

Chapter 1

Changing Definitions of Politics and Power

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States was a global media event, anticipated, analyzed, and celebrated around the world. In the run up to the election, even his most ardent supporters feared it would not be possible because although Americans seemed to agree they were in the midst of an economic and political crisis and shared a desire for change, many white Americans would not be able to bring themselves to vote for a black man with a foreign name that sounded suspiciously like that of public enemy number one, Osama Bin Laden. The long-term politicization of racist social relations, the growth and consolidation of black pride and solidarity since the civil rights movement of the 1950s, and the contestation of the “naturalization” of white domination in the US played a crucial role in the conditions under which his election was possible; as well as Obama’s cool, “post-racial” self-presentation as sophisticated, urbane, smart, and yet, “of the people.” The meaning of the event for those – many more – of us who will never be in a position to elect a US president is perhaps even more interesting. The election of Obama was a chance for Americans to confirm, largely to themselves, that the ideal of America as the land of opportunity for everyone and the guardian of democracy for the world, while it might have become somewhat tarnished as a result of bankers’ greed and the excesses of the “war on terror,” was still a cause for hope. But the incredible joy and relief with which Obama’s presidency was greeted across the world was also about hope. In Europe, the reputation of America rose immediately, even amongst social movement activists, along with the expectation that American foreign policy would now become fairer and more cooperative. Shortly after the election, I saw

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graffiti in an East London park that I interpret as a tribute to the new beginning offered by Obama's presidency: "Anti-Americanism is a conspiracy against radicalism."

Obama's election cannot properly be understood without addressing how culture and politics are intertwined. Contemporary political sociology is concerned with cultural politics as what we might call the "politics of politics." From this perspective, what events *mean* to those who interpret and act on them is what matters. What counts as "political" in terms of content and style must first be made political; it must be made visible and relevant to visions of how social relations are and could be organized. Processes of politicization in this respect are very far from under the control of professional politicians and public relations experts, however hard they try to set the agenda. But contemporary political sociology is also concerned with cultural politics in a wider sense: what is made "political" is not simply confined to what takes place within government, political parties, and the state. The perspective of cultural politics also helps us make sense of how the meanings of social relations and identities are consistently challenged wherever they are framed as unjust, exclusionary, and destructive of the capacities of individuals and groups.

Understanding "politicization" across the social field has not typically been the subject matter of political sociology until fairly recently. Political sociology has never been easily distinguishable as a field of research from others in the discipline of sociology. In general terms, however, it has been seen as concerned, above all, with relations between state and society. Most practitioners would probably agree with Orum's broad definition: political sociology directs attention toward "the social circumstances of politics, that is, to how politics both is shaped by and shapes other events in societies. Instead of treating the political arena and its actors as independent from other happenings in a society, [political sociology] treats that arena as intimately related to all social institutions" (Orum, 1983: 1). In principle, given the wide range of this definition, it might be expected that political sociologists would be interested in power as at least a potentiality in all social relations, and to have elaborated a conception of politics as an activity conducted across a range of social institutions. In practice, however, although they have sometimes gestured toward such an approach, the focus of political sociology has been politics at the level of the nation-state. It has shared what may be seen as the prejudice of modern sociology for taking "society" as the unit of analysis and treating it as a distinct, internally coherent, and self-regulating entity, organized around the nation-state. The most influential definition of power in sociology is that of Max Weber: power is "the chance of a man or a number

of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action” (Weber, 1948a: 180).¹ On this definition, power could be a dimension of any social relation, and politics need not be seen as a highly specialized activity exercised only in relation to a specific institution. In fact, however, Weber, like others, focused his attention on the state as a special kind of institution that successfully possesses a monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory (Weber, 1948b: 78). As Dowse and Hughes argue in their introduction to political sociology, although there seems to be no compelling *analytic* argument why the discipline should have focused its attention on state institutions, *as a matter of fact*, political sociologists have concerned themselves principally with the ways in which society has affected the state (Dowse and Hughes, 1972: 7).²

Over the last couple of decades, however, political sociology has shifted away from this focus on how society affects the state. From the point of view of contemporary political sociology, such an approach is fundamentally flawed. In the first place, economic, political, and cultural globalization means that what the state is and does is now itself in question. Though action taken in the “name of the state” is often very effective, and with the “war on terror” following 9/11, state violence has become more visible in some respects, state action must now almost invariably take into account institutions, processes, and actors in relation to which states were previously considered sovereign and autonomous. At the same time, the class formations around which national political parties were organized have become fragmented and the political concerns associated with class-based political parties problematized. The structure of the workforce has changed and with it, the expectation of stable, secure working lives for many people. The fragmentation and pluralization of values and lifestyles, with the growth of the mass media and consumerism and the decline of stable occupations and communities, all mean that previously taken-for-granted social identities have become politicized. In this context, the rise of social movements and networks organized differently from parties, and representing non-class identities such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, have changed both the form and the content of politics. Wider definitions of power and politics are needed to encompass the formation, contestation, and transformation of identities and institutions across the social field, if fluid, fragmented, and fast-changing contemporary social relations are to be understood.

Empirical changes would not be sufficient, however, to create a new approach to political sociology if there were not also new theoretical tools with which to make sense of them. There has been a paradigm shift in

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political sociology away from state-centered, class-based models of political participation, or non-participation, toward an understanding of politics as a potentiality of all social experience. It is in this sense that contemporary political sociology is concerned with cultural politics, understood in the broadest possible sense as the contestation and transformation of social identities and structures.

In the following three sections of this chapter, we will begin our discussion of political sociology with a look back at how it developed through the study of the work of the “founding fathers,” Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. We will then go on to consider the “analytics of power” developed by Michel Foucault, the single most influential thinker on the development of contemporary political sociology, and the work on “governmentality” that directly draws inspiration from his writings on politics and power. I will then introduce the most important theoretical themes of contemporary political sociology and explain why the concept of “cultural politics” is so useful to understanding “politics of politics” today. Finally, there will be an outline of the chapters to follow, indicating how each one deals with a particular theme in contemporary political sociology.

1.1 The Marxist Tradition of Political Sociology

In many respects, it is far from evident that the state should have a central place in Marxist analyses of capitalism, given their overwhelming theoretical commitment to the view that it is economic relations which ultimately determine all social and political life. Marx himself, concerned primarily as he was with capitalism as a mode of production, concentrated on the economic level, and had relatively underdeveloped and tentative views on the state. In fact, Adam Przeworski goes so far as to suggest that, given his theory of capitalism as a self-perpetuating economic system of production and exchange, there was no room in it for theorizing the state as contributing to its reproduction (Przeworski, 1990: 6970). Although this is an extreme view, based on Marx’s later work, it is true that it has proved very difficult for neo-Marxists to give due weight to ideology and politics without giving up the central theoretical Marxist commitment to economic class struggle as the motor of history.

The roots of later Marxist theorizations of political power as a translation of economic power concentrated in the modern state are there already in Marx’s writings. Although Marx had no fully developed theory of the state, he did discuss it in various ways throughout his writings. Here we

shall follow Dunleavy and O'Leary's (1987) classification of Marx's analyses of the state into three distinct and somewhat contradictory positions on how it contributes to the reproduction of the capitalist system and the economic power of the bourgeoisie. All of them have been followed up in different ways by neo-Marxist theorists (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 209). First, in the instrumental model, the coercive aspect of the state is emphasized; it is seen above all as repressive of working-class resistance to exploitation. The "executive of the modern state" is "but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Marx, 1977: 223). On this model, economic power is quite simply translated into political power, by which means the dominant bourgeoisie rules over subordinate classes through the liberal state. Second, in his later, more empirical writings, Marx suggested a different model of the state – the arbiter model (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 210). In "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," he sketches the modern state in such a way as to suggest its relative autonomy from the interests of the bourgeoisie. The modern state has grown so strong that in exceptional moments, when the bourgeoisie cannot completely dominate the other classes against which it must struggle, it may become an arena for competing interests, an ostensible mediator, and may even act independently to limit the power of the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1992). However, "state power does not hover in mid-air"; it is only class interests that are represented at the political level and, ultimately, economic power will determine how state power is to be used (Marx, 1992: 237). Despite the relative autonomy of the modern state, then, economic power is translated into political power since it needs the material support of the historically ascendant class, and it therefore works ultimately to ensure the economic advantage of the bourgeoisie. Third, in his mature economic work, Marx suggested a third model of the state: the functionalist version. In this view, developed in *Capital*, volume 3, the state is "superstructural," determined entirely by changes in the economic "base" of society. The state apparatus, government, and legal forms operate in order to optimize the conditions for capital accumulation, regardless of how directly the bourgeoisie manages state institutions and irrespective of the balance of forces in society (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 21011). In this understanding of the state, political power is irrelevant; the state is but an epiphenomenon of the economic logic of the capitalist system which reproduces itself in every social and political institution to the advantage of the dominant economic class.

For some time after Marx's death, this economistic model of capitalist reproduction was Marxist orthodoxy. Although early Marxists gave some

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consideration to the role of the state in sustaining capitalism, theorists such as Kautsky and Plekhanov, concerned above all to establish Marxism as a rigorous science, worked to discover the historical laws by which the economy developed. They, therefore, reduced the superstructure – the political, ideological, and cultural – to emanations of the economic base (Taylor, 1995: 24952). It is the neo-Marxist rejection of this simplistic economism which in recent years has led theorists to consider political power at the level of the state as relatively autonomous of economic power.

Neo-Marxism

Writing in the 1920s, Antonio Gramsci was the first Marxist to theorize the ideological and political superstructures as relatively autonomous of the economic base. As such, he was a major influence on other neo-Marxists such as Louis Althusser. The key term for Gramsci is “hegemony” which means the way in which the dominant class gains consent for its rule through compromises and alliances with some class fractions and the disorganization of others, and also the way in which it maintains that rule in a stable social formation (Gramsci, 1971; Simon, 1982). In terms of Dunleavy and O’Leary’s typology, Gramsci’s is an arbiter theory of the state: the state is formed by the balance of forces achieved in the struggle for hegemony. For Gramsci, a class does not take state power; it becomes the state (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 69). However, Gramsci is innovative in Marxism in not thinking of the state as the institution in which politics takes place. According to Gramsci, hegemony is gained in the first place in civil society where ideology is embodied in communal forms of life in such a way that it becomes the taken-for-granted common sense of the people. All relations of civil society involve issues of power and struggle, not just class relations. Politics is more a cultural sensibility than an institutional activity for Gramsci. In this respect, he has been an important influence on the political sociology of cultural politics, especially through the work of Stuart Hall in cultural studies (Morley and Chen, 1996).

Gramsci’s thought in this respect was limited, however, by his commitment to economism. Gramsci, like Althusser, saw ideology as practices that form subjects; for both thinkers, our experience and our relationship to the world are mediated through ideology. In Gramsci’s view, subjects are not necessarily class subjects, but rather collective political wills formed by articulating ideas and values in different combinations in order to draw different groups into the hegemonic project. However, as a

Marxist, Gramsci was committed to the belief that ideological struggle is grounded in class struggle; he, therefore, argued that there must always be a single unifying principle in every hegemonic formation and that this can only be given by a fundamental economic class. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 69) point out, this is not just to say that, ultimately, the economy determines politics, but also to see the economy itself as outside hegemony, as somehow naturally given and non-political. As they argue, this means that there is nothing for Marxists to do but identify the direction in which the economy is heading; there is no possibility of political intervention, or even of effective class struggle, in the domain that really matters to Marxists, the economy. In their view, Gramsci limited the scope of politics in that it should be seen as fundamental to the founding and contestation of any social order whatsoever. Gramsci's model is also limited in that, seeing politics as ultimately rooted in class struggle, it cannot give sufficient weight to social movements organized around gender, race, sexual politics, the environment, and so on. However, to reject economic determinism and the centrality of the class struggle is to go beyond Marxism altogether.

Similar issues arise in the work of Althusser. Although his project was to rescue Marxism from economism, insofar as it remains within the Marxist framework, economism cannot be avoided. Althusser maintained that the state should be seen as relatively autonomous of the economic base. However, his theory of the state is better described as "functionalist," rather than in terms of Dunleavy and O'Leary's arbiter model. Although he insists that political structures have their own laws of development, there is no discussion of class conflict at this level; the state is fully implicated in the logic of capitalism, where it functions to reproduce the mode of production (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 255). As Althusser sees it, the state is relatively autonomous of the economic base because, although the economy determines "in the last instance," it does so by determining another level of the mode of production as dominant according to the specificity of the mode of production: in feudalism, religion is dominant; in capitalism, the state. Furthermore, since the capitalist mode of production requires the state to reproduce its conditions of existence, there is a reciprocal determination between the economic and political levels; the last instance of economic determination never arrives since the economy is itself formed by the political (Althusser, 1971).

Insofar as Althusser's theory of the state is functionalist, it has been criticized as involving a sophisticated form of economic reductionism. The problem is that, if the economy is determining in the last instance, then whatever the form and dynamic of contingent, actually existing capitalist

states, ultimately they are irrelevant in relation to the necessity of the reproduction of capitalism itself. In fact, the term “relative autonomy” is oxymoronic; if autonomy is relative, then ultimately it is not autonomy at all. As Paul Hirst argues, Althusser is trapped by his own question – “how is it possible for capitalist social relations to exist?” – since there is no general answer to this question which would not involve him in the teleological logic of functionalist explanations. Althusser is searching for the causes of an existing state of affairs which the explanation then takes to be necessary for their existence; in effect, the consequences make the causes necessary (Hirst, 1979: 435). The conclusion that Hirst draws from this is that, if the relative autonomy of the state is to be taken seriously, there can be no reduction of the political to the economic: the form of social classes produced as effects of politics must be analyzed as such.

In fact, the most influential aspect of Althusser’s work has been the importance he gave to issues of ideology and subjectivity. Althusser saw the state as working through the repressive institutions of the police and the army, but also through ideology embedded in state institutions – for him, a mixture of public and private institutions, including those of education, the family, trade unions, and religion. Althusser saw society as a complex of structures, each with its own dynamic, linked into a totality by the ultimate determination of the economy. The function of ideology is to make individuals into subjects who will fit the positions provided by those structures. Although it is described as consisting of “representations” – “images, myths, ideas, or concepts” – ideology does not work through the conscious mind, but in an unconscious relation to the world which is lived in social practices, such as religious rituals, political meetings, and so on (Althusser, 1971: 3944). Althusser’s theory of ideology avoids the pitfalls of the Marxist notion of “false consciousness,” in which people are seen as dupes of the capitalist system, since he does not see ideology as consciousness at all; in his view, ideology is itself material, involving experiences lived in real social practices. However, ideology does involve a degree of mystification in that subjects necessarily live an imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence (Barrett, 1991: chapter 5).

Althusser’s lasting influence lies in the way in which he situated ideology as a matter of *practices* rather than conscious ideas and beliefs and the emphasis he gave to subjectivity as a means of social control. We will return to this point in section 1.5, where we discuss cultural politics. However, the Marxist epistemology that gave him the assurance to assert that subjects systematically misrepresent reality is problematic. Althusser maintained that Marxism is scientific because it is “open” and

“counter-intuitive,” where ideology is “closed,” and that it draws its problems from politics and practice rather than from critical theory (Benton, 1994: 45–9). This is problematic since Marxism has invariably seemed extremely dogmatic to non-believers, and at the same time, it has been riven by factional disputes. Furthermore, it is difficult to draw a distinction between science and ideology according to the “openness” of science given that, following Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) very influential work on science; it is generally acknowledged that even the natural sciences are less concerned with genuinely testing theories than with confirming them.

1.2 The Weberian Tradition of Political Sociology

The autonomy of the political at the level of the state is central to Weber’s political sociology. In fact, Weber’s work stands at the beginning of a tradition of thought that is explicitly anti-Marxist on just this issue of the autonomy of the state and the importance of liberal democratic politics. As a liberal committed to the defense of individual freedom, which he saw threatened in modernity, Weber opposed his work to Marx’s economic determinism. He took the concentration of the means of administration in the nation-state to be as important as the concentration of the means of production in capitalism theorized by Marx (Bottomore, 1993: 1011).

As we saw above, Weber defined power in such a way as to suggest that it may be present in all social relations, so that politics need not be seen as confined to the single arena of the state. In fact, his definition of politics is also very broad: “[it] comprises any kind of *independent* leadership in action” (Weber, 1948a: 77). Despite these definitions, however, Weber immediately narrowed the field of his analysis to the power and politics of the nation-state. He saw the state as the most powerful institution in modern society since it has gained the legitimate monopoly of force over a given territory, and, therefore, took politics to involve “striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state” (Weber, 1948a: 78). As David Held points out, Weber’s emphasis on territoriality is crucial; the modern state is a nation-state in competitive relation to other nation-states, rather than with armed segments of its own population (Held, 1987: 150). Weberian sociology, therefore, explicitly shares the propensity of sociology in general, and included Marxism in the ways we have discussed, for taking total societies organized around nation-states as the object of its analysis.

Weber describes the state as gaining its power in modernity by concentrating the means of administration in the hands of an absolute monarch, expropriating the “ownership of the means of administration,” in a way similar to that described by Marx in the case of workers who are deprived of control of the means of production (Weber, 1948b: 812). Officials in modern, rational bureaucracies have little or no control over what they do since the rules and procedures of bureaucracies take on a life of their own, restricting the activities and decisions of those who work in them to the functions of the offices they fill. In this way, bureaucracy forms a “steel-hard housing” within which most individuals in modern societies must live and work, since its effects are felt not only by those who work in administration, but also by those who are administered.³ According to Weber, this form of life is the price that must be paid for living in a highly complex and technically advanced society. Bureaucratic administration is the only rational way of managing economically and politically differentiated societies since economic enterprises need predictability above all; without it, they cannot calculate in order to ensure profitability. This is why the socialist dream that the state will wither away once the dominant class has been deprived of its power in the ownership of the means of production is more like a nightmare for Weber: to abolish private property would increase the power of the state since there would be no countervailing power of the market, and management of the economy would come entirely under the control of bureaucrats (Held, 1987: 1504).

Although Weber saw himself as a neutral social scientist, his political sociology has a normative dimension. He is concerned to analyze representative democracy as it actually works in modern societies, arguing that the ideal of participatory democracy cannot be practiced in large-scale, complex societies. On the other hand, however, he is also concerned that democracy may be the only way in which the “steel-hard housing” of modern bureaucratic power can be broken. Clearly, the elite administration that must run modern societies cannot be directly accountable to the masses; this would make for inefficiency and unpredictability, especially given what Weber sees as the irrationality and ignorance of the general population. Democracy is important, nevertheless, primarily because elections provide testing grounds for charismatic leaders who are then given the mandate of the people and who can establish the goals the bureaucrats are to realize. Such leaders offer the only chance of overriding the bureaucratic machinery (Giddens, 1972: 389). More conventionally, democracy is important because, even if it only offers the opportunity to dismiss the ineffective from office, it thereby provides a certain degree of protection for the people (Held, 1987: 15460). In Weber’s view, democracy is less

the rule of the people than the rule of an elite which combines exceptional leaders and bureaucratic experts.

Political sociologists have been inspired by Weber's view of liberal democratic politics. Elite theorists tend to see democracy as working along the lines proposed by Weber (Marsh, 1995: 285) and, although the history of its intellectual development has not been thoroughly traced, there are affinities between pluralist theories and Weber's view that there are many sources of power, not just the economy, and that elites do not rule supreme but can be challenged by organized groups in the political process (Held, 1987: 187). However, it may be that Weber's view of power and politics is problematic in terms of his own sociological theory. Despite his belief in democracy as a way of mitigating the power of bureaucracy, Weber was generally pessimistic, seeing the "polar night of icy darkness" in which individual freedom is highly constrained by impersonal administration as a likely outcome of the development of modern societies (Weber, 1948a: 128). But this pessimism is linked to his view that the majority of the population is uninterested in, and ignorant of, political matters. There are undoubtedly long-term trends towards lack of interest in and apathy concerning party political matters; the proportion of the population in Western liberal democracies who use their vote is in steady decline. On the other hand, if politics is defined more widely, we may see individuals as much more actively engaged in re-making social relations than he was able to discern from within the terms of the political sociology he founded.

Elite theorists

Elite theorists are concerned with the question of how and why it is that a minority must always rule over a majority, which they see as inevitable in any society. Political elite theorists are, above all, concerned with the decision-makers in society, those they see as holding power as a cohesive, relatively self-conscious group (Parry, 1969: 134). Modern elite theorists have been extremely influential in political sociology. Joseph Schumpeter, in particular, has been an important figure as a popularizer of Roberto Michels's ideas on political parties and Weber's theory of democracy. He influenced the generation of sociologists and political scientists involved in the professionalization of the discipline in the 1950s, especially in the US. According to Bottomore (1993: 28), so great was this influence that, for some time afterwards, political scientists in particular took electoral politics and voting behavior as the only worthwhile topic of study, to the exclusion of the substance of political conflicts.

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Michels took the concentration of power in the hands of an elite to be a necessary outcome of complex organizations. He is responsible for the emphasis in empirical political sociology on analyzing the dynamics of party politics. His famous “iron law of oligarchy” states that, in modern societies, parties need to be highly organized and so, inevitably, become oligarchic, being hierarchically run by party leaders and bureaucracy such that the bulk of members are excluded from decision-making (Michels, 1962). Michels was critical of this process, although he saw it as tragically inevitable. As a socialist, he was disappointed that socialist parties would be unable to realize their democratic ideals, unlike Weber and Schumpeter for whom bureaucratic and hierarchical parties are the only means by which political leadership in large-scale societies can emerge (Scott, 1996a: 317–18).

Developing Michels’s thesis, Schumpeter saw democracy as nothing but competition between political parties whose elite members deal in votes, just as businessmen deal in commodities. It does not, and should not, mean rule by the people; it is rather a method for arriving at political decisions by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote. Once elected, professional politicians must be allowed to rule, assisted by a strong, independent bureaucracy of expert administrators, since the stability of the political system requires respect for the judgment of elected representatives (Schumpeter, 1943).

A radical version of Weberian elite theory is the institutional elite theory proposed by C. W. Mills. In Mills’s view, the elitism of the US in the twentieth century is a serious hindrance to democracy rather than the factor that makes it possible and viable. As he sees it, power has become concentrated and unified in the elites of three institutions in the US: the military, the corporate, and the political; the connections between them having been strengthened by the growth of a permanent war establishment in a privatized incorporated economy since World War II. This concentration, combined with the one-way communication of the mass media as it is organized by elites, makes ordinary citizens ignorant and rather complacent, although fitfully miserable, about the extent to which they lack control over their lives (Mills, 1956).

Mills’s argument is similar to that of Marxist elite theorists, notably Ralph Miliband, for whom the capitalist class assures its reproduction by means of the close links it enjoys with the leaders of such powerful institutions as political parties, the civil service, the media, and the military (Miliband, 1969). They differ, however, in that Mills refuses to see the power elite as necessarily unified by virtue of its economic class position and social background, arguing that the shared interests and perspectives

of its members are the contingent product of particular historical developments. Marxists, of course, explain the unity of the elite in terms of the interests of capitalism (Bottomore, 1964: 34). However, a comparison of Miliband's and Mills's studies clearly reveals the convergence of Weberians and Marxists on the issue of the relative autonomy of the state. For Miliband, like other neo-Marxists, the state must be able to separate itself from the immediate interests of ruling-class factions if it is to be effective in ensuring the interests of capitalism in the long run (Held, 1987: 207). For Mills, as for other Weberians, however much it is conditioned by elite decisions taken elsewhere, the political elite of the state has its own effectivity.

Elite theory has tended to approach studies of democratic processes from a conservative perspective, radical and Marxist elite theorists notwithstanding. Schumpeter's work has not only focused attention on electoral politics as if they were politics *tout court*, it has also led to "actually existing" democracy being taken as a more or less perfect instrument of rule, with scope for only minor, technical improvements (Bottomore, 1993: 28). In effect, for empirical political sociologists – the charge is less valid in the case of more conceptual and normative work (Held, 1987: 178–85) – a limited view of what politics involves has been strongly linked to a limited view of what democracy must be if it is to be practicable and to allow for stable government. The state-centric view of power and politics held by elite theorists is linked to their understanding of mass society consisting of a passive, ignorant, and apathetic population: technically incompetent to participate fully in politics, according to competitive elitists; and continually deceived as to its real interests, according to more critical versions. Once politics is seen as a matter of everyday life, however, the emphasis changes completely. Contemporary political sociologists see society itself as cut across with inequities of power, any of which may be politicized and, therefore, become the focus of contestation. Far from being passive, social agents are seen as engaged in remaking their own identities and the institutions of their everyday lives.

Pluralism

Unlike elite theory, theorists of pluralism do tend to see citizens as actively involved in politics.⁴ As pluralists see it, politics is a matter of competing interest groups, none of which can dominate completely over any of the others since all have access to resources of different kinds. Furthermore, they see the state itself as a set of competing and conflicting institutions, rather than a monolithic entity which exerts its power over the rest of

society (Smith, 1995: 211). For this reason, they avoid the term, preferring to think in terms of government. Similarly, the “people” in a democracy is not a unified whole with a single will to be exerted, far less an apathetic, incompetent mass which needs to be ruled by an elite. Democratic politics involves endless bargaining in order to influence government policy, which is nothing more than a compromise between the differing interest groups involved in the political process (Dowse and Hughes, 1972: 135).

In response to their critics, pluralists have revised what has been taken as naïve view of the openness of liberal democratic politics. Neo-pluralists see elites, and especially corporate elites, as having a greater degree of influence than other groups on government policy; they take it that this may not be openly and visibly exerted in the political process and that it may constrain the effective influence of other interest groups (Held, 1987: 202). In this respect, in neo-pluralism, there is a convergence between neo-Marxism, pluralism, and radical elite theory (Marsh, 1995). However, neo-pluralists do not fully endorse the presuppositions of elite theory; instead, they argue that the elite are not unified, nor are they capable of manipulating and deceiving the citizens into accepting elite rule. On the pluralist view, elites must be seen as existing only insofar as they are genuinely responsive to the interest groups they purport to serve (Dowse and Hughes, 1972: 138). Neo-pluralists also depart from the assumptions of neo-Marxists: although business may on occasion subvert the democratic process, this is a contingent matter; politics at the level of the state is primary and so it cannot be the case that the state is ultimately driven by the interests of any particular group, including the capitalist class.

Although pluralists take a wide view of politics as central to social life and independent of the state, ultimately they share the definition of politics held by classical political sociologists. Pluralists are interested in the plurality of interest groups which form and re-form in the social only insofar as they orient their demands to governmental institutions. Although the state is seen as little more than the arena in which social groups engage in political conflict, it is only insofar as these conflicts take place at the level of the state that they are treated *as* political (McClure, 1992: 118–19). By definition, for pluralists there is no politics outside the state.

This limited pluralist definition of politics is linked to a restricted definition of power which, although wider than that of other schools in traditional political sociology, nevertheless makes it impossible to see the construction and contestation of social identities as political. Famously, Dahl (1956: 13) defines power as “a realistic ... relationship, such as A’s capacity for acting in such a manner as to control B’s responses.” This

presupposes an already constituted social actor who is in possession of power such that he or she is able to control the effects produced. As critics of pluralism have pointed out, the emphasis on observable effects means that they neglect ideas and the way in which the political agenda may be shaped in such a way that direct manipulation of the outcome of the political process is unnecessary (Lukes, 1974). Indeed, we must understand the very formation of the identities, capacities, and concerns of social groups as effects of power. The formation of identities and the construction of political perspectives are much more fundamental ways in which the politics of politics is structured than by decisions taken in a centralized bureaucracy.

Although pluralists do not take the interests of the social groups they study as given, their definitions of power and politics prevent them from understanding the formation and contestation of political identities in the social field and lead them to focus only on the way in which individuals try to maximize their interests at the level of government. In this respect, the pluralist perspective remains within the framework of traditional political sociology. A theory of politics of this kind cannot begin to grasp the asymmetries of power between groups in civil society that have been politicized by the activities of new social movements since the 1960s; pluralists were, in fact, extremely surprised by this development (Held, 1987: 199–200).

1.3 The Durkheimian Tradition of Political Sociology

Durkheim's work has not had the same degree of status and influence as that of Marx and Weber in political sociology. For Durkheim, the state was of relatively little significance in creating and maintaining social order, which is for him the key problematic of sociology. Durkheim's interests lay rather in questions of social solidarity, and especially with the possibility that the rise of individualism might give members of modern societies a sense of belonging together rather than resulting in a war of all against all. The state does have an important role to play in securing social order, but it can only do so by means of a moral consciousness shared by all members of society – even if the state must sometimes take the lead in formulating it (Giddens, 1971: 102; Lukes, 1973: 668–74). For Durkheim, the state is an outcome of the division of labor that creates modern societies, whilst at the same time it contributes to the expansion of individual freedom. Most importantly, it takes on the function of reflecting on and refining society's "collective representations," the social

symbols that express beliefs and values in public rituals and ceremonies, and which guide individuals and constrain their behavior. Durkheim famously, and strikingly, likens the state to the brain: “its principal function is to think” (Durkheim, 1992: 51). Modern societies can only be bound by “organic solidarity,” which is experienced by those who find themselves interdependent because they occupy different but equally essential roles in the collective endeavor that is society, and who are bound by common respect for the rights of the individual. This is compared to the mechanical solidarity experienced in simpler pre-modern societies where a strong sense of community is generated out of the similarities of members’ lives. The state fosters solidarity by creating and transforming collective representations into binding decisions in law and policy for the good of all (Vogt, 1993).

Although Durkheim generally writes as if what is functional for social order will inevitably come to pass, according to Hans-Peter Muller, his political sociology is intended to show how organic solidarity *might* be achieved. Durkheim actually lived through times of great conflict in nineteenth century France, which he attributed to the difficult transition from an agrarian-corporatist to an industrial-capitalist society (Muller, 1993: 95; see also Lukes, 1973). Unlike Marx or Weber, however, Durkheim did not see conflict as intrinsic to modern societies. On the contrary, where there is conflict, this is attributable to lack of proper social and normative integration. According to Durkheim, it was necessary to reform French society, to prevent egoism triumphing over moral individualism, by coordinating the democratic state, occupational groups, and the individualistic ideal. This meant reform to create a meritocratic society: Durkheim saw inherited wealth as undermining basic levels of trust in the legal contracts on which modern economies depend (Parkin, 1992: chapter 4). It also involved the fostering of occupational associations, or guilds, to mediate between the state and the individual, to protect the individual from the state if it should become too strong, but above all to foster moral consciousness for the common good. For example, Durkheim believed that individuals should vote as members of their professional associations rather than according to where they happen to live, in order to encourage each person to reflect on their shared interests with others in their group and, by extension, with others in the society. Associations are moral communities intended to reshape self-interest for the good of all rather than to further the aims of their members; though linked to occupation, Durkheim seems to have imagined a guild as more like a civil rights organization than like a trade union. This makes him something of a pluralist, though in a rather limited sense, given his overarching

concern with harmony between members of society rather than conflict (see Cladis, 2005). Durkheim also seems to have something in common with elite theorists of democracy insofar as he sees “certain personages or classes in society” employed in the state as particularly well suited to interpret society’s moral consciousness on behalf of everyone else (Parkin, 1992: 39).

Insofar as he regarded a high degree of substantive equality to be absolutely essential to well-functioning modern societies, Durkheim was not as conservative as he is often seen (Turner, 1992). It is in the more fundamental aspects of Durkheimian sociology that we see his conservatism. Despite his proposals for democratic reform, Durkheim’s conceptualization of society actually has no place for politics at all. For Durkheim, social conflicts are inherently pathological, because he makes no allowance for valid disagreements over the interpretation of “collective representations”: not only must there be consensus on cultural norms for society to work harmoniously, to be morally healthy, but the right norms for a particular form of society are identifiable by the sociologist. The social conflict Marx and Weber see as intrinsic to modern societies, Durkheim sees as “pathological,” at best a result of difficult transition to a properly functioning new society in which the science of sociology, which Durkheim saw himself as discovering, has a special legislative role. There is no place for politics in Durkheim’s sociology, only for scientifically informed social reform; politics is contingent and partial, fundamentally unnecessary to a properly functioning society, and actually inherently immoral.

Neo-Durkheimian political sociology

Neo-Durkheimian political sociology is inspired by Durkheim’s work on the importance of collective representations as both constraining and enabling, and the way in which they are reinforced and elaborated in rituals, performances, and solidaristic passions. This work takes Durkheim’s problematic of the moral basis of social cohesion as its object of study, and especially the cultural conditions of democracy and social justice. Where the optimism of Durkheimian functionalism ultimately denies the importance of politics (as Lukes puts it, in his early work at least, Durkheim tends to assume “an identity between the ‘normal,’ the ideal, and the about-to-happen” [Lukes, 1973: 177]), neo-Durkheimian studies focus on the *difficulties* of achieving and maintaining solidarity, and on the way in which the very definitions of social justice may be expanded in complex contemporary societies.

In his work *The Civil Sphere*, Jeffrey Alexander builds on the later work of Durkheim on religion to argue that, although contemporary societies have been transformed by secular humanism, spiritual dimensions are vital to the construction of social solidarity.⁵ He argues that there is an underlying consensus in American society that democracy is sacred, and that it must be protected from profane counter-democratic persons, events, and activities. The civil sphere is organized around cultural codes that maintain this fundamental binary opposition and which are available, and invariably drawn on, when concrete political disputes arise. The civil sphere exists alongside other spheres in differentiated societies, as a “solidary sphere, in which a certain kind of universalizing community comes to be culturally defined and to some degree institutionally enforced” (Alexander, 2006: 31). Membership in the civil sphere depends on accounting for oneself as motivated and as acting democratically (rationally, reasonably, and realistically, and not irrationally, hysterically, or unrealistically) to support democratic social relationships (which are open, trusting, truthful) and institutions (which are rule-regulated, not arbitrary, promote equality not hierarchy and inclusion not exclusion). Whatever or whoever comes to be defined as profane is seen as polluting, “to be isolated and marginalized at the boundaries of civil society, and sometimes even destroyed” (Alexander and Smith, 1993: 164). The civil sphere may be expanded to include class and status groups previously excluded from its terms where those stigmatized as counter-democratic are able to claim, and to institutionalize, their membership through its cultural codes. The codes of the civil sphere may also be used to “invade” the non-civil spheres of the economy, the state, the family, and religious interaction. Alexander gives detailed attention to the social movements that have successfully used the language of the ideal community of the civil sphere to bring black Americans, women, and Jews into the democratic mainstream. Ultimately, this is possible because the civil sphere is premised on moral individualism; it is the rights of the person that are sacred in contemporary societies. The civil sphere therefore contains within it the possibility of expanding terms of democratic and social justice.

Alexander’s “strong programme” of cultural sociology, of which *The Civil Sphere* is the most highly developed exemplar, involves a sophisticated account of how culture, structure, and social action fit together. We will draw on some of the insights of this program later in the chapter to develop the theoretical framework for analyzing cultural politics. In terms of political sociology, however, *The Civil Sphere*, whilst it brilliantly updates Durkheim’s work for the twenty-first century, also shares some of the difficulties of that work with regard to politics.

Alexander's theorization of *The Civil Sphere* does not neglect political agents. There is nothing necessary or functional about the expansion of the cultural codes of the civil sphere to include those persons and situations previously excluded. Successful use of democratic symbols is contingent; it depends on the mobilization of social movements to "repair" solidarity. Nevertheless, there is a sense in Alexander's work that American society (the concrete example he analyses) is inherently just; some groups have found themselves excluded from the civil sphere, but this is the result of a mistaken attribution on the part of historically located political actors who, with the benefit of hindsight, the sociologist identifies as themselves profane, counter-democratic. Alexander presents his account as sociologically neutral, but, actually, it favors egalitarian social reform rather than authoritarian interpretations of characteristics of belonging and social organization. Like Durkheim's own theory of social reform, however, it is an account which does not acknowledge its own political position. What justifies treating the historical examples from which Alexander extrapolates the deep structure of society as more than just that – singular, successful, examples of how the use of progressive terms have been deployed on a number of separate occasions? In fact, Alexander's understanding of the way in which the deep cultural structure of society tends towards justice for all in the civil sphere makes politics oddly peripheral to his sociology. Although conflicts over interpretations of democratic codes are intrinsic to Alexander's view of society in a way that they are not part of Durkheim's, because respect for individual rights is "hard-wired" into the sacred democratic codes, in a very fundamental sense no human being is ever completely excluded from the civil sphere. While a particular group may be historically and contingently excluded as "polluting," the universalizing codes of the civil sphere themselves promote a logic that inherently resists the interpretation of any individual as "outside" democratic society. In enabling, even requiring, the "outsider" position to be challenged, the cultural codes themselves therefore work against the "absolute" binary opposition between sacred and profane: the "polluted" outsider is in some way always already sacred. It is important to note that, for Alexander, definitions of counter-democratic "evil" are theoretically as fundamental to that binary structure as definitions of the sacred, but it is surely not by chance that his analyses of concrete events and social movements are invariably progressive. The problem here is reminiscent of the problem with Durkheim's functionalism: what is functional must in some way be normal and ideal. Similarly, the civil sphere is already really, deeply just, and therefore any contingent historical injustices not only do not alter that but will be, must be, eradicated. Though

they may involve blood, tears, even questions of life and death, political disputes are rather superficial and ephemeral viewed in the light of the deep and necessary tendencies towards justice of the civil sphere itself.

Durkheim's foundational work should be seen alongside that of Marx and Weber as influential on political sociology. In fact, it gains in importance in contemporary political sociology because of the importance Durkheim gave to how symbolic meaning is implicated in the constitution of social relations. There is evidence, for example, that Ferdinand de Saussure, a crucial figure in the formation of contemporary political sociology – we will consider the significance of his work towards theorizing cultural politics in section 1.5 below – was directly influenced by Durkheim. As Alexander points out, even if there was no direct influence, the resonances of Durkheim's ideas about symbols in Saussure's "semiotics" are substantial (Alexander, 1998: 4–5). Just as important as a good grasp of symbolic meanings to contemporary political sociology, however, are workable definitions of power and politics that enable us to map how meanings are contested by concrete social actors and with what effects in constituting identities and perspectives across the social field. For this, we turn to the work of Michel Foucault. As we shall see, Foucault does not give us everything we need to conceptualize cultural politics: in particular, he neglects the importance of cultural meanings. Nevertheless, his radical break with previous sociological conceptions of power and politics takes us some way towards a framework for thinking about cultural politics.

1.4 Foucauldian Definitions of Power and Politics

Foucault's definition of power is the single most important theoretical contribution to rethinking contemporary political sociology. Foucault himself has rather a paradoxical relationship to contemporary political sociology: although he is the theorist whose work has been most influential in its development, and although he was actively engaged in various political activities, including campaigns for prisoners' rights and gay activism, he professed himself to be much more interested in ethics than in politics (Foucault, 1984a). This preference for ethics, which he saw as a matter of self-creation rather than of principles of right and wrong, is related to his distaste for systematic theorizing. Foucault refused to provide a map of social and political institutions with which to understand contemporary politics, but his work can be used to analyze the working of power in unexpected places and unexpected ways.

In this section, we will first look at an outline of Foucault's "analytics of power," and then at work on "governmentality" that has been influenced by his later work. Although the study of neo-liberal governmentality is an important and influential strand of contemporary political sociology in itself, it does not exhaust Foucault's influence on contemporary political sociology, which has been both broader and deeper than this body of work alone. We will look at this wider influence on "cultural politics" in the final section of the chapter.

Foucault's analytics of power

Foucault explicitly denies that he has constructed a *theory* of power, arguing that power must be analyzed in its operations and effects and cannot be captured in a systematic set of related concepts conceived in advance of its application (Foucault, 1984b: 82). He prefers, therefore, to think in terms of an "analytics of power" in which power is identified only in the instances of its exercise. It is, nevertheless, possible to make some general points about this "analytics."

Power for Foucault is, above all, productive. His analyses are opposed to what he calls the "juridico-discursive" model in which power is seen as possessed by the state, especially the law, and is used to impose order on society. According to this theory, power involves legitimate prohibition modeled on the legal contract, according to liberals, or repressive legislation and policing to preserve class domination, according to radicals. It is, at any rate, essentially negative, restrictive, and inhibitory (Foucault, 1980a). According to Foucault, to think of power in this way is to miss how it works in institutions and discourses across the social field. Foucault is concerned to analyze power in the details of social practices, at the points at which it produces effects, as a fluid, reversible, and invisible "microphysics" of power. In Foucault's model, power is productive in the sense that it is constitutive, working to produce particular types of bodies and minds in practices which remain invisible from the point of view of the older model of power as sovereignty. Power is pluralist: it is exercised from innumerable points, rather than from a single political center. It is not the possession of an elite, and it is not governed by a single overarching project. However, seeing power as productive is not to see it as good. On the contrary, in most of his work at least, Foucault's use of the term "power" implies a critical perspective on social practices. It is productive of regulated and disciplined social relations and identities which are to be resisted.

The most general sense in which power is productive for Foucault is through knowledge. Knowledge, especially that of the social sciences, is closely implicated in the production of docile bodies and subjected minds. “Discourses” is the term Foucault uses for these systems of quasi-scientific knowledge. Knowledge as discourse is not knowledge of the “real” world as it exists prior to that knowledge. Although it presents itself as *representing* objective reality, in fact, discourses *construct* and make “real” the objects of knowledge they “represent.” Knowledge is distinguished from other ways of apprehending the world and considered to be “knowledge” of the objective world because it is supported by practices of power. As Foucault sees it, knowledge involves statements uttered in institutional sites in which it is gained according to certain rules and procedures, by speakers who are authorized to say what counts as “truth” in that particular context. For Foucault, the analysis of discourse requires the determination of how new objects of knowledge emerge, under what discursive and non-discursive conditions, and especially, what effects of power they produce. As he puts it, “Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (Foucault, 1980b: 133).

Foucault’s analysis of knowledge as constitutive and implicated in power breaks, then, with the “official” view the social sciences would like to have of themselves as disinterested, neutral, and, as such, contributing to human progress. It also breaks with the radical view that knowledge produced in elite institutions is inherently mystificatory, concealing real relations of power. As Foucault sees it, it is not so much that discourses *conceal* power, but rather that they *contribute* to its exercise in the production of social relations of authority and conformity.

Power produces individuals both as objects and as subjects. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes how docile bodies are produced by organizing individuals in practices of surveillance that train comportment according to classifications of normal and abnormal. This takes place in different ways in different institutions across the social field, including the military, factories, schools, hospitals, and so on (Foucault, 1979). In *The History of Sexuality*, volume I, he analyzes the production of sexualized bodies in practices of confession (Foucault, 1984b). According to Foucault’s analysis, far from being natural, “sexuality” has been developed over a long historical period. We in the West have learned to experience ourselves as desiring in particular ways, initially through the Christian confession and now, in contemporary society, in settings which use therapeutic techniques – in psychotherapy proper, but also in counseling, social work, education, even “phone-ins” about personal problems, confessional

TV shows, and so on. In Foucault's view, the body is imprinted in history; its capacities are historically specific and produced in practices of power.

According to Foucault, power also produces subjectivity. In this respect, Foucault famously breaks with the humanist idea that the subject is the source of intentional meaning, self-reflexive, unified, and rational which has been dominant in modern Western thought (McNay, 1994: 4). For Foucault, subjects are always *subjected*, produced in discourses and practices of power which *position* them as speakers who are in possession of self-consciousness and, most importantly in the twentieth century, of an unconscious that determines desire. In *The History of Sexuality*, volume I, Foucault discusses at length the irony that in trying to liberate him or herself in therapy, the analysand is actually subjecting him or herself to a strategy of normalization which *produces* the very subject who should free him or herself in this way (Foucault, 1984a). In positioning oneself as the "I," the subject of speech in the discourse of psychoanalysis, one is produced, and experiences oneself, as an individual with secret desires which must be uncovered in analysis if one is to be free and healthy. The self of psychoanalysis is *produced*, not *discovered*. Furthermore, the production of self takes place in a relationship of power insofar as the analysand's speech, thoughts, and dreams must be interpreted by the analyst, positioned as an authority by the discourse of psychoanalysis. What the case of psychoanalysis illustrates, according to Foucault, is that subjectivity itself, the very possibility of having a self of which one is aware, of saying "I" with some degree of self-knowledge, is conditional on the exercise of power.

It is clear that Foucault could not have identified the effects of power on the body and on subjectivity using a totalizing theory of power. His analysis depends on examining the precise details of historically specific knowledges and practices as they operate differently in different institutions to produce constraining and subordinate identities. Nevertheless, his studies have been quite extensively criticized as tending to fall back into the negative view of power to which he is opposed, portraying it as a monolithic, unmitigated force of domination. Certainly, as previously noted, his use of the term "power" suggests a *critical* perspective on existing practices of subjection and objectification. In this respect, it has undoubtedly been highly effective in denaturalizing reified social constructions. However, critics argue that if *all* social relations and identities are the product of power, this critical perspective is actually redundant. There are two related points here. First, it is argued that the concept of power suggests that something is overcome, or dominated, in its exercise. If, however, all human capacities are produced in power, why call it power

at all? If power is productive rather than repressive, Foucault could have said that everything is socially constructed rather than that everything is produced in relations of power, without losing the sense of his analysis (Fraser, 1989). Secondly, it is argued that, if power is productive of all capacities, it follows that individuals are nothing more than “place-fillers,” without resources to resist it: they have no capacities for autonomous self-creation or the generation of meanings and values which they could use against the effects of power (McNay, 1994: 102–4). On this understanding of Foucault’s work, far from freeing us from the limitations of seeing power as negative, he actually portrays it as absolutely repressive, allowing no possibility of resistance.

In Foucault’s early work on power, there does seem to be an inconsistency between his theoretical commitment to an “analytics of power” as positive and the overwhelmingly negative tone of the historical analyses he carried out. He implies, and sometimes states blankly, that power is everywhere, as in this notorious statement from *The History of Sexuality*, volume I: “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere ... Power is not an institution, nor a structure, not a possession. It is the name we give to a complex strategic situation” (Foucault, 1984b: 93). Critics are undoubtedly right to point out that if power is everywhere, it becomes a metaphysical principle and loses all normative and explanatory content. As Peter Dews (1984: 21) puts it: “[O]nly if we can produce a counterfactual, specifying how a situation would change if an operation of power were cancelled ... can [this] concept be empirically applied.”

In his later work, however, Foucault’s ideas about power developed in ways which meet these objections, at least to some extent. The most significant developments in this respect are his ideas on domination, power, and resistance. The question of whether these new ideas mean that he actually breaks with his previous ideas is controversial. There are those who see this work as a radical new departure, or at least a change of direction (McNay, 1994; Hindess, 1996: 19), while others argue that Foucault’s work is “at root *ad hoc*, fragmentary and incomplete,” and should not be interpreted as developing according to an ideal of unity at all (Gutting, 1994: 2). It is indisputable, however, that his later thoughts on power are a good deal more complex than those used in the earlier analyses.

In “The Subject and Power,” Foucault discusses the relationship between power, domination, and resistance in contemporary society. He argues that, as a matter of definition, where there is power there must be resistance. He had sketched out this idea in his earlier work, but here he

develops it further, arguing that power necessarily works on what he calls “free subjects.” It is only where there is the possibility of resistance, where subjects are not fully determined but may realize different possibilities from the range with which they are faced, that it is meaningful to think in terms of power. Slavery does not involve a relationship of power where the slave is in chains, but rather a relation of violence. Apparently in opposition to his previous assertions that “power is everywhere” and that subjects are discursively constructed, Foucault is here committing himself to the view that the “free subject” necessarily exists prior to discourse. However, he retains the view that subjects are constructed in practices of power insofar as he maintains that subjects are *subjected* where they are controlled by others, and also insofar as they are tied to their own identity by conscience or self-knowledge (Foucault, 1982).

Foucault links his analyses of power directly with the antagonistic struggles of social movements, arguing that one of the most important aspects of these struggles in contemporary society is the way in which they challenge subjectification. To some extent, social movements are based on the assertion of existing identities, and so on the acceptance of categorizations of normal/not normal produced in discourses and practices of power. On the other hand, however, they sometimes involve the refusal of existing identities:

on the one hand, they assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up his community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way. (Foucault, 1982: 211–12)

The examples he gives are struggles against the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill, of medicine over the population, and of administration over the ways in which people live. Foucault makes the point that it is in part a result of the way in which social movements resist power that it is possible to analyze it as such. Resistance is necessary to the definition of power, and it is also methodologically important to the study of power in that it brings power relations and the methods by which it is exercised into view.

Foucault also refines his analytics of power with the concepts of domination and government in his later work. In fact, according to Barry Hindess (1996), he increasingly uses domination as a term to analyze what is more commonly thought of as power, replacing the term power with

government. According to Hindess's reading, Foucault used more precise terms in order to distinguish between power as a feature of all human interactions and domination as a particular structure of power in which antagonisms are consolidated in hierarchical and stable relations. Power, then, is not denounced as such, the implication of the critical perspective of Foucault's earlier work. On the contrary, it now represents the potential fluidity of social relations. Since power only acts on those who may resist, and who may in turn act on others, there is always the possibility of reversals of power. In domination, however, those who are dominated have such little room for maneuver that reversals of power become impracticable, though they are never, strictly speaking, impossible (Foucault, 1982; Hindess, 1996). Again, the activities of social movements may be used methodologically to understand how far a particular set of social relationships should be seen as domination or as relations of power, according to the degree of freedom they enable or allow for the politics of identity and solidarity.

Governmentality

In Foucault's later work, although he remained critical of the "juridico-discursive" model of power as possessed by the state, and also of general theories of power and the state, he nevertheless began to build up something like an "analytics of power" concerning state formation and reproduction in the West. These studies concern what he called "governmentality."

Foucault defines "government" as "the conduct of conduct," the attempt to influence the actions of free subjects. It concerns how we govern ourselves as free subjects, how we govern "things," and how we are governed. In this way, Foucault's ideas on governmentality encompass his previous work on discipline and the production of docile bodies, and on the production of subjects who rely on authorities for confirmation of their "normality." What is new in this work, however, is how these disciplinary practices are now related to the historical formation of the modern state and to the way power is exercised through practices that maintain it as such.

Foucault sees governmentality as a modern form of power, which first arose in opposition to its competitor, the Machiavellian idea of sovereignty, in the sixteenth century. Machiavellianism was a doctrine developed to guide the sovereign leaders of the early modern state, advising them how to maintain peace and security. According to the advice set out in *The Prince*, the principal object of government is the maintenance of

the sovereign's rule over the territory and subjects of the state. For its opponents, however, this type of rule is too external to the society and, therefore, too fragile to be successful. The practices of government should rather be *immanent* to society, exercised over "men and things" to promote wealth and well-being. It was from the eighteenth century onwards, however, according to Foucault, that governmentality was increasingly established with the development of capitalist agriculture and the redefinition of the "economy," which became associated with "population" rather than the family, and with a range of knowledges and techniques concerned with managing its expansion, health, and productivity. Through the expansion of these knowledges and techniques, including the gathering and manipulation of large bodies of statistical data, "government" itself became a science, the science of managing the welfare of the population. At the same time, the modern state, already somewhat centralized territorially as an administrative and military apparatus around the sovereign in early modernity, becomes increasingly "governmentalised." It is increasingly dispersed through disciplinary practices and "micro-politics," concerned with the "conduct of conduct," with increasing the productivity of people and things rather than with imposing order and security from above (Foucault, 1991).

The idea of governmentality clearly develops Foucault's "analytics of power" beyond the earlier critique of the "juridico-discursive" model of power as sovereignty. But Foucault does not seem to be entirely clear or consistent on how we should understand state formation and development in modernity in relation to disciplinary power. On some occasions, he continued to write in his later work as if he understood the state as largely irrelevant to disciplinary power. For example, in his lecture on "Governmentality" in 1978, Foucault argues that "maybe, after all, the State is not more than a composite reality and a mythical abstraction whose importance is more limited than we think" (Foucault, 1991: 103). This seems close to his earlier position on the study of power: it is necessary to "cut off the King's head" to avoid getting caught up in overestimating the importance of the state and related ideas like sovereignty and law at the expense of understanding how disciplinary power actually works. Indeed, in language reminiscent of Marxism, Foucault went so far as to insist that, "The State is superstructural in relation to ... power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth" (Foucault, 1980b: 122). On other occasions, however, Foucault seems to suggest that the state is not irrelevant to the exercise of disciplinary power; government through state institutions is an important aspect of strategies of "governmentality" (see the discussion

in Dean, 1994: chapter 8; also Rose and Miller, 1992; Curtis, 1995; Rose and Miller, 1995). The “conduct of conduct” is plural, attempted in different ways in institutions and practices across the social field. As such, governmentality is constructive of centralized state power, strengthening and extending it; at the same time, state institutions further disciplinary power through activities in which states specialize, such as passing legislation or raising taxes to support large-scale knowledge production with which to manage the “population.”

One of the most influential developments of Foucauldian ideas of “governmentality” has been the analysis of neo-liberalism. For Foucauldians, liberalism is not a political theory, or an ideology, but rather a practice: “a “way of doing things” oriented towards objectives and regulating itself by means of a sustained reflection” (Foucault, 1997: 73–4). Neo-liberalism, by extension, is a practice, dominant in the West by the end of the twentieth century and to a certain extent spread across the world that is informed by the aim of “rolling back the frontiers of the state,” which neo-liberals theorize as having intruded too far into the private sphere of the economy. For neo-liberals, the scope of state activities must be reduced in order to stimulate and maintain markets to create more wealth, but also for the sake of individual freedom, which is undermined by the extension of law and bureaucracy into private lives. “Rolling back the frontiers of the state” involves not just stimulating markets for goods and services by reducing regulation, but also creating markets where there were none before, especially within the public sector and organizations previously governed by bureaucratic hierarchies. It has gone far beyond the marketization of welfare, education, and health associated with attempts to cut public spending, the sale of public assets, and the deregulation of labor markets. Neo-liberal practice has, for example, gone so far as to marketize the prison service, turning over practices of punishment which, as Nikolas Rose points out, were previously considered essential to state sovereignty (Rose, 1999: 146). Inevitably, of course, the creation of such quasi-markets out of what were previously taken-for-granted as state practices actually requires a great deal of state activity, to set targets, regulate standards, and monitor outputs. Insofar as markets cannot do without state regulation, neo-liberalism is incoherent (Tonkiss, 2001). In practice, Foucauldians argue that neo-liberalism has resulted in the creation of a certain kind of individual, an entrepreneurial self who understands her/himself to be free to choose in the market, but who must then exercise choice continuously and correctly if s/he is not to suffer the stigma and

material consequences of failing to make use of market forces, whether in education, personal development, work, or any other “life-style choice.” The entrepreneurial self is free in that s/he understands her/himself to be self-governing and oriented towards self-realization, but s/he is under the imperative to manage her/himself correctly, according to increasingly fine-tuned standards that are set by economic and social management practices over which s/he has no control (Rose, 1990, 1999).

The direct influence Foucault’s work has had on contemporary political sociology cannot be over-estimated. His ideas on discipline, the interrelation of knowledge and power, and more recently on governmentality, have directed attention toward the exercise of power in practices and the formation of identities across the social field. Once we begin to look at the world through the lenses Foucault provides for us, conventional politics at the level of the state is displaced to the periphery of vision and other forms of politics come into focus.

However, a Foucauldian analytics of power is not all that is needed to understand the range of engagements with hierarchy and exclusion that concern contemporary political sociologists. And the way in which contemporary political sociology sees power and politics as significant across the social field is not solely due to the influence of Foucault’s work. Indeed Foucault’s “analytics of power” is limited with respect to what we might call “positive” political projects, those that make demands for equality, whether of redistribution, recognition, or representation (see Fraser, 1997, 2008). Whilst, as we noted above, Foucault’s critique of power may have become more nuanced as he introduced the idea of the “free subject,” reflexive in relation to concrete possibilities of action, it is very difficult to envisage any kind of worthwhile politics other than resistance from within a Foucauldian framework. Successful demands for a bigger share of collective resources, more respect for particular groups, or a different democratic system, necessarily involve closing down other social possibilities, whether by state regulation or something “softer,” like disallowing certain ways of talking and acting. But it is just such demands that have been so important to social movements and to challenges to extend citizenship and democracy with which contemporary political sociology is concerned. In the Foucauldian framework, all “positive” demands that are realized through collective enforcement involve the solidifying of power into domination to a greater or lesser extent; it is only through resistance that power remains fluid. It is unsurprising in this respect that Foucault himself became more interested in ethics than in politics.

1.5 Cultural Politics

Although the Foucauldian analytics of power has been an important influence on contemporary political sociology, more is needed to properly understand how politics works today. In addition to theoretical debates around Foucault's work, contemporary political sociology has also been influenced from three other main sources. The first is the intellectual work carried out within and on behalf of social movements. Sociologists from the 1970s onwards have been active participants in movements, especially in feminism and anti-racism, and have therefore been directly called on to think about politics in new ways (see Eyerman and Jamison, 1991). We will explore the politics of social movements more fully in chapter 3, and how they have been translated into struggles over definitions of citizenship rights and identities in chapter 4. The second influence, itself related both to the significance of Foucault's work and to that of social movements, was the rise of the "anti-disciplinary" discipline of cultural studies. The story of the relationship between cultural studies and sociology is long and complex, and I do not have space to do it justice here (see Denzin, 1992; Hall and du Gay, 1996; Long, 1997; Oswell, 2006). Perhaps the chief effect cultural studies has had on sociologists is to renew interest in the importance of symbolic meanings in social life. This interest has a long history in sociology (from Weber and Durkheim through to phenomenology and ethnomethodology), but it has always been somewhat marginalized in the macro-theorizing of society which has dominated the discipline, and especially the sub-discipline of political sociology. In this respect, contemporary political sociology is closely linked to the "cultural turn" that is still ongoing in sociology. Thirdly, and more recently, given how the prominence of the state has been called into question in globalization, sociologists working on this topic have also had to rethink power and politics. We look at globalization more fully in chapter 2. Here we consider Manuel Castells's theorization of power and politics, which draws on, but goes beyond Foucault's influential "analytics of power."

There are two main ways of understanding "culture" currently in the social sciences. According to one version, the "epistemological variant," culture is implicated in all social practices because, as human beings, we have access to reality, we know it and manipulate it, only through social classifications. This variant has been very much influenced by Foucault's theory of discourse. Culture is "constitutive"; it is not reflective or expressive of other social practices; it is not determined by them, nor can it be

used simply as a tool or instrument to bring about change. Culture is constitutive in the sense that it is only through symbolic representations that humans experience, sense, access, and manipulate reality, whether created by human beings or not. This is not to say, of course, that culture *creates* reality as such: clearly, symbols do not create mountains out of stone or trees out of wood. It is rather that culture is constitutive of *our* reality, and this is crucial to how our social world (including its material artifacts – buildings, borders, irrigation systems, and all the rest) is reproduced and transformed. We only know the effects of material artifacts, as well as of existing social structures that exist “outside” our heads, through our own understanding and use.

On the other hand, others see the significance of culture as historically specific. As we shall see in chapter 2, this view is particularly associated with the idea that we are now moving into a new era, that of “postmodernism.” Whereas in modernity, culture occupied a separate sphere of society as high art, it is argued that in postmodernism there has been an expansion of culture into other realms of society. Culture has been commodified as the value of art is increasingly closely linked to its market price and, at the same time, the economy itself is increasingly dependent on culture, in research and design, advertising, niche marketing according to lifestyle, and leisure and service industries. Politicians perform to their audiences through the media, and personalities count more than policies. And in the social realm, distinctions of status depend to an even greater extent than before on the display of cultural credentials, rather than on economic or political power (see Crook et al., 1992; Kumar, 1995). According to this version of the “cultural turn,” the historical importance of culture has been determined by changes in social structure.

Whether culture is seen as universally or historically preeminent, however, cultural politics now takes on an unprecedented importance. The term “culture” is notoriously difficult to define. As a working definition, we will adopt that of Raymond Williams: culture is “the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored” (Williams, 1981: 13). This definition includes the more commonly used conception of culture as “the works and practices of intellectuals, and especially artistic activity” (Williams, 1976: 80), and also the still narrower understanding of popular and media culture. In this most general sense, culture, as Jeffrey Alexander puts it, “is not a thing but a dimension, not an object to be studied as a dependent variable but a thread that runs through, one that can be teased out of, every conceivable social form” (Alexander, 2003: 7).

Foucault's theory of "discourse," whilst it certainly helped sociologists to understand the importance of *language* to social life, is something of a limitation with regard to understanding the importance of *meanings*. As we have seen, Foucault was concerned with what discourses do, with the effects they have on bodies and minds as a result of the authoritative way they are put into practice in institutions formed around knowledges. He was not concerned with how situated social actors interpret what discourses mean to them; only with how they are circulated and with what effects in practice. For Foucault, signs are *functions*, organized not on the basis of meaning but of *use* (see Oswell, 2006: 33). It is for this reason that his understanding of politics is limited to resistance to authority, rather than enabling anything more creative. Foucault literally does not see politics as meaningful activity.

What do contemporary sociologists mean by "meaning"? As we noted in the introduction to this section, many answers to this question have been proposed in the history of social thought. The most influential on contemporary political sociology is that of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Saussure, meaning in language is produced in a differential play of signs, rather than by representing objects in the world. Words are *symbols* of the world, not pictures or mirrors. There is no intrinsic link between objects and words; what joins them is the way in which *words* are linked together in chains of meaning that are learned as social conventions. In fact, without language, we would be unable to identify objects and concepts with any degree of consistency (Saussure, 1966). Language does not simply *name* the world; it makes sense of it and orders it for us. Jonathan Culler gives a good example of Saussure's analysis of language as a "system of differences without positive terms." He asks us to imagine teaching a non-English speaker what the word "brown" means. To show him or her nothing but brown objects would be useless; he or she would have to learn to distinguish brown from other colors. The word "brown" does not simply label objects that are already given; it constructs "brown" things as different from gray, orange, red, and so on (Culler, 1976: 246). Furthermore, it is entirely possible to imagine a world in which such "brown" things were not distinguished at all. They are only meaningful for us because we have learned through social interactions with others to recognize them in this way. Meaning structures the world for us, then, through classifications; it exists only for us insofar as we make distinctions that have value and interest to us, and we are continually learning how others make and use socially relevant classifications.

Most importantly for our understanding of cultural politics, social meanings are not fixed; differences are not closed and final, once and for all. They cannot be fixed because social actors must continually interpret and make use of meanings in the company of other people in different situations. In fact, social meanings are continually changing simply through repeated use: symbols are meaningful only insofar as they are used regularly, and a sign that is repeated is always somewhat novel with respect to the context in which it appears (Derrida, 1978). Continuities are vital to culture; culture is the reproduction of traditions, habits, perceptions, and understandings. But culture is inherently fluid and dynamic, a continually moving and “changing same” (Gilroy, 1993: 101), which makes it open to political contestation and at the same time somewhat resistant to political invention.

On the other hand, meanings may become *relatively* solidified and fixed. At the extreme, they may become “hegemonic”: taken-for-granted as if they simply reflect how things are and must be. This is problematic because settled meanings invariably enable possibilities of action that favor the projects and dreams of some at the expense of others. Collective action is needed to challenge and change meanings that have been relatively fixed. To give an example, as married women began to move into the labor force in greater numbers in the 1960s and ‘70s, a new term became current: “working mother.” This apparently neutral definition of what was taken to be a new phenomenon became fashionable, used routinely in the media and everyday life. In the 1980s, however, with the rise of the feminist movement, it became much more controversial. It was seen as contributing to the “knowledge” that women were naturally designed for the care of home, husband, and children, that they were primarily housewives who happened to work outside the home. As such, it both described and legitimated the “double burden” of household tasks and paid work which increasing numbers of women were taking on, whilst at the same time calling into question any commitment some might have, or want to have, to career advancement, more responsibility, or higher pay at work. “Working mother” limited the aspirations of those women who identified as such, and it limited all women by treating them alike as primarily, and naturally, mothers whose first concern was their duties at home. Feminists in the 1970s and ‘80s challenged the term “working mother,” discrediting it as a neutral description, and at the same time calling into question a whole set of assumptions which had very real effects on how women could shape their lives.

What this example also shows is the importance of symbolic meaning in structuring social life. Cultural politics is not just about words. Indeed, it need not be about words at all. Bodily gestures, fashion, flags, global brands – these are all examples of sets of meaningful signs within which we understand particular gestures and movements, what an item of clothing says about the person wearing it, and so on (see Barthes, 1972). Nor is cultural politics restricted to the manipulation of symbols in texts and images. In order for signs to be politically relevant, they must become part of routine use in *practice*.

Although Anthony Giddens does not use the term “culture,” (which is surely related to the fact that he takes little interest in the *content* of social actors’ interpretations), his influential theory of social practice helps us understand how social life is reproduced, and altered, through the use of meanings in a way that is close to the model of cultural politics we are discussing here (see Ortner, 2006; Sewell, 1992: 7). Giddens’s structuration theory is an attempt to overcome the duality of “structure” and “agency” which he sees as a perennial motif in sociology. He argues that social reproduction should be seen as stabilizing relationships across time and space through the knowledgeable use of rules and resources on the part of social agents (Giddens, 1984). In face-to-face or mediated interactions, social actors more or less consciously sustain, re-make, or challenge structures whilst, at the same time, their interpretations and actions are themselves constrained by existing distributions of resources and ways of making sense of the world. What Giddens calls “structures” are consistent patterns of social interaction that both emerge from situated practices and provide the frameworks within which those interactions take place. To return to our example of the “working mother,” it is not difficult to imagine how her daily practices at home and in paid work would be routinized in quite different ways compared with those of women who expect to negotiate with managers, colleagues, teachers, people employed to care for babies and young children, family, and friends to sustain what is currently described in the UK as “work-life balance.”

Finally, what this example also shows is the importance of identities to the reproduction and modification of social structures. Although what is important in a general way in cultural politics is how symbols are interpreted and re-interpreted in social life, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is embodied people with emotional ties to others and individual biographies who are making social reality (see Turner, 1996). It is in the creation of identities which may then be very hard to dislodge – perhaps especially where people are barely conscious of their strong attachments to particular ways of thinking and feeling – that

structures are reproduced. Gender and sexual identities may be particularly important in this respect, not just in reproducing intimate relations in private, but also in securing hierarchical relations across the social field. For example, formal politics in the state has traditionally been a very masculine activity: we have only to consider photographs of “world leaders” at, for example, G8 summit meetings to see that this is the case. On the other hand, if we think of the carnivalesque protests against neo-liberal globalization that take place at these same events, except for the small number who actively seek violent confrontation, we have a very differently gendered picture in mind. This is not to say that men and women are inherently different. It is rather that the gendered division between male and female is one that appears to be very well-established and stable – the queer politics we will consider in chapter 4 notwithstanding – and identities across the social field that are tied to masculinity and femininity may be particularly difficult to challenge and shift (see Butler, 1993, 1997).

Having outlined, then, the importance of *culture* to politics, let us turn now to *politics* itself. No easier to pin down than “culture,” in very general terms, politics involves struggles over power. Political struggles are always, in some of their dimensions at least, “negative.” They are always *against* existing social relations, concerned with challenging or resisting power as it is exercised by some over others. As I have suggested above, Foucault’s analytics of power as productive of compliant minds and docile bodies is concerned above all with this dimension of politics. On the other hand, politics may also be “positive,” carrying forward what we sometimes call “political vision,” a sense of how social relations should or could be re-arranged.

The sociologist of globalization Manuel Castells has suggested a two-dimensional definition of power that usefully complements Foucault’s understanding of power as productive. Defining power generally in Weberian terms as the probability of an individual or group being able to exercise its will despite resistance, Castells sees the Foucauldian understanding of power as shaping the mind – and, we should add, bodily practices too – as its most important aspect (Castells, 2009: 15–16). Power shapes understandings of reality, of “how to go on” with social routines, and the establishing of standards and norms with which social actors are expected to comply in social practices. The exercise of power always involves the successful construction of meaning that is routinized. In addition, however, Castells also argues that it is important to understand how power may, on occasion, involve force, or the threat of force. As we have seen, Foucault viewed the use of force as involving a

relationship of violence rather than of power, and he suggested it was becoming less relevant as societies became more concerned with fostering disciplinary power over populations rather than with controlling and eliminating those who seemed to pose a threat to sovereign state power. For Castells, it is important to understand that the state is the ultimate guarantor of micro-powers exercised across the social field, a position it maintains because of its privileges with regard to the legitimate use of force – even if these privileges are relatively rarely exercised (Castells, 2009: 15). As the ultimate guarantor of micro-powers because of its special privileges with regard to force, action “in the name of the state” – the state itself is not unified, and “it” cannot act – does have particular importance in contemporary societies. It is not that force trumps in the exercise of power. On the contrary, state violence, the regulation of civil society, and the collection and distribution of wealth are all shaped, rationalized, and legitimated by the meanings such actions are given in ongoing practices of state formation and reproduction. The crucial point here is that the state is itself an especially significant site of cultural politics.

In this respect, it is also important to note how power and force both contribute to the economic importance of states. There are two main dimensions to the threat of state force with regard to markets. Firstly, the state is involved in the regulation and de-regulation of economic exchanges and contracts. For example, state actors have the final authority over the conditions under which multinational corporations operate within their territory. Even if communications and transport infrastructures now make it much easier than ever before to send labor, ideas for research, design and advertising, money, components and final products across borders, ultimately states still retain the authority to regulate cross-border flows. Whether or not national economies are “open” or “protected” remains a matter for political decision. Secondly, the state itself exercises significant economic power. In wealthy liberal-democracies, large amounts of money are collected as taxes and distributed to state employees employed in bureaucracy, education, healthcare, and so on, as well as in welfare to those most in need. When support for Keynesian managed capitalism was more or less hegemonic in the mid-twentieth century, state legitimacy depended on its capacity to ameliorate the effects of markets on citizens. Welfare rights are just as important as ever to many citizens, as neo-liberalizing economies are increasingly oriented towards providing low wage and insecure employment (in the US and UK, for example), while, where neo-liberalism has been strongly resisted, rates of structural unemployment tend to be high (as in, for example, France and Germany). Because money is the means by which the necessities of life – shelter,

warmth, and food – are met in our societies, the threat of its complete withdrawal is a form of force. It is exercised where states do not meet obligations to ensure at least minimal levels of well-being for citizens.

Castells argues that instead of thinking in terms of the relations between “state and society,” as in classical political sociology, we should rather understand social life as made up of networks. Unlike states, networks do not have clear boundaries: they do not remain within national territories, nor do they restrict themselves to a strict division between state and society. They are sets of interconnected nodes, which organize flows of information. For Castells, networks in globalization are multilayered structures: economic (involving production, consumption, and exchange), technological, environmental, political, and military. They are also multiscalar: global, national, local, and individual (Castells, 2009: 14–15; see also Castells, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2009). Castells sees states as nodes in networks, where nodes absorb and process relevant information as it flows within and across networks. As we shall see in chapter 2, the networked state is no longer simply the sovereign political body within its own territory; it must now share authority and sovereignty (to a greater or lesser extent according to its size, capacities, and ongoing commitments to cooperate) with other states and with other organizations in global governance.

To sum up, then, contemporary political sociology concerns cultural politics, which is the interpretation of social meanings that support, challenge, or change the definitions, perspectives, and identities of social actors, to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others, across state and society. In comparison, the threat of using force to impose the will of some on others is much less common. The threat of force is, moreover, itself applied according to definitions. Some groups and actions are defined as problematic, and as in need of state control. For example, illegal migrants are generally seen as a problem in wealthy liberal-democracies, rather than as an economic benefit, and as a result they are at risk of being subjected to the force of the state. In contrast, rates of conviction for sexual assault remain low, though it is clearly illegal and the numbers of incidents reported to the police have been rising in recent years.

Interpretations of social meanings involve power because shaping and achieving a degree of mutual consent to the institutionalization of definitions and perspectives closes down or marginalizes existing possibilities with which some members of society are identified. The institutionalization of some social meanings rather than others makes it easier for some actors to realize their existing projects and goals, while others have to alter and adapt as best they can to new situations. Of course, at any particular time, the greater part of social life is not politicized. For the

most part, social relations that close down future possibilities for some as they open up opportunities for others continue routinely, accepted by all concerned as the proper way to go on with life in common. In part, this is because, in shaping identities and perspectives, cultural politics changes preferences. Understanding “how to proceed” in everyday life shapes individual aims and goals as well as permitting us to get along together. It is only relatively rarely that cultural politics becomes a significant force for change. Nevertheless, in complex, hierarchically ordered, and unequal societies, there is always the potential for re-assessment of the justice, feasibility, or attractiveness of existing arrangements. The main way in which settled social structures become politicized is through the formation of collective will in social movements, which makes issues and injustices visible, challenges assumptions structuring the *status quo*, and represents alternatives. Although change is a permanent *possibility* of social life, and ongoing, insofar as the reproduction of social relations requires the continual re-iteration of symbolic meanings in slightly new contexts, it is relatively rare that challenges to routine understandings of “how things are done” coalesce into large-scale or fundamental social change.

Contemporary political sociology

Arguably societies are currently going through fundamental changes linked to the development of information technology. In chapter 2, we discuss globalization, probably the most dramatic and widely acknowledged challenge to sociological models of state-centric politics. Globalization makes it difficult for state actors to control the traffic of goods, services, technology, media products, and information across borders. State capacities to act independently in the articulation and pursuit of domestic and international policy objectives have become highly politicized as a result. The political authority of the state to determine the rules, regulations, and policies within a given territory has to some extent been “scaled up” in order to try to take control of processes and flows of globalization. The “internationalizing state” raises difficult questions for contemporary political sociology concerning fundamental assumptions about society that were established by the isomorphism of state, the nation, and national territorial boundaries.

The empirical changes brought about by globalization problematize the most basic concept of sociology, “society,” by disaggregating the economic, social, and political processes previously seen as bound together within the borders of distinct national societies. What Ulrich Beck calls

“methodological nationalism,” the construction of societies as internal to state borders, is no longer viable (Beck, 2000). Indeed, as a way of understanding empires, and the subsequent inter-connections of metropolitan centers and post-colonial states, it was always limited (see Bhambra, 2007). Social life must be rethought in terms of multiple and multiscalar networks and identities, and power and politics as an aspect of social life rather than as separate institutions within a society governed by a single determining base, as in the case of Marxism, a single inexorable logic, as in Weber’s rationalization thesis, or functionalist social solidarity, as for Durkheim. Globalization opens up issues that require a wider view of power and politics than that provided by the framework of classical political sociology.

In chapter 3, we look at social movements, which displace the focus of classical political sociology on social systems and questions of causality, shifting attention to the way in which social actors make society through cultural politics. Social movements transform social relations by challenging and redefining meanings and creating new collective identities across the social field. The study of social movements also shifts the focus on relations between state and society. Social movements are at least as concerned with personal decisions and with changing the rules and routines of everyday life as they are with policies and the law. The state is often seen as biased and bureaucratic, too blunt an instrument to bring about the detailed transformation in social relations at which they aim. Nevertheless, contrary to the claims of some theorists of social movements, the activities of social movements are not confined exclusively to changing ways of life through micro-politics. Indeed, even the global social movements that have become prominent over the last decade are often engaged in redefining state policies and practices, both from below, within national territories, and from above, through the international organizations of global governance.

In chapter 4, we examine how the cultural politics in which social movements engage are transforming citizenship. Citizenship rights are as much a matter of definition as the contestation of identity, lifestyle, media representations, and ethical consumerism with which social movements are more typically linked. Citizenship involves questions of identity and membership that have been central to social movements concerned with “difference.” Feminism, the gay and lesbian movement, and anti-racist movements are sometimes thought of in derogatory terms as involving “identity politics.” Challenging the way particular groups have been identified as inferior, trying to change what is generally seen as a source of shame into pride, they have been criticized for giving too much

attention to the politics of recognition, with demanding respect for differences between groups, at the expense of dealing with important questions of the redistribution of wealth and social democracy that were previously more typical on the Left. In addition, social movements concerned with identity have been criticized as authoritarian and essentialist, as closing down possibilities for self-creation by putting too much emphasis on particular aspects of individuals' lives. It is certainly important to understand struggles over definitions of citizenship in the context of neo-liberalizing globalization in which many of the social rights achieved in the welfare states of the twentieth century have been lost or are in question, and inequalities of wealth and poverty are growing. But, as we will see in this chapter, social movements contesting citizenship have been just as concerned with "equality" and "freedom" as with "difference," and debates over the relative weight to be given to all these issues – to recognition, to redistribution, and to the relationship between personal and social identity – have been vital to redefining social relationships as the influence of social movements has spread. Debates over citizenship in contemporary societies concern a range of problems, including how to accommodate different ways of identifying as a member of society; what diversity means for equality of citizenship rights in terms of recognition, redistribution, and political representation; and how freedom to redefine identities in the future is to be balanced with concerns for equality.

The intensity of debates over what citizenship really means, and should mean, in terms of equality, freedom and difference is matched in contemporary political sociology by questions concerning *who* should have citizenship rights and obligations, both within state territories and beyond. Globalization raises questions of post-national citizenship in relation to large-scale migration and settlement in the territories of Western states; and to the urgent necessity to respond to environmental dangers. As national identity, rights and obligations, and the sense of belonging in a territorially bounded "community of fate" come into question, citizenship itself, previously closely linked to the nation-state, is becoming de-territorialized.

Finally, in chapter 5 we look at the changing conditions of democracy in relation to globalization. Representative democracy in the West is in something of a crisis, with declining interest in political parties, and generalized mistrust of politicians (the very real hopes raised by Obama notwithstanding). Given the questions raised by globalization about the limits of the nation as establishing a legitimate democratic political community, is democratizing international political institutions a viable response to the crisis of democracy at the national level? If so, how might

it be achieved? What difference does the cultural politics of social movements make to democracy? And what is their democratic legitimacy, given that contesting and redefining issues that are supposed to alter global policy agendas does not involve a global public and is never subjected to popular vote?

Notes

- 1 This definition of power is also adopted by Marxisant political sociologists (see Bottomore, 1993: 1).
- 2 They then go on to do just that. Although they argue for seeing politics as a class of actions rather than a set of institutions or organizations, in particular as the establishing of the rules of social organization, their primary focus is on government as a special set of this class, involving the setting of rules intended to be absolute. In practice, therefore, their main focus is again on the relation between state and society.
- 3 Although Weber's term is usually translated as "iron cage," Alan Scott has convincingly argued that "steel-hard housing," the casing which encloses machines, is actually a more accurate translation and a better metaphor for the constraints of modernity Weber wants to convey by it (Scott, 1997a).
- 4 Pluralism is categorized as Weberian here more on the basis of its intellectual orientation than its theoretical antecedents. It is better seen as founded by American political scientists, notably Robert Dahl and his school, than by Weber. Nevertheless, it may be taken as Weberian in relation to Marxism insofar as it insists on the autonomy of the political process, and sees power as dependent on the intentions and circumstances of social actors, rather than on socio-economic structures.
- 5 There is a growing scholarship that might usefully be analyzed here in terms of its neo-Durkheimian contribution to political sociology, if there were enough space (e.g., Alexander, Giesen, and Mast, 2006; Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006; Lamont and Thevenot, 2000; Smith, 2005).

