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# Developments in Evolutionism<sup>1</sup>

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In the article some developments in evolutionism have been discussed. It was established that the traditional approach of evolution in terms of growing complexity and unilinearity is not completely satisfying. Developments such as stagnation, decline, and collapse were excluded from the evolutionary analysis, as were transformations that, though bringing about important changes in societies, did not lead to the emergence of a 'higher' level of development. When, as is proposed here, emphasis is laid on the fact that evolution means structural change, such phenomena can very well be included in evolutionary studies. This approach, it seems, does more justice to the views of Darwin than the more traditional ones.*

*Sociopolitical evolution is considered here to be the result of a complex interaction of changes in a limited number of factors (the societal format, the domination and control of the economy, and the ideology). Together these changes produce a sociopolitical structure which, in its turn, influences the other factors. In this way structurally different sociopolitical forms emerge. Such changes occur in the most instances as the unforeseen results of decisions and choices made earlier, which in their turn had been occasioned by larger and smaller changes which had happened earlier in the lives of people.*

*In this approach evolution is no longer considered unilinear; preference is given to a multidirectional approach. There can be discerned a number of separate evolutionary streams. Cultures that developed in one stream cannot be traced back to cultures that developed in other streams. An evolutionary stream is formed by a*

*number of more or less interrelated societies within a certain region, the cultures of which display communal features which are based on the transformation of a limited number of 'core principles'. As examples were given the precolonial streams of Polynesia and Africa south of the Sahara.*

*Finally it was considered that corresponding sociopolitical structures have emerged in various streams at different points in time, such as chiefdoms, or early state structures. With the help of Stewards theory that under certain, specified conditions, cultural phenomena can be repeated an explanation for such correspondences was given. It was postulated that sociopolitical organizations at a certain point of development inevitably encounter problems, similar to those, encountered by other sociopolitical organizations (problems of communication, taxation, control, protection, and so on). There are only few effective possibilities to solve such difficulties – and the surviving organizations seem to have discovered independently similar solutions for similar problems.*

## INTRODUCTION

The connection between anthropology and evolutionism has known many ups and downs. In the second half of the nineteenth century the views of Tylor, Morgan, and other evolutionists dominated anthropology, but at the end of that century evolutionism was nearly wiped out by the detailed – but not unjust – criticisms of Boas, Lowie, and Kroeber<sup>2</sup>. Only since the forties of the twentieth century interest in it came back, mainly as a consequence of the works of White and Steward. The renewed interest – sometimes called neo-evolutionism – reached its peak in the years between 1960 and 1990, and was dominated by the writings of Service, Sahlins, Fried and Carneiro (for detailed reviews: Harris 1968; Vogel 1975; Claessen 1989, 2000a, part I). At the end of this period evolutionism did disappear again from mainstream anthropology, and new fields of interest, such as feminist anthropology and post modernism, came in its place. Since some years, however, evolutionism has again become a topic of interest in anthropology; new evolutionary approaches come to the fore, and older views are in the process of rethinking as appears from publications in *Social Evolution and History*, in the volume edited by Leonid Grinin *et al.* (2004) on early states, its alternatives and analogues, and in

Carneiro's recent history of evolutionism (2003). It is not possible to discuss all recent approaches and considerations in the space of an article; I will limit myself therefore to changes in the views on the evolution of sociopolitical organization.

Sociopolitical organization is always part of a more encompassing whole, a culture. It is not possible to isolate social and/or political structures from their cultural background. Influences of other aspects of the culture will continue to play a role in the development of such structures – and vice versa. This interaction will also appear in this article, in which several times will be switched from a specific sociopolitical organization to the culture of which it is a part, and back.

In this article first some new views on evolutionism will be presented, then the problem of unilinear versus multilinear evolution will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the separate evolutionary streams that have played a role, and finally attention will be given to the question of how in different places, and in different evolutionary streams, similar sociopolitical structures did develop.

### **SOME BASIC CONCEPTS RECONSIDERED**

It is customary to define evolution in terms of growing complexity and unilinear development and, indeed, there are arguments to do so. There are now more human beings than ever before, the capacity to produce has grown beyond belief, technology reaches to the moon and beyond, and the ability to organize more people than ever in complex social and/or political structures is demonstrated by modern nation states and multinationals. The nineteenth-century sociologist Spencer (1971) made the principle of growing complexity the cornerstone of his concept of evolutionism, and Karl Marx (1964) formulated in the *Formen* a series of increasingly complex modes of production. Some decades later the American scholar Leslie White (1949) even reformulated the Second Law of Thermodynamics to explain why human culture is the only phenomenon in the universe that is characterized by growing complexity. And, in the nineteen-seventies Robert Carneiro (1970, 1973) became the spokesman of all those who considered growing complexity and unilinearity the main characteristics of evolution. This view he repeated in his recent *Evolutionism in Cultural Anthropol-*

ogy (2003). Implied in this approach was the conviction that evolution was composed of a number of stages (stadia, levels). The names of Sahlins, Service, Fried, and the archaeologist Renfrew are part and parcel of this period. When the works of these evolutionists are analyzed more closely, however, what emerges is that it are not so much evolutionary sequences which have been put together, but classifications of societies (or traits, or features). Societies with more or less similar sociopolitical organizations (or economies, or religions) were placed together in the same level (band, tribe, chiefdom, state, etc.). As long as the classificatory character of such exercises is recognized, there is nothing wrong (*e.g.*, Lomax and Arensberg 1977). When one presents such a classification as an 'evolutionary sequence', however, problems arise, for in that case it should be made clear how the apparent 'jump' from one level to the next higher one is occasioned. The explanations given seldom were convincing (Khazanov 1985; Claessen 1989, 2000a: 49–56; Service 1971 suggests some mechanisms). I will return to this problem below.

Apart from the problems caused by the construction of the 'levels', there is the more fundamental problem that the evolutionary study of human cultures till then had been restricted to sketching the development to greater complexity, a development characterized by unilinearity. There are reasons, however, **not** to make growing complexity and unilinearity the essence of cultural evolution. There are many developments that do not lead to growth of complexity. Stagnation, decline, and collapse are as characteristic of the development of human culture as growth and florescence (Yoffee 1979, 1993; Tainter 1988; Yoffee and Cowgill, eds. 1988; Claessen 2000a: 66–69; Kowalewski 2000). Moreover, how are we to cope in such a view with phenomena such as cyclical developments (*e.g.*, the Frankish kingdoms between 500 and 1400 described in Claessen 1985; see also Kowalewski 2000), or cases where similar political structures turn up at different levels of development (*e.g.*, chiefdoms; Carneiro 1981; Earle 1991, 1997)? And, how are we to cope with societies that never evolved to a 'higher' level of development, but yet underwent considerable changes in their culture in the course of time, as was the case with hunters and gatherers (*e.g.*, Lee and Devore 1968; Hayden 1981;

Lourandos 1997; Borsboom 2000), or with those groups of West African horticulturists that experienced complex transformations, but yet remained tribal horticulturists, as described by Muller (1985, 1998)? A more general discussion of these problems is presented by Bondarenko and Korotayev (2000). And, finally, as Bargatzky (1987) demonstrated, only reduction at the subsystem level enables the development of a stable suprasystem – or, stated differently, if a center does not succeed in reducing the complexity of the subsystems, the balance of power in the system will be unstable. Indeed, as Shifferd (1987:47) remarked, continued centralization is the least common outcome of the evolutionary process.

It seems wise therefore to discard growth of complexity as the cornerstone of cultural evolution (with the problem of unilinearity will be dealt in the next section). Rather we should return to Darwin, the founding father of evolutionism who's work was neglected so long by social scientists, who pointed out that evolution has no direction at all (pace Spencer), and that there is no internal 'drive', or 'necessity', for simple forms to develop into higher forms:

On our theory the continued existence of lowly organisms offers no difficulty; for natural selection, or the survival of the fittest, does not necessarily include progressive development – it only takes advantage of such variations as arise and are beneficial to each creature under its complex relations of life. And it may be asked, what advantage, as far as we can see, would it be to an infusorian animalcule – to an intestinal worm – or even to an earth worm, to be highly organized. If it were no advantage, these forms would be left, by natural selection, unimproved or little improved, and might remain for indefinite ages in their present lowly condition (Darwin 1872/1995: 98).

Instead of concentrating on growing complexity, we should look for a more satisfying characteristic. For this we should go back to the essence of evolution: namely the phenomenon of **structural change**. Evolution then can be defined as 'the process by which structural reorganization is affected through time, eventually producing a form or structure which is qualitatively different from the ancestral form' (Voget 1975: 862); or, as Harris (1968: 25)

formulated it: evolution is ‘the change of one form into another’. Evolutionism then becomes the scientific activity of finding nomothetic explanations for the occurrence of structural changes. Structural change expresses the fact that in one or more aspects of a (cultural) system changes occur that have consequences for all (or most) of the other aspects of that system. The system as a whole will then be transformed. It does not seem necessary that the whole system changes at the same moment; this may take some time. If we do accept this view, such phenomena as stagnation, decay, and collapse from now on can be presented in evolutionary terms, too. Concepts like ‘devolution’ or ‘involution’ are no longer necessary (though one may prefer to continue using these terms as a kind of ‘shorthand’; cf. Carneiro 1988: 783). And, there is no impediment to considering transformations as evolutionary phenomena, as the necessity of reaching a ‘higher’ level of development no longer is demanded. It is the structural change that counts.

Regarding the question in which ways such structural changes are brought about, two aspects should be distinguished, namely **how** such changes are produced, and **why**. Both aspects will be discussed here shortly.

In *The Early State* (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 624 ff.) a first attempt was made to discover the general factors behind the evolution of this phenomenon<sup>3</sup>. Several factors were found to play a role, while it also appeared that the process was comparable to a snowball: once in motion its momentum tended to increase. There was found to be a mutual reinforcement of the phenomena and their effects in all of the developmental processes studied. Mutual reinforcement can work in two directions. Should the influence be ‘positive’ the organization tends to grow in size and complexity. But, should the influence be ‘negative’ the developments would slow down, stagnate or eventually lead to a collapse of the system. The analysis of the factors in *The Early State* (*ibid.* p. 625 ff.) revealed that six factors were particularly closely bound up with the development of the state: population growth, war, conquest, ideology, the production of a surplus, and the influence exerted by states already in existence. The order in which these factors played a role varied from state to state, as did their intensity. One incontrovertible fact was that the factors ideology and surplus had to be considered necessary – without their ‘positive’ influence it would seem

that the evolution of more complex sociopolitical structures was impossible, and were these factors 'negative', no more sophisticated form of development emerged, but stagnation and decline made their appearance instead.

These findings were reconsidered and evaluated in *The Study of the State* (Claessen and Skalník 1981: ch. 25). It appeared that several of the conclusions in the previous publication required supplementing and reformulating. The ideological factor was given more emphasis (1981: 479, 484), while war and conquest were reduced to secondary factors; these were much more likely to have been the consequences of disturbances in the ideological, economic, or demographic situation, than forces in themselves (cf., however, Lewis 1981; Cohen 1985). Pertinently the formulation of the factor surplus was too restrictive; the economic factor contained far more than just the production of a surplus. This is why the term 'surplus' was replaced by 'domination and control of the economy' (1981: 484). This allowed phenomena like management, irrigation, trade, markets, or the distribution from state storehouses, to be subsumed under the term. The data from *The Study of the State* confirm that, in view of the great variety in the order per case, it was not possible to designate one of the factors stated as the *prime mover*, the first cause.

In *Development and Decline* (Claessen, Van de Velde and Smith 1985), we attempted to construct a general model for the evolution of sociopolitical organization using the results obtained up to that time. We called this the Complex Interaction Model (CIM). To achieve this it was necessary to circumscribe the factor population growth more narrowly (cf. Hassan 1975: 42; Hayden 1981; Lourandos 1997: 15). Therefore we introduced the concept 'format of the society' (societal format). This involves not simply the number of people, it refers to the number of people in relation to the means of production and the area of land available (Van Bakel 1989: 167–169). A mutual, reciprocal influencing of each other causes changes in the factors (or 'groups of factors') ideology, format of the society, and (domination and control of) the economy, creating the conditions under which sociopolitical organizations emerge, or which trigger off a more elaborate development. Once it had been established, the sociopolitical organization became the fourth factor in the model, which in its turn influenced

the other three and acted as a co determinant. One change evoked the other; a complex interaction had come into play (1985: 255). The CIM thus clarifies how the evolution of sociopolitical structures has taken place – regardless of whether this concerns creation and florescence, or conversely stagnation and decline. The same factors that – under specific conditions – produce growth, produce – under different conditions – stagnation, decline, and eventually collapse (Claessen 1992: 10, 97–100)<sup>4</sup>.

When we talk at a high level of abstraction and restrict ourselves to evolution in general, the factors identified and their mutual interaction are sufficient to reach an explanation. When, however, we want to investigate how this complex interaction works in concrete cases, the factors are insufficiently specific. A concrete, specific sociopolitical system does not come into existence in a vacuum, but in a certain area and at a certain time. These givens form the ‘context’, within which the evolution of that system takes place. For the specific application of the model it thus is essential to add data from the physical and social environment. By doing so, the role of the environment (water, desert, drought, clay soil, and the like) could be taken account of, as well as the influence of the surrounding societies. Neighboring societies usually influence each other deeply; they fight wars, exchange brides, trade with each other, conquer each other, and so on. Certainly, in a number of places states have developed independently (as Steward stated already, and was repeated by Fried 1967), but once in existence the surrounding societies soon followed, influenced by interaction and/or imitation of the protagonist. Terms as diffusion, stimulus diffusion, or peer polity interaction may be in its place here (Kottak 1980; Renfrew and Cherry 1986; Connah 1987; Roymans 1990).

Words of caution are necessary here. Although it is possible analytically to distinguish the factors of the model, it is difficult to separate them in practice. In the cultures under study such type of distinctions are not made; the various factors are narrowly connected and interconnected. It is the researcher, who distinguishes them. Moreover, the factors economy, or ideology are brought into play only as far as they are important for the sociopolitical organization. This may give rise to a more comprehensive analysis of the field in question in order to get a better understanding of its working (as was done *e.g.*, in Claessen and Van de Velde 1991 with



regard to the economy, and in Claessen and Oosten 1996, with regard to the ideology).

At the end of his book about the evolution of chiefdoms, Timothy Earle (1997: 203–208) presents a comparable model of evolutionary development. The greatest difference with the CIM is that in place of ‘the format of the society’ he includes the factor ‘war’; his factors ‘ideology’, and ‘control of the economy’ are more or less equivalent to those in the CIM. What we refer to in our model as the ‘context’, he calls ‘underlying conditions’. The working of his model is determined by two variables, namely the question of how access to greater power can be limited to only a few, and the problem of how various sources of power can influence and reinforce each other. In Earle’s eyes, economic power is the easiest to acquire and to control. In contrast, military power is difficult to hold in check; from one moment to the next allies can become opponents. Ideology is determined in a highly individual way and only by providing it with material shape (temples, rituals) are large groups of people able to share elements of it. The possibilities open to a political leader to determine these material manifestations give him a chance to keep a firm hand on the ideological factor. In the social reality, the gearing of the various factors to each other is not easy and in many cases the factors even militate against each other or they cancel out each other’s influences – a conclusion reached also in connection with the CIM. Patricia Shifferd’s remark that ‘in fact, [such] continued centralization was the least common outcome in the sample at hand’ (1987: 47)<sup>4</sup> has wide application, indeed.

It will be clear that Earle’s views link up with those elaborated in this article, and that the framework of the CIM is enriched by the variables he has proposed. I think, however, that the factor ‘societal format’ provides more pertinent indications of the course (the dynamics) of the evolution than does his factor ‘war’. War remains – even in Earle – a derived factor, albeit a most important one. And, though characterizing war as a derivate, it should not be thought that war was unimportant in the evolution of human culture: in various places I have indicated evolutionary consequences of war (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 626; Claessen 1990; Claessen 2000a: 110–112). On the other hand, there is Hallpike’s pertinent

statement that

Mere violence, however, cannot lead to permanent institutions of political authority, and to my knowledge there is no instance of military activity *by itself* ever having led to the emergence of even chiefly authority (1986: 235).

We think that with the help of the Complex Interaction Model, we can find an answer to the question of how sociopolitical organizations evolve. It now remains to be seen to what extent it is possible to answer the question of **why** cultures change. What induced people to give up the First Affluent Society (Sahlins 1968, 1972), and to develop agriculture, urban life, and the state (Southall 1991: 78)? Put in this way, the question is not very fortunate; nobody has ever consciously desired this and nobody could have foreseen the changes which would take place in the culture as time passed. Sociopolitical changes occur in the most instances as the unforeseen results of decisions and choices made earlier, which in their turn had been inevitably occasioned by larger and smaller changes, which had happened earlier in the lives of people. Developments are mostly the logical or inevitable result of decisions which have been taken earlier; decisions which were definitely not taken with that particular goal in mind. Many evolutionary changes came about unintentionally, and without any clear set out plan of action (Claessen and Skalník 1978: 624; Kottak 1980: 58–87; Hallpike 1986).

From the very beginning of mankind, human beings tried to survive – and in order to do so they had to provide themselves with a number of necessities such as food, drink, shelter, clothes, sex, tools, and protection. To achieve this they had to undertake all sorts of activities: to conquer the obstacles of the natural environment, and to handle the problems of the social environment<sup>6</sup>. It may be assumed that our distant ancestors, when problems of whatever nature presented themselves, strove to find the sort of solution which would seem to them to yield a ‘good’, ‘favorable’, or ‘positive’ result (Lewis 1974: 19–20). This is what we can reasonably assume, even though we no longer know how they saw ‘good’ or ‘positive’. Van Parijs (1981: 47–50) proposes therefore the use of a more general term and suggests ‘to optimize’. He then

points to the fact that people generally do not make a choice from the whole gamut of theoretically possible solutions, but are much more likely to take refuge in known, tried and trusted solutions like those developed in their own society or among their neighbors. Generally people choose for the local; he thus speaks of 'local optimization'. Such choices are not necessarily 'nonrational', as Gary Webster calls them (1996: 611), but are based on considerations that for the people concerned were rational. Naturally not all choices were fortunate and not all relationships turned out well. They were based on local optimization – with all limitations that may imply.

When one person undertakes activities and by doing so meets another person, the other person is forced to react: action invokes reaction. The way in which the other reacts is equally a question of local optimization: people react in an obvious way and whether or not this was fortunate only time would tell. Human actions set off a series of continual changes. Certain developments require actions and these invoke reactions, which have to be reacted to and so the whole process rolls on. It is not possible to indicate – except for specific cases – prime movers; each of the factors of the CIM plays a role in the never ending game of actions and reactions. The desire for luxury, better houses, more children, ideologically based honor, or status – it is all very human and from all times. Yet, the freedom of acting is but limited, for earlier decisions and choices continue to work through and bring in their train consequences which were never intended or foreseen (cf. also Cohen 1981).

#### **A TRADITIONAL DILEMMA: UNILINEAR OR MULTILINEAR ?<sup>7</sup>**

Already early in the nineteenth-century anthropology it was realized by the scholars that many data did not fit in the neatly formulated evolutionary frameworks into which – it was assumed – every society, and each custom should have a place. Tylor (1871) tried to cope with this type of irregularities by applying very broad categories. Morgan (1877) developed an ever growing number of classifications and categories. Yet, neither Tylor, nor Morgan, should be considered unilinearists (Harris 1968: 171–172). It was, for example, Morgan, who pointed to the fact that the American Indians had

followed a separate development and, having announced that they had domesticated the llama and were able to produce bronze utensils, he added:

Considering the absence of all connections with the most advanced portion of the human family in the Eastern hemisphere, their progress in unaided self-development from the savage state must be accounted remarkable (1877: 40).

Although the message of this pronouncement is unmistakable, the evolutionists, regardless of whether these were nineteenth century or middle twentieth century, have not done much with it. Scholars continued to be obsessed with the categorization of all societies in one great evolutionary scheme. The only exception seems to have been Julian Steward, who in the nineteen-thirties suggested that evolution had gone along different lines; evolution was multilineal (Steward 1955). One of the most important building blocks of his theory was the idea that cultural phenomena are repeatable, provided that specified conditions were met. He demonstrated this with the help of an analysis of the development of the patrilineal band (1936; reprinted in 1955). This type of band society had come to the fore in different regions, with different ecological surroundings – and without cultural contacts. Later Elman Service would remark correctly that Steward had in fact explained the evolution of the patrilocal band (1971: 38).

In a later article, *Cultural Causality and Law* (1949; reprinted in 1955), Steward made clear that also in the development of more complex cultures repetition and regularity, indeed even patterns, did play a role. The main argument was that under certain specified conditions, more or less corresponding forms of sociopolitical organization invariably evolved. In this article Steward compared the evolution of sociopolitical organization in five regions: Peru, Mexico, China, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. The fact that in each of the cases the state did evolve, made Carneiro (1973) remark that Steward was a crypto-unilinearist. In that same article, Carneiro tried to make it plausible that there was no real difference between multilineal and unilinear developments. The difference was only a matter of ‘distance’. When a number of developments were surveyed from a bit of distance, it could be seen that they all led to the same stage. If the process was scrutinized more closely, then it was pos-

sible to see that the societies concerned reached that stage via different paths. To some extent I find myself agreeing with this idea. In our investigation into the origins of early states (Claessen and Skalník 1978), it did indeed emerge that various factors played a role in the process of state formation. However, the order in which they appeared varied, as did their intensity. Nonetheless, in all the examples the final result was the early state. This was not surprising in view of the fact that the point of departure for our research was – as by Steward – the early state. Our sample consisted of societies that all had reached the early state. The important point here is that the stage of the early state could apparently be reached via various paths (cf. Claessen and Oosten 1996: 365–370, where this idea is worked out more fully). Societies that did not reach the state level were left out of our sample (as was done by Steward). The evolutionary sequence of a number of societies that all reached the same level cannot be other than unilinear, though some multilinear episodes on the road towards this level may have occurred. The same line of reasoning underlies Service's well known sequence of band, tribe, chiefdom, state (Service 1971) and Fried's sequence egalitarian, rank, stratified, state (Fried 1967). In both cases the authors present in fact the genealogy of the state; small wonder that their sequences are characterized by unilinearity and growing complexity<sup>8</sup>.

Recently it has become clear that the evolution of complex societies is even more complicated than thought till now. Carole Crumley (1995) introduced the concept of heterarchy. Patrick Chabal *et al.* went 'beyond states and empires' and suggested forms between chiefdoms and informal polities (2004). And Leonid Grinin *et al.* (2004) brought together a collection of articles on early states, its alternatives and analogues. Social evolution is multilinear indeed.

In the approaches discussed thus far no attention at all has been paid to the many different sorts of societies which had passed through lines of development not leading to chiefdom or state. Bushmen and Pygmies still live and are still hunters and gatherers – as are several Inuit groups, and bands of Australian Aborigines – though their cultures underwent considerable changes in the course of time and most probably followed their own different evolutionary paths (for literature, see note 6). Service (1971: 6–9) empha-

sized that these groups represented a very ancient culture (as had Tylor before him). When, however, it came to putting unilinear diagrams together they never came into the picture, for they should have been accorded an own place – something that would have been difficult in a unilinear framework. In whatever unilinear ‘evolutionary’ classification, bands invariably came out as the lowest level. The problem of ‘placing’ such non-fitting societies should not be underestimated. Among them can be found the large tribal societies of New Guinea, the numerous highly diverse population groups in Indonesia, the many traditional societies in Latin America, the peoples of Micronesia and many others as well.

Evolution models in which these societies are placed somewhere on a low rung of development and are typed as ‘backward’ or ‘underdeveloped’ do not justice to the fact that we are confronted here actually by peoples that followed different evolutionary paths which have continued their courses to the present day. Their pedigrees are at least as long as, for instance, those of the Anglo-Saxon superpowers (cf. Yoffee 1993). It simply will not do to shunt them with the assistance of Sahlins' distinction between general and specific evolution (1960) onto some sideline under the heading ‘specific evolution’, and then to proceed to include them in a unilinear framework as societies with a ‘deviant’ development. Naturally, in the course of time, there have been various societies which have reached a higher level of sociopolitical development – but this does not allow us to assume that they represent the one and only line of development. Now that the term ‘multilinear’ has been rendered fairly useless for describing the more or less simultaneous origins of various lines of development by the intervention of Carneiro, another term should be chosen to indicate the evolution of human societies along its various lines. The word ‘multidirectional’ would seem to be a good choice for this.

### **MULTIDIRECTIONAL EVOLUTION**

In *Europe and the People without History* Eric Wolf (1982: 24–72) gives a description of the world around 1400, which contained a colorful diversity of principalities, chiefdoms, trading cities, markets, nomadic societies, temple communities, hunters and gatherers. This description very well fits with those given by other an-

thropologists, historians, or travelers. And, indeed, various societies had developed in the course of time completely independently of each other. There was little contact between the great powers which ruled in the fifteenth century. For a short time the Mongols had succeeded in bringing together an enormous empire (Krader 1978), but this had collapsed already at the time Wolf describes. Principalities had emerged in Indonesia in Sumatra, Java, and Bali (Wisseman Christie 1995; Hall 1985) and various of these formations were still going strong around 1400. There were no significant contacts between the Mongols and the Javanese – indeed if there were ever any. And while the Mongol empire emerged at one end of the earth, only to disappear again, elsewhere other mighty states developed, those of the Incas and the Aztecs – once again without having had contact with either the Mongols or the Javanese, or indeed even with each other (Haslip-Viera *et al.* 1997). Events in Europe took a different course. After a period of cultural florescence in ancient Greece (Van der Vliet 1987) came the Roman Empire, which trampled upon chiefdoms, early states, and big men structures (Nash 1978; Roymans 1990). And while the Merovingians, Carolingians, and Capetians succeeded each other in Western Europe, the Umayyads and the Abbasids did the same in the area that had been islamized (Lapidus 1988). And all this time the Inuit continued to hunt and the life of the Australian Aborigines really did not change. Many of these cultures were known in fifteenth-century Europe; the travels of Marco Polo, William of Rubroek, and De Plano Carpini to the empire of the Mongols had contributed to this, but by far the majority of them only became known to scholars in later years. Columbus drew the attention of Europeans to the Americas. The islands of Polynesia were described in great detail in the journals of Captain Cook (1768–1780) and the writings of those who traveled with him, and the exploration of the heart of Africa would take even longer. In a nutshell, quite discrete from each other, a large variety of cultures had come into being (Fagan 1998; Claessen 2000a: 169–170; 2000b).

The fact that in the course of time numerous cultures have come into being without having had some form of contact with each other lies at the basis of the idea that the evolution of human culture has been multidirectionally. In various parts of the world, separate evolutionary developments apparently have taken place,

leading to the great variety of cultures in past and present. It seems probable that these separate evolutionary streams can be connected with different regions. Cultures that developed in one area are not derived from cultures that developed in another area. To be more specific, the developments in the Americas followed a different path from those in Africa south of the Sahara; there were no relevant contacts between the two continents, and the cultures are based on different underlying principles. The cultures of Polynesia cannot be traced back to those of the Indo-Europeans, or to those that were found in Africa south of the Sahara, and so on. The idea that there have been separate evolutionary streams is not new. Lewis H. Morgan already hinted at a separate development of the American cultures and those of the Old World in his *Ancient Society*, and characterized the American achievements as a form of 'unaided self-development' (1877: 40). The Italian Marxist, Melotti (1977), proposed that various modes of production had developed from the Primitive Community, which meant that the Asiatic mode of production had played a role in one region but not in another<sup>9</sup>. The French anthropologist Coquery-Vidrovitch introduced the idea of a specific African mode of production (1969). And, in the *Principles of Social Evolution*, the British anthropologist Hallpike presents the idea that a number of core principles formed the basis of the development of various evolutionary streams (1986: 289–291) and distinguishes amongst others a Chinese, and an Indo-European stream.

The point of departure for a multidirectional model has to be placed at the period in which *Homo sapiens* began to play his role. Whether we do this or not, one thing is evident: our earliest ancestors lived of hunting and gathering. These apparently undifferentiated groups knew in fact considerable mutual differences in their way of life and organization, incontrovertibly influenced by the nature of the game they hunted, the availability of inhabitable caves, the proximity of rivers, the quantities and sorts of vegetable food, and the possibility or the necessity to build up stores. As time passed, such differences gradually widened and gave rise to a great variety within the cultural regions. This is not true just of Europe, as is described by Champion *et al.* (1984), but is also valid for East Asia (Testart 1982), Indonesia (Slamet-Velsink 1996), and the New World (Steward 1955). A similar degree of variation can be



found among the Australian Aborigines (Lourandos 1997), and the hunting and gathering groups of Africa (*e.g.*, Stauder 1971; Lee 1969; Woodburn 1968). From such beginnings a number of evolutionary 'streams', which were clearly distinguishable from each other, grew as time went by. Such a stream can best be seen as a number of more or less mutually interrelated societies within a certain region, the cultures of which display communal features which are based on the transformation of a limited number of 'core principles' (Claessen 2000a: 171)<sup>10</sup>. It is assumed here that various of the core principles had their origin among the hunters and gatherers of the late Pleistocene. It goes without saying that this is an hypothesis which will be difficult to prove. Looking at these core principles we should not think of differences in technology, because in the first instance these are determined by the physical environment. What are more important are the differences in ideology (see for instance Steward's discussion of the role of the 'secondary aspects' that give a culture its specific color (1949/1955)). In my research into the organization of early states I found that the ideological aspects – in corresponding political structures – showed large differences per region. These ideological aspects permeated all sorts of aspects of the organization of the state and made it possible to distinguish between for example early African states, and those of Polynesia or Western Europe (Claessen 1970, 1981, 1985, 1996). I can give here only an indication of how such evolutionary streams can be envisioned; this article is not the place to present the streams in any detail. I will limit myself to precolonial Polynesia and precolonial Africa south of the Sahara.

### **POLYNESIA**

The cultures of the Polynesians can be traced back to the Ancestral Polynesian Culture, that came into existence in a fairly isolated situation in the Tonga-Fiji-Samoa region some 2000 years ago (Green 1979: 48–49; Kirch 1997: 250; Kirch and Green 2001). From this region the Polynesians have spread over the islands, where they met with slightly varying physical environments. Each time, therefore, some adaptation to the new situation was necessary. There are good reasons to see the ramage structure, a kinship group based on principles of primogeniture and seniority, and the

sacredness of the oldest descent groups with their direct line of communication with the gods, as the core principles of the Polynesian culture (Kirch 1984; Kirch and Green 1987; Claessen 1996, 2000a: 175–177). In theory the ramage embraced the whole (island) community. In the larger, more populous islands usually the founding ramage split into a number of more or less independent branches. It is assumed that the ‘founder’ of the ramage can trace his descent back to a divine ancestor. This descent imbued his direct descendants with sacred powers. Succession in the ramage was by primogeniture; if the eldest child was a daughter this could lead to problems. Within every family brothers and sisters were ranked according to their birth order and this rank was then inherited by their own descendants. As the family heir in the most senior line was directly allied to the gods, access to the gods for the other ramage members had to pass through him. This high status was coupled with his influence on fertility; without his ritual intervention ordinary people would work to no effect (Thomas 1990: 29 ff.).

The colonization of a new island called for a complicated interplay between the format of the society and the economic possibilities, confronting the sociopolitical and ideological structures that were imported – a confrontation which caused a number of transformations.

The low population density in Samoa at the end of the Eighteenth century hindered the

Development of a hierarchical organization; that was present in concept, but never realized.

People easily could escape demanding chiefs and fly to other villages where they would be welcome because of the shortage of people (Van Bakel 1989, 1991; cf. Tcherkézoff 1997).

The Hawai'i Islands in contrast, had a sizeable population. The presence of large structures such as irrigation canals and fishponds (Tuggle 1979: 172, 175; Kirch and Sahlins 1992, vol. 2: 118–157) indicates that there was even a certain degree of pressure on the resources. On the other hand, the presence of many nobles and priests, intimates that enough surplus was produced – or rather extorted from the commoners – to allow for such luxuries (Van Bakel 1991; Kolb 1994). As long as there was a certain balance between the size of the population and the resources, the sociopolitical

structure in the Polynesian islands developed into greater complexity. In Tonga (Douaire-Marsaudon 1998), in Hawai'i, as well as in Tahiti (Claessen 1978), even early state structures emerged. Where the size of the population remained below the level of possibilities – as was the case in Samoa – the sociopolitical structure remained embryonic. In the smaller Marquesas and Cook Islands only chiefly structures were found, while the situation in Easter Island is not very clear, as the island was discovered only after the collapse of the sociopolitical structure. Also on the atolls the ramage structure was found, be it in an embryonic form (*e.g.* Danielsson 1956: 40–52; Huntsman and Hooper 1996: 154–163). When the pressure on the resources increased collapse of the administrative structure was inevitable. This happened in the Marquesas Islands (Van Bakel 1989; Thomas 1990; Kirch 1991), and a similar situation was found in Easter Island (Van Tilburg 1994; McCoy 1979).

It would seem that there are sufficient reasons to view Polynesia as a region with its own evolutionary stream. The island cultures were based on just a few core elements which do not occur elsewhere, or at least not in this specific form or combination. Nevertheless it could be asked if the Polynesian developments should not be placed within a wider context, a context that also includes Melanesia and Micronesia – and perhaps even Indonesia. Such an approach could be defended, but I am afraid that it would be very difficult to formulate core principles that would hold equally for all these so variant regions. It is certainly true that the Polynesian culture is derived from a Melanesian form, but there are few reasons for supposing that there were still any important ties between Melanesia and Polynesia after the development in isolation of the Ancestral Polynesian Culture. The connection with Indonesia is even still more remote. According to Irwin (1992) the prehistory of Micronesia is still relatively unknown, and the cultural ties with Polynesia are not yet very clear. In their recent study, Kirch and Green (2001) very strongly defend the view that the Polynesian culture is an unique configuration, and should not be considered as just a subtype of a larger Oceanic culture.

#### **AFRICA SOUTH OF THE SAHARA**

A short description of the evolutionary developments in Africa

south of the Sahara (from now on: Africa), is difficult for various cultural influences have played a role here. Nevertheless I will do my best to demonstrate that an idiosyncratic development of the culture can be established in this region. Any investigation of Africa has to begin with the fact that for a long time the continent was extremely thinly populated. Small clumps of people lived scattered here and there, surrounded by huge empty spaces, though some regions (West Africa, the Interlacustrine Region) may have had a slightly denser population (Newman 1995). For a long time, hunting and gathering were the principal means of existence. Here and there more complex societies emerged from this initial situation. Various factors played a role in this. Among them were the fact that in some favorable regions groups became sedentary, and the occurrence of climatic changes which meant for example that the Sahara became much drier, which led to migrations from the Sahara region to the savanna and the forest zone in the south. In later times also other migrations played a role, such as the Bantu migration (Van Bakel 1981; Lwango-Lunyiigo and Vansina 1992), and the migration of the Nilotic peoples (Newman 1995: 160–177). A great role in the developments was played by the emergence of long-distance trade (Connah 1987), and the development of societies in which cultivators and herdsmen lived in one group (*e.g.* Ankole; Steinhart 1985). These factors were not always present, nor were they contemporaneous with each other, but these were what gave the impulses for structural change (Connah 1987; Garlake 1990; Newman 1995). What gave the specific African color to these developments was – just as in Polynesia – the ideological aspects; the core principles. The most important of these were:

- all relations on any level of hierarchy were perceived in terms of kinship and/or communal ties; in some cases such ties were real, in other cases it was only a way of expressing feelings of dependency (Vansina 1991);
- chiefs and rulers were sacred intermediaries between the people and the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors;
- the health of the leader determined his capacity to promote the fertility of women, the herds, and the land;
- the relationship with fertility ran via the one who as the ‘first’

had reclaimed the land and in doing so had concluded a contract with the earth spirits<sup>11</sup>.

At various places sedentary agricultural groups with complex cultures developed from the initial situation characterized by nomadic hunters and gatherers. In these agrarian communities leadership was usually allocated to the leader of the lineage<sup>12</sup> which had settled in that area first and by 'opening up' the land had entered into a 'contract' with the earth spirits, which continued to give him access to fertility in exchange for offerings. Small groups of cultivators who later wanted to settle in this area and desired to make a claim on the fertility of the ritual leader (usually the earth priest) had to ask him permission and display a certain degree of obedience. In this way gradually not inconsiderable territorial units or villages emerged (cf. Luning 1997; Vansina 1991; Kopytoff 1999). These traditional views still legitimize social and political relations. For example Zuiderwijk (1998: 92) states for the mountain area of Cameroon that:

The clan that first occupied the land and founded the village is called the clan of the chief. In principle, and often in practice, the chief is indeed a member of this clan. Clans that arrived later were warmly welcomed, and even given virgin land to cultivate, but they came to be under the symbolic authority of those who arrived first.

Despite the islamization or christianization of large areas the belief in such relationships still play a role, as appears from studies by Jansen on village life in Mali (1995), Colson and Van Velsen, of Tonga villages in Malawi (respectively 1968, and 1964), Vansina (1991) on developments in the Congo region, and Van Binsbergen on villages in Zambia (1979). Clearly, these views appear to play – or have played – a great role in large parts of Africa.

The strongest effect of these core elements can be found in the more complex societies of Africa. Muller (1981: 264 ff.) already emphasized that chiefdoms and early states share the same ideology, a view repeated later by Vansina (1991: 91). Some generalized observations of the role of these traditional views in a number of early states will make this clear<sup>13</sup>. In all these states the sacred rulers were linked up to the gods by long, complicated, and in part mythical, genealogies. In daily life their sacred status was ex-

pressed in a host of rules and prescriptions. For instance, they were not permitted to touch the earth with their bare feet. To avoid this they wore slippers, were carried in litters, stood on lion skins or cow hides, or else their coming and going was limited to their own enclosure. There was a multitude of rules to do with food and drink. The people were supposed to believe that the ruler never ate, drank, or slept – and thus were prevented to see him do so. When he died it was custom to conceal his death for a while. When his decease was finally announced it set off great mourning rituals which often included human sacrifices and ritual anarchy.

A successor was ‘chosen’ from among the ruler's sons (and sometimes from among his brothers) who were all – in theory – eligible. In some early states (*e.g.*, Dahomey, Claessen 1987), principles were developed to limit the number of candidates considerably. As the heir was not sacred (in contrast, for example, to Polynesia) he had to be made so and extensive, often protracted rituals were needed to transmogrify the human prince into a sacred ruler. It was usual for human sacrifices to be part of these rituals, while the candidate had to transgress various rules of his society in a ritual manner: he committed incest (whether or not symbolically), he ate human flesh and one man – and usually many – were killed. Once the king was sacred a direct link was made between the health of the ruler and the fertility of women, cattle and land. As only strong and healthy men were thought to be able to conduct the necessary rituals it was believed that the survival of the society was at risk once the physical powers of the king began to wane. Numerous rituals were applied to prevent this to happen – but in the end the ‘threat’ could no longer be avoided and the death of the king was left as the final solution. In such cases he was politely invited to commit suicide or he was killed by his entourage<sup>14</sup>. Various researchers (Muller 1980; Abélès 1981, Simonse 1992) have linked this regicide with the blatant transgressions committed by the ruler during his consecration. These violations would present a society with the opportunity to get rid of the ruler when he was no longer able to comply with his ritual obligations (*cf.* De Heusch 1987 for a slightly different view).

In most of the African early states there was a close bond between the ruler and his mother. The queen-mother was not just his (biological) mother, she was even more a political institution be-

cause she embodied the bond between her family and the ruler. Therefore her family became the most prominent in the kingdom; there was even the custom that, should the mother of the ruler predecease her son, the family appointed another woman 'mother of the ruler'.

Although African sacred rulers are hedged in by a plethora of rules and rituals, these are obvious transformations of only a few underlying core principles. The ruling families started long ago as heads of families to whom other groups attached themselves, or they were immigrants who married the daughter of the earth priest (Van Binsbergen 1979; Claessen and Oosten 1996: 386). Here we meet with the idea that the one who was the first to reclaim the land made a 'contract' with the earth spirits, and via this obtained access to (and control over) fertility. This control could rest from the beginning within the royal family, it could have been acquired by marriage, or could be within reach via ties with chiefs of clans. The access to fertility provided the ruler with a very strong form of legitimacy.

Naturally the factors of the CIM, like population growth, the means of existence, the development of the economy, management, qualities of leadership, and ideological stimuli played a role in the forming of variations and transformations. It was these factors that promoted growth or led to decline and fall. Also many cases are known of societies that never made it to early states at all (as argued by Shifferd 1987; Claessen 2002). Action as well as reaction played a role, and quite a few decisions must have been made on the basis of local optimization. In these respects the developments in Africa conform to the evolutionary patterns in other places. The specific African color, however, was determined by the African core principles (cf. Claessen 2000b: 6).

### **UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

In the foregoing section it was proposed to take account of various evolutionary streams alongside each other, which may explain the large and deeply rooted differences between the cultures of for instance Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. In this section I will examine the mirror-image of this model, namely the fact that corresponding sociopolitical structures have emerged in the various

streams and at different points in time. Investigations recorded in for example *The Evolution of Urban Society* (Adams 1966), *Van Vorsten en Volken* (Claessen 1970), *The Early State* (Claessen and Skalník 1978), *The Chieftdom, Precursor of the State* (Carneiro 1981), *Chieftdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology* (Earle, ed., 1991), *How Chiefs Come to Power* (Earle 1997), indicate that this was the case for instance with (early) states and chieftdoms. 'Corresponding', however, does not mean 'identical' (cf. Wason 1995). Such types of generalized statements are based on intercultural comparisons, and to make such a type of comparison possible the data must be formulated in such a way that comparison becomes possible. This means that specific functions or activities have to be brought under more general headings. To give an example: in *Van Vorsten en Volken* I established that there were certain aspects found in the African kingdoms that were absent in the Polynesian kingdoms, and the Polynesian kingdoms displayed characteristics that were neither found in the African ones nor among the Incas (Claessen 1970: 312–316). On the other hand, it was also possible to establish that – such differences notwithstanding – there were also many corresponding structural characteristics, especially when the data of the comparison were brought to a higher level of abstraction. The fact that some rulers were associated with the lion, others with the leopard, and again others with the shark led to the formulation of the more general statement that rulers usually were associated with the strongest or most dangerous animal in their surroundings; a method applied earlier by Steward (1949/1955). The many tables in *The Early State* (1978: ch. 25) likewise indicate that there are important differences between the various regions. However, in terms of structure and functions, the political organization of early states showed a high degree of correspondence. We therefore decided to consider the early state as a separate category (Claessen and Skalník 1978, 1981; Claessen and Van de Velde 1987; Claessen and Oosten 1996). The same line of reasoning can be used for the concepts of chief and chieftdom. The problem now is, that such corresponding sociopolitical structures emerged in various evolutionary streams, and at different moments in time, independently of each other. There is no reason to suppose that there has been some relation between, say, the development of the Merovingian and Carolingian states in Western Europe, and the



development of the Maya states in Central America, though they occurred at more or less the same time; neither is there any reason to expect influences from Polynesian early states on the developments in Africa south of the Sahara – even though they developed in more or less the same period. And, although there can be pointed out structural correspondences between the realms of the Incas, the Mongols, and the Romans, these polities came into being in different periods and under different circumstances. Some relation between the declining Roman Empire and the developing early kingdoms in Western Europe can be expected to exist, but the Romans did neither influence the Mayas, nor the Indonesians, who founded in that same period the kingdom of Srivijaya (Wisseman Christie 1995: 266 ff.).

The possibility of a mutual influencing between neighboring states cannot be ignored in this discussion. There were often intensive contacts through which developments which appeared in the one society were soon known and adopted by all neighbors; this is 'peer polity interaction' (Renfrew and Cherry 1986). The chance, however, that complex cultural concepts manifested themselves over large distances and exerted a deep influence on peoples with a completely different culture is remote; there are no indications of this to have happened. It was only in the recent past that Western culture, violently or non-violently, has reached large areas of the world. A non-diffusionist explanation for the occurrence of structural correspondences in different evolutionary streams will have to be sought.

A first attempt to deal with this problem was undertaken a good seventy years ago by Julian H. Steward (1936/1955) in his study about the origins of the patrilineal band. He made it plain that under certain, specified conditions, cultural phenomena were repeated. Time and again, whenever these particular conditions were reproduced, a patrilocal band is said to have developed. Following this line of reasoning for the origins of the state (as was done by Steward 1949/1955), we can also think of specific conditions which made it necessary, perhaps inevitable, for the leaders of the societies concerned to develop new, structurally different, administrative principles (even when only following ideas based on local optimization!). Recently Jonathan Haas (1995: 18) pointed out that (early) states share 'basic characteristics of institutional bureaucracies, ruling elites, state religions, standing armies, and

centralized economies. These common characteristics, standing at the heart of the state form of organization, represent a cross-cultural response to similar forces of population pressure, resource shortage and increasing social complexity'.

A view, fully confirmed by our findings in *Ideology and the Emergence of Early States* (Claessen and Oosten 1996: 365–372). Here we suggested, moreover, that hard necessity induces governments to replace impractical or non-functional solutions with more effective ones. This point of view is a pragmatic one: there would only seem to be a few effective possibilities to govern a large-scale society and to keep it afloat (Haas 1995: 17; Hallpike 1986: 243, 277; Claessen 1970: 318–319). A pragmatic view – but a real Darwinian one, too, for less effectual institutions will not stand the test of hard reality, and will disappear. It is the survival of the fittest in *optima forma!*

The conditions under which a state organization emerges can be summarized as follows: there must be a population which is sizeable enough to permit a complex, stratified society; there must be a territory over which control is exercised; there must be an economic system which yields enough to be used to support numerous specialists and privileged persons; and there must be found an ideology which explains and justifies the existence of a hierarchical administrative organization (Claessen and Oosten 1996: 5). Developments – whether positive, or negative – in one or more of these conditions will oblige the ruler to take measures. If he is successful, an early state will emerge; if not, stagnation and decline will be the result and in the polity falls apart.

Summarizing what has been expounded above, it can be said that there are a number of factors which taken together explain the development of corresponding (socio) political structures in separate evolutionary streams:

- \* a number of specific conditions have to be met if an early state or a chiefdom is to take shape;
- \* comparable problems which have appeared at various places on earth lead to the development of comparable solutions;
- \* only few institutions work satisfactorily which results in only a limited variety in the remaining institutions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Several colleagues read and comment upon drafts of this article. They should not be held responsible for eventual errors in the text. I want to thank especially Dmitri M. Bondarenko (Institute for Africa Studies, Moscow), Donald V. Kurtz (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; University of Texas, San Antonio), Herbert S. Lewis (University of Wisconsin, Madison), and Albert A. Trouwborst (Catholic University, Nijmegen).

<sup>2</sup> In his recent article, Lewis (2001: 382) states that 'It was not Darwin that Boas and his students rejected but the entirely different teleological perspective of Herbert Spencer and his followers'. As Spencer's views dominated the evolutionistic notions of that period, this rejection did damage evolutionism seriously. Cf. Harris 1968: 260.

<sup>3</sup> The cases presented in *The Early State* are those of Angkor (Sedov), Ankole (Steinhart), Axum (Kobishchanov), the Aztecs (Kurtz), Chou China (Pokora), Ancient Egypt (Janssen), Capetian France (Teunis), Georgia (Koranashvili), Hawaii (Seaton), the Incas (Schaedel), Jimma (Lewis), Kachari (Maretina), Kuba (Vansina), Maurya (Seneviratne), the Mongols (Kradler), early Norway (Gurevich), the Scythians (Khazanov), Tahiti (Claessen), the Voltaic states (Skalník), Yoruba (Kochakova), and Zande (Kandert). In *The Study of the State* ed. by Claessen and Skalník, (1981) were discussed: Rwanda (Bäck), Adrar (Bonte), Mamprusi (Drucker-Brown), Sri Lanka (Gunawardana), the Mongols (Khazanov), Kushana (Narain), Deccan (Perlin), Kalinga and Andhra (Seneviratne), Bunyoro-Kitara (Steinhart), early Japan (Sugita), Maurya (Thapar), Kenedugu and Samori (Tymowski).

<sup>4</sup> By collapse is meant here the collapse (or decline) of the sociopolitical organization. In most cases collapse does not include the culture concerned, nor the disappearance of the population: Tainter 1988; Yoffee and Cowgill 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Her sample consisted of twenty-one African cases, and for comparative reasons, the Aztecs.

<sup>6</sup> There is an abundant literature on the problem of how hunters and gatherers survive, conquer the physical environment, and cope with their social surroundings. *E.g.*, Bird-David 1992; Lourandos 1997; Borsboom 2000; Lee and Devore 1968; Coon 1971; Stauder 1971; Persoon 1994; Nooter 1971; Service 1966.

<sup>7</sup> A lengthy discussion of forms of evolutionism is presented by Korotayev, Kradin, de Munck, and Lynsha (2000).

<sup>8</sup> In a recent article Carneiro (2000:58) states that the study of the evolution of [for example] chiefdoms 'benefits greatly from being depicted by stages which point to the successive structural stages that the process undergoes'.

<sup>9</sup> Dmitri Bondarenko informed me that Melotti's ideas were rather popular among Soviet historians. As it introduced multilinearity into the unilinear Soviet doctrine, his views were not formally recognized. There exists an extensive literature in Russian on the subject.

<sup>10</sup> My approach is influenced by the Leiden concept of the Field of Anthropological Study. The FAS concept was developed by J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong and P. E. de Josselin de Jong (de Josselin de Jong 1980) with respect to the Indonesian

archipelago as a conceptual tool for regional comparison. It enables us to consider different cultures as structural transformations of each other.

<sup>11</sup> There is an extensive literature on the ideological backgrounds of the African cultures. To mention some of the more relevant publications: Muller 1980, 1981; Van Binsbergen 1979, esp. pp. 137–157; Skalník 1996; Fillitz 1996; Shifferd 1996; Kochakova 1996; Simonse 1992: 210–230, 265–275; Vansina 1968, 1991; Claessen 1981: 80–81, 2000a: 178–181; Claessen and Oosten 1996: 368–370.

<sup>12</sup> We should be aware that the concept of the lineage for Africa is contested heavily by anthropologists as Adam Kuper (1982). Vansina (1991) relates that many ‘clans’ in the Congo region were only constructs of European travelers – occasioned by the fact that political relations here were expressed in kinship terms.

<sup>13</sup> To these early states belong Dahomey (Claessen 1987; Bay 1998); Rwanda (Bäck 1981; Maquet 1961); Burundi (Laely 1995; Mworoha 1977); Bunyoro (Beattie 1971); Ankole (Steinhart 1978, 1985); Buganda (Claessen 1987, 1991; Ray 1991); Kuba, Tio and Luba (Vansina 1978); Congo (Vansina 1991); Benin (Kochakova 1996; Bondarenko 2000); Jukun (Meek 1931); Asante (Wilks 1975, 1977); Swazi (Oosten 1990, 1993). General works that have been consulted: De Heusch 1987; Muller 1981, 1998; Connah 1987; Simonse 1992.

<sup>14</sup> The phenomenon of regicide was furiously debated in the literature. Evans-Pritchard (1948) maintained that this ritual regicide never occurred. Studies by Meek (1931), Beattie (1971), Muller (1980), and Simonse (1992) have made it plain that such ritual killing really did occur. In some early states (*e.g.* Dahomey) the king was not killed, but a substitute, and elsewhere (*e.g.* Buganda) there were held ceremonies to prolong the royal life. Such activities were mainly found in states where the political position of the ruler was strong.

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