and orientation...Ritual is the most primitive reflection of serious thought, a slow deposit...of people’s imaginative insight into life” (Langer 1942:165). Fustel de Coulanges argues in the *Ancient City* (1864) that modern institutions had sacred origins expressed through ritual. A.M. Hocart (1936, 1970) traces the origins of government to the organization for ritual in what he called the “quest for life.” Geertz (1973:146) similarly argues for an “inherent sacredness of central authority.” In contemporary societies civil religion generally replaces more traditional religions in providing the mantle of legitimacy. However, as mentioned previously, even a purely civic symbol like the national flag can achieve the status of a holy relic as witnessed by the reverence many Americans imbue in the stars and stripes. Sally F. Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977) distinguish between contemporary secular rituals and more traditional religious and/or mystically inspired ritual (Turner 1969).

David Kertzer (1988) has effectively demonstrated the wide range of political rituals and their uses with a particularly incisive analysis of the role of mystification in converting the obligatory into the desirable. Max Gluckman’s (1954) pioneering analysis of rituals of rebellion in South East Africa was adapted by Aronoff (1977 and 1993) to explain how the top leaders of the Israel Labor Party perpetuated themselves in power and maintained Labor’s dominance of the political system. He suggests that the

conditions which led to the breakdown of such rituals were a reflection of radical cultural and political changes transforming Israeli society. Kubik (1994) demonstrated how the Catholic Church and independent groups of citizens effectively utilized the Pope's visit to Poland in 1979 to orchestrate public rites and political rituals that undermined the hegemony of the Polish People's Republic and paved the way for radical transformation of the political system.

Yet the application of concepts derived from the study of so-called “simple” or “traditional” societies to the understanding of contemporary so-called “complex” or “modern” societies, requires their refinement.¹⁰ One of the main questions in such an adaptation is how narrowly to restrict or widely to broaden the definition. Victor Turner’s restrictive definition of ritual as “formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technical routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” would exclude many secular rituals. On the other hand, Robert Bocoock (1974) and H.L. Nieburg (1973) use “ritual” as a metaphor for so many social activities that it loses much explanatory value.¹¹ We suggest a balanced definition that includes contemporary secular rituals while excluding other forms of ceremonial behavior. Rituals take place in controlled and bracketed social settings in which the actions of the performers are prescribed and constrained while the rules of everyday life are temporarily suspended.

¹⁰ Although this is a highly problematic heuristic distinction because it is too often reified, real differences necessitate conceptual refinement and the need to point out the differences as well as the similarities between comparable phenomena like ritual in different types of societies, e.g., those with low and high divisions of labor as Aronoff did in his application of rituals of rebellion. “There is ... no simple progression from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern;’ but a twisting, spasmodic, unmethodical movement which turns as often toward repossessing the emotions of the past as disowning them” (Geertz 1973:319).

¹¹ Bocoock defines ritual as “the symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture in a social situation to express and articulate meaning.” Nieburg applies Gluckman’s aforementioned notion of “rituals of rebellion” to as disparate phenomena as rock concerts, obesity, and suicide without even attempting to justify his dramatic deviation from Gluckman’s explicitly restrictive insistence that such rituals can not occur after the emergence of social class since actors can then opt for alternative social roles.

The actors are aware that performing these acts has serious implications for them and their communities although some consequences (such as generating or maintaining social cohesion) may not be consciously intended.

One of the defining characteristics of all ritual (as opposed to other ceremonial forms and games with which they share some traits) is that the outcome is *predetermined*. Ritual performers converse in mutually understood symbols although they may attribute significantly different meanings to them. Ritual is an important means for dealing with ambivalent social roles, conflicting interests, cognitive dissonance between ideology and reality, and threats to the unity of the social unit in which they take place. Ritual represents reality symbolically in a selective and disguised manner thereby allowing discourse on it to take place aimed at achieving conciliation, affirmation, or transformation of ideology. Given the necessity for the control of outcomes, rituals in contemporary democratic states with competitive party systems and open societies tend to take place among groups with subcultures. In such contexts society-wide events sponsored by the state, tend to be more ceremonial than ritual as we define it.¹² The reason for this is that the limited ability of rulers to define reality (achieve hegemony) and control the behavior of wide segments of pluralistic populations in complex societies. The existence of competing discourses and a multiplicity of alternative roles for political actors reduces the possibility of predictable outcomes in societal-wide political spectacles.

¹² For the distinction see Mary Gluckman and Max Gluckman, "On Drama, and Games and Athletic Contests," in Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (1977).

Figure 3: Characteristics of Traditional Rituals, Secular Rituals, and Ceremonies

	Actions	Implications	Setting	Outcomes
Traditional	Prescribed	Profound	Societal	Predetermined
Secular	Prescribed	Important	Group/State ¹³	Predetermined
Ceremony	Optional	Marginal	Variable	Undetermined

Rhetoric

Rhetoric, as in the case of the Pope's sermons during his visit to Poland, constitutes an important component of political culture that has been given insufficiently serious treatment in the study of politics. Too frequently inappropriately used concepts such as charisma are applied to account for the effectiveness of politicians in communicating with, and mobilizing the support of, various constituencies. We need more careful and systematic analyses of the rhetorical techniques which enable politicians to mobilize shared sentiments having a high emotional charge. This important subject, while known to the ancient Greeks, has only recently begun to receive serious scholarly treatment. As Robert Paine (1981:10) observes, political legitimacy involves getting people to accept what is said and “persuasion rests upon the ability to organize the experience of those who are persuaded.” Paine (1981:21) suggests that beyond being a spur to action, “the role of rhetoric is that of agent in the ritualization of politics.”

¹³ Statewide rituals (as opposed to ceremonies) are more common in authoritarian states with closed societies than in democratic states with open societies.

F.G. Bailey (1981:25-40) outlines three major dimensions of rhetoric and the contexts in which they are likely to be used. Logical reasoning offers propositions about facts for empirical validation. Utilizing *plain speech*, the speaker appeals to the intellect of the listener. The context for this type is one of certainty in which there is consensus regarding the rules of discourse such as ideally exists in the university and scientific community. The second type is characterized by *deliberative rhetoric* which is designed to reach a decision on matters requiring action. It entails the consideration of at least two points of view. Such tempered speech encourages discussion but not of all sides to the question as in the first type. Therefore Bailey defines its appeal as *pseudo-cerebral*. The context of this type lacks consensus but is one in which there is a basic agreement on the political rules of the game. It is therefore the dominant form of political dialogue deemed desirable in democratic societies. The goal of the third type, *hortatory rhetoric*, is to inhibit free discussion and to exclude from public discussion all but one point of view. It aims to persuade the audience to endorse the position of the speaker by accepting his definition of reality. Bombastic grandiloquent style is used to discourage or even eliminate discussion. *Cardiac* appeal to the heart (rather than the head) characterizes this type. The critical faculty is suspended through the excitement of emotions aroused through the use of sacred symbols, emotionally powerful metaphors, and metonyms. Contexts of *high uncertainty*, in which the rulers' political authority to impose constraints has been eroded by social and economic conditions and/or threats to public security, can create public demand for meaningful order. Such conditions create a receptive climate for grandiloquent exhortation and the manipulation of the masses through the utilization of political rhetoric, myths, and ritual by demagogues.

Figure 4: Dimensions of Rhetoric

Objective of the Speaker	Style of Speech	Object of Appeal	Context
Logical Reasoning (Discovery)	Plain	Intellect	Certainty
Deliberative Rhetoric (Persuasion)	Tempered	Pseudo-Intellect	Consensus
Hortatory Rhetoric (Manipulation)	Grandiloquent	Emotions	Uncertainty

Legitimacy and Legitimizing Discourses

Although the notion of legitimacy dates from classical Greek political thought, the major modern theorist associated with refining the concept is Max Weber. Kubik (1994:8) defines legitimacy as “a state or process of valorization in which a given action, institution, regime, or social order is ‘sacralized’ or ‘dignified’ by being related to a system of shared values contained in root paradigms and dominant symbols of a given group. Legitimacy occurs when the ‘legitimized’ elements are linked to the ultimate domain of ‘the culturally postulated and the socially unquestionable’ – to use a very apt phrase of Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977:2).” Importantly, legitimacy claims put forth by the rulers can be recognized as valid and thus legitimacy can be granted *only* when the ruled enjoy a minimum of freedom to make such a decision (Scott 1990). The degree of congruence between key, politically relevant values and principles shared by the rulers and the ruled (publicly expressed under at least minimal conditions of freedom) determines the extent of the legitimacy of the political institutions. The primary means of

evaluating the degree of such congruence is through the analysis of the public discourses of the rulers and the ruled and by interpretation of their participation in public ceremonies and rituals. “The higher the degree of similarity the higher the degree of legitimacy” (Kubik, 1994:9). Another way of phrasing it is that legitimation is the process that transforms power resting ultimately on coercion into authority based on a modicum of consent, if not consensus. We agree with Swartz, Turner, and Tuden (1966:11) that “instead of trying to decide what kinds of support a whole political system may have, or whether the system as a whole is legitimate, increased analytical power can be gained by dividing the political system into a number of aspects or levels and examining each for the presence or absence of legitimacy, for, and other types of support.”

The primary problem of legitimacy, according to Geertz, is to make sure that the ruled experience “what the state ‘does’ as proceeding naturally from a familiar and intelligible ‘we’” (1973:317). For example, for someone like Sukarno, the former ruler of Indonesia, the primary role of the leader in post-colonial contexts is to dispel “the aura of alienness from the institutions of modern government” by making the “nation-state seem indigenous” (Geertz 1973:317-18). He suggests that this “conceptual dislocation” is the most appropriate focus for cultural studies of state politics.

Legitimizing discourses, a weaker form of “cultural” control than dominant ideologies, are defined by Richard Merelman (2003:9) as “*any body of ideas, images, or practices that portrays a political regime to be functioning as its power holders claim it to be functioning, and, in so doing, provides support to those who exert power in the regime.*” Intellectuals play a central role in the production of legitimizing discourses. The case he examines is the pluralist theory of American politics and the role of the political

science department of Yale University between 1955 and 1970. Merelman contrasts the concept of legitimating discourses with stronger forms like the theory of dominant ideologies. The former does not assume that the weak will adopt the ideas of the powerful. It asserts no determinate relationships between social position and beliefs. The concept of legitimating discourses neither presumes that reality will be distorted, that power holders are irrational, nor that reality will be mystified. Intellectuals are frequently allied with power holders, but may also oppose them. Whereas dominant ideologies explicitly support those in power, legitimating discourses are less explicit which actually increases their effectiveness in providing cultural ammunition for political leaders. More subtle and indirect support is almost always more effective than overt political manipulation of cultural forms which calls attention to itself. A case in point is the manipulation of collective memory.

Collective memory

Collective memory is never static and is never objective. The manner in which the past is interpreted shapes our understanding of the present and the future. The history which becomes part of the fund of shared knowledge of a movement, a people, or a state is not what has been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so.

“Modern nations...generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so ‘natural’ as to require no definition other than self-assertion” (Hobsbawm 1983:14).

As George Orwell wrote in his classic *1984*, “who controls the past, controls the future. Who controls the present, controls the past.” To put it another way, in domestic politics as well as international conflicts, the victors write the history books. For example, during the period of perestroika Soviet school authorities canceled final examinations in history courses because the teachers no longer knew the “correct” answers. An academic wag in Moscow claimed that the most unpredictable thing in the U.S.S.R. is the past since every new leader rewrote it. Throughout the former Soviet Union and East Europe history is being rewritten. Statues of Soviet “heroes” were toppled and others reinstated and resurrected. The Committee for Historical Justice of Hungary ordered the reinternment of the remains of former premier Imre Nage and other former communist reformers who were hanged as traitors in 1958 from their unmarked graves. The rites were televised nationally as the new regime attempted to gain legitimacy from this symbolic rewriting of history. When he was prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin orchestrated an elaborate state funeral for 2,000 year-old bones reputedly associated with the second Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire in an attempt to gain legitimacy for his government’s policies and to gain political and ideological dominance of his party. In addition to the reburial of bones, archaeological sites and artifacts frequently play important roles in nationalist attempts to gain legitimacy from the past. We devote an entire chapter to the discussion of this topic.

(Invented) tradition

Eric Hobsbawm (1983) distinguishes between the *invented tradition* of modern states and *custom* characteristic of so-called traditional societies. He suggests that the main differentiating characteristic of invented tradition is that the continuity with the past is “factitious,” i.e. produced by human rather than natural forces. He claims that invented traditions are characterized by invariance whereas custom does not preclude limited innovation as long as it appears compatible with precedent. He implies that the distinction rests on the extent to which innovation is consciously manipulated thereby making invented traditions more artificial than custom. Hobsbawm claims that traditional practices were specific and strongly binding whereas modern ones are vague and compulsory. Since our approach assumes the humanly constructed nature of all culture, his claim that custom is more “authentic” than invented tradition appears exaggerated. The degree to which the custom or tradition appears to be manipulated, however, influences credibility since obvious manipulation calls attention to the socially constructed nature and thus “artificiality” of the claim. Clearly some claims are more credible than others either because they are supported by culturally accepted evidence or because they fulfill psychological, social, and/or political needs of those who believe them.

Figure 5: Custom and Invented Tradition

Features of custom and invented tradition according to Hobsbawm					
	Continuity with the past	Innovation	Conscious manipulation	Specificity	Binding
Custom	natural	limited	minimal	specific	strong
Invented tradition	fictitious	significant	maximal	vague	compulsory

Ideology and Utopia

Ideology is a more concrete, rationalized, and systematized version of the general political culture articulated by groups and regimes to give legitimacy to their identities and to justify their goals. In his classic essay “Ideology as a Cultural System,” Geertz (1964, 1973) criticized interest theory, which views ideology as a mask and a weapon, and strain theory, which views it as a symptom and a remedy, as well as the cathartic (safety valve or scapegoat), morale, solidarity, and advocacy explanations of ideology as being inadequate. They all ignore the process of how “ideologies transform sentiment into significance and so make it socially available” (Geertz 1964:56). By bypassing the question of how symbols symbolize, “they evade the problem of construing the import of ideological assertions by simply failing to recognize it as a problem” (Geertz 1964:57). He calls for a symbolic model which explains how the unfamiliar is made familiar. “The function of ideology is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped. ...Whatever else ideologies may be “projections of unacknowledged fears, disguises for ulterior motives, phatic expressions of group solidarity” they are, most distinctively, *maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience*” (Geertz 1964:63-4, emphasis added). The endurance of dominant ideologies and hegemonic political cultures at any point in time varies depending on their effectiveness in providing models for dealing with societal problems.

In his excellent editor's introduction to Paul Ricoeur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), George Taylor summarizes Ricoeur's interpretation of Marx's view of ideology as *distortion*—the opposite of *praxis*. Weber on the other hand, viewed ideology as *legitimation*, which combines the claim to authority by the rulers and the belief in their legitimacy by the ruled. Ricoeur emphasizes the role of ideology in bridging the discrepancy or gap between claim and belief. "The discrepancy between claim and belief is a permanent feature of political life, Ricoeur maintains, and it is ideology's permanent role to provide the needed supplement to belief that will fill this gap" (Ricoeur 1986 xvii).¹⁴

Following Karl Mannheim, Ricoeur contrasts ideology with utopia. The symbolic mediation between claims and beliefs of ideology is constitutive of social existence. It integrates and preserves individual and collective identities and begets order through reproductive imagination. The productive imagination of utopia, by contrast, explores the possible alternative orders. It thereby *de-reifies*, or calls into question existing social orders. It highlights the *contingency* of social order thereby undermining the *status quo*. Utopia is a dream or vision intended to change the *status quo*. "Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, or hermeneutics, confirms that we must maintain the dialectic and move back from a criticism of ideology by utopia to what we may call a criticism of utopia by ideology" (Ibid xxxiii). This dialectic, which typifies the social imagination, is according to Ricoeur "constitutive of social reality itself" (1986:3).

Hegemony

¹⁴ This is what Max Gluckman (1956) called the inherent "frailty of authority." Aronoff (1986) elaborates on this theme in his edited volume of essays which analyze this phenomenon in diverse cultural contexts.

Hegemony, associated with Antonio Gramsci, is a concept that has been refined and applied by a number of scholars.¹⁵ According to Kubik (1994:11) “hegemony refers to that aspect of power relationships which is not produced or guaranteed by coercion but by the acceptance (even if fragmentary and not fully conscious) of the rulers’ definitions of reality by the ruled.” Some scholars argue that hegemony is thus an extreme form of ideological domination in which the legitimation of power is so entrenched in the cultural definitions of reality that they become taken for granted as forms of everyday consciousness, habits and customs. Bourdieu analyzes this phenomenon using the concept of “symbolic violence” (1991), whose end result is *doxa*. In *Practical Reason* Bourdieu (1998: 56-7) reminds us that “it should not be forgotten that such primordial political belief, this doxa, is an orthodoxy, a right, correct, dominant vision which has more often than not been imposed through struggles against competing visions. This means that the ‘natural attitude’ ... the primary experience of the world of common sense, is a politically produced relation, as are the categories of perception that sustain it. What appears today as self-evident, as beneath consciousness and choice, has quite often been the stake of struggles and instituted only as the result of dogged confrontations between dominant and dominated groups... Doxa is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view—the point of view of those who dominate by dominating the state and who have constituted their point of view as universal by constituting the state.”

Laitin defines hegemony as “the political forging – whether through coercion or elite bargaining – and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in a state and the

¹⁵ Gramsci (1971), Laitin (1986), Lustick (1993), Ortner (1989), Scott (1985), and Sider (1986).

concurrent idealization of that schema into a dominant symbolic framework that reigns as common sense” (1986:183). This analysis pivots on the understanding of “dominance” about which Laitin writes. Does dominance connote completeness of control? Total control? Complete hegemony seems to be obtainable only in situations of “the total abolition of any social realm of relative discursive freedom” (Scott 1990:83). But as James Scott convincingly argues such situations are extremely rare, if not non-existent (1990:70-107). For him, the concept of hegemony is thus not very useful, unless it is meant to refer to *relative dominance* of the hegemonic model over counter-hegemonic models of reality in a given social field. The latter can be formulated by the weak as “hidden transcripts” that are often difficult to detect. Hegemony should be seen, therefore, as a process that is always contested by counter discourses present in “hidden transcripts,” cultivated through countless act of “everyday resistance,” or even displayed through “ceremonial revolutions” (Kubik, 1994:247 & 250).

It is, therefore, imperative to analyze hegemony and counter-hegemony together; it also seems useful to distinguish between semiotic and psycho-social forms of hegemony. A group (government, class, elite) achieves (cultural) hegemony in a given socio-political field – in respect to a given “object” (government, regime, office) – (a) when its discourse and its interpretation become dominant or exclusive (rare occurrence) in this field, that is when it *saturates* the public space, and/or (b) when this discourse *resonates* with the attitudes of the populace.¹⁶ The higher the saturation and resonance,

¹⁶ Resonance is defined in Snow and Benford (1988) in the following way: A discourse and an attitude resonate with each other when goals, values, ideas, etc. expressed (contained) in this discourse are congruent with the goals, values, ideas, etc. upon which this particular attitude is founded.

the stronger the hegemony. Hegemony has thus two aspects: semiotic (saturation) and psychological (resonance).¹⁷

Laitin investigates the significance of strongly polarized “schemas” for achieving hegemony. As he argues, an interpretive “schema” proposed by the rulers is rendered hegemonic through (1) “choosing one major strand of the culture making it the privileged aspect of culture” (Laitin 1986:92) and (2) defining the major divide of the society in terms of this “privileged aspect” or “schema” and (3) making sure that most of the “members of all social strata interpret politics and choose strategies of participation in terms of [this] divide” (Laitin 1986:107). The political culture of a given socio-political unit (e.g., a state) is never completely “hegemonized” by such a (di)vision, which usually has to compete against counter-hegemonic visions. It seems, however, that competing political actors always try to create a hegemonic vision of the political order, saturate the public space with it, and make it resonate with peoples' attitudes in such a way as to enhance their power. Sometimes bipolar hegemonic visions dominate the public sphere with unusual might and clarity, as has been determined by Aronoff (1991) for Israel; Laitin (1986) for Nigeria; Auda (1993) for Mubarak's Egypt; Rakic (1998) for Serbia in the late 1980s and in the 1990s; and Kubik (1994a) for the pre-1982 Poland.

The concept of political culture is critical if not indispensable for several research concerns central to political science, including legitimacy, consent, coordination, collective identity, conflict resolution, and even rebellion. It is undeniable that for a while this area of study was indeed “moribund” (Laitin 1986:171), but since political science began absorbing the lessons of the “cultural turn” by discovering the semiotic

¹⁷ In the view of this formulation, communists in many countries, for extensive periods of time achieved a high level of semiotic hegemony, although very rarely enjoyed (it seems, data is hard to obtain) psychological hegemony.

understanding of culture (Johnson 2002, Wedeen 2002, O'Neil 1999) and employing at least some of the conceptual tools discussed above, the study of the relationship between politics and culture has become reinvigorated and begun producing important results. Some of them are discussed in the chapters that follow. Whereas the concept of political culture is less frequently used in political anthropology (as opposed to its more frequent use in the discipline of history), the focused analysis on the relationship between culture and politics is at the core of political anthropology.