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POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: THE ANALYSIS OF THE SYMBOLISM OF POWER RELATIONS

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A decade ago, an eminent political scientist carried out a survey of political studies within social anthropology to assess their contribution to the study of politics generally (Easton 1959). His conclusion was brief and confident: 'Political anthropology does not yet exist'. Social anthropologists, he argued, were interested in politics only indirectly, and only in so far as it affected other institutional variables in society. 'Purely political considerations are incidental to the emphasis on kinship structure and its general social effects' (1959: 212).

Apart from some brief, caustic remarks by Bailey (1968: 281) against it, Easton's verdict has remained unchallenged. Yet I can think of no other comment on social anthropology which has been as damaging and as academically irresponsible as this one. It is damaging, firstly, because Easton is one of the leading figures in political science today and his views count widely in the social sciences. Secondly, his article on political anthropology (1959) and his preoccupation with the concept of 'political system' have made him popular with social anthropologists (Gluckman & Eggan 1965), some of whom seem to attach much weight to his judgement. Even an anthropologist of the calibre of Southall seems to have accepted Easton's view and, with apologetic remarks to forestall possible Leach-type charges of butterfly collecting, has urged that we should overcome our weakness by embarking on new, more sophisticated, 'unidimensional' classifications of political systems (Southall 1965). Easton's comment is irresponsible because it is based on what seems to have been a hurried reading of a few monographs that happened to have been published shortly before he made it. As I indicate below, he neglects whole streams of thought within anthropology whose contribution to the study of politics have been immense. Worst of all, he completely misunderstands the nature of the central theoretical problems with which social anthropology deals.

Easton writes as if there were a consensus as to what political anthropology is about. But such a consensus does not yet exist. Indeed, political scientists themselves are not agreed about the exact domain of political science. In a recent survey of his own discipline, Easton (1968) states: 'Political science is still looking for its identity' and in his book *A framework for political analysis*, published as recently as 1965, he is still concerned with the question of what variables should be included within his 'political system'. If this is today the case with political science, about which he knows so much, he certainly could not have been so sure ten years ago about what variables were the concern of political anthropology.

This is not a matter of playing with words and definitions, or of quibbling between rival disciplines. The issues are far more fundamental; for they pose the whole topical question of the role of social anthropology in the study, not only of

the changing societies of the newly independent states of Africa and Asia, but also of the complex societies of the developed countries. Our traditional subject matter—the isolated, small-scale society—has undergone fundamental political change and can no longer be studied ‘as if’ it were still relatively autonomous, but must be considered within the institutional structure of the new state. This brings social anthropology face to face with political science which, since the second world war, has rapidly developed into a very powerful discipline, both in terms of financial and manpower resources and in terms of its influence on governments and on other disciplines. What is more, in recent years a large number of competent political scientists have invaded ‘our territory’ and have undertaken research in the politics of the new states of the ‘third world’.¹

These developments highlight the state of transition through which social anthropology is now passing and call for a re-examination of aims, methods and theoretical orientation. They also raise the question of the nature of the relationship between political science and social anthropology. What can they learn from one another? What kind of division of labour and of co-operation can be developed between them? Underlying these questions is the major question: what is political anthropology?

The central theoretical problem in social anthropology

A discipline is defined in terms of the major problems with which it deals. A ‘problem’ in this context refers to the need for the analysis of *interaction* between major variables. The advance of a discipline is as much in the identification and isolation of these variables as in the analysis of their interdependence. As Homans once pointed out, one of the lessons we learn from the older sciences is to cut down, as far as we dare, the number of variables with which we deal.

The first major theoretical and methodological breakthrough in the development of social anthropology occurred when Durkheim, and later Radcliffe-Brown, advocated the analytical isolation of social from historical and from psychological facts. It is true that in recent years this has been subjected to criticism by some anthropologists, on a variety of grounds. But this criticism has so far been directed against the *rigidity*, not the theoretical principles, underlying this separation. Even those anthropologists who regard social anthropology as a kind of historiography and call for the analysis of historical data by anthropologists agree, nevertheless, that social institutions cannot be sociologically explained in terms of past events (Evans-Pritchard 1956: 60). Similarly, even in the study of symbols and of symbolic behaviour, whose operation is closely involved in psychic processes, the separation of the social from the psychic has been systematically maintained (Leach 1958; Gluckman 1963; 1968; Turner 1964).

Following the theoretical leads by Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, social anthropologists developed the so-called ‘holistic’ approach to society and concentrated on the study of what came to be known as ‘social structure’. But, setting aside explicit theoretical and methodological formulations, the question should be asked: what have social anthropologists actually done in order to study the social structure holistically? The answer can be found in the monographic studies which they have produced.

Broadly speaking, social anthropologists have interpreted the ‘holism’ of the

social structure in terms of a limited number of specific institutions (Beattie 1959). A survey of the monographs will show that they have generally concentrated on the study of four broad institutional fields: economic, political, kinship and ritual. On a higher level of abstraction, these four institutional fields comprise two major variables: the political and the symbolic.

The separation between the economic and the political in socio-anthropological studies is often very arbitrary. What has come to be known as 'economic anthropology' is in fact an admixture of descriptions of economic process and economic relationships. These two aspects of economic activity belong to two different conceptual schemes that have been developed by two different disciplines. Economic process refers to the interaction between man and relatively scarce resources. Economic relations, on the other hand, refer to interaction between men involved in the economic process. Social anthropologists have been interested mainly in economic relations, i.e. in relations between individuals and groups in the processes of production, exchange and distribution, and most social anthropologists who have studied process have done so mainly in so far as process affected economic relations.² But these economic relations are relations of power and are thus essentially political, forming a major part of the political order in any society.

These two types of power, the economic and the political, are certainly different in a number of respects and they are associated with different types of sanctions. But they are intimately interconnected and are in many contexts inseparable. In both we are in fact dealing with relationships of power between individuals and groups, when these relationships are considered structurally throughout the extent of a polity. In both institutions, relationships are manipulative, technical and instrumental, as men in different situations use one another as means to ends and not as ends in themselves.

Similarly, kinship and ritual, though distinct in form, have a great deal in common, and the separation between them is often arbitrary, and sometimes misleading. They are both normative, depending on categorical imperatives that are rooted in the psychic structure of men in society through continual socialisation. Both consist of symbols and of symbolic complexes. These symbols are cognitive, in that they direct the attention of men selectively to certain meanings. They are affective, in that they are never emotionally neutral; they always agitate feelings and sentiments. They are conative, in that they impel men to action. These characteristics determine the potency of symbols, which can be ranged on a continuum, from the least potent, a mere 'sign', to the most potent, a 'dominant symbol' (Turner 1964; 1968).

Symbols are systematised together within the framework of dynamic ideologies, or world-views, in which the symbols of the political order are integrated with those dealing with the perennial problems of human existence: the meaning of life and death, illness and health, misery and happiness, fortune and misfortune, good and evil. These two symbolic complexes support one another within a unified symbolic system.

Both categories of symbols, those of kinship and of ritual, have been used almost interchangeably in the articulation of political groupings and of power relationships between individuals and groups. Ritual symbols form part of most kinship systems, and kinship symbols form part of most ritual systems. Kinship symbols are said to

be particularly suited to articulate changing interpersonal relationships, while ritual symbols are said to be particularly suited to express political relations of a higher level. But there are many cases where a kinship ideology is made to articulate the political organisation of large populations in both uncentralised and centralised societies. The Bedouin of Cyrenaica (Peters 1960; 1967) and the Tallensi (Fortes 1945; 1949), for example, express their political organisation in the idiom of kinship. The same can be said of the organisation of kingdoms. The whole political structure of the Swazi is expressed in a lineage pattern that pervades the whole kingdom from the highest to the lowest levels (Kuper 1947). In other centralised societies kinship symbols articulate political groupings and political relations on only some levels. Among the Mambwe (Watson 1958) and the Lunda of the Luapula valley (Cunnison 1959) the stability of the political structure at the top is symbolised in terms of 'perpetual kinship' relationships. Among the Ashanti, on the other hand, only the lower part of the political structure is organised on a kinship basis (Fortes 1948). But even when we consider the symbolism of interpersonal relationships in large-scale, contemporary industrial society, we can see that these symbols articulate an endless array of informal political groupings whose operation is a fundamental part of the total political structure of the society.

Similarly, ritual symbols need not be exclusively involved in the articulation of the relatively high level, large-scale, political groupings, and can be seen to express various types of interpersonal relationships. Thus, as Gluckman (1962) points out, in most tribal societies, interpersonal relationships are highly 'ritualised'. Also, in many Mediterranean and Latin American countries extensive use is made of the ritual kinship relationships created by the institution of 'god-parenthood', *compadrazgo*, in the organisation of various types of interpersonal relationships and of groupings, in some cases between the socially equal, in others between the socially unequal (Mintz & Wolf 1950; 1956; Pitt-Rivers 1958; Deshon 1963; Osborn 1968).

Kinship symbols and ritual symbols are highly interdependent and neither category can operate without the other. The distinction between them is often based, not on objective sociological analysis, but on native usages and ideologies. The same can be said of the broader distinction between 'sacred symbols' and 'profane symbols', or between ritual and ceremonial generally (Leach 1954; Martin 1965; Douglas 1966).

This is not to say that there are no significant differences between symbols, or that symbols should not be categorised. But symbols are highly complex socio-cultural phenomena and can be classified according to a variety of criteria, depending on the purpose of the classification. In other words, such a classification depends on the nature of the problem of the analysis which, in turn, depends on the variables that are considered in the study. I am arguing here that in social anthropology the central theoretical interest in the study of symbols is the analysis of their involvement in the relationships of power, and that this will call for a type of classification which may often be at variance with that provided by the cultural traditions of which the symbols are part.

Form and function in symbolism

It is essential that we distinguish between symbolic *forms* and symbolic *functions*. The same symbolic function, within a particular political context, can be achieved

by a variety of symbolic forms. For example, every political group must have symbols of distinctiveness, i.e. of identity and exclusiveness. But this can be achieved in different symbolic forms: emblems, facial markings, myths of origin, customs of endogamy or of exogamy, beliefs and practices associated with the ancestors, genealogies, specific ceremonials, special styles of life, shrines, notions of purity and pollution, and so on (Cohen 1969: 201-14). Thus, ritual symbols and kinship symbols differ in form but not necessarily in function.

It is also important to remember that these two forms of symbols do not exhaust between them the whole symbolic universe in a society. There are many other forms of symbols that are not ordinarily subsumed under either the category of kinship or ritual. This is such an obvious point that it seems unnecessary to mention it. Yet it is surprising how often we tend to forget it and thus lead ourselves astray in our observation and analysis. This is particularly the case when we study changing pre-industrial societies or more developed societies. Often in such cases traditional symbols of kinship and of ritual lose their significance and we then begin to talk of 'social disintegration' or, when we refer to ritual particularly, of 'secularisation'. It then becomes easy to slip into the theoretical position that the hold of symbols on social relationships is weakening as the society becomes more socially differentiated and more formally and rationally organised. But, as Duncan (1962) points out, there can be no social order without the 'mystification' of symbolism. This is true, not only of capitalist societies as Marx maintained, but also of socialist societies, where emblems, slogans, banners, mass parades, titles, patriotic music and songs, and, inevitably, the 'world view' of dialectical materialism—these and a host of all sorts of other symbols play their part in the maintenance of the political order. 'Secularisation', writes Martin (1965: 169), 'is less a scientific concept than a tool of counter-religious ideologies'.

Thus, although kinship symbols and ritual symbols may become obsolete in modern society, other symbols take their place in articulating old, as well as new, symbolic functions. A change of symbolic form does not automatically entail a change of symbolic function, because the same function can be achieved by new forms. Similarly, a continuity of symbolic form need not automatically entail a continuity of symbolic function, for the same form can fulfil new functions. In some situations old symbols are revived to perform new functions (Gluckman 1942; Cohen 1965). As I argue elsewhere (Cohen 1969: 211-14), the challenge to social anthropology today is the analysis of this dynamic involvement of symbolism, or of custom, in the changing relationships of power between individuals and groups.

Societies often adopt different symbolic forms to achieve the same types of symbolic functions. This is what we mean by cultural differences. These differences arise as a result of different combinations of circumstances, some of which can be historical, cultural and ecological. Some symbolic forms are adopted from other peoples through interaction with them at different historical periods; others are conditioned by special ecological factors. For example, a people living in a forest area will make use of trees in carving symbols, or in general symbolic representation, while a people living in the desert will make use of other media and experiences in constructing their symbolic forms. Again, because Islam is categorically opposed to the employment of painting, carving, dancing and music in its

symbolism, extensive use is made in orthodox Islamic countries of a wide range of linguistic forms—rhetoric, proverbs and the like.

Symbolic forms are the products of creative work. Their internal structure is a dramatic structure and their study is partly a study in the sociology of art. Many symbols are the creation of anonymous artists. It is only in more advanced and sophisticated literate societies that special, named, artists are commissioned to create symbols for specific functions—to design a flag, write an anthem, compose music for a hymn, paint a picture of a saint, stage a ceremonial. But we are all potential creators of symbols. Through our dreams, illusions, spontaneous activities, moments of reflection and in the general flow of our consciousness we continually proliferate symbols and manipulate them. Many men keep their symbolic creativity to themselves. Others externalise it and try to share it with other men. This symbolic proliferation within each one of us is not entirely our autonomous creation, but is the product of a dialectical interaction between ourselves and our social reality. At times of change, some men's symbolic forms can provide better solutions to the current problems of a group than other symbols and those men who create, mobilise, or articulate them may become leaders and have their symbols adopted by the group. There is thus a great deal of the creative artist in the political leader who, through his rhetoric, slogans and tactics manipulates existing symbols or creates new ones. When this creativity is particularly original, when it helps to articulate or to objectify new groupings and new relationships, we describe him as 'charismatic'.

Social anthropologists analyse symbolic forms in order to discover their symbolic functions. One of the most important of these functions is the objectification of relationships between individuals and groups. We can observe individuals objectively in concrete reality, but the relationships between them are abstractions that can be observed only through symbols. Social relationships develop through and are maintained by symbols. We 'see' groups only through their symbolism. Values, norms, rules, and abstract concepts like honour, prestige, rank, justice, good and evil are made tangible through symbolism, and men in society are thus helped to be aware of their existence, to comprehend them and to relate them to their daily life.

Symbols also objectify roles and give them a reality which is separate from the individual personalities of their incumbents. Men are trained for their roles, installed in them, and helped to perform their duties in the course of a series of stylised symbolic activities. By objectifying relations and roles, symbols help to differentiate between them, a function particularly important in multiplex relationships (Gluckman 1962).

By objectifying roles and relations, symbolism achieves a measure of stability and continuity without which social life cannot exist. Power is an erratic process. A vengeance group may have to wait for years before it finds itself involved in a case of homicide that will require action on the part of all of its members. But it must be ready for action all the time; for such an event can occur at any moment. Its members cannot afford to disband in the meantime, but must keep their grouping alive. This continuity of the group can be achieved mainly through group symbolism, not through the irregular exercise of power. Similarly, although a régime may come to office and maintain itself for some time purely by

force, its stability and continuity are achieved mainly through the symbolism of authority which it manipulates. Subjects do not start their lives every morning by examining the dispositions of power in their society to see whether the régime is still backed by the same amount of power as before, or whether that power has diminished and the régime can therefore be overthrown. The stability and continuity of the régime are made possible through a complex system of symbolism that gives it legitimacy by representing it ultimately as a 'natural' part of the celestial order.

Through the 'mystification' which it creates, symbolism makes it possible for the social order to survive the disruptive processes created within it by the inevitable areas of conflicting values and principles. It does this by creating communion between potential enemies. A proverb among Arab peasants states: 'I against my brother; I and my brother against our cousin; I and my brother and my cousin against the outsider'. A man discovers his identity through interaction with others. To co-operate with his brother against their cousin he must reconcile his hostility to his brother with the need to identify with him in the fight against their cousin. He, his brother, and their cousin must achieve communion to contain their enmities if they are to co-operate against the common enemy.

As Smith points out (1956), all politics, all struggle for power, is segmentary. This means that enemies at one level must be allies at a higher level. Thus a man must be an enemy and an ally with the same set of people, and it is mainly through the 'mystification' generated by symbolism that these contradictions are repetitively faced and temporarily resolved. Indeed, Gluckman goes so far in elaborating on this function of symbolism as to state that ritual and ceremonial do not simply express cohesion and impress the value of society and its social sentiments on people, as in Durkheim's and Radcliffe-Brown's theories, but exaggerate real conflicts of social rules and affirm that there is unity despite these conflicts (Gluckman 1963: 18).

The degree of 'mystification' mounts as the social inequalities between people who should identify in communion increase. This is a point stressed and greatly illuminated by Marx in his exposure of the mysteries of capitalist symbols and 'ideologies'. It is further elaborated and discussed by Duncan (1962) who points out that all social order involves hierarchy, that all hierarchy involves relations between superiors, inferiors and equals, and that relationships between these are developed and maintained through the 'mystification' of the symbolism of communion.

It is not my intention to attempt to give here a survey of the various symbolic functions that have been discovered by social anthropologists. Many such functions have been identified and analysed; but the systematic search for them and the analysis of the ways in which these functions do their job is still at its beginning. What I want to stress is that social anthropologists have been collectively concerned with the study of interdependence between two major variables: power relations and symbolic action.³

Power and symbolism in anthropological analysis

I must hasten to say that there is nothing theoretically new in this. Leading social anthropologists have expressed the same view, though sometimes using different

terms. Thus more than fifteen years ago, Leach maintained that the main task of social anthropology was to interpret symbolic statements and actions in terms of social relations (1954). Similarly, Gluckman (1942: 1965) has for a long time held the view that social anthropology differs from the other social sciences in that it is concerned with customs, which are essentially what I am calling symbols. Social anthropology, he states, is concerned with the analysis of custom in the context of social relations (1965). Again, Evans-Pritchard states that social anthropology 'studies . . . social behaviour generally in institutionalised forms, such as the family, kinship systems, political organisation, legal procedures, religious cults, and the like, and the relations between such institutions' (1956: 5).

This does not mean that all social anthropologists are in agreement that they are principally concerned with the study of the symbolism of power relations. As we shall see below, a few of them are barely interested in the study of symbols and concentrate on the study of power relations and power struggles between individuals and groups. Other social anthropologists, on the other hand, are not interested in the study of relationships of power and concentrate on the study of symbols as such. But the overwhelming majority of social anthropologists fall on the continuum between these two extremes in that their work consists in the analysis of various types of symbols within essentially political contexts. Often they alternate in their analysis between these two variables, though some do so more consciously, explicitly and systematically than others.

The two variables are in fact two broad aspects of nearly all social behaviour. As Nadel and Goffman have shown, all social behaviour is couched in symbolic forms (Nadel 1951: 28-9; Goffman 1959). On the other hand, as many social anthropologists point out, relationships of power are aspects of nearly all social relationships. In the words of Leach: 'Technique and ritual, profane and sacred, do not denote types of action but *aspects* of almost any kind of action' (1954: 13).

There is no assumption here that these two aspects account exhaustively for all concrete social behaviour; for this is a highly complex process which cannot be reduced to the operation of a few variables. Power relationships and symbolic behaviour are only analytically isolated from concrete social behaviour, in order to study the sociological relations between them. It is also important to note that the two variables are not reducible one to the other. Each is qualitatively different from the other. Each has its own special characteristics, its own type of process that is governed by its own laws. Symbols are not mechanical reflections, or representations, of political realities. They have an existence of their own, in their own right, and can affect power relations in a variety of ways. Similarly, power relationships have a reality of their own and can in no way be said to be determined by symbolic categories. If the one variable were an exact reflection of the other, then the study of their interdependence would be of little sociological value. It is only because they are different, yet interdependent, that their isolation and the study of the relations between them can be fruitful and illuminating.

It is not relevant to ask whether the isolation of these two variables is valid or not. One can isolate for analysis any variables from concrete behaviour, for it is an axiomatic assumption that all the variables involved in that behaviour are, to a lesser or greater extent, directly or indirectly interdependent. The question is only whether the variables isolated for analysis are significantly interconnected and

whether the study of this interconnexion is likely to develop systematic hypotheses and to lead to further analysis. The work and achievements of social anthropology have so far demonstrated the value and the analytical possibilities of the study of the two variables discussed here.

Analysis in social anthropology has consisted in the study of interdependence, or of dialectical interaction, between the two variables rather than in the study of either of the variables separately. A concentration on only one, to the neglect of the other, will result mainly in descriptions whose theoretical value will be limited. This is of course a bald statement, for each of the two variables contains 'sub-variables' whose operation and interdependence must be analysed to make our description of the major variable more refined and more accurate. The difference between analysis and description is a matter of degree.

There are at present two experimental trends in social anthropology, each of which is concerned principally with only one of the two major variables.

The action theorists. One trend is a reaction against the emphasis placed by earlier anthropological studies on 'collective representations' in the classical Durkheimian tradition. This school of thought tends to sweep the theoretical pendulum towards an orientation emanating from Weberian 'action theory'. This theoretical approach (see Bailey 1968; Barth 1966; 1967; Boissevain 1968; Mayer 1966; Nicholas 1965) distrusts analysis in terms of groups and of group symbols, and concentrates on the activities of 'political man' who is ever impelled to the pursuit of power. Mayer states this in a cautious way: 'It may well be that, as social anthropologists become more interested in complex societies and as the simpler societies themselves become more complex, an increasing amount of work will be based on ego-centred entities such as action sets and quasi-groups, rather than on groups and sub-groups' (1966: 119). In a recent article Boissevain pushes this position to its limit: 'The accent must shift from the *group* towards the *individual* . . . Individuals, and the loose coalitions they form are thus logically prior to groups and society. A view which postulates the reverse is illogical' (1968: 544-5).

Anthropologists of this school of thought present a picture of political life in terms of a continuing 'game', in which every man is seeking to maximise his power by perpetually scheming, struggling, and making decisions. Every action he contemplates is the outcome of a transaction in which the returns are at least equal to, if not in excess of the outlay.

Action theory anthropologists have deepened our understanding of the dynamic processes involved in the struggle for power that goes on, not only within changing societies, but also within traditional societies. They have used a 'microscope' to show us politics at the grass-roots level, and have introduced into our vocabulary a number of valuable terms to label 'non-group' collectivities: 'faction', 'ego-centric network', 'action set'. In a recent book, Bailey (1969) presents and discusses a body of concepts and terms designed to deal, in a very perceptive and penetrating way, with the subtleties of political behaviour at this level. These concepts and terms direct our attention to types of groupings and to processes of political interaction that have so far escaped our attention, and thus provide us with important tools, not only for analysis but also for the collection of field data.

But when this orientation is pushed to its extreme and is presented, as Boissevain

(1968) does, as a substitute for the 'old methods', it becomes one-sided and thus gives a distorted picture of social reality. To put it metaphorically, the microscope that this school holds is so powerful in disclosing the details of face-to-face political interaction that it is powerless, or out of focus, to reflect the wider structural features of society.

Boissevain is certainly right in stating that the individual is prior to the group, but only if he is referring to the *biological* individual. In society, however, we do not deal with biological individuals but with social personalities. The greater part of our 'human nature' is acquired from society through socialisation. As Mead (1934) shows, self-identity, the very concept of 'I', is acquired by man through interaction with other men, with whom he communicates through symbols. A man is born into a society with a culture and a structure by which he is shaped. This sociocultural reality is an objective fact which confronts him from the outside. To that extent the group is prior to the individual. This does not mean that man is dwarfed by that reality and that his nature and his will are determined by it. Man also develops an autonomy of his own, his 'self', by which he reacts on society. The relationship between man and society is thus a dialectical one (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 193-4; Berger & Luckman 1967). But we must not exaggerate the extent to which a man is free from the groups to which he belongs. For example, in our society we believe that we are free to choose our partner in marriage, that we marry for love. We certainly do so to a large extent. But, as many studies in contemporary industrial societies have shown, most of us marry our social equals. Anthropologists call this class endogamy. Endogamy, as we all know, is a mechanism for maintaining the boundaries of groups and for keeping their membership exclusive to prevent the encroachment of undesirable outsiders into them. In pre-industrial society, endogamy is formally institutionalised, as in traditional Indian society. In our society it is not formally institutionalised but is, instead, enforced in a subtle, mostly unconscious way through the operation of a body of symbols that we acquire through socialisation. The status groups to which we belong implant special 'agents', special symbols, in our personalities and make us respond to some categories of members of the other sex rather than to others. When we acquire the symbolic behaviour implicit in the special 'style of life' of a status group, we are in fact thereby automatically acquiring the restraints, the collective representations, of that group. This means that even when we feel that we are acting as free individuals in following our own motives we can in fact be acting as members of groups. Groups act through the actions of their members. During an election campaign, candidates, brokers, mediators and voters manipulate one another, following their own private interests. They form factions, action sets, and loose alliances. But they at the same time, knowingly or unknowingly, act as members of larger political groups.⁴

Some action theorists take the rules of the game, i.e. the symbols governing social behaviour, as given and as being outside the 'arena' in which the struggle for power takes place, when in fact these symbols are dramatically involved in the whole process at every one of its stages. In other words, this approach assumes stability as it studies change. For an ambitious and clever man to be able to manipulate other men, he must be able to manipulate symbols by interpreting and re-interpreting them. These symbols are the collective representations of groups

and only when a man himself participates in such groups and accepts the constraints of their symbols can he succeed in his endeavour.

If we concentrate exclusively on the study of 'political man' we shall inevitably deal only with his conscious and private endeavour. But factions, action sets and other 'non-groups' are not 'entities', but partial sections abstracted from a wider and more inclusive social field. No amount of study of ego-centric networks will reveal to our view the political structure of society. The ego-centric network is meaningful only when it is seen within the context of the 'total network' (Barnes 1968).

The thought structuralists. The other extreme trend in social anthropology at present concentrates on the study of symbols, or of collective representations, often quite out of the context of power relationships. Its orientation is neatly described by Douglas (1968: 361): 'Anthropology has moved from the simple analysis of social structures current in the 1940's to the structural analysis of thought systems'.

Anthropologists of this school—among them T. O. Beidelman, R. Needham and P. Rigby—are greatly influenced by the 'structuralism' of Lévi-Strauss. As Jacobson and Schoepf, the translators of his *Structural anthropology*, state (1968: ix): 'His approach is holistic and integrative . . . He conceives of anthropology in the broadest sense, as the study of man, past and present, in all his aspects—physical, linguistic, cultural, conscious and unconscious . . . He is concerned with relating the synchronic to the diachronic, the individual to the cultural, the physiological to the psychological, the objective analysis of institutions to the subjective experience of individuals'. Lévi-Strauss takes in his stride, among many other variables, both symbolism and power relationships in his analysis. Thus, in his study of myth he takes it for granted that in any particular context myth is a 'charter for social action'. But, as Leach (1967) points out, Lévi-Strauss is interested in further problems. He aims at the discovery of the 'language of myth'. He is indeed ultimately concerned with discovering nothing less than the 'language', the 'thought structure', behind all culture.

The thought structuralists believe that we see 'objective reality', both natural and social, not as it 'really is', but as 'structured' in terms of logically related thought categories that are built into our psyche. Whatever order there is in nature and in society is largely the outcome of the activities of man under the guidance of his 'programmed' mind. The key to understanding the structure of society is thus, not the analysis of the dynamic on-going patterns of interaction between men, but essentially the 'code', or the logic, the grammar that is implicit in the thought categories and in the systems of relations between them. Thought structuralists are therefore bent on 'breaking the code', for all time and for all culture. To do this they concentrate on the study of symbolic forms and symbolic behaviour. Thus, while the action theorists concentrate on the study of 'political man', the thought structuralists concentrate on the study of 'ritual man'.

Thought structuralists have greatly refined our understanding of the nature and working of symbolism. They have re-emphasised the view—recently weakened by the departure of many anthropologists from some of the tenets of classical Durkheimian sociology—that the symbolic order is not just a mechanical reflection, or an epiphenomenon, of the political order, but is a fact having an existence of its own, in its own right. They have drawn attention to the systematic relations

existing between the different parts of that order. Like the action theorists in the field of power relations, they have provided anthropology with a number of important concepts and terms that can be used as tools for both analysis and description in the field of symbolism.

It is when they lose direct reference to social interaction that they become one-sided and stray from the main stream of social anthropology. Most of them are fully aware of this danger and almost invariably begin their different dissertations with a declaration of faith in 'social structuralism' and a promise to bring their analysis of thought structure to bear upon the dynamic intricacies of social organisation (e.g. Willis 1967). But, as the exposition proceeds, the promised analysis is put off until the end, when it becomes largely inconsequential.

This is in no way an indication of analytical weakness but is rather a matter of orientation and interest. The problems that this approach poses are not sociological problems, but principally deal with the relations between symbols. Thus, Needham's learned article on Nyoro symbolic classification (1967) deals with a cultural 'puzzle'—that among the Bunyoro, while all that is good and propitious is associated with the *right* hand,⁵ the helpful diviner uses his *left* hand in throwing the cowrie shells, which he uses as a divining mechanism. The problem thus deals essentially with relations between symbols, without much reference to social interaction. Problems of a similar nature are also raised for example by Beidelman (1968*a*), Douglas (1968) and Rigby (1968). These are of course very important problems for social anthropology, but only if they are systematically analysed within the context of power relationships.⁶

This is because there can be no general science of symbolic behaviour as such. Symbolic phenomena are highly complex phenomena which can be studied from different angles, depending on the nature of the other variables that are included in the analysis. In social anthropology we are interested in symbols mainly in so far as they affect and are affected by power relations. In other words we study the symbolic as it is structured, or systematised, not by a special logic inherent in it, but by the dynamics of interaction between men in society (see Evans-Pritchard 1937). At every stage in the study, reference has to be made to both variables. A study of symbolic systems on their own will inevitably be 'undisciplined', in the sense that it will have no specific aim or frame of reference, and is therefore likely to wander in different directions, mixing metaphysics with logic, art, psychology, theology, or linguistics. This is indeed the reason why scholars like Langer (1964: 55) and Geertz (1964) complain of how little has been achieved in the development of a 'science of symbolic behaviour'.

All this is well known to the thought structuralists, but their dilemma is that too much notice of the involvement of symbolism in power relations will inevitably lead to a departure from the neat logic of thought categories. I believe that this is the source of Beidelman's complaint, twice expressed recently (1968*b*; 1969), that V. W. Turner 'lacks appreciation of those logical and formal qualities which all symbolic systems . . . possess'. Beidelman himself (1968*b*: 483) points his finger on the real issue when he states that 'Turner emphasizes symbols as expressions of forces; Lévi-Strauss emphasizes their nominal qualities . . .'. The thought structuralists certainly illuminate the formal properties of symbols, but, in the words of Fortes (1967: 9) 'at the cost of neutralising the actor'.

All of the practitioners in either of these opposing camps, the action theorists and the thought structuralists, are accomplished anthropologists, with a great deal of work behind them in the 'holistic' study of the interdependence between power relations and symbolic action. Fully aware of the methodological and theoretical implications of what they are doing, they can certainly afford to concentrate on the study of one variable, while bracketing, or holding constant, the other variable. But it is their disciples who are likely to become one-sided and thus lose track of the central problem of the discipline. This is noticeable in some post-graduate work of recent years which tends to concentrate on one variable to the neglect of the other. The main reasons why this one-sidedness appeals to beginners is that it requires little analytical effort. It solves for them the irksome problem of having to find a 'problem' for the analysis of ethnographical data. To concentrate on the study of either power relationships or of symbolism does not involve a great deal of analytical effort; it poses mainly problems of unidimensional description. An account of how individuals struggle for power, or of how people behave symbolically, is a categorical description of facts which can be either true or false. It is only by posing problems involving the investigation of sociological relations, or of dialectical interaction, between different sets of facts, or variables, that significant analysis can be undertaken.

The principal contribution of social anthropology to political science

In my view, the greatest and most valuable contribution of social anthropology to the study of politics is not so much the simple typologies of political systems that have been developed, as the analysis of the symbolism of power relations generally. The most penetrating and enduring part of the 'Introduction' to *African political systems* is that dealing with the 'mystical values' associated with political office (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940: 16-22). Easton is right in stating that social anthropologists are interested mainly in non-political institutions like kinship, religion and forms of friendship. What he fails to see, however, is that the specialisation of social anthropology is in the *political interpretation* of these formally non-political institutions. Our major interest is not in the one-sided effect of politics on these institutions, as he maintains (Easton 1959). On the contrary, we generally seek to explain these non-political institutions in terms of political relations. Thus the analysis of great public symbolic dramas like those of the Tallensi by Fortes (1936; 1945), of the Shilluk by Evans-Pritchard (1948), of the Swazi by Kuper (1947) and Gluckman (1954), of an Arab Shi'ite village by Peters (1963)—to mention only a few—is analysis in political terms. So are studies of fictitious genealogies by Bohannan (1952) and Peters (1959; 1967) or of joking relationships by Colson (1962). Even studies of such apparently 'domestic' relationships as marriage by Leach (1961), Peters (1963) and Cohen (1965), and many others, are essentially political studies. Again, Gluckman's explanation of the stability of marriage is formulated in purely political terms (1950).

This line of analysis is of crucial importance for political science. Firstly because, as Mannheim (1936) pointed out long ago, the political scientist studying his own or a similar society is himself caught up in the same system of symbols which he is trying to decode. Symbols are largely rooted in the unconscious mind and are thus difficult to identify and to discuss by people who live under them. The central

concern of political science is the study of the effect of informal political groupings on the functioning of the formal structure of government and of other large-scale organisations. All behaviour, whether in formal or in informal groups, is largely couched in symbolic forms. The very concepts and categories of thought which political scientists employ in their analysis are themselves part of the very political ideology which they try to understand. It is true that Mannheim's paradox can be to some extent overcome by slow, accumulative, empirical and comparative research. What is more, some great thinkers like Marx, Durkheim and others have developed the analysis of the symbolism of advanced industrial societies.

But all this is not enough. Despite many decades of the most intensive research on these lines, there is as yet very little analysis of what Mackenzie (1967: 280) has called 'political ritual' in contemporary polities. Very little is yet known about the way the British cabinet works (SSRC 1968: 25), about how decisions of vital importance to the British economy are taken (see Lupton & Wilson 1959), and there is little agreement among political scientists about the nature of political ideology in contemporary industrial societies. Mannheim's challenge remains valid.

Secondly, the symbolic order of a society can be understood only when it is studied within the total cultural tradition of which it is a part. This tradition includes cosmology, theology, art and literature. Because of their relative isolation and of their simple technology, the small-scale, pre-industrial societies that have been studied by anthropologists have little occupational and institutional differentiation. Their cultures are therefore not very sophisticated and tend to use limited themes and experiences in the construction of their symbolic systems (see Douglas 1968: 17). Industrial society on the other hand is very highly complex, with a great deal of division of labour, a multiplicity of groupings, and a high degree of social and cultural heterogeneity. This complexity, together with highly developed literacy and channels for the speedy communication of cultural items, make its symbolic system very highly complex and therefore very difficult to analyse. This does not of course mean that no studies of the symbolism of contemporary society have been successfully carried out. Some important work in this field has been done by a larger number of thinkers, including Marx, Carlyle, Weber, Durkheim and K. Burke. But this work has always been thwarted by the problems of ideology, scale, complexity, concepts and techniques which I have just mentioned. One of the most penetrating analyses of symbolism in contemporary society is Duncan's (1962) *Communication and social order*. Yet one can see after studying it that it is essentially based on sheer intuitive work without any methodical and systematic study of empirical situations.

What I want to emphasise here is that the social anthropologist, by analysing the symbols of power relationships in small-scale, pre-industrial societies, has gained a great deal of insight into the symbolism of power relationships generally. Anthropological analysis of the symbols involved in the development, organisation and maintenance of various types of kinship relationships, of marriage, friendship, patron-client relationships, corporate political groupings, ritual, and of different systems of stratification, can give the political scientists working in industrial society significant concepts and hypotheses for analysing a whole range of informal political groupings and informal relationships. These informal groupings and

relationships pervade the whole formal structure of contemporary industrial society. They are indeed the very fabric of which the structure of all societies is made, and their analysis is the central problem of political science.

Apart from these analytical findings, social anthropology has developed techniques and methods that can be of great help to at least some of the branches of political science. In recent years anthropologists have been adapting these methods and techniques to the study of communities and groups in complex societies in both developed and developing countries. A rapidly increasing number of anthropologists are now applying their 'micro-sociological' techniques to studies in urban areas, where the struggle for power between individuals and groups is intense. As Firth points out (1951: 18), although anthropological techniques are micro-sociological, anthropological formulations can be macro-sociological and can thus be adapted for the study of state-level politics.

The lesson of political science

The small areas of social life, in whose study social anthropology specialises, are now everywhere becoming integral parts of large-scale social systems. Micro-sociological techniques cannot in themselves deal with the higher levels of these systems. Social anthropologists have been well aware of this problem and to deal with it have developed such concepts as 'social field' and 'plural society'. These are purely descriptive concepts and the question is not whether they are valid or not but whether they are helpful in analysis. They are certainly helpful in directing our attention to certain characteristics of the new societies but, in my view, they do not face the central problem squarely. The greatest political revolution of our time is the emergence of the new states of the 'third world'. In both the developing and the developed societies, the state is today the greatest holder and arbiter of economic and political power.

Social anthropologists have done a great deal of work on relatively small-scale primitive states.⁷ But, apart from a few exceptions (see for example, Lloyd 1955; Bailey 1960; 1963; Mayer 1962; Cohen 1965: 146-73) they have ignored the importance of the modern state in the study of the politics of small communities, for two main reasons. The first is that when they initially became aware of this problem, many of the communities which they studied were in lands still under colonial rule. This was particularly the case in Africa, where international boundaries had been largely the creation of colonial powers. In former British territories, indirect rule helped to perpetuate the exclusiveness and autonomy of the relatively small tribal communities. Under those circumstances there was no 'state' to consider and the most that an anthropologist could do was to try to study the colonial administration. But although some anthropologists began over thirty years ago to advocate that the European administrator and missionary should be studied along with the native chief and witchdoctor as part of the same political system (see Schapera 1938), no serious attempts were made to probe into the domain of the colonial administration. One reason was that in many cases it was the colonial government which initiated and financed the research.

The second reason why anthropologists have not taken the modern state as the context within which the analysis of small communities should be made, is their earlier objections to the study of political philosophy which had dominated the

study of the state until about the time of the second world war. The tone was set by the editors of *African political systems* when they stated that they had found the theories of political philosophers to be of little scientific value because their conclusions were not formulated in terms of observed behaviour (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940: 4).

This last objection is no longer relevant because the state is now being *empirically* studied by political science which has grown tremendously in stature in the last two decades. In the U.S.A. and Britain alone, enormous financial and manpower resources have been allocated to the empirical study of state-level politics in both the developed and developing countries. There has been a spectacular proliferation of departments of political science in the universities, with corresponding facilities for research, travel and publication (see Wiseman 1967; Mackenzie 1967; SSRC 1968). Some excellent monographs and articles on the politics of countries of the 'third world' have been published and are being used in courses in political science in the universities.

While it is true that political science is still 'looking for its identity' and that it is still exploring various approaches that have become the specialisations of different schools of thought within it, there is, nevertheless, an underlying interest in the study of state-level phenomena, and it is in this respect that social anthropologists can learn a great deal.

Some anthropologists may dismiss the findings of political science for this very reason, i.e. for political science being 'macro-political'. They would argue that it takes an anthropologist over a year of fieldwork, and many years of processing and analysing his data, to make a study of the social system of a simple community of a few hundred people; and that it is therefore absurd to attach any scientific value to the findings of political scientists who make generalisations about whole societies with many millions of inhabitants. But this argument ignores two fundamental issues. The first is that because the state exists and plays such a crucial role in changing the structure and the culture of our small communities, someone must study it. Such a study is essential not only academically but also for a variety of practical, mainly administrative, considerations. It is absurd to say that the study of the state, as a whole, should await the development of 'micro-sociology'; this may be a long-term development and, in the meantime, the political scientist is meeting the challenge. The second is that political science has developed new concepts and new techniques for dealing with state-level political phenomena in an effective way. There has been a revolution in methods of indexing vast amounts of information, processing them and employing them in future analysis (see Mackenzie 1967: 66-74; Deutsch 1966).

Political science today approaches the study of small communities and groups with reference to the state. In the political scientists' conceptual framework, the tribes, bands and isolated communities, which have been the major object of our studies, are now either in the process of integration within new sociocultural entities or, if for any political reasons they still cling to their traditional identity, the most that can be said about their distinctiveness is that they are 'interest groups' exerting pressure on the state or on groups within the state. Thus, as I show elsewhere (Cohen 1969), the phenomenon called 'tribalism' or 'retribalisation' in contemporary African societies is the result, not of ethnic groups disengaging

themselves from one another after independence, but of increasing interaction between them, within the context of new political situations. It is the outcome, not of conservatism, but of a dynamic sociocultural change which is brought about by new cleavages and new alignments of power within the framework of the new state.

A great deal of progress in the study of such 'interest groups' has been made in recent years by political scientists. Indeed, many political scientists see the political structure of the state as being 'pluralistic'—using this term in a different sense from that of social anthropologists—that is, as consisting of innumerable groupings of various sorts which mediate between the individual and the state (see Bentley 1949; Finer 1958; Eckstein 1960). The development of interest groups, and the nature of the relationships between them and the state, depends on the structure of the state. Some states allow a great deal of group 'pluralism'; other states discourage or even prevent the development of such groupings by conducting an endless struggle against them. These differences between states have been studied by political scientists empirically and comparatively (see Ehrmann 1964; Castles 1967). The term 'political culture' has been sometimes used to describe these structural differences between states. The anthropologist who studies small groups within the contemporary state cannot afford to ignore such studies. Indeed, I go further and say that the anthropologist must *deliberately* formulate his problems in such a way as to make reference to the state a necessary part of his analysis.

Conclusion

Political anthropology differs from political science in two respects: theory and scale. Political science is essentially unidimensional, being mainly concerned with the study of power: its distribution, organisation, exercise, and the struggle for it. As it deals with only one variable, political science is descriptive. In the words of one of its practitioners, its effort is mainly 'to delineate relevant phenomena, to generate useful classifications and breakdowns, and to pinpoint the important characteristics of political activities' (Young 1968: 5). Its universe of reference is the modern state.

Political anthropology on the other hand deals with much smaller areas of political life, but compensates for this limitation of scale by greater depth of analysis. It is, as I have suggested, concerned with the analysis of the dialectical interaction between two major variables: relationships of power and symbolism. This is essentially a collective concern, though individually anthropologists differ in their emphasis on the one variable rather than on the other.

A great deal of work has been accomplished by social anthropologists on these lines. A survey of this work, with an analysis of the various interests and schools of thought within it, would require a full-length monograph. It has not been my intention in this article to attempt even to outline such a survey. What is more, in order to highlight some points I have had to oversimplify many issues.⁸

In my view, it is possible now for political anthropology, on the basis of the work already done, to proceed to investigate questions such as these: How do symbols articulate the different organisational functions of political groups? What is the range of variation in the symbolic *forms* that perform the same symbolic *function* in political contexts under different cultural traditions? What is common and what

is different between these symbolic forms? Do these different forms differ in their efficiency and effectiveness in the development and maintenance of specific power relationships? What are the political potentialities of the patterns of symbolic behaviour associated with various kinds of interpersonal relationships? How do political and symbolic activities interact with one another within the organisation of the individual biography? What are the main processes involved in the development and maintenance of a political ideology? What are the different types of symbolic techniques, found under different cultural traditions, for keeping ideologies alive? How do symbolic and political processes affect one another in situations of rapid change? How is art affected by, and how does it affect, political relationships?

Many social anthropologists have in fact been dealing with questions like these, though not always directly and systematically. What is needed now is a synthesis of our findings so far, and a more systematic orientation towards the analysis of the involvement of symbolic action in political contexts. Political anthropology is indeed nothing other than social anthropology brought to a high level of abstraction, through more rigorous and more systematic analysis.

NOTES

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¹ See for example Coleman 1958; Post 1963; Sklar 1963; Mackintosh 1966 on Nigeria alone. See also the papers included in Geertz 1963; Apter 1965; Almond & Coleman 1960.

² Analysis of economic process by anthropologists is a contribution mainly to economics (see Dalton 1969). On these points in general see also Firth 1967.

³ I want to emphasise that this is not a reflection of my own personal interest but is, in my view, the unfolding of the full implications of our concepts and techniques. Social anthropologists still uphold the view that their approach is 'holistic' and that even when they are interested in the study of one social institution, like law or marriage, they have to analyse it in relation to the other major institutional variables in the society. This means that whether they choose to concentrate on specific symbolic phenomena or on specific power relations they have to carry on their analysis within the context of both variables. I also believe that most, if not all, social anthropologists still uphold the Durkheimian methodological 'rule' that a social fact should be considered in its manifestation throughout the extent of a society. When, for example, the father-son relation is studied in this way, it will be seen as a relation existing between two social categories which include most of the males of the society. In some societies fathers exercise a great deal of control over their sons, while in other societies they exercise less. This makes the father-son relation a significant feature of the political order in any society. Thus in some Arab villages which I studied (1965) local governors effectively contained 'youth power' by enlisting the co-operation of the elders who exercised a great deal of authority over their sons. In British society on the other hand, where fathers exercise much less power over their sons, the authorities have to deal directly with youth by mobilising a greater police force. Social anthropologists also say that their approach is comparative, and this inevitably leads to a high degree of abstraction. If all these points are assumed, then my contention that social anthropology is collectively concerned with the analysis of the symbolism of power relations will follow. Each monographic study is in fact an experiment in the analysis of these two variables. As in other sciences, the greater part of the work of the social anthropologist consists in 'preparing the experiment'. This consists in analysing and sifting the data in order to isolate the two variables from those other variables which the anthropologist brackets as 'other things being equal'.

⁴ 'We are all, to a greater or lesser degree, mean, selfish, dishonest, lazy, inefficient, and grasping; and yet we have ideals of generosity, unselfishness, honesty, industry, efficiency, and charity. Although we seldom live up to these ideals, our behaviour is affected by reaffirming them' (Devons 1956).

⁵ Beattie, who is the authority on the Bunyoro, questions the validity of this generalisation by Needham (Beattie 1968).

⁶ I believe that the most stimulating parts of Douglas's outstanding book *Purity and danger* (1966) are those dealing directly with the symbolism of power relations.

⁷ See for example Nadel 1942; Smith 1960; Lloyd 1965 and the studies contained in Forde & Kaberry 1967.

⁸ A detailed monograph on the subject is in preparation.

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