

INTERVIEWS WITH GERMAN ANTHROPOLOGISTS

Mr. Bargatzky, which social milieu do you come from?

On my father's side, I am from a traditional family of officials. My father's brother was an official, namely an administrative lawyer for the first Adenauer regime, accordingly the first Grand Coalition. He was a man whose law studies did not fully engage him, although he practised a quite demanding profession. He was devouring all sorts of books. If you take a look at this book shelf right here '*Rythmus des Lebens*' (meaning 'rhythm of life'), '*Lebensgesetz*' (meaning 'law of life') and '*Kosmologie*' (meaning 'cosmology') – All these books I inherited from him. However, in ethnological terms he did not shape me at all, as I have already early realized his tendency to Ethnocentrism. My father, as a painter, was much more open-minded. My grandmother of my father's side grew up in Indonesia – back then still called 'Dutch East Indies'. When I was a child she used to tell me a lot about it. Today, I still have pictures, letters and big book of pictures from that time. This definitely contributed to my early interest in foreign cultures.



I was born in 1946. Unfortunately, my parents got divorced very early. As a child I used to commute from Bavaria to Baden as my mother came from Upper Bavaria and my father from Baden. This is how I already early learned about certain mechanisms of delimitation, namely between the people from Baden and those from Württemberg. Until my 15th birthday I was living in Baden. Afterwards, my father got married again and we moved to Heidelberg, located in the Electoral Palatinate, where I also completed my *Abitur*¹. Although I never lived in Baden again since then, I am still cultivating my nostalgic memory of this place and even today, I sometimes use this specific tone of voice. North of the Main people keep asking me if I am from Swabia and I definitely do not like this because I am not a Swabia, I am from Baden. After my *Abitur*, I went to Munich for my community service. The physical examination for the military service was in 1964. Before I turned 16, I wanted to go to the navy in order to become an officer. Instead I ironically became the first conscientious objector of my school – it was quite a scandal back then. By now, I managed to leave this behind and I already participated twice into so called information training for civil executives. By now, I have reached the status of a reservist. I have been through so many different phases.

What did you read as a child?

Of course I was reading the exotic novelist, Karl May, as well as the Swedish explorer and travel writer, Sven Hedin, at

¹ General qualification for university entrance.

a later point of time. I have my uncle to thank for this. My uncle, Walter Bargatzky, had, amongst other things, a passion for the polar research. I can still remember him reading out the work by Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian Polar explorer, in the evenings when I, as a child, spent my holidays at his house. For me this was my first contact with the foreign even though without a direct ethnological reference. I actually do not really know how I became an ethnologist later. What I can remember clearly though is that our teacher back in elementary school, maybe in year two or three, asked us what we want to become later. Already at that time I considered the field of *Völkerkunde*.

You already knew this terminology back then?

Indeed, I already knew it back then. In both my father's and my uncle's library there was, for example, the encyclopaedia of foreign religions and I know that I was already interested in these topics as a child. These thoughts happened to disappear again though. As a child I indeed knew that the term *Völkerkunde* exists, but my interest in foreign people and areas rather evolved later through my passion for religion. Initially, I was rather interested in the foreign in terms of adventures, so to speak romantic issues. I read more than 30 of the Karl May's volumes, an exotic novelist, but I did not read selected ethnological pieces already as a school boy – unlike the great Hermann Baumann.

As a high school graduate, did you have any idea about your future profession?

No, that was very unclear. Already back then, I was really occupied with the general question if there is something like basic structures of the human thought –even before I heard about Lévi-Strauss. That was a philosophical basic interest of mine: What do all people have in common? At that time I was reading Freud for example. This is how my rather philosophical thoughts turned into ethnological ones so that I developed an interest in humanity in general.

Did you read any particular philosophers during your school time who were inspiring you? Or was it more a fundamental and amorphous kind of interest?

At that time I was rather reading philosophical-historical pieces, for example Hans-Joachim Störig's '*Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie*'² ('A small World History of Philosophy'). When I was at high school, my Catholic religion teacher of those days gave me the assignment to talking about Kant – which is an actually impossible assignment for a 16-year-old boy, but this naturally gave me an even deeper understanding of philosophy. Accordingly, I did not directly read philosophical writings, but I read, for example, James Joyce as well as classic authors like Schiller and Kleist.

During my high school time, nothing indicated though that I would later become an ethnologist. I was rather thinking about studying German or Philosophy. However, in the *Oberstufe*³ I suddenly started to be quite good at maths, which made me really proud. Full of enthusiasm, I then had the idea to study Mathematics and Physics. For God's sake, I did not realize this plan, as neither my talent nor my interest was sufficient enough. Instead, I found my way back to my

² Hans- Joachim Störig, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie*, Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart, 1950.

³ Upper school at the secondary school

original central question of human and transcultural universals. This is how I finally found my way to the Institute of *Völkerkunde* in Munich, where I literally just knocked on the door and immediately met Johannes Raum.

You began your studies in 1969 in Munich studying *Völkerkunde*, Philosophy and Early History. Why did you decide to do *Völkerkunde* as your major subject?

I wanted the cultural comparison to be the basis of my studies. I always thought we, first of all, had to look at other cultures and learn about the others before we could compare them to ourselves. Philosophy though was just concerned with European issues so that I decided to study Philosophy only as minor subject. I chose to study Early History in order to also look at the past.

What was your first impression of the academic world?

Back then, Dr. Raum was very helpful for me. I can remember every detail of our meeting. He said he could not help me and he told me about his colleague who would be the right person to answer my questions. This is how I finally met Hanns Prem, my first big leader of the subject. I think he was just working as research assistant at that time.

Why did Mr. Raum send you to Mr. Prem?

Prem had a philosophical orientation and he was also a Mexican specialist. Already as a school boy, I was very interested in the indigenous culture and when I met Prem, I finally got in touch with someone who was working in this field. He simply understood my questions. Prem also brought Mühlmann to my attention and he told me to read everything from both Mühlmann and Karl Popper. In this respect, in my first stage of studying I felt to be in very good hands with him and he definitely moved me in the right direction. Finally, it was a result of his influence that I left Munich and went to Hamburg, as Ancient American Studies were practiced there.

Apart from Raum, who else was there as a professor back then at the institute?

Helmut Straube and Lázló Vajda. Thinking about the two of them, Lázló Vajda had the biggest impact on me. We did not always agree on everything, but he had an immense factual knowledge – also about the western civilization. He used to connect his extensive knowledge with his philosophical approach, namely Marxism, on which he liked to play a little bit. I was also very interested in Marxism, but to me it was not always tangible enough. I was fascinated to combine my own western culture with components of non-European culture and to give it a philosophical basis at the same time – this was an important signpost helping me to find my way later.

On the intellectual level, are there any parallels between you and Vajda regarding both regional terms and your interest in central philosophical questions?

Yes, from time to time I am still reading his work *‘Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Hirtenkulturen’*⁴ (meaning ‘Investigation of the history of herder cultures’). His lectures were also just great and he always gave great impulses. He absolutely had his own group of youth.

How would you characterize Helmut Straube?

Straube was a neat person. Among other things, he arranged my first job in the subject, namely my position as a full-time research assistant for one year, as it was called at that time. That happened in 1979/80 through Prem’s intercession, who was already a professor at this time. After the field research was done in 1980 I got a permanent employment as assistant researcher. Although the salary was identical, it was a totally different job title in administrative terms. Additionally, I have to thank Straube that he indirectly introduced me to Jensen. Adolf Ellegard Jensen is one of the big, shaping leading figures of the subject. With the help of Straube, I finally found my approach of Religious History orientated towards Jensen. I was also impressed by his agrarian ethnography, so to speak the agrarian complex of intensification. In certain respects, Straube managed to bring together my interest in religion, going back to my childhood, and my interest in social being; summarized in Brecht’s formula: ‘The human being: First the grub, then the morals.’ I saw a combination of that in Straube, even though he did not realize that like a synthesis. I managed to purchase this synthesis myself later. This is how everybody, through his individual profile and his particular orientation, contributed something to my development. Later, I managed to combine these components in myself. Anyway, I did not realize that back then and I went from Munich to Hamburg, as I have mentioned before. That was my next big input.

Let us talk about Munich for a short time, please. How do we have to picture Johannes Raum in the end of the 60s?

I got to know him better just in the course of time. Before I later got my professorship in Bayreuth, the institutes of Munich, Heidelberg and Tübingen were important stations. Johannes Raum could be characterized as a lovely man, at least on a personal level. He brought me close to the British Social Anthropology, which was not settled down in Germany back then, especially not in Munich.

That probably derived from his father’s influence?

Yes. I met his father once. He was an old, orderly man who wrote an essay every year long into his old age.

What did Munich offer you in regional terms – or maybe did not offer?

One thing Munich did definitely not offer me at that time was the South Seas. I wanted to know more about the South Seas. In a way, this was also driven by exotic self-interest interest. That was still the time of Freeman, a time when

⁴ László Vajda, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Hirtenkulturen*, in: *Veröffentlichungen des Osteuropa-Instituts München*, Nr. 31, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1968.

Margaret Mead's achievements were taken seriously and Samoa was regarded as an existent form of an alternative society, so to speak as paradise – 'The Papalagi' etc. We still had this on our minds and we were just gradually realizing it was nothing but fiction. These ideas most likely contributed to my intention to go to Hamburg. Moreover, Hamburg was supposed to have a milieu which was working on the basis of academic science. Eike Hinz and Hartmut Lang were working there. Hartmut Lang was a doctoral candidate at that time and Eike Hinz was Zimmermann's assistant. There also was Hans Fischer.

One thing that was really missing in Munich – except for Vajda, who was always flirting with his Marxism – was a more diverse orientation beyond the cultural history. In Munich, I could not follow my interests in the philosophical basis of the subject as well as in theoretical questions. I thought I could do that in Hamburg. After I completed my doctorate, I returned to Munich, my first station.

In how far were methods of field research a part of the program in Munich?

Systematic field research, as far as this is even possible in our subject, was something I learned in Hamburg, not in Munich. Hans Fischer brought his master student Hartmut Lang from Tübingen. In a way, Hartmut Lang was the *Spiritus Rector* of our institute, as he gave most of the important impulses in terms of content. Among other things he established the so called field research training program: one semester of preparation, four weeks of the field research training program in Western Ireland and finally one semester of follow-up processing. I was a part of the second group of Hamburg. As I came to Hamburg um 1971, it should be the year 1972/73. There were particular funds for this seminar. This program was an equivalent of what we are now doing in Bayreuth and also what many institutes are practicing by now. In this respect, Hamburg was one of the earliest institutes and I was probably one of the first students in Germany practicing it in a way like this.

Just a short contemporary question concerning your career: did the events of the late 60s and 70s lead your interest in other cultures in a certain direction? – For example in the direction of Marxist questions?

I think Maurice Godelier was another important character for me, and he still is until today. Jensen and Marx, especially neo-Marxism, are the central pillars of my own work. However, I think this developed independently from the events of those times. In my opinion, the events in Hamburg were rather deterred. I never really felt like a part of the generation of '68, as I found this too collectivistic. There were 20000 students at the University of Hamburg and just about 2000 students could fit into its main auditory. The Marxist group, or rather the student body of our faculty, decided to call for a general strike in the main auditory. 500 out of the 1000 people present in the auditory were their own members so that, of course, all of them supported the strike. Suddenly, one could see a 'Rote SA' (*left-wing extremists*) standing in front of the *Philosophenturm*⁵. People got quite rude and would not let me enter. This is why I was rather supporting the opposite side and I simply could not be bothered. Moreover, at the Institute of Hamburg there were these two big camps: the Marxists on the one hand, and the *Popperianer*⁶ namely critical rationalists, on the other hand. I counted

⁵ Highest building at the Hamburg University.

⁶ Philosophy related to Sir Karl Popper.

myself to the latter group. In verbal battles we were discussing about basic principles. My interest in Marx did not come back until later, but it was not too long after my time in Hamburg. In my opinion, Marx, especially his early approach, is a very important stimulus for our subject nowadays. Anyway, focusing on his work was not a result of my biographic circumstances; these rather sent me into another direction.

You have also mentioned the connection between Marx and Jensen. Could you please explain this in more detail?

Let me try to express it like this: The early work of Marx, communicated by Godelier, is able to open the gates for the understanding of both religion and myth. This is necessary to work on premodern societies, namely those societies whose social synthesis bases on a joint production and consumption. This formula is central though to answer important questions like the following: How do all the single individuals manage to form a social union through joint production and consumption? The logic of this union is written in the code called religion or myth. Although this came to Marx' and Engels' attention, both of them just stopped at that point, and so did Godelier. Metaphorically speaking, these philosophers opened this gate systematically logic and theoretically founded. Later, people like Jensen just walked through this gate although they did not know who had actually opened it. Accordingly, in my opinion these two components belong together just like the two sides of one coin. In a sense, this complies with the theory of myth just like Jensen represented it in this work – although he can just functionally realize this, not on the historical level.

In my opinion, the problem of recent *Ethnologie* in Germany is that just one branch was continued progressively. The only approaches of interest are those of Weber and of Günther Schlee, who was strongly orientated in cultural history. In order to answer the question: Does recent *Ethnologie* in Germany still have a school, an actual shape? I think it has not anymore.

Likewise, French neo-Marxism and the American version of neo-Marxism promoted by Jonathan Friedmann, is not received in Germany at all. This is why nobody knows what to do with people like me. Some of them regard me as an old-fashioned religious ethnologist, and others think I would indoctrinate people with my ideology of Marxism.

What do you think, why was this connection so poorly received in Germany?

I do not know. All I can do is making presumptions. On the one hand, instead of proper schools there are rather networks in Germany, even today. On the other hand, due to German past people developed a resistance to almost everything that could just slightly remind them of Hitler or the Nazi time. The word 'myth', for example, has become absolutely discredited after the so called 'Rosenberg myth'. I think that the majority of German ethnologists will not, until recently, be able to work on issues of religion in such a way it is done in France or the United States – or just like Marshall Sahlins shows us. In a sense this is quite paradox as we orientate ourselves by these philosophers. Personally, I can just find psychological explanation for this as the coming to terms with the German past was quite inadequate. Otherwise, for example both the conceptual and theoretical framework would be much more differentiated. To me, it was of major importance to discover these two components – the conceptual and the theoretical framework. For example, we can have a look at the philosopher and science theorist Kurt Hübner: His great work *'Kritik der*

*wissenschaftlichen Vernunft*⁷ ('The critique of Scientific Reason') deals with the problem of premises as such in the context of the theoretical thinking in physics. He shows that there is a Cartesian ontology containing certain premises, just like those of classical mechanics. Let us note we talk about premises; these are not reality. Hübner asks himself: is it possible to design an ontology which does not follow these Cartesian premises? Thus, he ends up with myth. Obviously, some colleagues cannot understand this, which remains a mystery to me, as Hübner provides us with the necessary tools. These elegant tools are not received at all. In this respect, I am clarifying my position in word and script for years now, but I realize that I cannot reach my colleagues with that. I am experiencing barriers of understanding in Germany I cannot overcome.

I can recognize some approaches in recent *Ethnologie* that, at least, try to reconcile these concepts. In Hauschild's '*Magie und Macht in Italien*'⁸ ('Magic and power in Italy') for example, there is indeed a connection between environment, ecology and religion, even if it does not derive from Marxism.

Yes, there are colleagues I could surely pull in the same direction with, but often there are factors preventing this. People having the same direction rather tend to see each other as competitors.

Do you think the dimension of the subject could eventually be a reason?

This could be. Yes, maybe it is just because the subject is not that big. When I went to one of my last congresses, I just realized this enormous competition between colleagues. A friend of mine, a non-ethnologist, listened to my presentation; later, she told me she clearly felt this competitive atmosphere amongst ethnologists. First of all I was a little angry about this, but she was right. People know each other, addressing each other with the familiar *du*, it is such a small club. Maybe the idea of competition is stronger especially because we are so close, much closer than in other subjects.

I would like to switch to Ancient American Studies. How did your regional focus develop?

After all, it is always hard to reconstruct the personal motivation for such a setting of priorities, as it is quite irrational somehow. In my case though, it was the confrontation with a particular question, which later also led to the topic of my dissertation. It was the question about the mythological aspect of every single stranger – just like the White Chief who enters a society and, so to speak, becomes the leader. At that time, Ulrich Köhler recommended me a reading by Cabeza de Vaca, the story of the four remaining Spanish who travelled along the coast of Florida or Texas in 1528. Did they affect this area? This question brought me to America.

During my time in Hamburg, the Ancient American Studies were fading into the background. The only result of reading Cabeza de Vaca was a half-finished dissertation, which I finally gave up due to the scientific theoretical milieu in

⁷ Kurt Hübner, *Kritik der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft*, Alber Verlag, Freiburg, 2002.

⁸ Thomas Hauschild, *Magie und Macht in Italien: Über Frauenzauber, Kirche und Politik*, Merlin Verlag, Gifkendorf, 2002.

Hamburg. This took two years of my life. In the end, I handed in a dissertation dealing with the topic '*Die Rolle des Fremden beim Kulturwandel*'⁹ (meaning 'the role of the foreign in the context of the cultural change') Afterwards I asked myself what would come next. I had almost reached the point to go into the direction of Mexican Studies. According to my researches, I had to go to an archive in Austin or Texas reading Old Spanish material. As a result, I started to look at other options and suddenly, the Southern Seas came back to my mind. This is how finally thought about Samoa again. The Samoa's history finally became the core of my habilitation work which was not published though.

In the course of time, the tide had turned again, especially due to practical reasons. My family and children were in Bayreuth and Samoa was simply too far away and hard to reach. It is much easier to travel to the United States every year. Since 1983, I have been travelling through the United States almost every year for two weeks. If I had time and money now, I would especially work in the south-west. I would, for example, work on religious-ethnological aspects of the Pueblo and Navajo people, especially about the concept of compartmentalization. Although the iron grip of the Spanish is gone for a long time now, most of the Pueblo population is Catholics. In the morning, people go their Catholic church, they receive the Holy Communion and then, they carry the Holy to the Plaza and finally hold a sort of religious kachina ceremony. This is compartmentalization – religion is not blended, but it is practiced separated. After the Holy Communion they suddenly come up with the traditional kachina dances – above all, the Franciscan Father seems to be the favourable guest of honour. He watches everything and is in favour of the local region. This is a fascinating field and during the last years, I familiarized myself with it more and more and by now, I would really like to write a more detailed paper about it. Accordingly, this would be something I find really tempting and which I could also reconcile with my family condition. I cannot just go to the South Seas for such a long time anymore and leave my wife and children at home. However, I try to go whenever it is possible.

Where exactly do you go then? To Arizona?

Yes, New Mexico, Arizona. This year I also go to Mexico for the second time.¹⁰ At the time of my unfinished 'Cabeza de Vaca' dissertation, I got in touch with an archaeologist called J. Charles Kelley. He was a professor in Carbondale, Illinois, and he wrote his early writings about the trade routes of the Trans-Pecos region. Later, he became quite famous due to his research of Alta Vista, Durango and Zacatecas. I wrote him some letters and he answered politely, and thus we finally became friends. I used to visit him on a regular basis in Fort Davis in West Texas just until his death. I am still in touch with his widow – also an archaeologist called Ellen Abbott Kelly – and I'm visiting her again this year. This is how one thing led to another. I will spend most of my time in archives and at universities in New Mexico. I will also try, if possible, to visit the Navajo region in Arizona.

You are a professor at an institute in Bayreuth focusing on Africa. How did this happen?

⁹ Thomas Bargatzky, *Die Rolle des Fremden beim Kulturwandel* (Hamburger Reihe zur Kultur- und Sprachwissenschaft, Band 12), Klaus Renner Verlag, Hohenschäftlam, 1978.

¹⁰ This trip to Mexico could not be realized. (T.B., Okt. 2010)

Between 1980 and 1985, I had a fixed-term job as a research assistant in Munich. As soon as this job was about to expire, people took legal action against this and finally Bavaria had to give in. They would have employed me on a permanent basis though. Instead, I decided to habilitate in 1986, which was followed by a sort of transitional period. At that time, I got another scholarship and I was writing my habilitation. I finally completed it in 1988 and afterwards, I was working as a substitute professor firstly in Tübingen and later in Heidelberg. After that, I actually did not know what comes next. Then, I finally got the phone call telling me that the institute in Bayreuth offers a professorship. So I applied, did my presentation and finally got the job. I also had an interview in Münster, but I just reached the third rank. Bayreuth's biggest advantage was its small size. At that time, we stayed in another building so that we were always in touch with the colleagues of other subjects. In some ways, Bayreuth also is a little bit like an arrangement arising from misunderstandings. Except for Mr. Winter, who also follows another direction, the mainstream in Bayreuth has a rather empirical orientation: into the direction of field research, Africa and economy. It was not the idea of synthesis between economy and religion, just like I was striving for. I was grateful though that there was a connection to the Religious Studies at all. I used to sit down with Ulrich Berner quite often and I definitely have to thank him for many impulses. In this respect, it was a quite mixed experience. After some time, it just became habitual and I stayed in Bayreuth.

The Fiebiger professorship was not tied to Africa, was it?

No, it was not tied to Africa. At the beginning, when they started to create the various SFB structures, people tried to win me over to Madagascar, but I did not want to start a new research region. At that time, my habilitation was still not published and, of course, it is not until today. You always need to know what to do with all the data you collected during the years. This is why I wanted to devote myself to the data I already had collected.

How could you explain that any regional specialization, as a rule, is quite monolithic in German *Ethnologie*?

Yes, this is sad and I, for both inner-scientific and systematic reasons, cannot understand it. It happened to me once that I said, during a presentation at a congress, that I was looking for people for a research project in America containing the topic religious change. A young woman got in touch with me and we even applied for project dealing with Zuni people. Unfortunately, it failed because of internal issues concerning the tribe. At this congress she told me that she was interested in working with me, but that her master thesis was about Africa. I realized this as enrichment and I intended to work on a comparative level. She explained to me afterwards that nowadays basically nobody would think like this. In Germany, people are obviously forced to specialize on a specific region. Maybe, the enormous pressure of competition is a reason why people have to specialize themselves on a particular region. Or maybe, if people focus on more than one region, they are scared to get the reputation of being superficial and, in this way, to reduce their chances on the job market. I could imagine people talking about me in a similar way. When I was studying at the institute of Munich, people always motivated us visit various seminars. It was the same in Hamburg. Whereas Vajda was the specialist for Africa and Zerries the one for the South American region, Prem was rather working on Ancient America and finally Raum focused on Sub-Saharan Africa. It must be emphasized that our subject is a comparative one. Bayreuth is a good example to show that the comparative studies of *Ethnologie* got lost. Our colleagues are now trying

to bring it back to life. Accordingly, both Bayreuth and Hamburg were rather an exception regarding their wide variety. At my time at university, also the other, even smaller institutes motivated us also to research beyond the regional restrictions of our professors. At any rate, it was no damage for the career. However, when I was talking to the younger generation about this, it seems to be, at least in Germany, rather bad for their career. The reason can just be something external to the field, in other words pressure of both competition and existence. The result is that people have to acquire a deeper and deeper expertise in just one single field. Later, they hope to put this in the balance successfully. However, this is not *Ethnologie*.

If you had to locate yourself in theoretical terms, could you do that or do you rather see yourself as a rather eclectic product?

I am convinced from eclecticism, but I am also claiming to achieve the synthesis. I do not fear contact, neither with Marx nor with any other field where I could find something that brings me forward. My book *Mythos, Weg und Welthaus*¹¹ ('Myth, way and global house') could be seen as the attempt to bring together heterogeneous issues synthetically. If I had to classify myself in the tradition of German *Ethnologie*, I would most likely locate myself close to Jensen, except for the historical orientation. Jensen is still trying to reconstruct prehistoric cultures and this is simply not supportable anymore. Reading Jensen structurally though, one will find a very good description of a certain form of socialization of both social organization and subsistence farming. This is also accessible for a neo-Marxist interpretation.

It is the tragedy of German *Ethnologie* that during the '60s, the guillotine came down on the big, future-orientated traditions. As a result, German *Ethnologie* lost its profile. There is Mühlmann, for example, who was actually badly received. As he joined the NSDAP in 1939, people did not continue to spend time on his scientific approaches – although he is quite modern. Let us, for example, have a look at the theory of empires represented by the Berlin political scientist Münkler. It virtually calls for Mühlmann's revitalization. This is one thing. The other thing is Jensen's tradition. If people had tried at an early stage – just like I did – to connect Jensen to the French tradition or to neo-Marxist ideas, it would have also been a great offer for every non-ethnological craft. However, this did not happen.

In one of my articles¹² of 2001, I complained about German *Ethnologie*, which is definitely barricading itself behind forms of cultural relativism. Certain questions are simply not allowed to be asked. How comes, for example, that groups of Asian immigrants, compared to African and Arabic immigrants, manage to settle down among higher income groups within just a few generations? In this context we are not just talking about Germany. If we do not want to refer back to racist reasons for this, we have to start looking for the cultural ones. I realize though that this question cannot even be asked in Germany, as we, a priori, expose ourselves to suspicion of being either ethnocentric or simply pejorative. Although this is a clear finding and accordingly, there must be any factors explaining this finding. But apparently German *Ethnologie* is not ready for this – just because of this self-caused paralysis being a consequence of this ultra cultural relativism as *ultima ratio*. Though, we are not necessarily attractive as a partner of discussion.

¹¹ Thomas Bargatzky, *Mythos, Weg und Welthaus. Erfahrungsreligion als Kultus und Alltag*, LITVerlag, Münster, 2007.

¹² Thomas Bargatzky, „Alles ist Kultur: Ethnologie und Zeitgeist“. In: Hermann Joseph Hiery (Hg.), *Der Zeitgeist und die Historie*. Dettelbach, J.H. Röhl, S. 21-36, 2001.

Would you agree that both this arbitrariness and this mental block are increased by the pluralism of postmodern voices? Or would you rather place this somewhere earlier, maybe back to the time of Geertz and the interpretative anthropology?

Geertz is a very good keyword. Let me say it like this: To me, Geertz is one of the most overestimated ethnologists. He wrote beautiful literal miniatures and I really appreciate his book 'Negara'¹³, as well as his description of Cockfight. However, taking a closer look at Geertz, one can realize he is actually just a weaker version of Arnold Gehlen. German *Ethnologie* turned its face towards an interpretative orientation, namely towards a philologization and aestheticization of our subject. People no longer ask for real and social problems, just like the question of how immigrants differentially try to get away from the host society. Instead, a sort of 'literarization' of *Ethnologie* appeared. This already began at the time of Lévi-Strauss. Only his work '*Structures Elementaire de la Parenté*'¹⁴ was really pursuing. When it comes to the implementation of his structural formula though people may ask: What was the master thinking? As a consequence, people try to implement the master's thoughts, which are directly followed by the raise of reception history and seminars – this is exactly what Georg Steiner once described as 'rampantly spread of the secondary'¹⁵. In addition, we also have to refer to the various so called turns. Recently, a book was published claiming that there are eight different turns by now. The aestheticized subject became tangled in both itself and in its own modelling.

How do we explain that this appealed especially to Germany and the US? It was totally different in France and Great Britain as well as in Austria and Switzerland.

This is astonishing indeed. I can just answer this question intuitively. In terms of multicultural problems, Germany and the US are very similar in a way. According to estimates, there are up to 55 millions of Spanish speaking immigrants in the United States by now, including the unknown cases.

This is partly connected to the call for a new republic, namely the Republica del Norte. Such a republic would include parts of southwest America and the North Mexican provinces. This situation is aggravated by the academic milieu and its party almost naïve multiculturalism. In Germany the problems are quite similar, even if the scale is much smaller. Nobody actually knows the exact number of Muslim immigrants in Germany, but it seems reasonable to assume there are up to 3.5 millions of people. In 2000, there were almost 2 millions of Turks in Germany. There is a huge majority of Muslim immigrants who want to integrate and learn the language. Besides, there are minorities, usually small but quite strong and often intimidating. Sometimes they become strong through the connection to German politicians – for example the case of the Hoover secondary school in Berlin in 2006.¹⁶

¹³ Clifford Geertz, *Negara; the theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali*, Princeton University Press, 1980.

¹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté*, Paris (dt. Ausgabe: *Die elementaren Strukturen der Verwandtschaft*. Frankfurt a.M. 1981), 1949.

¹⁵ George Steiner, *Real Presences*, London (dt. Ausgabe: *Von realer Gegenwart*. München 1990), 1989.

¹⁶ In 2006, the media paid attention to the 'Deutsche Gebot' of the Herbert Hoover Realschule in Berlin Wedding having the highest proportion of foreigners of all Berlin schools. Back then, only 12 percent of all pupils were of German origin. On school property pupils obliged speaking only German. Politicians of 'die Grünen', 'die Linke' and representatives of Turkish organisations accusing the school of 'forced germanization'. The

Nowadays, it is quite popular to think that the idea of the nation was overcome and that cultural diversity must be the new focus. This is also very common amongst ethnologists and I think this is a mistake. We know that human behaviour is very flexible. Nevertheless, it is a false conclusion to assume that almost everything, which is possible for the human being, would be also possible within a single society. Of course, it is not.

As an ethnologist in the field people learn about the meaning of conformity. When I came to Samoa, I first of all had to buy a tie and a white shirt in order to go to Church on Sunday in a decent way. They would have loved to also tattoo me, but then I stood out against this. We learned to both classify and subordinate ourselves. Maybe the ethnological milieu represents a special breeding ground so that ideas of cultivation and diversity can flourish. Naturally, I cannot prove this, but there seems to be a sort of substrate, so to speak a humus layer, which helps these ideas to flourish. Thereby, people tend to forget about the important questions, just like: When did the transition to philosophy happen? Accordingly, when did people start to think in world views using the medium of abstract terminology? People do not recognize these big questions anymore, as they had to generalize in order to answer them. They need the courage to put aside both the individual cases and the colourfulness and to have a look at the broader structures of the subject. However, recent ethnologists reject this attempt immediately, as it is considered to be essentialism.

In your opinion, does recent *Ethnologie* realize to meet the requirement examining the broader context based on the individual case? Geertz, for example, also demanded for this.

No, I do not think it has been realized. I think, no matter where exactly you do your research, you can basically work on everything. This is why, in my opinion, there should not be such a strong pressure for ethnologists to unilaterally specialize on a region. People should research about whatever they like. Everyone should just be able to interpret his individual case in such a way that also the general becomes visible – just like a hydrologist who investigates a pond and finally ends up with fundamental ecological findings. In my opinion, we could though not realize this training of recognizing the general.

Now, we have already reached another question. What is your core of *Ethnologie*?

Let us have a look at the four axioms of ethnological research: the biotic and psychological unity of human beings and the culturalization of behaviour – so to speak values we have phylogenetically inherited and which are not concrete, but can be just realized through a cultural superstructure. Finally, there is the limitation of diversity, namely the premise that despite of all diversity, there must be some common structures of thought or an epistemological unity of human beings. In my book *'Ethnologie – Einführung in die Wissenschaft von den unproduktiven Gesellschaften'*¹⁷ ('meaning *'Ethnologie – introduction to the science of unproductive societies'*) I referred to – to put it simply – the necessity to recognize the unity within diversity. At the moment, recent ethnologists just cultivate diversity, but, for God's sake, this

struggle only calmed down when it became obvious that the school management, the pupil body and the parents mutually agreed on this decision in order to reduce violence and improve integration. In the very same year, the school was awarded with the German National Prize. The whole process is documented on the internet in detail. (T.B.)

¹⁷ Thomas Bargatzky, *Ethnologie - Einführung in die Wissenschaft von den unproduktiven Gesellschaften*; Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg, 1997.

is about to change soon. I just refer to Christoph Antweiler. There is a positive shift and maybe, the subject is not totally lost.

Until now, we have been talking about internal, intellectual-historical components in great detail. Which social function does *Ethnologie* have in your opinion? Is there even one?

First of all, every science should define itself rather on the basis of its own questions than on the basis of its social relevance. This is why I always emphasize I was no part of the '68 generation. Being a citizen also means to have a certain responsibility towards our society, namely to give something back. The question is what this could be. Today it is definitely possible to communicate with the institutions. These fears of contacts, I can still remember from my time as a young scientist, seem to reduce amongst the younger generations. When I was around 30 years old, I participated into a congress of Frank Bliss dealing with development aid. At that time, people said they do not want to dirty their hands with this issue. This was not my position, but I could observe this very well, even amongst the younger colleagues. Today, students come with the intention to work together on development aid projects.

There is still another aspect. Now, we have reached one of my special hobbies – the transformation of the *Bundeswehr*¹⁸ after the German reunification and the collapse of the Soviet Union – so to speak the shift from an army of national defence towards an army of intervention. In this context, the unfortunate slogan of Peter Struck, former Minister of Defence, is quite characteristic: Germany is also being defended at the Hindu Kush. People should consider the existing professional knowledge, for example the logic behind non-nation state systems according to Trutz von Trotha or the corresponding model of Sahlin. It should be our task then to tell the politicians that already people of a different calibre were failing in Afghanistan. How should Nation Building work out there? If people think they have to hang around there, no matter if this is a good idea in general, they should for goodness' sake leave these models at home. People should rather orientate towards the local structures. We also have to tell our soldiers that the local logic of action is totally reversed: Instead of the nation and the fatherland, they put their individual relations first. This system bases on a totally different logic, which is definitely not the model of the national state. Further, the national state cannot be realized there as long as the fundamental precondition is still missing: modernisation and industrialisation. People want to be modern but at the same time they do not want to give up their individuality.

Do you think it is the social function of ethnologists, for example, to explain the local logics to the natives?

Amazing, you just hit the nail on the head. At this point I also have to criticise the mainstream of the ethnological milieu in Germany. This is because we first of all need to have the courage to name those foreign logics, but people are afraid of this as they could easily be accused of ethnocentrism. This problem is comparable to a cake we want to keep but at the same time we want to eat it. It does not work like this. We have to force ourselves to find a terminology for this foreign at all, as it is the basis for our science of the cultural foreign. This is where the tragedy already begins. If I really represent these ideas in public, people will directly accuse me of being politically incorrect or, even better, of being

¹⁸ Federal Defence of Germany

essential. In the past it was the accusation of ethnocentrism.

On a scientific-theoretical level, does this mean you call for more specialisation and discussion concerning the terminology of foreignness? – An approach which rather tries to include foreignness than to explain it and which also leaves space for the possibility of another logic without even trying to decode it?

Exactly. My criticism is always a sort of self-criticism, too. In 1985, I wrote my first textbook¹⁹ emphasising that the subject of *Ethnologie* is a relative term: the foreign is always relative to the individual. Karl-Hein Kohl later adopted this idea to his book. I turned myself around in a full 180 degrees. For example: If a chief in Samoa, a matai, receives his new name, he is likewise changing his personality and becomes another human being. He changes from an individual to a social person. This is foreign to our recent imagination, which is totally individualised, as everybody represents a little universe for himself. It is exactly this foreign we need to name. Personally, I have been trying to offer such a terminology for years now, as the foreign owes a structure we can and definitely must name. This must not necessarily be realized through a specific approach, but simply defining the foreignness relatively, as I did once, is the wrong way.

I think indeed that the relational component is important, but it is simply not the only one. Reducing it to the relational is, in my opinion, rather the problem – not the relational as such.

Yes, reducing it to the relational. This means we have to win back fixed points. This must happen in concrete political problems of the present – just like the transformation of the *Bundeswehr* including military foreign assignments. There already are some ethnologists without these fears of contacts, but we have to train them properly. We need to know exactly, even beyond the regional culture, how such a system of concentrically logic is working and which behavioural components it contains. We need to have the courage to trace back specific local behaviour to certain structures and to name them. We can do this. The tools are available, but we just do not dare. As long as we do not do this, *Ethnologie* will continue to moan about its missing relevance – same moaning I remember back from my time at university.

There is one last thing I would like to add in terms of self-criticism. I started to develop my outsider position after I published my book about Cultural Ecology²⁰. Indeed, there was something missing: the complex of mythology and religion. After I published this book about Cultural Ecology, I finally understood that I first of all have to look at people's concept of nature before I could really talk about Cultural Ecology. With my following books 'The Invention of Nature'²¹ and '*Ethnologie – Eine Einführung in die Wissenschaft von den unproduktiven Gesellschaften*' I tried to fill my former gaps and give a solid basis – but these books were not received in the same way. Even the most recent publications talk about the dichotomy of nature and culture, but this is just our modern way of thinking.

¹⁹ Thomas Bargatzky, Einführung in die Ethnologie. Eine Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie, Helmut Buske Verlag, Hamburg 1985.

²⁰ Thomas Bargatzky, Einführung in die Kulturökologie. Umwelt, Kultur und Gesellschaft, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin, 1986.

²¹ As publisher, together with Rolf Kuschel (Kopenhagen). Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang Verlag, 1994.