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**DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY:
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THEIR APPROACH TO 'OTHER CULTURES'**

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I would like to begin this, my *farewell lecture*¹, by reflecting on a memory that takes me back to 1964, to Amsterdam, more specifically to my primary school. My class had to sit an exam to determine what kind of secondary education we would pursue in the near future. One of the tasks in this test was to produce a drawing entitled *De Mens*. This Dutch word is often considered the equivalent of the English *Man*, but it is gender-neutral and therefore its closest translation would be *the human being*. I drew a Girl with White skin.

To my surprise, this was followed by another task: to draw the *Other human being (de Andere Mens)*. I can still remember the moments that followed, and being torn between two options: what should I draw? Another girl, but with darker skin, in Africa perhaps, with exotic clothing and paraphernalia? Or, the second option, a person of the opposite sex? Finally, I opted for the latter. I drew a boy. A Boy with White skin.

I doubt the prophetic value of this episode, but perhaps my moment of reflection, and the fact that I remember this moment so vividly, could be seen as a sign of what would become the focus of my professional interest: the diversity among people and groups. This diversity can be based on several criteria, two of them being the options considered in the aforementioned test. A person may be identified as Other as the result of assumed differences between the sexes or genders, a subject of Gender Studies, or Otherness may refer to the diversity among peoples and cultures, a major theme of Cultural Anthropology.

Either of these areas could form the basis of today's lecture. I opted for the latter, Cultural Anthropology, focusing on the theme of 'Culture' and cultural diversity.

¹ The original version, in Portuguese, is available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.6/7803>.

The Other and Anthropology

When I was a student on the Cultural Anthropology degree at VU University in Amsterdam, the book *Other Cultures* by John Beattie was set as an introductory text, as it was at several other universities in the period around 1970, particularly in and around Great Britain². The title of the book contains the word *Other* and one definition of Cultural Anthropology is precisely that, 'the study of the Other'. The term 'Other' implies a physical or psychological distance, which may be large or small. It can grow, or, on the contrary, it can shrink and even, in certain cases, disappear altogether. In the research of Cultural Anthropology, distance and proximity, viewed in this dynamic light, are fundamental. They are implicitly present in the research subjects, but also in the methodology.

Those who are unfamiliar with Anthropology often associate the discipline with studying 'distant' people, *far-away and long-ago*: so-called primitive societies – outside the Western world -, or prehistoric people or hominids, such as Homo habilis and Neanderthal. Although these areas of research form part of the broad spectrum of specialisms within Anthropology, they are far from being the whole story. Today, I will be looking at Cultural Anthropology, the study of cultures and the variety among cultures. These cultures may be far-away in terms of time and space, but they can also be close to home.

In Anthropology, and in Social Sciences as a whole, we aim to gain a better understanding of human beings and the way in which they form groups and interact with one another. In other words, we aim to achieve greater psychological proximity to Others. The Social Sciences approach shies away from the obvious and refuses to settle for immediate answers, and this is exactly what I hope to demonstrate through this lecture.

It is worth remembering that when we refer to 'the Other' we are faced with a dualistic concept. During fieldwork, when studying a culture, the aim of anthropologists is to get to know 'others', but, viewed from the perspective of the participants in this other culture, the former are obviously the 'other'. It is not uncommon for groups and peoples (and not just Western ones) to feel as if they are at the centre of the world, and hence judge other people from their own perspective. The names of many ethnic groups in their vernacular languages literally mean 'the people' or 'the real people', implying a belief that their own group is superior or unique. It should, however, be noted that a certain degree of self-esteem is essential to a group's own social survival.

² John H.M. Beattie, *Other Cultures. Aims, methods and achievements in social anthropology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

Anthropology and Fieldwork

Anthropology places particular emphasis on fieldwork, that is to say living with the people we wish to study. This is not only a means of collecting data, but also an excellent way of achieving a greater understanding of, and dialogue with, participants in a culture. To this end, we often use the participant observation method, considered the archetypal Anthropology technique, in which the researcher lives like and with the 'others', experiencing their everyday, and not-so-everyday, lives. Naturally, in order to do so, anthropologists must become accustomed to social norms and adapt to local etiquette. As part of their research, they must ask many questions and, by doing so, they risk being considered 'naïve' by the participants, to whom the answers seem obvious, as they have always lived this way. The anthropologist must therefore try to participate in activities that are 'normal' for the participants, in the process becoming a 'student' of the 'others' – placing him or herself in the role of recipient, which implies a position of inferiority. For an anthropology project to succeed, in the classic sense that emerged in the times of Bronislaw Malinowski³, about 100 years ago, the researcher would have to spend a considerable amount of time living with the community in question: several months or even years.

Of course, anthropologists do not throw themselves into fieldwork unprepared. They have already trained in specialist observation techniques and are familiar with monographs and other works, providing sources for comparison and a theoretical framework. They have pre-prepared templates for recording their observations on the ground, tailored to the research subject. But, no matter the level of preparation, real life demands flexibility and creativity.

Almost 40 years ago, I got the chance to carry out extensive field research into a rural community far from Europe: in Minahasa, in the north of the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia (Figure 1). This gave me an opportunity to get to know the community and acquire a rudimentary knowledge of the languages spoken there; to be present in this location through the changing seasons and witness the activities and rituals of its peoples, but also, with time, to access information, feelings and beliefs about more personal or controversial issues⁴.

³ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. London: Routledge, 1922, pp. 1-26; Marilyn Strathern, Out of context. The persuasive fictions of Anthropology, *Current Anthropology* 28, 3 (1987), pp. 251-270; 277-281.

⁴ About practice and results of this research, see for example: M. Schouten, Old and new élite in a village of Sonder, in: Helmut Buchholt and Ulrich Mai (eds.), *Continuity, change and aspirations. Social and cultural life in Minahasa, Indonesia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994, pp. 104-120; M. Schouten, *Leadership and social mobility in a Southeast Asian society: Minahasa, 1677-1983*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1998; M. Schouten, Prestígio e poder na Indonésia: Continuidade em épocas de mudanças, *Anais Universitários da Universidade da Beira Interior*, special issue (2000), pp. 121-134.



Figure 1. Map of Indonesia. Minahasa is situated on the northernmost peninsula of Sulawesi, its largest town being Manado (indicated on the map).

Participation in the community implied an interiorization, imperfect as it was, of seemingly trivial rules of daily interaction. I had to get used to the customary way of greeting people in the street, which started with the question: ‘Where are you going?’ In the beginning, this greeting made me feel quite uncomfortable, given the value that my culture of origin places on privacy in public spaces. It was also difficult to become accustomed to using the cardinal points instead of ‘left’ and ‘right’. While it is possible to learn about these differences through books and conversations, applying them, or attempting to do so, in real life certainly proved more revealing. Living in the village also involved the sharing of meals, and consuming whatever was available or offered. To accompany the staple food (rice or corn), there were fruits and vegetables, and no lack of *marica*, a hot pepper used to season local dishes, nationally known as being extremely spicy. Depending on the occasion and the financial means available, the diet of the local population included animal protein sources, such as meat and fish. For events and special visits, special meats such as bat, mouse and cobra were served, as well as grilled grubs as a snack.

Initially, my every step, everything I did and ate was observed and commented on, particularly by the children. But gradually, as I settled into daily life, the distance between myself and the people of the village began to blur. On the other hand, the distance in relation to Europe – family, friends and colleagues – was vast during this period. Air and sea connections were complex, costly and time-consuming. This was before the introduction of personal computers, mobile phones and the internet. Replies to the letters I sent took at least six weeks to arrive. Making a phone call entailed a journey of several hours to the city of Manado,

followed by hours on a wooden bench inside the Telephone Services building, waiting for a connection to Europe.

You may ask: why subject yourself to such discomfort? But ‘discomfort’ is not the right word and, in any case, research projects in any scientific field always entail difficult moments of frustration and despair. Research in Anthropology, and in Social Sciences as a whole, can be a fantastic and fulfilling experience for the researcher. However, it also demands effort and minor or major sacrifices. What matters is that immersion in a culture different to our own teaches and enlightens us in a multifaceted way. Data obtained just through conversations and interviews are valuable, but somewhat imperfect, and therefore verification and triangulation will always be necessary – a basic rule of science. Discrepancies between what subjects do and what they say can come to light through observation. But the observations that Anthropology demands cannot, in general, be achieved from a safe distance, by *olhares janeleiros* (looking through a window), in the words of sociologist José Machado Pais⁵, but should be observations that involve some participation of the researcher in the phenomenon observed.

The Gaze in Social Science

Anthropologists, as well as sociologists, pay great attention to detail and context. With his expression the *imponderabilia of daily life*, Malinowski acknowledged the potential significance of the everyday. Similarly, the sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann stressed that the ‘banality’ of daily life is not a ‘banal’ subject, but a process of pivotal importance that reveals a great deal about how social reality is constructed⁶. Scholars including Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu drew attention to the human habit of ‘naturalising’ social behaviour, accepting these behaviours, these habits, as being biologically determined⁷. However, in reality, they are a social construct, that is to say their performance and interpretation are dependent upon social and historical context.

Analysis of the perception of social reality existing within a social group is a pillar of the Social Sciences. With this in mind, anthropology promotes the ‘denaturalising gaze’, showing that what is normal in one culture or subculture is not normal in another. Many of the so-called details of life observed may not seem spectacular, but we must remember that they can provide valuable clues about how life is organised and about the worldview of the culture or subculture

⁵ José Machado Pais, *Sociologia da vida quotidiana*. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2002, p. 112.

⁶ Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Corps de femmes, regards d’hommes. Sociologie des seins nus*. Paris: Nathan. 2004 [1998.], p. 12.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*. Paris: Plom, 1961; Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979.

studied. Take, for example, the possible symbolic meaning of practices involving the body - the addition of certain adornments, the use of certain colours, and how this changes⁸. Routine and rupture can be analysed if we possess comparative knowledge and are familiar with the relevant theory, and if we pay close attention to the sociocultural context.

Also in Sociology, prominent authors such as Whyte, Goffman, Becker and Wacquant⁹ have devoted studies to daily life 'on the ground', becoming integrated with the groups they were studying. In other words, contrary to popular assumptions, Sociology has a long tradition of using qualitative methodologies, and is not solely based on quantitative methods. And although it is archetypal of Anthropology, intensive fieldwork is just one potential methodological approach¹⁰. Anthropologists are also well-positioned to reflect on facts or ideas on macro level, such as (supposed) national cultures, or broad concepts such as identity and interculturality.

In Social Science studies, the detachment of certain phenomena from their cultural context is avoided. If not, those phenomena, particularly if they are very different to those that the reader or observer considers normal, risk being used to caricature or stereotype a culture, thus negating its complexity. Travellers and chroniclers (non-anthropologists), when coming into contact with other peoples, usually have focused on these 'strange' aspects. As an example, let's consider the Padaung ethnolinguistic group (also known as Palaung or Kayan Lahwi), in Northern Thailand and Burma (Myanmar), in which many girls undergo a body modification procedure. Through the gradual addition of copper rings to the neck, their clavicles are pushed downwards and the neck elongated, as you can see in this photograph (Figure 2). This ethnic group has received a great deal of attention on social media, but this has solely focused on this custom of female mutilation, earning the Padaung a reputation as 'the tribe of giraffe women' – a term that is not only unpleasant but also reductive. It is worth noting that the word 'Padaung' means 'long necks' in the language of the Shan people, the dominant ethnic group in northeast Burma¹¹.

⁸ Reimar Schefold, *Franje of weefsel? Exotica en essentie in de culturele antropologie*. Leiden University, 2003.

⁹ William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1943; Erving Goffman, *Asylums. Essays on the condition of the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York: Anchor Books, 1961; Howard Becker, Blanche Geer, Everett C. Hughes, Anselm Strauss, *Boys in white. Student culture in medical school*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961; Loïc Wacquant, *Corps et âme. Carnets ethnographiques d'un apprenti boxeur*. Marseille: Argone, 2000.

¹⁰ Interview with Anna Tsing, conducted by Maija Lassila, *Suomen antropologi* 42, 1 (2017), pp. 22-30.

¹¹ About the relationships between the Shan and their neighbouring ethnic groups, see the classic work by Edmund Leach, *Political systems of Highland Burma*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954.



Figure 2. Padaung woman. Source: Wikipedia.

Padaung are, therefore, 'the Others' both to their neighbouring peoples and to those contemplating them from a distance. This Otherness has become a commodity for tourism entrepreneurs, among them members of the local population. As we see in almost all tourist destinations, those observed are not passive objects of the 'tourist gaze'¹². Indeed, there are active agents among them, who adapt their cultural practices to meet the expectations of the tourists. As a result, in recent decades, among the Padaung there has been a tendency to increase the number of rings - seemingly elongating the women's necks even further in order to attract more tourists, thus exacerbating the suffering, as this procedure causes pain, while considerably restricting freedom of movement¹³. It is just one of many forms of body mutilation women undergo in countless societies and cultures. Such procedures can sometimes be very dangerous, or even lethal, and inflict disabilities and chronic pain on hundreds of thousands of women all over the world.

Returning to the subject of cultural tourism, it involves the physical convergence of people from different cultures, the visitors and the visited. However, this proximity can be accompanied by psychological distancing. This is especially true when tourists pay fleeting visits to societies and attend shows and demonstrations, underpinned by the narratives of mass-

¹² On the *tourist gaze* and the narratives for tourists (*storytelling*), see: John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd ed., London: Sage, 2002 [1990]; Maria Johanna Schouten, Memories of faraway visitors to Southeast Asia: The 'Portuguese fort' in Amurang, *Illuminuras* 50 (2019), pp. 9-30.

¹³ Stephen Sparkes, Stretching the family budget. Tourism and ethnic identity among the Padaung Karen, Northern Thailand, *NIASnytt* 1 (1996), pp. 7-9; A. Harding, *Burmese women in Thai 'human zoo'*. BBC January 30 2008, in <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7215182.stm>; Jessica Theurer, Trapped in their own rings: Padaung women and their fight for traditional freedom, *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 2, 4 (2014), pp. 51-67. In his first novel, George Orwell suggests that, already in the 1930s, British colonial officers viewed excursions to observe the Padaung (Palaung) women as a pleasant pastime (George Orwell, *Burmese Days*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967 [1934], p. 123.)

market tourist brochures and guides. In search of 'Authenticity' they see Otherness and foreignness confirmed. This is an issue we will touch upon again later.

Observing the Other, before Anthropology

The fascination with the Other among travellers is nothing new. Prior to the development of Cultural or Social Anthropology¹⁴ as a discipline, which took place in the nineteenth century, many descriptions of little-known societies already existed in the Western world. These descriptions were the fruit of curiosity, a need for information, or chance encounters. I will now cite a few examples, which I have chosen according to my personal interests and preferences.

In his account of the Persian Wars, the Ancient Greek Herodotus gave wide-ranging information on the peoples living around the Mediterranean basin and the modern-day Middle East. When I was a secondary school student, reading Herodotus had a substantial impact on my choice of university course. A significant contribution to this was the enthusiasm of my Greek language and literature teacher, Hein van Dolen, who did actually publish a translation of the *Histories* of Herodotus into modern colloquial Dutch¹⁵.

For my second example, allow me to skip forward to the period of the so-called Discoveries. The letters and accounts written by the scribes of Portuguese explorers, such as Álvaro Velho and Pero Vaz de Caminha, about the people and cultures encountered in India by Vasco da Gama, and in Brazil by Pedro Álvares Cabral are widely known. However, today, I would like to focus on a Dutchman working for the Portuguese, a secretary to the Viceroy of the State of India in the late sixteenth century. In his book entitled *Itinerário*, this man with the very Dutch-sounding name Jan Huygen van Linschoten left us with a portrait of peoples of the Asian continent: their physical appearance, their customs, their dress and even their languages¹⁶. The book was almost immediately translated from Dutch into English, German, Latin and French, but at the time it was not translated into Portuguese, despite (or, more likely, because of) the fact that it concerned areas of the world with which the Portuguese had important contacts. Only in 1997 did a Portuguese translation see the light of day, a magnificent

¹⁴ The terminology applied (Cultural Anthropology, Social Anthropology, Ethnology) depends of the school and the national tradition.

¹⁵ Herodotus, *Histórias* [*Het verslag van mijn onderzoek*, translation by Hein L. van Dolen. Nijmegen: SUN, 1995].

¹⁶ Linschoten, Jan Huygen van, *Itinerario: Voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huyghen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien, 1579-1592*. Amsterdam: Cornelis Claesz, 1596.

publication to coincide with the commemoration of the Portuguese discoveries, celebrated in that decade¹⁷.

In the two centuries that followed the so-called Discoveries, the period in which Europe's interest in knowledge and science exploded, numerous land and sea expeditions aimed to expand the understanding of geography and astronomy, and collect more information on unknown regions: geological phenomena, flora and fauna, as well as local populations and their costumes. Examples of this include the voyages of Louis Antoine de Bougainville and James Cook in the Pacific Ocean. They brought objects or samples of the natural environment back to Europe – for scientific reasons but also for commercial purposes. The wealthy classes in Europe were eager to collect and display objects from the Other World (*exotica*) in their homes, including plants and animals.

The Portuguese writer José Saramago drew his inspiration for his novel *A Viagem do Elefante* (*The Elephant's Journey*) from the fact that, in the mid-sixteenth century, King John III of Portugal sent an Asian elephant to Vienna as a special gift for his cousin, Archduke Maximilian of Austria¹⁸. This theme has also been addressed, from a more factual perspective, by a colleague at the University of Beira Interior, Tesseleno Devezas, who, alongside Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues, co-authored the book *Salomão – o elefante diplomata* (*Salomão – The Elephant Diplomat*)¹⁹. Years earlier, in 1515, King Manuel had won admiration on the European continent by an even more remarkable diplomatic gift, the rhinoceros from India he sent to Pope Leo X, which, under the name of Ganda, became famous thanks to a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (Figure 3).

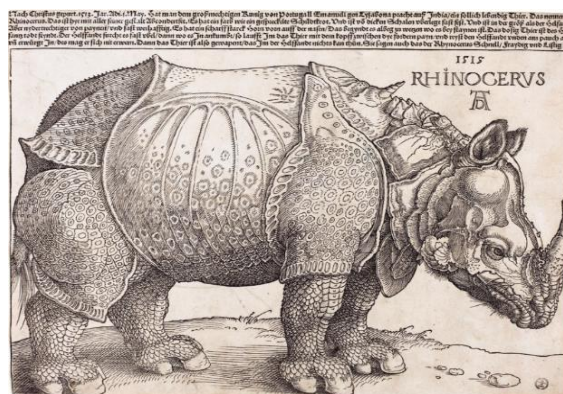


Figure 3. 'Ganda', by Albrecht Dürer, 1515.

¹⁷ *Itinerario, Viagem ou Navegação de Jan Huygen van Linschoten para as Índias Orientais ou Portuguesas*. Translated and edited by Arie Pos and Rui Loureiro. Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 1997; Suzanne Daveau, A primeira tradução portuguesa da descrição das Índias Orientais por Linschoten (1596), *Finisterra* 64 (1997), pp. 127-128.

¹⁸ José Saramago, *A viagem do elefante*. Lisbon: Editorial Caminho, 2008.

¹⁹ Tesseleno Devezas and Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues, *Salomão - O elefante diplomata*. Famalicao: Centro Atlântico, 2008.

Many wealthy individuals had special cabinets in which to showcase exotic artefacts, including taxidermied animals: ‘cabinets of curiosities’, known universally by the German word *Wunderkammer*. In the home of the painter Rembrandt in Amsterdam, now a museum, the objects from distant lands on display were also used as models for his paintings (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Detail of the *Wunderkammer*, present situation, in Museum Het Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam. (www.queensu.ca/gazette/alumnireview/stories/rembrandts-collection-curiousities)

The residence of Rembrandt is located close to the Portuguese synagogue, in a neighbourhood which, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was home to many immigrants, hundreds of whom were of African descent. This etching (Figure 5) of 1675 shows men inside the synagogue, wearing hats and holding books, and, less prominently, a hatless, dark-skinned man.



Figure 5. Interior of the Portuguese synagogue with the bima. Detail of an etching by Romeijn de Hooghe, *De Predikstoel en Binnen Transen*, (Amsterdam, 1675. Atlas Dreesmann, Collection Municipal Archive, Amsterdam; detail reproduced in Mark Ponte 2019, p. 49).

Some of Rembrandt's neighbours with African roots modelled for his paintings and drawings. At the time, Amsterdam was a financial hub of the transatlantic slave trade, and the Blacks living in the city had arrived there by various means and for various reasons, for example to serve the Dutch and Portuguese on their maritime voyages²⁰. The great majority of the city's black population communicated in Portuguese and had Portuguese names; the places of origin listed in the official city records include Angola, Cape Verde and Congo, but also the Algarve²¹. Others came from Northeast Brazil (Pernambuco), an area that was a Dutch territory in the 1630s and 40s, governed by John Maurice of Nassau. This Rembrandt painting (Figure 6) probably depicts the two brothers who are referred to in the archives as 'Manuel and Bastiaan Ferdinando' and had made their journey to Amsterdam from São Tomé²².



Figure 6. Rembrandt van Rijn, c. 1661, *Two young Africans*. Collection Mauritshuis, The Hague.

²⁰ Charles R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne empire*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973; Dienke Hondius, Black Africans in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, *Renaissance and Reformation/ Renaissance et Réforme* 31, 2 (2008), pp. 85-103; Mark Ponte, 'Al de swarten die hier ter stede comen'. Een Afro-Atlantische gemeenschap in zeventiende-eeuws Amsterdam, *TSEG/ Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History*, 15, 4 (2019), pp. 33-62.

²¹ Based on his research of marriage registers of the city, in this period, Ponte (2019, p. 37) identified two hundred *Swarten* (literally blacks, but in reality all dark-skinned individuals, including those hailing from Asia).

²² Mark Ponte, 'Twee moeren in een stuck van Rembrandt', in: Huygens Instituut, *Wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland*. Amsterdam: Ambo Anthos, 2017, pp. 265-269. About the role of São Tomé in transatlantic trade, see: Gerhard Seibert, Colonialismo em São Tomé e Príncipe: hierarquização, classificação e segregação da vida social, *Anuário Antropológico* 40, 2 (2015), pp. 99-120; David Abulafia, Virgin Islands of the Atlantic, *History Today* 69, 11 (2019), in <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/virgin-islands-atlantic>.

Among the wealthiest families in northern and north-eastern Europe, the presence of dark-skinned domestic servants was also a mark of prestige. Family portraits from the time, particularly those from the Netherlands, often feature young people of African descent, with varying degrees of visibility.



Figure 7. Jan Steen, 1659-1660, *Fantasy interior. The family of Gerrit Schouten*. Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. [Wikimedia commons].

In this portrait by Jan Steen (Figure 7), the servant in the bottom left corner is not immediately visible (like the black person in the Portuguese synagogue, in Figure 5). But he is there. This shows that black people lived in very close proximity to Dutch families, within the home environment, but that they were also distant: their very presence was based on the fact that they were 'different', 'exotic', and, of course, subordinate.

The Western gaze on other peoples and cultures

At this point, I will consider two broad categories of societies considered 'different' from the Western perspective: firstly, societies without writing, sometimes referred to a *pre-literate*, or

tribal; and, secondly, communities from the 'Orient'. Outside the scientific sphere, the former are often referred to as 'primitive' or even 'savage', in stark opposition to 'civilised'. The Latin origin of these terms clearly illustrates the nature of the two categories (*silva* means forest; *civis* means city-dweller, or citizen). In Antiquity, in this case Ancient Greece, we see another term used to refer to less sophisticated 'others': *barbaroi*. This is an onomatopoeia, representing the sound 'bar-bar', which citizens of Athens and other Greek cities claimed to hear when coming into contact with 'other people'. Thus, the term *barbaros*, and its modifications such as barbarians, which exists in several modern-day European languages, originally applied to those who did not speak Greek or share the customs Greek citizens at the time considered normal. These represented the general rule or ideal, a perspective we may well call Athens-centric.

Throughout history, 'civilised' peoples have attributed various characteristics to 'savages'. These can be positive (such as Rousseau's notion of the Noble Savage), but generally, Savages are associated with ignorance and atrocity. I have read accounts by explorers in the seas of eastern Indonesia, particularly the area around Timor, who were utterly terrified of the inhabitants of these small islands, famous for the practice of headhunting expeditions and, at times, cannibalism. They were frequently referred to as 'inhuman savages'²³. The belief that certain Other people walk the line between Human and Non-human is clearly evident in many travel logs, theological debates and proto-scientific discourses²⁴.

In the first decades of its existence, Cultural Anthropology focused on these simple societies, or *primitive isolates*. This 'primitivist paradigm' was framed by the evolutionist approach, prevalent at the time, and was based on the idea that knowledge of the origin and development of a phenomenon (in this case, a society) was the key to understanding it²⁵. In reality, societies that were entirely uncontacted were very rare, probably non-existent. There was also an urgent need to document and study the habits, beliefs and languages of these cultures, fuelled by the fear of their imminent extinction²⁶.

²³ John Wilson, *The Cruise of the "Gipsy". The Journal of John Wilson, surgeon on a whaling voyage to the Pacific Ocean 1839-1843*, ed. by H. Forster. Fremantle: Australian Association for Maritime History, 1991.

²⁴ Examples in: Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001; Frank Westerman, *El Negro en ik*. Amsterdam: Atlas, 2004 (English summary on: http://www.letterenfonds.nl/images/dossier/Westerman_Negro_screen.pdf); Angel Espina-Barrio, *Manual de Antropologia Cultural*. Recife: Massangana, 2005, pp. 60-62; Gregory Forth, *Images of the wildman in Southeast Asia. An anthropological perspective*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008; Ricardo Roque, Mountains and Black Races, *The Journal of Pacific History*, 47, 3 (2012), pp. 263-282.

²⁵ Adam Kuper, The idea of primitive society. In: *The invention of primitive society. Transformations of an illusion*. London: Routledge, 1988, pp. 1-14; Susana Matos Viegas and João Pina-Cabral, Na encruzilhada portuguesa: a antropologia contemporânea e a sua história, *Etnográfica* 18, 2 (2014), pp. 311-332, here p. 314.

²⁶ This concern, although based on somewhat different ideas, is the inspiration for today's so-called Urgent Anthropology.

In the era of the so-called Discoveries, Europeans encountered distant cultures on their voyages, to which the label ‘savages’ could not properly be applied. In India, China, Japan and Southeast Asia, there were vast, well-organised kingdoms, or empires, with lavish court cultures and enormous libraries. The first cities that the Europeans discovered in India were ‘larger than London and Paris’²⁷. Contrary to expectations, when the Portuguese arrived in Calicut and elsewhere in India, they were not greeted with respect. Seen through the eyes of the inhabitants of these areas of Asia, the brutes and savages were the Portuguese (and, in a broader sense, the Europeans). The low status of the latter meant, for example, that in India, members of the higher castes banned marriages between their women and the Portuguese, and that these were shunned and at times even expelled from China and Japan²⁸.

This relationship, which forced the Europeans to resign their position of superiority and adopt a humble attitude, contrasts with the still prevailing image in the Western world of the Europeans as having always been the dominant global force. For Western historians and classic scholars of the social sciences, such as Marx and Weber²⁹, interpretations of the world and of history centred on Europe. Today, however, academics increasingly recognize the prominence of Asia and the Asian kingdoms on the world stage during various periods of history, leading to a *Decentring of Europe*. Currently, in the global conjuncture, we are witnessing the resurgence of Asia.

This *re-recognition* of the historical significance of Asia arose after a period of what we could term arrogance on the part of the Europeans, coinciding with their nineteenth and twentieth-century imperialist endeavours. However, in the past, the European population demonstrated a great appreciation of certain aspects of Asian culture. Orientalism in art (in music, visual arts, literature and interiors) was inspired by an idealised image of the areas east of the Suez. A sense of mysticism, eroticism and adventure hovered over the Orient, inhabited by the mysterious Others. Since the eighteenth century, there has been an academic interest in classic texts from India, China and Java among experts in the field of arts and literature (philologists), who have studied the so-called ‘high culture’, the culture of the court³⁰. 40 years

²⁷ Jack Goody, cited by Brian O’Neill, Miraculous Eurasia. *Anthropology of this century* 4, May 2012, in <http://aotcpres.com/articles/miraculous-eurasia/>.

²⁸ K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and western dominance*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970 [1953], pp. 55-70; Rui Loureiro, O encontro de Portugal com a Ásia no século XVI, in: Luís de Albuquerque et al., *O confronto dos povos na época das navegações portuguesas*, Lisbon: Caminho, 1991, pp. 155-211, here p. 156; Teotónio R. de Souza, A literatura de viagens e a ambiguidade do encontro de culturas: O caso da Índia, *Cadernos Históricos* 8 (1997), pp. 85 – 96; here p. 87.

²⁹ Lufti Sunar, *Marx and Weber on Oriental Societies: In the shadow of Western modernity*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

³⁰ The most famous names include William Jones (1746-1794), Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) and Pieter Johannes Veth (1814-1895).

ago, this type of study by Westerners, particularly insofar as it concerns the Arab and Islamic world, faced severe criticism in the book *Orientalism*, by Edward Said³¹. This author argued that in those studies differences between the East and the West had been exaggerated, and used to support and justify colonialism and imperialism.

Although, when I first read it, I was enthusiastic about Said's book and its criticism of cultural imperialism, my excitement evaporated when I analysed the sources cited by its author. This was just one of many instances in which, when analysing a text or an opinion, the importance was revealed of referring back to its sources or methodology and the danger of relying on incomplete or de-contextualized quotes. Today, this kind of mistake is all too common. It seems to me that internet and Facebook users often only read the title and first few lines of a post before clicking 'like'. Many misunderstandings arise from this kind of careless and fragmented reading.

Staying on the subject of the contact between the East and the West, I would like to illustrate this danger by citing the first line of a well-known poem, dating from 1889:

'Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.'

Here, the author, Rudyard Kipling, appears to suggest that there is an insurmountable chasm between Eastern and Western cultures, and seems to be trying to discourage attempts at closeness between those living under the British *Raj* (the British Empire in Asia) and their colonisers. In reality, the intention of the poem (which is a ballad about an encounter between a Pashtun and a Brit) was to refute the affirmation of the first line, something which can only be understood if we read the entire poem. The true intention of the author is revealed in the third line, underlined in the stanza below, which is repeated at the end of the poem:

*'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the two shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of
the earth.'*

³¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism. Western conceptions of the Orient*. 2nd edition. London: Penguin Books, 1995 [1978].

The author affirms that, under certain circumstances, there is no distance between Eastern and Western men. We may criticise the poem today for praising hegemonic masculinity, but not as an expression of disdain for the people of the East. Therefore, those who do not read the whole text risk drawing the wrong conclusions.

While on the subject of nineteenth-century poetry, I would like to cite another well-known verse on East and West. Two generations before Kipling, in 1819, the German Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote the following lines:

*‘Wer sich selbst und andere kennt,
Wird auch hier erkennen:
Orient und Okzident
Sind nicht mehr zu trennen’.*

In other words: ‘He who knows himself and others - Will here also recognise: that East and West – can no longer be separated’.

This short fragment is part of one of Goethe’s major works, *West-östlicher Divan*, written after reading the translation of the works of Hafiz, a great twelfth-century Persian poet³². Goethe reflects on the desire for, or even the inevitability of, contact between the East and the West. Indeed, his poem is a sort of conversation between the two poets, a dialogue that is celebrated in a monument in a park in Weimar (Figure 8). This takes the form of two chairs, at the same level, facing one another, intended for the two men from different cultures.



Figure 8. Monument Hafiz-Goethe, Weimar. Photo by James Hodkinson

³² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*. Stuttgart: Cotta, 1819.

A few years after Goethe wrote those lines, imperialism emerged, with the Western nations asserting their dominance over other countries, including in Asia. The whole world could be characterized in terms of *the West and the Rest*, with the West assuming superiority over 'the Rest'. In other words, all other cultures were considered as one single mass. Today, in the post-colonial era, among international organisations, for instance, there is a desire for dialogue and a respect for other cultures, in all their diversity. However, worryingly, other trends exist, as we are witnessing all too often hostility and violence between groups or individuals. I will not expand on this topic now, purely because of its complexity, but Social Sciences have a great deal to say on the matter.

Globalization

When talking about the convergence of cultures, we very often use the term 'Globalisation'. Coca-Cola, yoga and figures such as Cristiano Ronaldo are recognised worldwide, even in areas considered 'isolated'. They are elements of a global culture, although the degree to which they are appreciated depends strongly on the local culture.

Certain elements of culture spread throughout the world, giving rise to new cultural configurations. I have already mentioned tourists in search of Authenticity – for example in their contacts with the Padaung. But Western tourists are not always satisfied when they encounter the 'westernised exotic', rather than the 'pure and authentic exotic' that they had expected. They are disappointed when, during a demonstration of dances referred to as 'traditional', in Africa for example, the dancers wear wristwatches with their 'authentic' dress. One such example of this mixing of the 'exotic' and the 'modern' occurred a few years ago, when, after a dance performance in southern Africa, a tourist in the audience, who also happened to be an anthropologist, decided to try and find out more about the members of the traditional dance group, only to discover that they lived in London and that the man leading the group, who, to the delight of the tourists, had introduced himself as having multiple wives, in fact was gay, and lived accordingly.

Times have also changed in Minahasa, a society I have known for over forty years. Today, the use of mobile phones and smartphones is universal, and virtually essential as a large proportion of communication occurs via SMS. Facebook membership rates in Indonesia are among the highest in the world. If I wanted, I could return to the village in Minahasa on a daily basis, via Facebook, and, to a certain extent, stay abreast of goings on and 'follow' individual people. The use of new technologies opens new possibilities in social science research, although this requires a carefully planned methodology.

Minahasa has welcomed icons of globalisation, such as McDonald's and Pizza Hut in the city of Manado. This demonstrates the increasing influence of the middle classes in the area, both in demographic and cultural terms, as seen in many developing countries. Of course, anthropologists are observing this process, and, in recent years, several major studies have looked at the emerging middle and upper classes in these countries³³.

In almost all countries (in the Western and non-Western world), the middle classes in particular have adopted elements of a global culture, many of which are American, such as the celebration of Halloween. In 1990, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, a prominent theorist of globalisation, highlighted the role of electronic media in disseminating ideas and influencing tastes³⁴, a role that has intensified since then. On the other hand, 'globalisation' is not synonymous with 'homogenisation', as illustrated by television programmes like *Who wants to be a Millionaire*. Though produced and broadcast on every continent, the format is adapted to each individual country.

Other leisure and cultural consumption practices indicative of this globalisation are seen in the tourism industry. The middle classes in developing nations are travelling the world more than ever before. Even more commonly, they are visiting museums and theme parks in their home countries, where they can see replicas of Western landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty, or even Queen Elizabeth II and other royal personalities (Figure 9).

The 'Western' world, which for non-Westerners has been the 'other' world, is now accessible, via a long journey or a short one. This behaviour is similar to that of Westerners who have, for several generations, been visiting far-flung destinations or, alternatively, ethnographic museums or tourist attractions closer to home. Here, once again, we discern two mirrored perspectives on 'difference' and 'the other'.

³³ Richard Robison and David S.G. Goodman (eds.), *The New Rich in Asia: Mobile phones, McDonald's and middle class revolution*. London, Routledge, 1995; James L. Watson (ed.), *Golden Arches East. McDonald's in East Asia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997; Lizzy van Leeuwen, Being rich in Jakarta. A mother and two daughters, in: Henk Schulte Nordholt (ed.), *Outward appearances. Dressing state and society in Indonesia*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997, pp. 339-362; Henrike Donner, The anthropology of the middle class across the globe. *Anthropology of this century* 18, January 2017. <http://aotcpres.com/articles/anthropology-middle-class-globe>.

³⁴ Arjun Appadurai, Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Theory, Culture & Society* 7 (1990), pp. 295 -310.



Figure 9. British royals in Java. Museum Angkut, Batu (Indonesia). Source: *Istana negara ternyata juga ada di Kota Batu*, on <https://www.viva.co.id/gaya-hidup/travel/1001391-istana-negara-ternyata-juga-ada-di-kota-batu>

Approximation and distancing

There are similarities to be identified between the lifestyles of the middle classes in Nigeria or Peru, and those of people of the same class in Portugal. But the material and cultural difference between the middle classes and disadvantaged groups, in particular in the less developed countries, is shocking. In India, for instance, the vast divide between these sections of society is not so much geographic, but psychological and logistical. As anthropologist Mario Rutten has pointed out, it is now easier to travel from Delhi to London than from Delhi to rural areas of Bihar, the neighbouring province. Not only does it take longer, but the social distance between the middle classes in Delhi and the population of Bihar is greater than that between the middle classes in Delhi and London³⁵.

Although they are scattered around the world, members of certain categories (social, professional, religious, etc.) form communities, who identify with each other and sometimes meet, either virtually or in person. On the other hand, they are distant from, or even hostile or fearful towards, other groups that live in close geographical proximity. In a Western city such as Lisbon, social and cultural distances can be vast. There are groups within the population that have their own ways of life based on ethnicity or religion, and both the

³⁵ Mario Rutten, *Azië en Europa vergelijkenderwijs. Verwestersing en veroostersing in mondiaal perspectief, Mens en Maatschappij* 79, 1 (2004), pp. 24-42.

extremely poor and the super-rich are distant from and beyond the purview of the middle class.

But, rightly and as we may expect, anthropologists and sociologists are conducting research into these 'unknown lands close to home' and sharing their data and findings with the public and the relevant bodies, while respecting professional and ethical standards. A large volume of anthropological research is now being carried out in the Western world, and not just in small rural communities, or on the subject of so-called 'traditions'. There is a proliferation of urban research³⁶, and 'social change' is always a factor in sociological investigation. Anthropologists are also concerned with newly emerging customs, and, of course, transnational issues, such as migration and its causes and consequences.

Final thoughts

All of the foregoing helps us understand why Anthropology has been characterised as the discipline that makes the familiar exotic and the exotic familiar³⁷.

The (psychological and physical) distances between cultures and population groups have seemingly been reduced by the impact of various factors, including technology, transport and communication, as well as an explosion in the volume of information available. A great deal depends on how these resources are used, as well as who has access to them. Today, reliable information about the lives of people in different areas of the globe does exist, mainly thanks to the social sciences and good journalism, although this remains insufficient. However, there has also been a proliferation of sensationalist information and half-truths, and these are more widely consumed.

Technologies of all sorts can be developed and harnessed as a means of disinformation, capable of generating hatred, constructing sophisticated barriers and reinforcing borders. However, what we need are bridges, and these do exist – bridges, connections, collaborative networks between different cultures and contexts. But in parallel, there is a tendency to move apart, which is worrying in this day and age, especially when we consider the complex problems facing the globe, which cross all societies. Issues related to migration, climate change, pandemics

³⁶ Graça Cordeiro, Luís Baptista and António Firmino da Costa (eds.) *Etnografias Urbanas*. Oeiras: Celta, 2003; Special subject "Etnografias urbanas" (1), edited by Lígia Ferro and Renata de Sá Gonçalves; (2), edited by Pedro Costa, in *Etnográfica* 22, 2 (2018).

³⁷ Paraphrasing expressions by Manuela Ivone Cunha, *Cultura, Diversidade, diferenciação. Um guia elementar*. Braga: Centro Interdisciplinar de Ciências Sociais da Universidade do Minho (2016), p. 18; and of the Annual Meeting of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, in Prague, 2015. [<https://easaonline.org/agm.shtml>].

or terrorism cannot be understood and resolved by isolated countries, but only through international or global coordination.

When tackling such problems, solutions based solely on technology and hard science are not enough, as experience has made abundantly clear. Social and Human Sciences are essential, as all of these problems involve people and groups, their habits and attitudes – even their ways of processing information. In Social Sciences, issues are contextualised and all sides are scrutinised. Therefore, the greater proximity or convergence that I advocate is not only between population groups, but also between different scientific fields and disciplines, which must work hand in hand with the arts.

Among the Others, I draw particular attention to disadvantaged people, in a world marred by stark inequality. No one chooses where to be born – whether this be to a privileged family or a poor family, whether North or South of the Mediterranean, whether in a state with good social policies or one defined by extreme neoliberalism. In tackling these injustices, committed research is necessary. The study of inequality, on a global, national and micro scale, is a major field of research within the Social Sciences, and this inequality is, on many occasions, identified as one of the main causes of other great problems present within societies³⁸.

On the subject of inequality and diversity, I refer to this work by Arik Brauer (Figure 10), which brings to mind a person who, from the outset, had limited opportunities, being



Figure 10. Arik Brauer, *Im Würde*, 2008. Source: Leaflet Arik Brauer Phantastisch-Realistisch. Ein Lebenswerk. (exhibition in Erfurt, August 2019).

³⁸ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How today's divided society endangers our future*. New York: Norton, 2012.

female, poor, black, from a non-Western area, with a non-Western culture, in a landscape ravaged – perhaps by erosion, deforestation or armed conflict. Perhaps this is the Other I should have portrayed in my drawing at primary school. With this personal thought, we return to our starting point.

We have come full circle. However, after this journey through various aspects of contact between cultures, I would like to add a few personal words.

I have never regretted my decision to emigrate to Portugal.

In 1987, I started my job as a lecturer at the University of Beira Interior. I have watched the UBI grow and I admire the quality of research and teaching here. The undergraduate degree in Sociology began in the same year – 1987 – and since then, I have witnessed many changes and events in the Sociology department. I would like to thank my colleagues and also my students, both in Sociology and on other degrees, for their friendship and cooperation over the years and on many levels. As for the students, I believe that they have learnt with me, or through me, but I have also learnt from them. The act of teaching has always brought me great pleasure. My colleagues in other departments and faculties and the management of the university have also contributed to the success of my work and my everyday well-being. I must not, by any means, forget the administrative and technical staff of the university. I would also like to thank my many colleagues at other universities and institutions, with whom I have collaborated in an extremely varied range of contexts.

At this point, I would like to mention my family: I owe a lot to my parents and my brother, who are no longer with us. In particular I remember Jorge Patuleia, for his personality, for the way we used to share ideas, activities and adventures and for the great impetus he gave my work, including keeping me company in Indonesia. The years we spent together were good, but they are in the past. I would like to thank my son and my daughter for the camaraderie and happiness they give me. My thanks also go to my other relatives, in Portugal and Holland, and to my friends.

I consider myself lucky and, in a way, I am surprised to have reached this age, and this stage of my life, and in good health. I still have some plans for the future. Although this event is officially entitled *farewell lecture*, I hope that it will not be the end of my desire to acquire and interpret knowledge and to share ideas.