

Introduction

MAKING CONTACT AND MAPPING THE TERRAIN

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The present work should be read as an attempt to establish connections between two apparently distant and unequally developed currents of scholarship. We refer to anthropology in a very broad sense, comprising not only social as well as cultural anthropology, but also the variously and often vaguely defined historical anthropology that has gone beyond the traditional focus on stateless, nonurban, and oral cultures. Mention will also be made of archaeology, sometimes (by Marcel Mauss, among others) seen as the discipline most capable of compensating for the lack of anthropological evidence on the past of human societies. There is no consensus on the unity or the ideals of inquiry on this side of the field. We have no fundamental objection to Clifford Geertz's description of anthropology as an estranged double of philosophy, "a combination of a diffuse and miscellaneous academic identity and an ambition to connect just about everything with everything else and get thereby to the bottom of things" (Geertz 2000, ix). But we can presuppose general acquaintance with certain well-known names (from Boas and Malinowski to Lévi-Strauss, Geertz, and beyond), a number of landmark works, and the broader cultural echoes that document some kind of disciplinary progress. It is different with the other side of the field. Civilizational analysis is anything but a household notion, and some clarification of its claims will be needed.

Civilizational Approaches

As defined by Shmuel Eisenstadt (2003, 23–56), the civilizational dimension of human societies involves the intertwining of cultural visions of the world with institutional frameworks of social life, and thus, more specifically, with forms of social power. Civilizational analysis is, first and foremost, the comparative study of such configurations. As it begins with the demarcation of an analytical level, it can allow for a variety of concrete formations within that frame of reference, and some of those may be seen as civilizations in a more emphatic sense than others. The ancient Greek world, imperial China, and medieval Western Christendom are cases in point. Their historical record also highlights another aspect of the civilizational dimension: the configurations in question, at least the major ones, are large-scale and long-term patterns of social-historical reality, encompassing a plurality of coexisting and successive social formations. That was precisely the perspective from which Durkheim and Mauss discovered civilizations as “families of societies” (see Schlanger 2006). As they also understood, the multisocietal groupings that they proposed to analyze as civilizations were spatiotemporal phenomena. Civilizations emerge and unfold in history, but they have their distinctive historical contours and rhythms, differing from case to case. Contrasts between ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, or Western and Byzantine Christendom, can serve to illustrate varying patterns of historical existence and historical consciousness. As for the spatial contours of civilizations, regional boundaries are often easy to identify, as in the case of the East Asian region centered on China, or the expanding European domain of medieval Western Christendom; but both these civilizational regions also exemplify the internal differentiation of smaller historical-geographical ones, such as Northern, Western, and Central Europe.

It may be objected that these spatial perspectives are not equally relevant to all civilizations. In particular, the markedly translocal and transregional dynamic of Islam seems to set it apart from more circumscribed formations. But on closer examination, two geographical aspects stand out as crucial features of Islamic history. On the one hand, Islam, as a civilization crystallized within a region with a long multicivilizational history (the Near East, or the “Nile-to-Oxus region,” as Marshall Hodgson [1974] described it), achieved an unprecedented in-depth cultural unification of this area, and expanded from there. On the other hand, Islam was the only premodern civilization that expanded from the western to the eastern extremity of

the Afro-Eurasian macroregion and continued to gain ground in its southern parts. This is the specific historical-geographical meaning of the global thrust often attributed to Islam, and it is a fact of major importance that sustained territorial growth was not, in the early modern era, followed by any overseas expansion.

Civilizational analysis is, at least for the most notable recent and contemporary scholars in the field, within the domain of historical sociology. The contributions of authors such as Benjamin Nelson (2011) and Shmuel Eisenstadt (2003), who have linked their research programs to insights and anticipations of the sociological classics, have done most to define the orientations of further work. The academic status and autonomy of historical sociology are still somewhat uncertain (historical anthropology has been more effectively recognized in some countries, including Germany, but here too the overall picture is unclear). This applies a fortiori to civilizational analysis. We are dealing with a project still in the process of defining its tasks and encountering some skepticism from more established disciplines. The problem is compounded by an ambivalent legacy. Alongside the historical-sociological pedigree, other ways of thinking about civilizational issues have left their mark on the context of discussion. It may be going too far to speak of a metahistorical tradition, but that term has—because of their speculative bent and a loose relationship to the empirical record—been used to describe the well-known works of both Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. Their names stand for very different approaches; although nobody advocates a return to their visions of history, their continued invocation suggests that some of their questions are still relevant to lasting concerns. We may therefore consider these alternative approaches as unexhausted sources of inputs to the civilizationist project.

Finally, the historical-sociological view of civilizations—our primary frame of reference—can draw on the work of historians who discuss civilizations without precise conceptual markers or clear demarcation from other formations. Fernand Braudel's writings are perhaps the most prominent example. His reputation rests most of all on two massive works, the first on the Mediterranean in the second half of the sixteenth century (but with copious references to a longer history) and the second on capitalism and material life in the early modern world (Braudel 1996; 1981–84). In the former case, varying accounts of civilizational divisions within the Mediterranean reflect unresolved questions about the very concept of civilization. In the latter, the French original uses the term *civilisation matérielle*

to refer to what the English version calls material life, that is to say, the most basic networks of economic activity. But in the same volume, civilizations in the plural are invoked as large-scale formations that impose different patterns on societies and their economies, without any further clarification of the relationship between the two concepts. Braudel can, however, at least be credited with highlighting two aspects of civilizations in the plural: he stressed the centrality of religion as well as the importance of geo-economic and geopolitical infrastructures.

No representative author has ever suggested that civilizational analysis should develop a methodology of its own. There are no good grounds for attempting anything of the kind. Civilizational analysis is an interdisciplinary research program, with particularly strong links to historical sociology, and it draws on the whole spectrum of methods applied in the human sciences. Within that framework, it will require and develop its specific combinations of methods in response to particular issues. Given the state of the art, it would be premature to propose a systematic survey of these approaches (Max Weber's emphatic warnings against methodological constructions preceding substantive studies are still relevant), but a few basic orientations may be outlined. Because of the focus on cultural patterns and their interpretive as well as institutional implications, civilizational studies have inevitably tended to stress the significance of key traditional texts, and thus to rely extensively on a variety of hermeneutical approaches. This leaves us with a double legacy. On the one hand, a more balanced line of inquiry will strive to move beyond texts and situate them in the social and historical contexts that co-determine their effective interpretation. On the other hand, civilizational analysis can learn from the efforts of hermeneutical thinkers to show that the interpretation of texts provides guidance for hermeneutical work on other levels, from tacit cultural premises to the overt logic of action.

Another major task is the clarification and integration of processual analysis. This approach was developed in the sociological tradition, most seminally by Norbert Elias, in close connection with a critique of causal, functional, and structural explanations (Elias 2000; 2012). It can link up with philosophical reflections in the same vein, notably with the work of Alfred North Whitehead and his disciples. Processual dynamics were shown to have patterns of their own, irreducible to the more familiar models. The human sciences have yet to fully assimilate the insights of processual thought. In the particular case of civilizational analysis, this is one of the most urgent preconditions for further progress. Understanding civilizations

as historical processes is a necessary complement to the emphasis on cultural patterns. This leads to a third methodological observation. Contingency is an integral aspect of processes. In the context of civilizations, it involves internal as well as external factors. Choices between possibilities open to civilizations may be decided by contingent events; interactions between different civilizations unfold in historical settings, where complex chains of events can result in epoch-making events. A historical sociology of civilizations that takes due notice of these dimensions will move toward narrativist modes (currently exemplified by the work of Michael Mann; see Mann 1986–2012). But the narratives will include the dynamics of cultural patterns and power formations; here again, Braudel should be acknowledged as a pioneer.

Anthropological Landmarks

If anthropology and civilizational studies are characterized in these very broad terms, a closer analysis of their interrelations would have to deal with wide-ranging questions. Mutual borrowings did occur, sometimes in surprising contexts. One of the most widely read anthropological texts, Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (Benedict 1993), relies on a holistic concept of culture that is explicitly indebted to Spengler. A work written in the wake of the Boasian turn to ethnography thus aligns itself with a particularly speculative version of comparative civilizational analysis. Moreover, Benedict argued that Spengler's model, overly ambitious in his chosen field, could be put on a stronger footing within the anthropological universe of discourse. Spengler's conception of cultural integration through "destiny ideas," exemplified by his image of Faustian man in quest of infinity, was incompatible with the multiple strands and complex patterns of European history, but anthropologists were dealing with societies simple enough for this kind of unifying perspective to be applicable. On a more recent note, the most controversial offshoot of the civilizationist revival, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, uses an anthropological metaphor to underline its main point: civilizations are the "ultimate tribes" (Huntington 1996). Once again, this deservedly contested view has unmistakable affinities with Spengler's notion of mutually incommensurable symbolic universes. It is unnecessary to search for further examples of this kind; what we want to highlight is an overall trend and an inconclusive result of changing relations between the two lines of inquiry.

The classical beginnings of civilizational analysis have a strong anthropological background. Although this ancestry was later forgotten, a reappraisal of the French sociological tradition has shown that Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss developed clearer conceptual guidelines for the study of civilizations than anybody else at the time, and that this step beyond their original image of society was closely linked to a growing interest in anthropological research (Schlanger 2006). Mauss continued to reflect on these issues after Durkheim's death, and their joint legacy influenced some later works in the French tradition.

The dominant aspect of twentieth-century developments in the field, however, was an increasing mutual estrangement of anthropology and civilizational studies. Those who adopted the civilizational approach and tried to put it to comparative use tended to accept—without further argument—a historical boundary of their domain: civilizations were distinguished from prehistorical, stateless, or primitive societies, and equated with the state- and city-centered formations that developed from the fourth millennium BCE onward, first in the Near East and subsequently in other regions. Particular emphasis was then placed on later civilizations with more complex cultural articulations. The Axial Age, commonly identified with a few centuries around the middle of the last millennium BCE, was proffered as a paradigm of civilizational efflorescence. This perspective (most significantly elaborated by S. N. Eisenstadt [1986], following Karl Jaspers) was, in spirit if not in specific terms, akin to the comparative studies of Max Weber, whose substantive contribution to civilizational analysis went far beyond the French classics, but who was less focused on basic concepts. Weber did not relate to anthropology in any significant way. His “cultural worlds” (*Weltkulturen*) were those of the major Eurasian civilizational complexes, especially the Occident (implicitly understood as extending from Greek and Jewish origins to the modern Euro-Atlantic zone), the Chinese, and the Indian traditions. Although Weber's main emphasis was on the contrasts and divergences that set the Occident apart from other geocultural units, the comparative perspective was also extended to affinities and differences between non-Western cases. Seen from a later vantage point, the framework leaves much to be desired; there is no doubt that Weber vastly oversimplified the interplay of sociocultural forces and underestimated the historical transformations of both Chinese and Indian civilizations. To note another shortcoming, the emergence of a larger Indian (or Indianized) world is analyzed only in relation to Buddhism, and there is no discussion of the regional configuration that developed around China. A planned work on

Islam was never completed, but would clearly have portrayed this neighbor of the West as a later and somewhat less than equal entrant to the Eurasian field. That said, the general line of argument, and more precisely the effort to link interpretations of and attitudes to the world with institutional and practical patterns, are clear enough to constitute an enduring example for contemporary civilizational studies.

As for the anthropologists, the self-definition of their discipline underwent major changes, but none of these led to a civilizational turn. E. B. Tylor's culturalist and evolutionist program in the late nineteenth century is commonly seen as a foundational step that paved the way for further controversies and alternative projects. The distinction between cultural and social anthropology, which eventually served to demarcate national traditions, identified different foci of research, each of which allowed for divergent strategies. Closer study of cultural patterns (the North American specialty) and social institutions (the Western European) could result in fleshing out the functionalist conceptions inherited from nineteenth-century thought, but it could also direct attention to concrete historical settings, and by the same token raise doubts about evolutionary models.

In theory, both cultural and social anthropology could have linked up with the notion of civilization, as developed by Durkheim and Mauss: the cultural approach would have been compatible with their concept of collective representations, and the social one with the idea of civilizations as groupings of societies. In fact, and despite Durkheim's acknowledged influence on anthropologists in the Anglophone world, there was no sustained encounter of this kind. The closest approximation was probably A. L. Kroeber's proposal to include civilizations in his survey of cultures (Kroeber 2011), but without any effort to delineate or justify a new concept. For Kroeber, culture and civilization were basically synonymous terms, although it seemed convenient to single out the more complex societies as civilizations. If there was, as has been claimed (Bidney 1968), a theoretical convergence between Kroeber and Durkheim, it was implicit and limited, related to the cultural determination of individuality. There is no evidence that Kroeber read Durkheim and Mauss on the subject, though he did take note of Spengler. His response differed from Benedict's: Kroeber was not particularly concerned with finding a more adequate empirical basis for Spengler's central concepts, but rather saw Spengler's emphasis on the aesthetic features of high cultures as a point to be taken up and cleansed of metaphysical connotations. The way to achieve that was a further elaboration of the concept of "style" (Kroeber 1963).

Obstacles to Dialogue

The differentiation of cultural and social anthropology, accompanied by divergences on each side and various cross-influences between the main currents, put its mark on the history of the discipline in the twentieth century and gave rise to intellectual attitudes strong enough to shape more recent debates. For our purposes, it seems most pertinent that certain entrenched objections to the civilizational approach go back to this phase. It is hard to find a reasoned and representative statement of the anthropological case against civilizational analysis (on the whole, anthropologists prefer to bypass the issue). That said, three invidious and interconnected preconceptions—or stereotypes—stand out as dominant themes.

For many anthropologists, the very notion of civilizations (especially if defined with reference to the Weberian themes noted above) is loaded with normative claims that make it unfit for scholarly use. It implies an a priori devaluation of societies preceding the formation of states, cities, and writing systems, or remaining outside the historical arena of such processes. To opt for this paradigm is, in other words, to perpetuate the age-old division of humanity into civilized and barbarian peoples. In our view, this objection is unwarranted. There is nothing in the civilizational approach as such that would lead us to equate the transition to state-dominated and urban-centered societies in possession of writing with unqualified progress; neither the general direction of civilizational analysis nor the concrete research programs applied by Weber and Eisenstadt are incompatible with the view that the emergence of civilizations leads to a massive increase of destructive as well as productive capacities (manifested in warfare and conquest on a new scale, and in environmental damage), and that the balance between them is subject to change. The relative merits of stateless and state-dominated societies are open to debate. Although more comparative research on cultural traditions is needed, it seems a plausible hypothesis that different civilizations develop their specific versions of an ideology best described as primitivism, the general thrust of which is to condemn civilizing processes in the name of an idealized simpler past.

A second anthropological objection to civilizational approaches is directed against the supposedly speculative and ultra-holistic constructs presented as units of inquiry. This rejection of excessively totalizing models is widely shared (not least by historians). What gives the anthropological critique its specific thrust is the assumption that anthropological efforts to make sense of social life on a small scale are the best way to open up universal

perspectives. The emphasis on small social worlds, previously related to tribal societies, remains in force after anthropology's break-out from the traditional division of labor. As for the universalizing ambition, it has survived in weakened forms (a self-limiting version, aiming at global human relevance but certainly not at universal causal laws or cultural norms, is implicit in the above quotation from Clifford Geertz). This ambition was central to the history of anthropology. Durkheim's foundational work on religious life, probably the most seminal fusion of anthropological and sociological horizons, combines an intensive and carefully localized case study with strong claims to universal validity (Durkheim 1995). This direct and rapid access to universality is one of the promises built into the notion of elementary forms. But the reference to Durkheim will also help to show that the dismissal of civilizational perspectives is unfounded. As noted above, a preliminary sketch of civilizations in the plural as a field for comparative study was co-authored by Durkheim and Mauss. It belongs to the same phase of Durkheim's intellectual biography as the work on Aboriginal religion, and this enables us to contextualize both themes. The concept of civilization, defined in a way that implies plurality, is introduced as a necessary complement to the concept of society. It refers to a broader configuration of interconnected societies, characterized by specific forms of integration and differentiation. In a sense, the concept of an elementary form—meant to highlight the institutions of tribal societies at their maximum distance from the modern environment of sociology—is another such complement. Not that it suggests a pre- or infra-societal level; but it serves to put the more familiar structures of complex societies into perspective. The overall picture is one of multiple social-historical formations, with civilizations singled out as a level not to be neglected, but without any suggestion that the study of their patterns and processes should absorb or replace other established forms of social inquiry.

The third objection is closely related to the second, but it has a weight of its own. Large units of inquiry are conducive to speculative exercises of the kind that the human sciences should have left behind. The anthropological variation on this theme is based on a particular approach to empirical study: the practice of fieldwork, invented during the classical period of the discipline and later transferred beyond the tribal context. The guiding idea and the general significance of fieldwork were interpreted in widely different ways, including highly ambitious elaborations by authors whose work was in fact not particularly dependent on that background (such as Claude Lévi-Strauss). But what remains important, not least in relation to

the question of civilizations, is the notion of a direct experiential—in some versions existential—access to cultural otherness. The civilizational approach can then be presented as an inferior methodological option, unduly focused on the texts of great cultural traditions (often in unsatisfactory translations). A defense can start with the point that a certain emphasis on central texts follows logically from the themes mentioned above: cultural articulations of the world and their interplay with institutional dynamics. But the next step is to note that civilizational analysts can move beyond this beginning, by comparing the relative weight of central texts in different civilizations (this is not always a question of sacred texts in the strict sense), and tracing the impact of their prescriptive contents in social-historical contexts. Marshall Hodgson's analysis of Islam (Hodgson 1974) is a model case with regard to the latter. His idea of a civilization stresses the centrality of texts, canons, and written traditions, but also the need to link their destinies to the transformations of social power.

Finally, critics of civilizational analysis should not ignore the fact that its research program is still in an early stage of formulation. So far, the most seminal ideas on civilizations have appeared or been revived in connection with broader efforts to reorient sociological thought, but failed to gain admission to mainstream developments in that field. This applies to the classical period as well as to the last decades of the twentieth century, and it is in large measure due to the particular reasons for the civilizational turn (the late-twentieth-century revival was to a very significant extent prompted by the shortcomings of modernization theory). But a sustained comparative study of civilizations cannot make significant progress without closer cooperation of the human sciences. The integration of historical and sociological approaches is obviously of key importance, but as the present book will attempt to show, anthropology also has distinctive insights and guidelines to offer. It remains to be seen whether traditional and institutional obstacles to such a synthesis can be overcome.

Toward Convergence?

A more nuanced position may, somewhat paradoxically, be emerging from a third attempt to define the scope and aims of anthropology (distinct from both social and cultural conceptions of the discipline). Claude Lévi-Strauss's reorientation of anthropological thought and research, foreshadowed in

an early essay on the French sociological tradition (Lévi-Strauss 1945) and backed up by a series of major works, did not—despite recognition probably unequalled by any other anthropologist—gain general assent, but it seems to have sparked a discussion that can help to renew classical links to the civilizational field. That was, to put it mildly, not an obvious implication of the initial program. The key component of Lévi-Strauss's new paradigm was the idea of a rational unconscious, exemplified by the structures of language in light of phonological discoveries, but to be developed in more radical and general terms by anthropology. At the same time, the paradigm shift was supposed to solve problems raised by Durkheim and Mauss: the logic of cultural and social order, which they had tried to locate at the level of collective representations, had to be explained in terms of underlying and unconscious organizational principles.

The anthropological extension of this linguistics-based model involved two main steps. To begin with, the core institution of stateless societies was analyzed in a comparative perspective and shown to be a rational construct: the elementary structures of kinship (Lévi-Strauss 1969) could, on this view, be reduced to rules of matrimonial exchange, and this regulated formation of alliances beyond consanguinity was the most fundamental social bond. The second step was to apply the same analytical principles to primitive thought, now recognized as rational in its own way. For Lévi-Strauss, “savage thought,” as he called it, was based on the same invariant structures of human reason as its modern scientific counterpart, but it operated through a different medium and confronted reality at a different level. This general interpretation was concretized through very extensive and detailed analyses of myths. Mythical thought appeared as an ever-varying exploration of central and constant themes, primarily the relationship between nature and culture and the alignment of social and natural order.

At first sight, this line of argument might seem very far removed from civilizational concerns. The retreat from collective representations to an invariant underlying logic of organization is, by the same token, a severing of the links that Durkheim and Mauss had established between anthropology and sociology, which had led them to consider civilizations—made up of collective representations widespread and resilient enough to constitute a shared cultural milieu for multiple societies—as a theme for both disciplines. But the picture changes when we come to Lévi-Strauss's statements on the place of primitive societies in human history. Such reflections were needed to round off the program of anthropological research, and although they

never amounted to a systematic argument, they do suggest ways of reconnecting to a historical sociology with civilizational perspectives. As will be seen, these hints have been taken up by later authors.

To back up his claims that *la pensée sauvage* was a distinctive but not fundamentally alien mode of thought, Lévi-Strauss adds the point that primitive societies, though not prehistorical in any literal sense, do not relate to history in the same way as the better-documented state- and class-dominated ones. The former strive to suppress the experience and minimize the impact of history, the latter embrace and activate history, thus generating a dynamism inseparable from social inequality. This thesis became known as the distinction between cold and hot societies. Since the contrasting but equally holistic approaches to history find expression in integral forms of life, we seem to be dealing with formations of the type envisaged by civilizational analysts: conceptions of the world and the human condition, embodied in patterns and directions of social practices. However, the distinction between two ways of social life—as formulated by Lévi-Strauss—is couched in much more abstract terms than the differences usually stressed in comparative studies of civilizations. The diversity of cultural worlds created by “hot societies” is bracketed out. But there is a further twist to Lévi-Strauss’s philosophy of history. In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (Lévi-Strauss 1967), where he comes closest to claiming normative authority on behalf of anthropology, the societies singled out as representing the most balanced relationship between humanity and its environment are neolithic ones. Another reference to the neolithic transformation and its results can be found in the introductory chapter of the book on “savage thought” (Lévi-Strauss 1969b). Here, the fundamental rationality of this mindset is confirmed by the neolithic transformation, and especially by the invention of agriculture. As Lévi-Strauss saw it, such achievements could only be the outcome of systematic experimentation and cumulative learning made possible by the cognitive frameworks of the societies involved. He argues that “savage thought” is the most elementary form assumed by human reason and thus an attribute of hunting and gathering societies, but its potential is most decisively manifested in a process that takes the human species beyond that stage. The neolithic transformation (or revolution, to use a term still accepted by Lévi-Strauss but now questioned by prehistorians) seems to be the crowning practical success of primitive societies. It is a result of cumulative trends that do not amount to a radical change of the underlying relationship to history, but by creating the preconditions

for such a change (permanent settlements, a division of labor, and a surplus product), this transformation undeniably relativizes the distinction between hot and cold societies.

Both these themes, the distinction between two successive and opposite societal types as well as the idea of a historical bridge between them, became important for the following generation of anthropologists and social theorists. The work of Pierre Clastres on stateless societies (Clastres 2011) added a new dimension to Lévi-Strauss's dichotomy. Clastres argued that statelessness could not be understood as the mere absence of a subsequently dominant institution; rather, the societies in question had organized themselves in ways effectively blocking the development of a separate power center. That could not be achieved without a corresponding intellectual effort. Clastres did not adopt Lévi-Strauss's conception of a rational unconscious, at least not explicitly, and his argument leaves open the possibility that the antistatist thought embodied in tribal institutions might be a habitus rooted in very early learning processes. The rejection of the state would then, in the last instance, be a reaction against primeval experiences with some kind of tyranny.

In any case, Clastres described the implicit political thought of primitive societies in ways clearly reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss's savage thought. Marcel Gauchet (2005) made the affinities more visible. For Gauchet, the focus on interconnected intellectual and political dimensions of primitive societies was a first move toward the complex synthesis developed in his work on the political history of religion (Gauchet 1999). Here, the interplay of religion and politics—both notably underdeveloped themes in Lévi-Strauss's work—takes center stage in a macrohistorical narrative, beginning with societies wholly dominated by beliefs in mythical ancestors and in a comprehensive order seen as their legacy. For Gauchet, this is not so much an elementary as an extreme and total form of religion, and its impact on the political sphere is disabling. Within this framework, autonomous and collective self-transformation is impossible, and so is the constitution of a separate power center that would set itself above society. Marcel Gauchet is primarily concerned with the logic of the trajectory that began with the emergence of sacral rulership (the *Urform* of the state) and culminated in the formation of Christianity. The point to be noted here is that his whole narrative centers on the interplay of religion and politics. The religio-political nexus, as we might call it, is a crucial theme of civilizational analysis. Although Gauchet does not use that frame of reference, we can characterize

the whole line of thought leading beyond Lévi-Strauss as a substantive rapprochement with civilizational thought. This will appear more significant if another case is taken into account.

Maurice Godelier seems to have taken the same turn independently. His version of it is based on a long record of fieldwork and a sustained reflection on the relationship between Marxism and anthropology. Having abandoned the base-superstructure model (after a long effort to rescue it), he had to find an alternative answer to the question of the foundation of human societies. As he came to see it, this was not a matter of grasping absolute beginnings or ultimate determinants; the only meaningful approach was a focus on observable key factors in the formation of new societies and their collective identities. Fieldwork in New Guinea led Godelier to conclude that such processes involve a combination of several factors, and that the forces at work in tribal societies were not fundamentally different from those familiar to historians. The appropriation of a territory and its resources requires an authority of some kind, empowered to regulate the defense of the territory as well as the division of activities within it. Moreover, the legitimation of this authority involves claims beyond the experiential world: until recent times, “invisible beings, to whom humans attribute powers, have been an essential component of the sovereignty that human groups exercise over a territory” (Godelier 2007, 205). With this reference to the religious dimension of political power, Godelier moves into a field often visited by civilizational analysts; and the boundary that tends to separate their domain from tribal societies is further blurred by historical considerations. Godelier stresses the diversity of stateless societies in various places and phases, such as New Guinean tribes and the more complex cases of Polynesian islands. The result is, in short, a more historical vision of societies outside the mainstream transition to archaic civilizations.

To draw this part of the argument to a close, let us take a brief look at a very different anthropological project and its particular way of bringing civilizations in without engaging in closer examination of their patterns. It is not far-fetched to describe Clifford Geertz as a reluctant civilizationist: he unmistakably acknowledges the historical reality and the anthropological relevance of civilizations, but fails to follow this track when it comes to concrete analyses. Toward the end of his career, he described his early fieldwork in Java in terms worth quoting at length: “It was, if not the first, surely one of the earliest and most self-conscious efforts on the part of anthropologists to take on not a tribal group, an island settlement, a disappeared society,

a relic people, nor even a set-off, bounded small community of herders or peasants, but a whole ancient and inhomogeneous, urbanized, literate, and politically active society—a civilization, no less” (Geertz 2000, 14). This is a claim to have pioneered anthropological approaches to civilizations, no less. But there was no effort to go beyond the verbal recognition of civilizational features; the concept is neither explicitly applied nor developed further. Another early work, the comparative study of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, is described in an introductory remark as dealing with the “eastern and western extremities of classical Islamic civilization” (Geertz 1968, 4), but a preface written after the completion of the main text refers to “a supposedly single creed, Islam, in two quite contrasting civilizations, the Indonesian and the Moroccan” (*ibid.*, V). The analysis that follows these divergent statements makes no attempt to mediate between them, nor is there any clarification of what it means to move from the study of religion to a civilizational context.

The ambiguity toward civilizations persists throughout Geertz’s work. In one of his last major statements, a reflection on a “world in pieces,” and more specifically on the declining importance of cultural cohesion and national identity, he signals the importance of civilizational perspectives: “The coexistence in most parts of the world, indeed in virtually all, of great cultural traditions, rich, distinctive, and historically deep (civilizations in the proper, not the polemical sense of the term), with an endless progression of differences within differences, divisions within divisions, jumbles within jumbles, raises questions that cannot any longer be passed off as idle or inconsequent.” (Geertz 2000, 224). But again, the logical sequel to this observation is absent. Geertz could have gone on to consider the role of civilizational affinities in maintaining the “identity without unison” (*ibid.*, 224) that prevails when nations fade and cultures split. The failure to do so is the final confirmation of a stance that can—in retrospect—also be seen in Geertz’s most famous and controversial work: his analysis of the theatre state in Bali (Geertz 1980). Here, the question of variations to the relationship between culture and power, a civilizational theme par excellence, was tackled through a case study that became a classic example of thick description, but led to somewhat disconcerting results. Claude Lefort (1986, 20) distinguished between three processes involved in the cultural framing of power: interpretation (*mise en sens*), institutionalization (*mise en forme*), and representation (*mise en scène*). In that context, Geertz’s Balinese theatre state appears as an extreme case of representation overshadowing the

other aspects, to such an extent that the official power center rarefies into ceremonial display, whereas intensive power struggles unfold at lower levels of the social structure. We thus seem to end up with a picture of culture dissociated from power, and Geertz does not raise the question of broader implications for comparative studies. Critics found the vision of Balinese society implausible and hard to reconcile with general findings of the human sciences. Nordholt (2014) reconstructed the history of Bali in the last few centuries, with particular emphasis on the involvement of rulers in power struggles. In a more anthropological vein, Tambiah (1985) also emphasizes the rulers' pursuit of power, not least in view of the use that charismatic kings could make of their symbolic resources. More importantly for our purposes, he argues that Geertz's account of the Balinese state, properly reinterpreted, can be fitted into a general model of Southeast Asian state formation. This is the conception of the "galactic polity . . . a design that coded in a composite way cosmological, topographical and politico-economic features" (*ibid.*, 322). The galactic polity, discussed at length in a book that combines anthropological and civilizational perspectives (Tambiah 1976), is a complex configuration of culture and power; one of its key features is the combination of a comprehensive devolution of power to subcenters with an often latent but intermittently reactivated charismatic potential of the main center. To treat this formation as a civilizational phenomenon is not to assume that it represents a separate Southeast Asian civilization; the historical record clearly suggests a composite result of Indianizing processes interacting with a regional substratum.

Eurasia

The contributions to this book deal primarily with Eurasian subjects. What we have in mind is an inclusive concept of Eurasia (Hann 2016), defined as a macroregion encompassing the conventionally (and Eurocentrically) demarcated continents of Europe and Asia, as well as the North African coastal regions (whether we need a concept of Afro-Eurasia is less clear; Sub-Saharan Africa was for a long time less closely linked to Eurasian historical destinies than Egypt and the Maghreb). The papers published below situate themselves within this Eurasian framework. The only exception is the discussion of Durkheim and Mauss's civilizational model, for which they made use of research on indigenous societies in America as well as Oceania. But further development of the concept of civilization, discontinuous as it

was, drew mainly on Eurasian historical experiences. This book does not deal with the Eurasian spatial context as such, but since that question is certainly one of those we would like to see raised in anthropological and civilizational studies, a few remarks on possible approaches may be in order. Among those who have applied Eurasian perspectives (in the inclusive sense), various visions can be distinguished.

The first is a vision of Eurasia as the theatre of early globalizing processes, from the formation of the Roman and the Chinese empires to Islamic expansion (Therborn 2000). There were no comparable globalizing waves in the Americas, but the decisive turn came when the New World was integrated into Eurasian networks of power and trade. The problem with this view is that it tends to suggest a unilinear and cumulative globalizing process. In so doing, it obscures the specificity and multiplicity of Eurasian developments. Among the latter, three types of expanding intercultural—or, more emphatically, intercivilizational—formations stand out: networks of trade, imperial regimes, and transcultural religions (this is more precise than the more common “world religions”). These historical formations interact and overlap in different ways. For example, networks of trade are important for both empires and religions, and more important for some religions than others; they seem to have played a more significant role in the history of Buddhism and Islam than in the Christian case. The three fields are never coextensive. Religion and empire have sometimes been closely united, but not to the point of complete identity. The Christianization of the Roman empire coincided with the conversion of some neighboring states; the early unified Islamic empire began to disintegrate before in-depth Islamization could occur in its heartland. All three types of expansion depend on and are shaped by civilizational frameworks, but in the more important cases, such as those of world religions properly speaking, they transcend civilizational boundaries. Comparative study of this double-edged relationship is one of the key tasks on the agenda of civilizational analysis.

These Eurasian patterns have no parallel elsewhere. Trade networks and imperial states developed in the Americas, but not on a similar level; the Inca empire is rightly regarded as an astonishing achievement, in view of its archaic technological basis, but it is not in the same class as the great Eurasian empires, from the Persian onward. There were no American counterparts to the transcultural religions of Eurasia.

A further phenomenon specific to Eurasia is the formation of regions that may be described as civilizational crossroads. Commercial, imperial, and religious influences from multiple directions combine to give them a

distinctive profile, not identifiable with a particular civilization. The Eastern Mediterranean and the region historically known as Bactria (roughly corresponding to Northeastern Afghanistan and neighboring areas) are familiar examples. A strong case has been made for the island of Java (Lombard 2004), and a longer list would arguably include the whole of Southeast Asia. Such cases are particularly interesting when it comes to the impact of globalization (understood as a process beginning with the European discovery and conquest of the Americas) on the Eurasian macroregion. The interaction of a vastly expanded maritime context with complex regional patterns within the Eurasian landmass is an important topic for historical anthropology.

While these approaches emphasize connectivity, an alternative vision stresses parallel lines of development in the most dynamic cultural centers. The main rationale for a broader geographical horizon is in this case the effort to tone down traditional beliefs in European exceptionalism. Both Jaspers's and Eisenstadt's conceptions of the Axial Age, mentioned above, were conceived in that spirit. The idea of Indian and Chinese (originally also Iranian) cultural transformations, comparable and roughly contemporary to Greek and Jewish ones, is (among other things) an attempt to bring Eurasian dimensions to intellectual and religious history. Jack Goody's account of multiple transitions to the Bronze Age in different parts of Eurasia belongs to the same type of interpretation (Goody 2010). It should be distinguished from the theory of alternating Eastern and Western hegemonies, proposed by the same author in the same short book (see also Goody 2015), but best understood as a third version of Eurasian views on history. This construction links up with the work of those who see the recent rise and possible predominance of East Asia as a return to earlier patterns (Jones et al. 1993); the overtaking of China by the West is an obvious case, and so is the Chinese comeback, at least up to a point, but it is more difficult to find further support for the general claim.

I am not suggesting that Goody advocates two different theories. He has certainly tried to integrate the second and the third perspective (for the most recent attempt, see Goody 2015). The point is, however, that while the idea of alternating advances or hegemonies presupposes the Bronze Age background, the latter does not entail the former. To make that connection plausible, Goody has to emphasize roughly parallel patterns of development in East and West. But a strong case can be made for significant divergences, long before the modern one brought about by European industrialization and military domination. That story begins with the enormously important crisis of the late Bronze Age in the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean

(the ancestral regions of the Occident envisioned by Weber and others), and the absence of anything comparable in the East. Events of the late thirteenth and the early twelfth century BCE, extensively discussed in recent scholarship (for an overview, see Cline 2014) led to multiple collapses of old power structures and more or less protracted new beginnings. The most momentous change was the destruction of Mycenaean Greece and the subsequent rise of polis civilization, but important shifts also took place in other parts of the region from Egypt to Mesopotamia.

In all cases, a phase of shrinkage and disintegration preceded developments along new lines. In South Asia, the centuries around the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BCE are very obscure; a major crisis leading to the downfall of civilizational centers in the Indus Valley and Eastern Iran seems to have occurred much earlier, and in an altogether different setting. Chinese history is much better known, and here the course of events was very different from the Near Eastern record of crisis and collapse. The rise of the Zhou dynasty around 1100 BCE (there is some disagreement on the date) led to an upgrading of the archaic state, both on the level of power structures and in regard to its ideological basis. The Zhou achievement was solid enough to ensure a long political ascendancy and a much longer cultural afterlife. Aspects of Zhou traditions, variously transfigured but clearly rooted in archaic imaginations and experiences, entered into the mainstream of Chinese thought and became a source of continuity without parallel in the West. The political crisis of the Zhou regime matured slowly but took an explosive turn after the middle of the first millennium BCE, leading to interstate competition on a scale unknown elsewhere at the time.

Another major divergence resulted from the trajectories of imperial power in East and West. The fact that the Chinese and Roman empires made their decisive breakthroughs at roughly the same time, around 200 BCE, is obviously a case of contingent parallels, and so is the roughly simultaneous crisis that crystallized around 200 CE. But the later destinies of these two power formations differed. The Roman empire was at first more successful in reforming itself and coping with the crisis than the Chinese. In the longer run, however, the Roman empire disintegrated, and the sixth-century attempt at reunification failed, whereas the contemporaneous Chinese one succeeded. Although a Buddhist vision of rulership was clearly of some importance for the restoration of imperial power, it did not lead to an exclusive identification of the empire with a transcultural religion, as in the three civilizations that divided the Roman realm between them

(Western Christendom, Byzantium, and Islam). The Chinese pattern, stabilized in the seventh century CE and adapted without any fundamental changes under later dynasties, combined a sole imperial center, endowed with sacred authority, and a plurality of religious traditions.

Islamic expansion affected both eastern and western parts of Eurasia in multiple ways. Goody is inclined to see this historical experience as one more indicator of macroregional unity, but we may note some significant contrasts between the patterns of Islamic conquest and rule. In the East, during the medieval period, expansion brought Islam into contact with Inner Eurasian societies in early stages of state formation. Their responses combined conversion with counterexpansion, and thus led to an enlargement of the Islamic religious community while increasing the number of rival political units. This process involved the Turks and—in a much more troublesome way—the Mongols. Both groups contributed to an important phase of Islamic expansion into India. On the western frontier there was no significant progress of conversion beyond the limits of early conquests. A counteroffensive of Christian powers (including the papal monarchy) gathered momentum in the first centuries of the second millennium CE, and temporarily—during the Crusades—challenged Islam in its Near Eastern heartland.

Early modern times at first sight offer more promising ground for constructions of Eurasian unity. Three great empires (Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal) dominated the Islamic world. The Ottomans launched a new wave of expansion into Europe and absorbed the postimperial Byzantine state system that had been in the making since the thirteenth century, while the Mughals incorporated—in more variegated ways—a vast multitude of Indian states and territories. The Qing empire, centered on China and expanding into Inner Eurasia, was to some extent comparable to the Islamic formations. But alongside this undeniably cross-Eurasian pattern of continental empires, another development was to prove more decisive for the course of world history and conducive to new divergences between East and West: the creation of the first overseas empires by the states of the Atlantic seaboard.

Current historical scholarship shows a strong tendency to emphasize connections and conflicts between the societies of Inner Eurasia (largely but by no means exclusively nomadic) and their neighbors to the east, south, and west. This may be seen as the fourth Eurasian perspective. It is not easy to date the beginning of mutually formative interaction between Inner and Outer Eurasia (it was probably in the making at least as early as the second