The Inventiveness of a Tradition:  
Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands  
from an outsider’s perspective

Peter Berger  
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Abstract: Leiden structural anthropology achieved international renown through the work of J. P. B. and P. E. de Josselin de Jong and their colleagues and students. In the 1980s, especially after the retirement of P. E. de Josselin de Jong in 1988, it grew quiet around this school. This article investigates the status quo of structural anthropology in the Netherlands by focusing on developments in the last twenty years. It is argued that the structural tradition continued, though in less conspicuous ways, because it changed and at the same time retained characteristic features. Old concepts and methods were refined and developed, new emphasis added and current problems approached. Over the decades this inventive process was enhanced by a creative opposition and close but critical cooperation with various waves of French structuralism.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Marshall D. Sahlins diagnosed the discipline of anthropology as suffering from a “paralysing fear of structure” (Sahlins 1999:399). Various forms of “afterology” (postmodernism, postcolonialism, etc.), he states, assume morally appropriate attitudes with respect to colonialism or racism, for example, but instead of facilitating the understanding of other cultures would rather make “cultural logics disappear” (ibid.: 406). Although European anthropology might have been slightly less in thrall to afterologies than elsewhere, it is also true that recently there has been no discernible focus on structure and, in Germany at least, there are few who would now describe themselves as structuralists or be so described by others. However, the state of anthropology in Europe is not the same everywhere. While there was never a tradition of structural anthropology in German anthropology, the circumstances were different in the Netherlands.

The names of J. P. B. and P. E. de Josselin de Jong, although perhaps confused outside the Netherlands at times, are internationally recognized, and not only by Indonesianists. In the late 1970s and 1980s especially, several edited volumes appeared that claimed a structural tradition for Leiden anthropology, and works previously only accessible in Dutch were translated (Claessen and Moyer 1988; P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1977a; Moyer et al. 1981; Ridder and Karremans 1987). There was therefore a high degree of what Michael Prager calls “auto-historiography”, that is, the retrospective
construction of a distinct school of anthropology (Prager 1996:11 f.; Oosten, personal communication). The retirement of P. E. de Josselin de Jong in Leiden in 1988 was an occasion for several Festschriften, which provided evidence of a vital anthropological endeavour. At the same time, his retirement can also be regarded as the swan song of Dutch structural anthropology. At least as perceived from across the border it grew quiet around the Leiden school in the late 1980s.

In their review of Dutch anthropology, addressed to an international audience, Anton Blok and Jeremy Boissevain proclaimed the “discontinuity of Dutch structuralism” even before P. E. de Josselin de Jong’s retirement (1984:337). However, there are statements to the contrary. For example, Han Vermeulen, in 1997, found that structural anthropology was one of the “conspicuous continuities”\(^1\) in Leiden (Vermeulen 1997:42). Keeping this in mind as we visit the current websites of the faculty staff of the Department of Cultural Anthropology and Developmental Sociology,\(^2\) we only find one scholar, Franklin Tjon Sie Fat, associating himself with structural anthropology and this may appear as an anachronism to some people.

This article investigates, if in a somewhat impressionistic way, the status quo of structural anthropology in the Netherlands.\(^3\) Did structural anthropology come to an end with the retirement of P. E. de Josselin de Jong, with the lack of the word “structure” on the websites merely mirroring this fact? Or can we detect a continuity of this tradition, which, although not the same as in the 1950s or 1970s, is nevertheless alive and well? I will argue that the latter is the case and that the disappearance of the term “structure” as a label – the intolerable “s-word”, as Sahlin (1999:406) has it – does not automatically entail the end of structural anthropology. Rather, what we have here, alluding to Vermeulen, is an “inconspicuous continuity” of structural anthropology after 1988. Furthermore, one can speak here with Sahlin about the inventiveness of a tradition, “a permutation of older forms and relationships, made appropriate to novel situations” (Sahlin 1999:408 f.). That the tradition changed, integrating and making indigenous external – mainly French – elements, and at the same time articulating its distinctiveness, can in this view be seen as a sign of its vitality.

The intention here is not to present a complete or comprehensive history of Leiden anthropology. Much has been written on the subject: particularly detailed are Prager’s

---

\(^1\) All translations from Dutch or German are mine.

\(^2\) \url{http://www.fsw.leidenuniv.nl/ca-os/organisatie/stafleden.jsp}, accessed on 24 March 2009.

\(^3\) The motive behind writing this contribution derives from the academic background and current situation of its author. As a student of Georg Pfeffer, one of the few German anthropologists who would not be bothered about being called a structuralist (cf. Berger et al. 2009), and working for the last two years in Groningen in a place where anthropologists sought refuge in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in the 1980s when their own department was closed down (Papousek and Kuiper 2002), I became curious about the state of affairs in Dutch structural anthropology. I want to thank Yme Kuiper, Jarich Oosten, Jos Platenkamp and Patricia Spyer for comments on and reactions to the manuscript.
study (1996) which takes a historiographic and contextualizing approach, identifying various paradigm shifts in the period between 1917 and 1956, and Vermeulen’s work (2002), which focuses more on the institutional history of anthropology at Leiden. Most of the literature concentrates on the period between 1922 and 1988, when J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong and his nephew gave shape to the structural tradition in Leiden. However, I will focus on the pervasiveness and modifications of analytical ideas, theoretical assumptions and methodological convictions, particularly after P. E. de Josselin de Jong’s retirement in 1988. While emphasizing aspects of continuity, I do not want to indicate that we are dealing here with a homogenous tradition. Many students of P. E. de Josselin de Jong, for example, did not continue in the structuralist tradition and found other perspectives more promising, feminism being an example. Furthermore, as will be seen, those who continued in the structuralist line did so in various ways, each scholar accentuating certain features and giving structural anthropology his or her own stamp. Nevertheless, these are variations on a theme. Finally, this article does not attempt to pigeonhole those involved. What is at stake here is a particular anthropological practice and not the names with which this practice is associated. This conviction is shared by many scholars whose works I will discuss.

In the following I will outline the main ideas, methods and convictions of anthropologists working in Leiden within a structural framework. In particular, the focus will be on those who held the chair of Indonesian anthropology, first held by J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong and later by other professors who were associated with structural anthropology at the University of Leiden. In addition to publications by the scholars concerned, special attention will be given to their inaugural lectures, which have the status of a “publication” in the Netherlands but are not in every case readily available outside the country. Such lectures are particularly valuable for the present purpose be-

---


5 Structural anthropology in the Netherlands is more or less synonymous with Leiden. Jos Platenkamp, for example, recalls how, after his first year in anthropology in Nijmegen in 1969, he was told he should study in Leiden. Similarly, Jarich Oosten explains that everyone who wanted to work in this tradition came to Leiden (Platenkamp, personal communication; Oosten, personal communication). Therefore the focus on Leiden anthropology when talking about the tradition of structural anthropology in the Netherlands may well be justified. However, also in Utrecht (Arie de Ruijter) and Nijmegen (Jan Pouwer) structural anthropology was developed by some. Mention has also to be made of Jan van Baal, who never held a position in Leiden but is closely associated with this tradition; a contribution of his is also included in the reader Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands (J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong 1977). His major ethnographic work is on South New Guinea (van Baal 1966), for his theoretical vision see his Symbols for Communication (van Baal and van Beek 1985; see also Kuiper 1986).

6 The title of the chair has changed over time: Culturele Antropologie, i.h.b. van Zuid-Oost Azië en het Zuidzeengebied (P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1957); Culturele Antropologie en Sociologie van Indonesië (Schefold 1990); Culturele Antropologie en Sociologie van het huidige Indonesië (Spyer 2002).
cause they are programmatic statements – “visiting cards” as Yme Kuiper calls them (personal communication) – that provide a link between past, present and future. In their lectures the new professors comment on the history of the position they now fill, they emphasize particular aspects of this tradition while omitting others, and they state their motives, beliefs and ambitions for the future. As a newcomer to the field I also considered it advisable to complement my reading with some primary information from “indigenous informants”.

The legendary period

Structural anthropology was practised in Leiden long before it was described as such, let alone the coinage of the term “structuralism” by Lévi-Strauss in Paris. Nevertheless, the initial impulse came from France through the work of Durkheim and Mauss on systems of “primitive classification” (1963 [1903]). In this influential piece of work, Durkheim and Mauss tried to show how the physical organization of societies (the empirical level), for example the spatial layout of tribal settlements, produced corresponding indigenous categories of thought, such as culturally specific notions of space. In Leiden it was the lawyer Van Ossenbruggen (Van Ossenbruggen 1977 [1917]) who applied their ideas to Indonesian ethnographic data and is thus regarded as one of the founding fathers of structural anthropology in the Netherlands (Moyer 1988; Prager 1996). Around this time, W. H. Rassers, working at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden (founded in 1837), recognized the importance of the same ideas and also inspired his colleague at the museum, J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong, to take this direction (cf. Prager 1998). Being appointed part-time professor of general anthropology in 1922 and to the main chair (established 1877) related to the cultural anthropology of Indonesia in 1935, it was J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong who institutionalized this early form of Dutch structural anthropology, which from its very beginnings was closely related to the study of Indonesia – the Netherlands’ most important colony.

The inaugural lecture by J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong, the “culture hero” of the Leiden School’ (de Ruijter 1981:32), in 1935, introduced a new methodological outlook that can be regarded as one of the most significant threads of Dutch structural anthropology: the notion of the “Field of Ethnological Study” (1977), later called the “Field of Anthropological Study” (FAS) (cf. Oosten 1988:259). This method entails the comparison of historically related societies that share certain socio-structural features – the “structural core” including “asymmetric alliance”, “exogamous moieties”, “double des-

---

7 In January 2009 I had a conversation with Jarich Oosten in Leiden and in February 2009 another with Jos Platenkamp and Michael Prager in Münster. Furthermore, I had a long telephone conversation in March 2009 with Sabine Luning. I would like to thank all of them for their time and the inspiring discussions.
cent” and marriage as “total prestation” – but which are nevertheless sufficiently different to make a comparison fruitful. This methodological perspective proved to be the most influential aspect of J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong’s tenure of the chair at Leiden (until 1956), and it was adopted and developed over the years by other anthropologists working in Leiden (Barraud and Platenkamp 1990; Kuper 1977, 1982; Oosten 1985; Platenkamp 1996; Schefold 1994, 2001).

Within this comparative framework, J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong and his students had a particular vision of structure that is essentially pre-Lévi-Straussian, as they assumed it to be manifest on the empirical level. Thus, the notion of structure was more or less identical to that devised by Radcliffe-Brown in Oxford, in the sense that it was a matter of observable relationships. It was dissimilar, however, in that J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong and his students commonly used a diachronic explanation (which Radcliffe-Brown would have refuted) to account for the fact that the social structures they encountered empirically in Indonesia were usually far from perfect – they were incomplete. As reality did not fit the model, it was assumed that a complete proto-system must have existed, of which we find merely degenerate forms in the present (Prager 1996).

The understanding of structure changed fundamentally when J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong was succeeded in Leiden by his nephew P. E. de Josselin de Jong in 1956. Throughout his life P. E. de Josselin de Jong was an admirer of Lévi-Strauss and he introduced the latter’s ideas to Leiden, thereby giving a new twist to the school’s outlook. Lévi-Strauss published his first opus magnum on kinship in 1949 and in contrast to the greater part of the anthropological world, which mostly waited for the English translation 20 years later, his ideas were quickly received and debated in Leiden, with his work not only being read but also understood (Oosten, personal communication). For Lévi-Strauss, structures were real and complete on the level of the model – on the conceptual plane – and always only partially and imperfectly realized. Structures were an empirical possibility not a necessity. Certainly influenced by Lévi-Strauss, from the early 1950s onwards P. E. de Josselin de Jong came to question the empirical notion of structure and distinguished several different models of culture (see de Ruijter 1988:89) as abstractions. Hence, the crutch of a proto-system could be thrown away and the notion of regional comparison nevertheless be maintained, as the aim was now, as Gellner once put it, “to seek structure in culture” (1981:xxxiii), that is, on the cognitive plane and not on the level of observable social structures. While “moieties” (a “core” feature) were hard to detect empirically, except in a “degenerated” form, dualisms within the indigenous cosmologies were all too evident in the Indonesian data. Lévi-Strauss’s notion of “transformation” further helped to grasp the fact that societies

---

6 Mauss had the same idea of comparing Inuit societies that were sufficiently similar as well as different. J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong and Mauss almost used the identical formulation (cf. Platenkamp 1996:213 fn. 14).
within the region realized, elaborated and reversed themes that were common to the region as a whole. Therefore, features that were weakly emphasized or absent in one society could be explained by looking at the way they were elaborated in others.

Following Prager (1996), major paradigm shifts can thus be detected in the period between 1917 and 1956. The first theoretical framework was provided by the *Année sociologique* and the study of systems of classification, the second around 1935, when the previously broad regional scope was narrowed down to Indonesia, as a FAS defined by core features made comparisons within this region. Throughout, the notion of structure was empirical and inconsistencies were explained by the idea of proto-systems. As students of J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong became engaged in the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies, questions of cultural change, cultural degeneration and acculturation became virulent, leading to a strand of applied anthropology which intended to minimize the effects of these apparently inevitable processes (Prager 1996:212 f.). Theoretically of more impact was the shift effected through the work of Lévi-Strauss and the corresponding change in of the notion of structure, which became explicit in the two contributions of van Wouden and P. E. de Josselin de Jong in the Festschrift for J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong in 1956 (P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1977c; Van Wouden 1956; cf. Prager 1996:236 f., 241 f.).

While this new impulse from France was greatly welcomed and the theoretical sophistication of Lévi-Strauss admired, the Dutch structural anthropologists were at the same time sceptical (Prager 1996:6, 218 ff.; P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1977b). In the first place, Leiden structural anthropology meant thorough fieldwork and a very high quality of ethnographic data (P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1977c:233). This respect for the significance of ethnographic data also fuelled a certain aversion to grand theories. While P. E. de Josselin de Jong remained an admirer of Lévi-Strauss throughout his long career, the younger generation was more critical. For example, Jarich Oosten, who became lecturer in Leiden in 1970, criticized Lévi-Strauss for a biased approach

---

9 Only two out of ten studies by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong and his students between 1926 and 1935 dealt with Indonesia (Prager 1996:211).

10 With regard to the 1950s and 1960s, de Ruijter nevertheless claims that “Leiden structuralism was not a form of applied anthropology” (de Ruijter 1981:46).

11 The work of van Wouden is of great significance for the Leiden school and his main contribution (van Wouden 1968 [1935]) is regarded by Prager (1996:88) as pioneering or “als das Flagschiff unter den Studien der Leidener Schule”. In a letter to J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong (in 1953) Lévi-Strauss considered the fact that he was unaware of van Woudens book as one of the greatest shortcomings of his *Elementary Structures* (Prager 1996:230, the letter is reprinted in Prager 1996:257 f.).

12 Leiden anthropologists of all generations have been critical of though fascinated by the work of Lévi-Strauss. The early criticism, for example the review of *Elementary Structures* by J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong in 1952, is, however, confined “within a framework in which the limits had been set by Lévi-Strauss” (de Ruijter 1981:38).
to his data. Lévi-Strauss would try to establish the primacy of alliance in his kinship theory and then automatically assume the same in his study of myths, although there is certainly no necessary relationship between the field of kinship and that of myth in relation to alliance. He thus would notoriously eclipse the importance of descent in his analyses of myth (Oosten 1981a, Oosten and de Ruijter 1983b). Furthermore, the universalist tendencies of Lévi-Strauss informing his notion of the “human mind” could never gain ground in Leiden, an example being the criticism of his famous statement conflating the thought processes of South American Indians and his own (Oosten and de Ruijter 1983b:6f.; Oosten 1981b). In addition to the fact that universalist notions in structuralist theory were rejected, Oosten also detected in Lévi-Strauss’s argument a complete lack of concern for the problematic relationship between the views of observers and participants. This topic had already been taken up by P. E. de Josselin de Jong (1977[1956]) in the above-mentioned contribution in the issue of Bijdragen in honour of his uncle, which was reprinted in English under the title The Participants’ View of their Culture. Here, he contrasts the anthropologist’s model with the participants’ model, asking whether the indigenous vision recognizes the structural principles that anthropologists consider they have detected in the data.

Between 1922, when J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong became professor in Leiden, and 1988, when P. E. de Josselin de Jong retired, Dutch structural anthropology developed a clear profile. As already pointed out, in this period the Leiden tradition was inventive and also included the ideas of Lévi-Strauss. This led to a reconsideration of the notion of structure, which came to be located on the cognitive plane, and consequently to a shedding of quasi-historical arguments and the notion of proto-systems. Integrating French ideas did not mean copying them, and clearly the indigenisation of Lévi-Strauss’s ideas followed a local pattern, with the focus on ethnography, regional comparison and the accounting for indigenous models and participants’ perspectives.

These features – as well as other aspects that point towards the future and were taken up by later generations – can all be traced in P. E. de Josselin de Jong’s inaugural lecture, given in Leiden in 1957, which particularly raised methodological issues. He rejects the nomothetic approach of Radcliffe-Brown, the vagueness of Meyer Fortes and the “extremely decrepit” (P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1957:9) statistical method of Murdock’s Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), concluding: “We encountered laws that did not work out; laws that were formulated so vaguely that they became meaningless and tautological; and correlations deduced on the basis of dubious statistics” (ibid. 10). Instead of searching for laws, he suggested looking for “tendencies”, which clearly attests to the above-mentioned scepticism towards grand theories. In contrast to Radcliffe-Brown and Murdock’s comparative endeavours, P. E. de Josselin de Jong favoured the FAS method devised by J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong. Within this confined framework of related cultures he did not even rule out the possibility of nomothetic statements and the reasonable use of statistical methods in the future. However, for now, this was not the priority. Instead his anthropological method aimed at revealing the principles within a particular culture (ibid. 13).
Related to this aim, P. E. de Josselin de Jong stressed other methodological features. Firstly, he identified thorough fieldwork as the basis of any theoretical development and as the benchmark of our conceptual equipment which needs constant refinement. Since anthropologists were no longer working only on small-scale societies, “without history”, P. E. de Josselin de Jong adopted Evans-Pritchard’s position (Evans-Pritchard 1950), that is, anthropologists must take history into account. He stated that the conditions for such an endeavour were especially favourable in Leiden because cooperation between anthropology and oriental studies had always existed, adding that he intended to continue this dialogue (P. E. de Josselin de Jong 1957:14).

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that P. E. de Josselin de Jong also identified cultural change as a significant topic for research. While the general aim was to identify cultural principles, these structures have never been static, he claimed. However, currently (in 1957) due to increasing contact with Western societies, indigenous cultures were rapidly changing and hence the processes of adaptation and acculturation must be studied.

Finally, I want to emphasize one aspect which P. E. de Josselin de Jong (1957:11) considered to be “perhaps the most important from a practical viewpoint”, namely the deep ethnocentrism that he saw pervading our thinking and influencing our perceptions and analyses of other cultures. While P. E. de Josselin de Jong obviously considered this problem to be crucial he nevertheless held it to be a mere “practical” problem. It was another structuralist, Louis Dumont, who devoted his work to the analyses of ideologies, including what he called “modern ideology”, and thereby placed this question, understood as an epistemological problem, at the centre of the anthropological agenda. Thus, in P. E. de Josselin de Jong’s statement we find this idea only partially articulated, and while some of his students were highly influenced by Dumont, P. E. de Josselin de Jong remained aligned with Lévi-Strauss.

Inconspicuous continuity

In the 1970s, structuralism was, if not new, still largely accepted as a paradigm within the discipline as a whole. Consecutively several events occurred which cannot be addressed here: the cultural turn, reflexive anthropology and postmodernism dawned in anthropology, the latter trying to “deconstruct” all the grand theories and scrutinizing the modes of production of anthropological knowledge. In the Netherlands in particular, at the end of the 1970s universities were under increasing financial pressure and budget cuts continued during the 1980s, resulting in the closure of entire departments, as happened in Groningen (Vermeulen 1997, 2002; Papousek and Kuiper 2002). Certainly, an apparently worn-out paradigm would not be helpful in such a competitive academic setting. In his introduction to a collection of essays in honour of P. E. de Josselin de Jong at the time of his retirement, Arie de Ruijter expressed his bitterness over the situation of the younger generation of anthropologists and “great concern” (de
Ruijter 1987:85) regarding the future of the Leiden school. The main threats he identified were the financial situation and the university’s staffing policies, as well as the “juridical-organisational foundation of Dutch science” (ibid. 95), where privileges had become more valued than academic achievement. In such a situation, he considered that most of the young contributors to the volume would remain “outside academia” as “a sort of vagrant, marginal research proletariat . . . blocked in their development rather than being encouraged in it” (ibid.).\(^{13}\) De Ruijter ends with the bleak prospect that the Leiden tradition “may no longer be represented at the professorial level after the retirement of P. E. de Josselin de Jong” (ibid.). Although de Ruijter was right in the sense that most of the contributors to the volume did not receive permanent positions in the anthropology department, for a while at least the Leiden tradition did continue at the professorial level.

Thus, after more than 60 years the de Josselin de Jong dynasty came to an end, with P. E. de Josselin de Jong retiring and Reimar Schefold receiving the chair in 1989. He is generally not regarded as a structural anthropologist or a structuralist but rather as a symbolic anthropologist. Being interested in material culture and connected to ethnological museums, Schefold studied in Basel, where in the late 1950s and 1960s the “Kulturhistorische Schule” still permeated the field (Vermeulen 2003a). A look at his works, however, reveals the characteristic features of the Leiden tradition that I have mentioned thus far. Therefore, I consider Schefold’s work to be a continuation of structural anthropology in Leiden regardless of the fact that the term “structural” is no longer used.

In his inaugural lecture of 1990, Schefold explicitly aligns himself with his predecessors J. P. B. and P. E. de Josselin de Jong. Central to his argument is the antagonistic relationship between two key principles in Indonesia, which he glosses as “harmony” and “rivalry”. In his focus on the systematic relationships between ideas, Schefold takes up a key aspect of the Leiden tradition traceable back to the initial influence of Durkheim and Mauss. Schefold, however, reverses their determinism and that of the early Leiden school, stating that ideas are not the results of the social structure but, on the contrary, determine the patterns of social organization (1990:5).\(^{14}\) Symbolic structures, such as the complementary ideas of harmony and rivalry, not only manifest themselves in social reality, he goes on to say, but also offer the possibility of reflection on reality by creating alternative visions of the world, something he exemplifies with reference to

\(^{13}\) This statement could perfectly describe the situation in Germany more than ten years later, when the new regulations for the qualification periods for Promotion and Habilitation had been implemented and many suddenly found themselves “outside academia”.

\(^{14}\) However, the sociological determinism as put forward in Primitive Classification had already been rejected by G. W. Locher in 1938 (de Ruijter 1981:37). Locher was a student of J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong and an important figure in the foundation of the institute of Cultural Anthropology and Sociology of Non-Western Peoples in 1955/56. He was professor in Leiden between 1954 and 1973 (cf. Vermeulen 1999).
the rituals on Mentawai in Indonesia. Schefold conducted two years of fieldwork on
Mentawai (1967–69) and his lecture is a definitive plea for meticulous, long-term
fieldwork. Accordingly, he concludes by reminding the students not to forget that later
generations will care little about past theoretical trends, but will acknowledge human
imagination as it emerges from the ethnographic material (1990:26).

While Schefold stresses the continuity of the Leiden tradition by making indigenous
concepts as they emerge from detailed fieldwork central to his agenda, his lecture also has
an idiosyncratic note. I have already mentioned his reversal of the relationship between
ideas and social morphology. There is also a new nuance in his request for the considera-
tion of economic, ecological, political and historical aspects of any given context when
explaining the differences between systems of ideas within the field of ethnological study
(1990:23, cf. 1994:817). He thus explicitly links the ideological plane to external factors,
rather than considering it on its own terms, that is, as a structural transformation.

Both before and after his inaugural speech in 1990, Schefold – among other things –
dealt with systems of classification, in particular as explicated in ritual practice. He also
continued the Leiden tradition in the sense that he was inspired and at the same time
critical of Lévi-Strauss. Thus he took up the notion of the culinary code and tried to
develop the argument of the culinary triangle with reference to his Mentawai material
(Schefold 1982). Nevertheless, he rebuked Lévi-Strauss in a way that is reminiscent of
other Leideners. He rejected the scope of Lévi-Strauss’s comparisons and his argument
that myth is above all a signification of a universal human mind. Schefold was not inter-
ested in structures as such and their unconscious transformations but in the participants’
view and a “symbolic “parole” (1982:64), that is, actual cultural practice. While critical
of Lévi-Strauss, his analysis of the culinary code is certainly structural, pointing out the
systematic relationships evident in culinary ritual practice on Mentawai:

The meaning of its [a symbolic element in ritual] classificatory position is ulti-
mately clarified only by its structural arrangement, i. e. by the evolution of the mu-
tual relationships among the elements in the course of the ritual itself. This is the
key to a plausible “decoding” of the symbolic message. (1982:68)

In recent publications, he has also worked within the same structural framework, for
example, in his analysis of ritual blessings (2001). Here he compared, within the spe-
cific FAS, notions of blessing in relation to the social structure of various societies un-
der consideration and the value of precedence.

Mention should also be made of a programmatic article published in the 150th vol-
ume of Bijdragen, entitled “Cultural Anthropology, future tasks for Bijdragen, and the
Indonesian Field of Anthropological Study” (Schefold 1994). This article reads like a
manifesto of the structural tradition, with the subheadings of the contribution deli-
neating the Leiden programme, among them “Ethnography” and the “Field of Anthro-
pological Study”, “Idea principles”, “Participants” models”, “Total” configurations. In
this article, Schefold recaptures the shift in the Leiden tradition which I outlined
above, that is, the shift from the notion of a structural core within the comparative
endeavour of the FAS, understood in socio-structural terms – entailing the idea of structure located in empirical reality – to a cognitive understanding of structure and a new perception of the core elements as “idea principles”, a term P. E. de Josselin de Jong adopted from D. Moyer (ibid. 811). Thus, asymmetrical matrimonial exchange, dualistic structures and double descent – previous elements of the structural core – are now regarded as ideological features that may be realized empirically. Schefold further argues for an extension of the features compared within the FAS, and against any pre-determination of their meaning. He refers to the work of Fox and Platenkamp, and suggests deriving the comparative criteria from the categories of indigenous cosmologies (ibid. 813).

Another feature stressed in this article is the holistic nature of comparison. Schefold cautions against the atomistic comparison of elements and formulates the goal of comparing total configurations, that is, comparison of wholes on the level of ideas. This comparison should proceed on two levels, intraculturally and interculturally. Intraculturally, anthropologists should focus on the way the participants try to integrate cultural categories in a holistic configuration, and on the intercultural level, anthropologists should examine whether these configurations are recurrent within the FAS and whether systematic transformations are discernable. Hence, these levels also entail the distinction between participants’ models and more abstract models that the anthropologists construct on the basis of their comparison (ibid. 815). The above-mentioned article by Schefold on ritual blessings exemplifies such a procedure (2001:377 f.).

Schefold’s position, as just summarized, also testifies to the significance of the third wave of influence coming from France. After the initial influence of Durkheim and Mauss at the beginning of the twentieth century, who drew attention to the theme of systems of classification in the first place, and the second phase of influence mid-century through the work of Lévi-Strauss, which modified the notions of structure in Leiden, the third innovation from France came through the work of Louis Dumont. Indologists at Leiden, such as Jan C. Heesterman, were certainly influenced by Dumont – if in a critical way – as early as his original publication of *Homo Hierarchicalus* in 1966 (Dumont 1980), but the main impact of his thinking was felt in Leiden in the 1980s. Dumont devoted his academic life to the study of ideology, understood as a system of ideas and values. The notion of value, according to Dumont, implies hierarchy, defined as a relationship of “encompassment”, where superordinate values encompass subordinate values. After writing his magnum opus on Hindu ideology, in the following decades Dumont concentrated on what he called modern ideology, that is, individualism (Dumont 1986). Dumont also set up a research group within the CNRS called ERASME, attracting scholars who developed his ideas in various ethnographic contexts and focused mainly on the interrelationships between morphology and ideology as well as the expression of social relationships and values in systems of exchange. In

---

15 Equipe de recherche d’anthropologie sociale: morphologie, échanges.
one of their main publications (Barraud et al. 1994 [1984]), systems of exchange in Melanesia, Morocco and Eastern Indonesia were compared on the level of ideology, that is, as systems of values representing each society as a whole. Schefold’s theoretical framework was certainly influenced by these scholars, for example, when he speaks about “systems of values” (“waardenstelsels”, 1990:22) in his inaugural lecture, referring to Dumont in a footnote (1990:30f.).

However, other Leiden anthropologists were more directly involved in the intellectual exchange between Dumont’s group and Leiden, notably Jos Platenkamp. He studied at Leiden with P. E. de Josselin de Jong and taught at the institute from 1978 until 1993, when he took up the chair of Social Anthropology in Münster, Germany. It was also P. E. de Josselin de Jong who initiated the contact between Leiden and the ERASME team in Paris, when he invited Cécile Barraud, a student of Dumont, to respond to a paper by Jos Platenkamp at a conference in Leiden. Although not really interested in the work of Dumont, P. E. de Josselin de Jong nevertheless arranged a grant so that Platenkamp could spend a year studying under Dumont in 1984 (Platenkamp, personal communication). A very fruitful collaboration developed between CASA, the Leiden research programme Cognitive Anthropology/Structural Anthropology and ERASME, which became a permanent workshop from 1986 onwards and included exchange visits, reciprocal presentations and criticism of research, as well as joint conferences. The cooperation also resulted in two volumes of Bijdragen that were jointly edited by Barraud and Platenkamp (Barraud and Platenkamp 1989, 1990).

The influence of Dumont and ERASME is apparent in Platenkamp’s work, with the emphasis on the study of systems of values (for example, 1988, 2009). However, we can detect a reservation in relation to French structural anthropology, which is in line with previous statements by Leiden scholars. In a short contribution about the cooperation between CASA in Leiden and ERASME in Paris, Platenkamp (1991) argues that there is a broad consensus about the significance of in-depth ethnographically based studies of value systems, but that there are differences as well, especially in the scope of comparison of these systems of values. While ERASME makes comparisons on a worldwide scale, as for example in the project mentioned above (Barraud et al. 1994 [1984]), Leiden, he claimed, has “a more cautious” (Platenkamp 1991:45) approach, confining its attempts at comparison to a specific cultural area. This re-emphasizes the significance of the FAS method and also reformulates the Leiden scepticism towards grand theories, whereas the French in general are much less hesitant.

Another important structural anthropologist in Leiden who was influenced by – as well as critical of, as I have already noted – various waves of French structuralism is Jarich Oosten. As he describes it, P. E. de Josselin de Jong and he had a Brahman/Kshatriya

---

16 Platenkamp was not the only structural anthropologist who left Leiden to pursue his vision of anthropology elsewhere. Jan Brouwer, for example went to Mysore and Shillong (India), David Moyer to British Columbia (Canada) and Danielle Geirnaert to Paris.
relationship in Leiden, with P. E. de Josselin de Jong being ascribed sacred status and Oosten being the profane organizer and man of action (personal communication). Coming from Groningen he arrived in Leiden in 1970 and at first did not fit into the local scene well with his theoretical background, enthusiasm for Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* and northern Canada as his regional focus (cf. Platenkamp forthcoming). He taught and supervised students in Leiden for a long time before he became professor in 1997. As he describes it, he was interested in theoretical issues during the 1970s and 1980s (Oosten and de Ruijter 1983a), but from 1990 onwards mainly immersed himself in Inuit ethnography. While many within the CASA research group voiced the urge to escape the framework of structural anthropology and to find new terms, Oosten was the last to be concerned about the labelling of anthropology in Leiden (personal communication). In practice, however, as his publications testify, he was dedicated to a structural approach and adapted French elements from all three “waves”.

In his inaugural lecture, entitled “The Value of Difference” (1999), we find a reformulation and re-emphasis of characteristic features of structural anthropology in Leiden. Oosten primarily stresses “values” in the way they are embedded in particular ideologies which are different from one another, but nevertheless of equal worth. This claim of equal worth, Oosten argues, is already a moral statement within our own ideology and might be contradicted from the perspective of another culture. Here, without directly referring to him, Oosten provides evidence of Dumont’s influence on his work, by stressing the comparison of systems of values and difference, not as a form of derogatory “othering”, but as the essence of anthropology. In his collaboration with Henri Claessen, who was professor of Cultural Anthropology at Leiden, Oosten also introduced a focus on ideology from 1970 onwards. While Oosten was part of the CASA research group, Claessen was directing a research team focusing on Evolutionism and Materialism (EVOMAT). Claessen was mainly interested in political anthropology, especially in “the early state”, from a neo-evolutionist and materialist perspective (cf. Vermeulen 2002:133). He involved Oosten in this research programme despite the latter’s lack of conviction about “the early state” and the fact that he found materialism in general shallow. The common denominator was their historical interest. Oosten describes his part as missionary work. He tried to spread the word that “you have to include ideology. You do not understand anything about another culture if you ignore the ideological system and if you don’t reflect on your own ideological perspective” (Oosten, personal communication). The book that was eventually published shows that his efforts bore some fruit (Claessen and Oosten 1996).

However, Oosten was not only a proponent of research on ideologies but was also critical of Dumont. For example, he considered Dumont’s distinction between modern (individualistic) and non-modern (holistic) societies to be simplistic. Furthermore, he was also interested in what people do with ideology, that is, how it is played out, for example with reference to gender or status groups. Since ideologies are complex phenomena, he was also cautious about constructing a specific ideology in abstract terms from ethnographical data. What we encounter here again is the typical Leiden caution.
As such, he had the same reservations with respect to the ERASME team as did Platenkamp. Moreover, Oosten considered ERASME to be too doctrinally fixed (Oosten, personal communication).

Another key theme in Oosten's inaugural lecture is cultural change. This is a topic which engaged Leiden anthropologists from the time of J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong onwards (e.g. Locher 1978; cf. Prager 1996:181 f.), but which is still widely assumed to be contradictory to structural analysis. Similarly to Sahlin, Oosten argues that in order to understand cultural continuity we have to study processes of change. New elements are indigenised according to local configurations of values and in reacting to new challenges a culture is able to maintain its particularity. Oosten provides evidence of this when he discusses the attempts of Inuit shamans to come to terms with Christianity – this process not only being one of simple combination but also involving conflict and tension, at a social as well as an individual level (Oosten 1999; Oosten and Laurant 2002).

In addition to the focus on values and the study of change, and in relation to both, I would identify three further aspects that are crucial for the anthropology of Jarich Oosten. They are all represented in his inaugural lecture, but they were also emphasized in the conversation we had and permeate his other publications: the participants' view, interdisciplinarity and ethnography. While I presume they are of equal value to him, I would suggest that perhaps the most conspicuous is his stress on ethnography. For Oosten, the task of the ethnographer is to reveal the intrinsic order of the ethnographic material – an emphasis which almost literally echoes the inaugural lecture of P. E. de Josselin de Jong. To do justice to this enormous task, the ethnographer has to be prepared to go into every detail of the culture at hand and to encounter it with a certain humbleness. Oosten values this stress of detail in the work of Lévi-Strauss, who takes all versions of a myth into account and gives full attention to seemingly insignificant particulars. But at the same time the treatment of ethnography is also a controversial point in relation to the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. The supreme value of ethnography and ethnographic data entails a severe scepticism towards sweeping analysis and grand theorizing which tends to use data as mere illustration, or at least creates room for the suspicion that constructing neat models is the ultimate aim of anthropologists. For Oosten, ethnography has value in itself and the amount of ethnography presented in this inaugural lecture is rather unusual (though similar to Schefold's lecture). However, it is more than a matter of style. In his vision, ethnography is central to the survival of anthropology as a discipline: “On the level of empirical research the anthropologist has to meet the challenge posed by the detailed studies of historians and linguists, if he does not, he is nothing” (Oosten, personal communication).

The other two aspects of Oosten's approach can be seen as consequences of this conviction. Taking ethnography seriously also means taking the people with whom one is working and their culture seriously. The assumption of unconscious patterns in Lévi-Straussian structuralism entails arrogance in this regard, Oosten argues. Not only is falsification difficult, it also entails the hubris of asserting that the anthropologist by defi-
nition always knows best (Oosten, personal communication; cf. Oosten 1981b). Not denying the fact that many things in a culture remain implicit for participants, in his recent Inuit research Oosten places the participants at centre stage by having Inuit students interview their elders. He does this without lofty theorizing about the native voice or lamenting the crisis of representation. He is simply experimenting with ethnographic methods out of a devotion to the data, keeping an eye on the particular cultural configuration at hand as well as on the participants’ aims and requirements. In this way, he immensely enhances and modifies the emphasis on the participants’ view as first formulated by P. E. de Josselin de Jong (cf. Oosten 1999, 2005).

Another consequence of the devotion to ethnography is the realization that the skills and knowledge of the anthropologist are limited and cooperation with other disciplines necessary, especially with history and the study of languages. Oosten reminds us of this in his inaugural lecture, and his long engagement with the Centre of Non-Western Studies research institute (CNWS) is further evidence of this credo. From the beginning, Oosten was involved in this project, becoming its secretary when it officially opened in 1988 and its director between 1997 and 2004. The strength of the CNWS, as Oosten puts it, lies in the combination of humanities (Non-Western Languages and Cultures) and social sciences and its aim is to educate anthropologists to have a command of the languages of the region in which they are researching, as well as to engage language specialists working within the humanities in the cultural problems of the region (Oosten 1991:19). Furthermore, the CNWS stimulated cooperation between various disciplines as well as between university departments and non-university institutions in Leiden, such as museums and research institutes (ibid.). Seen from across the border, the CNWS was a success story that looked towards new horizons for interdisciplinary research and its discontinuation in 2008 leaves one baffled.

Conspicuous discontinuity

“A new paradigm of postmodern anthropology now entered the Leiden scene, somewhat belatedly.” Here Han Vermeulen (2002:149) is referring to the fact that Patricia Spyer succeeded Reimar Schefold to the chair in the Anthropology and Sociology of Contemporary Indonesia in 2001. Does this mean that Sahlins’ diagnosis of paranoia in the field has now reached Leiden, and with the new century, eighty years of distinguished structural anthropology in Leiden (Vermeulen 2002:150) has come to an end? Looking at Spyer’s background one would not expect this to happen. She is a student of Sahlins and of another renowned structural anthropologist, Valerio Valeri, the latter studying in Paris in the late 1960s and early 1970s under Lévi-Strauss, Dumont and Sahlins (cf. Stasch 1999).17

17 Besides Sahlins and Valeri Spyer also studied with Nancy D. Munn and Bernard S. Cohn in Chicago.
In her inaugural lecture of 2002, Spyri analyses the climate of violence between Christians and Muslims in Ambon, Indonesia (Spyri 2002). It bears the title “Fire without Smoke and Other Phantoms of Ambon’s Violence: Media Effects, Agency, and the Work of Imagination”. The focus is not so much on actual violence but rather on expectations of violence or “anticipatory practice” (ibid. 13). A local friend of Spyri’s “heard” about burning mosques and churches before any smoke could be seen, hence “fire without smoke”. Rumours preceding actions have important social consequences and lead to nervous situations where every minor phenomenon or detail is taken to be a sign. Spyri calls such a condition “hyper-hermeneutics” (ibid. 13). Previous attempts at explaining the civil war in economic or political terms, she argues, have failed to account for this particular climate.

The mobile, dense, and murky terrain in which something that is waiting to happen does, in fact, happen is built on spirals of information, misinformation, and disinformation, on the revamping of criteria of credibility, customs of trust and accountability, and on knowledge forms that blur the boundaries between what is seen and what is heard, what is known and what is suspected, what is feared and what is fantasized, what is fact and what is fiction. (ibid. 4)

According to Spyri, in this field, various forms of media, from TV to graffiti, play a crucial role in feeding the “work of imagination” because scenes of violence from all over the world may be used in the specific context and thereby give it global weight.

Rather than try to extricate a causal chain [of chronological events], I argue that confounding any clear trajectory from which one might plot the actions of the various parties involved is a swirl of images, vocabularies, sound-bites, slogans, and vectors introducing a host of mediatized and mediated elsewheres into the picture—or, inversely projecting Ambon, with all its troubles and sufferings, onto a larger than local scale. (ibid. 8)

After reading through the works of other Leiden anthropologists, Spyri’s style of writing and her analytic language already create a sharp contrast. However, it is of course not only a matter of style but also of interests, themes and perspectives. Previously, Leideners studied the relationships between, for example, morphological forms, myths and ideas unearthed by ethnography and set in a holistic framework. Tensions and inconsistencies arose, as the participants’ views were given due weight, but ultimately all these features could be integrated into an overall order. As the quotations above show, in her inaugural lecture Spyri is concerned with intrinsically hard-to-grasp and ambivalent phenomena, and words such as social structure or myth appear as solid rocks compared to “mediated elsewheres”.

Another example is Spyri’s book, The Memory of Trade, a revised version of her PhD (Chicago 1992), written during her years at the University of Amsterdam (1993–2001). It is based on two years of fieldwork among sea-divers and traders in the Moluccas and pays detailed attention to the annual Aru ritual, which focuses on
cassowaries. The book is set in the same postmodern mould, as it “considers the dilemmas, ambivalences, and compromises that describe Aruese people’s engagement and location of themselves vis-à-vis two imaginary elsewherees – the “Malay” and the “Aru” (Spyer 2000:ix). On the following page of the preface, Spyer states that her research follows the “tradition of classic ethnography” (2000:x), insofar as she constructs a small-scale community, only to emphasize the difference from what she considers to be classical ethnography.

A modest point I make in this book . . . is that the community at stake in its pages is in a crucial sense compelled in imagining and constructing itself to imagine and construct the much larger world around it. Simply put, such a community does not overlap with the bounded “societies” of an older anthropology devoted to the documentation of places like Aru . . . which assigned native alterity to a timeless topography . . . Arguing instead that Aru’s “runaway topographies” are inherently fissured . . . their presence ongoingly haunted by their absent elsewherees, this partial writing of Aru therefore assumes entanglement and modernity as its preconditions. (2000:x)

In some parts of Spyer’s book structural themes come to the foreground, for example, when she discusses the complementary roles of two ritual specialists – Prow and Stern – in the great cassowary ritual (2000:161 f.). The whole village community is then imagined as a boat and Prow and Stern represent opposites in spatial and temporal terms, the front vs. the back of the boat as well as the beginning vs. the end of the ritual process. Here, the influence of her teachers is recognisable since Spyer leaves room for the intrinsic structures of the ethnographic material to be articulated and she concedes significance to these patterns. She does not, however, pursue a structural analysis of her data. Lévi-Strauss” expression that not the Leiden anthropologists but the Indonesians are the great structuralists (cf. Prager 1996:1) seems to be suitable in this case.

It should be made quite clear that in describing Spyer’s work and providing long quotes I do not intend to evaluate her work, nor is the issue of whether it can be labelled as postmodern anthropology or not relevant in this context. The question that is relevant here is whether, considering that she is the successor of de Josselin de Jong and Schefold, her work can be regarded as a continuation or modification of Leiden structural anthropology. The brief outline presented makes it sufficiently clear, I think, that it does not amount to continuity. While I might be accused of being selective in my choice of quotes or possibly biased in other ways, sound evidence of this discontinuity and its deliberate nature is proved by her inaugural speech, which completely ignores all of her predecessors. While P. E. de Josselin de Jong, Schefold, Oosten and even Kuper (1977) emphasized the inspiration they gained from the works of their precursors and at the same time introduced a personal emphasis, we find no such reference in Spyer’s lecture.18

18 Authors that are referred to are, among others, Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai, Deborah Poole, Ann Laura Stoler and Raymond Williams.
Inconspicuous continuity, once again

Discontinuity with respect to university chairs does not necessarily imply the end of academic endeavours in directions other than those of the chairholders. In contrast to Germany, where you either become a professor or nothing, with non-professorial university staff only holding temporary positions, in the Netherlands a substantial part of the research and teaching activities in the departments is undertaken by lecturers (UD, *universitaire docent*) or readers (UHD, *universitaire hoogleraar*) with permanent positions. These lecturers are also engaged in supervising PhD students – in tandem fashion, where professors formally supervise the student while the lecturer *de facto* guides him or her – and are as such involved in the academic reproduction of a certain anthropological grinding. This also enables departments to offer a broader spectrum of anthropology than would be represented by the professors alone. In Leiden, the kinship specialist Franklin E. Tjon Sie Fat (Tjon Sie Fat 1990), associated with the department since the 1970s, holds such a position of lecturer in anthropology. Jarich Oosten also supervised PhD students who were formally under the guidance of Peter Geschiere or Reimar Schefold before he himself became professor in 1997 (Oosten, personal communication).

Two of Oosten’s former PhD students are now lecturers in the department of Cultural Anthropology and Developmental Sociology in Leiden, Erik de Maaker and Sabine Luning. The latter had previously studied anthropology at Leiden and was a PhD student between 1991 and 1995, doing fieldwork on the Maame chiefdom in Burkina Faso. On the back cover of her PhD thesis *To Gather in the Harvest. Ritual and Society in Maame, Burkina Faso* (Luning 1997) it is identified as a structural study. Luning investigates the relationships between ritual processes, various levels of social structure (house, village, chiefdom), oral traditions and the key values of Maame society. On the ideological level the distinction of *naam* and *tenga* is crucial and has repercussions in all of the above-mentioned domains. *Naam* is the quality of ruling over people and is associated with the outside, since rulers are by definition allochthonous. Complementary to this is the idea of *tenga*, which means “earth” and is the association with a specific locality mediated by the earth priests of various autochthonous groups. While, according to Luning, other anthropologists of the region have focused on the annual ritual cycle of the rulers alone (in relation to *naam*), Luning examines this complex of rituals in relation to the annual cycle of various groups, represented by the earth priests (in relation to *tenga*). Luning repeatedly stresses the methodological significance of comparison and a relational perspective, and according to this conviction she not only investigates the relationships between the rituals of the annual cycles but also compares two occurrences of the ritual of succession, one which she was able to document in 1993 and another occasion from 1963. Furthermore, she explores the relationships between the domains of rituals and oral traditions or origin myths. The notion of origin or the past is epitomized in the concept of *rogem miki*, which could be translated as “found at birth” (ibid. 17) or “that which precedes” (Luning 2007:99). Relating to
the time before now, it entails a set of rules or “customs” and represents an entity with which regulated ritual relationships have to be maintained, but it also has a subjective meaning for participants (ibid. 230 f.). The ruler is regarded as the nodal point between society as a whole (Maane chiefdom) and its origin. Before a new chief may commence his rule he has to ritually travel to two places associated with naam and tenga – respectively, the royal tombs and the sacrificial sites of the earth – thereby uniting both principles and providing the link to the origin, which at the ideological level encompasses the relationships of the present (ibid. 228, 287 f.).

In her structural analysis of rituals Luning chooses an actor focus. This is already apparent in her definition of ritual, where Luning argues that the emphasis should be on the concepts used by the participants themselves (ibid. 16). Furthermore, she is not primarily interested in ideal types of ritual practices but in the ways rituals are empirically acted out. This also includes a description and analysis of negotiations concerning the scheduling of ritual events, which varies according to different local groups. Moreover, from the participants’ perspective, rituals are subject to change, and a concept such as rogem miki, which could be glossed as “tradition”, is in no way unchangeable but intrinsically subject to change and particular elaborations (ibid. 17, 114 f.; cf. 2007:92). Luning became aware that participants’ explanations, discussions and elaborations vary according to the context, and the death of the ruler triggered responses in social actors that indicated a relationship between rituals of succession and annual rituals, which although the anthropologist had noted it earlier, had not been previously discussed by the participants. In following the participants’ view, Luning is not just recording native voices but paying attention to the tension and interaction between the perspectives of the participants and the anthropologist and ultimately transcending the actors’ point of view at the comparative level, which she stresses throughout (ibid. 18).¹⁹

Before coming to Leiden, Eric de Maaker studied anthropology at the University of Amsterdam and, as Oosten reports, when he started his PhD in Leiden, he approached him and stated that he did not want to write a structuralist thesis. Oosten replied that the only thing he would be interested in was a good thesis. However, Oosten continues, de Maaker’s book is now perceived as a structural work by many (Oosten, personal communication).

First and foremost, de Maaker’s book (de Maaker 2007) is ethnographic. The dissertation, entitled Negotiating Life. Garo Death Rituals and the Transformation of Society, is based on almost two years of fieldwork in Northeast India. In addition to occa-

¹⁹ Currently, Luning is involved in a multidisciplinary research project on gold mining in West Africa, involving international companies and which is mainly concerned with economic anthropology and the relationship between society and the state. Relationships of debt play an important role here, and they can be fruitfully analysed from the perspective of structural anthropology, she says. In the future, she would be interested in further investigating the relationship between economy and cosmology (personal communication).
sional references to authors such as Hertz, Bloch and Parry, as is appropriate for a study of death rituals, de Maaker abstains from taking any explicitly theoretical position. Instead, he immerses himself and the reader in Garo ethnography, trying to disclose the intrinsic patterns of relationships that are at stake in the context of death. Like Luning, his focus is on the relationship between ritual and society.

In addition to being a rite of passage, death rituals among the Garo are about the redefinition of social relationships, in particular between “houses”. Crucial and of great consequence is the rule that when a married person dies he or she has to be replaced by someone from the original kin group, so that the widow or widower receives a new husband or wife. Again like Luning, de Maaker focuses on the actual ritual practice, the process of negotiation as the title Negotiating Life makes clear, in addition to discerning the general patterns. As such he points out that the processes of replacement are not a matter of course, but depend on various considerations of the actors involved. If the “house” that the deceased belongs to is an important one, with a lot of land and significant relationships to deities, then the chances of replacement are optimal, otherwise the chances are less. Death rituals thus entail the option of “houses” being continued through the generations, as is true for the affinitive relationships at stake. The processes of replacement are just one type of transaction in a web of exchanges which de Maaker outlines with great care.

As well as the focus on ethnographic detail, intrinsic structures and actual practice, another feature of de Maaker’s work worth mentioning in the present context is his choice to work among a Garo minority who have not yet converted to Christianity, the so-called Songsarek. Some other anthropologists might have wanted to study “change” immediately, while de Maaker, apparently, first chose to investigate the basic patterns that might be subject to modifications.\(^{20}\) Furthermore, like other anthropologists whose work has been sketched here, de Maaker places an emphasis on the participant’s point of view. Being trained as a visual anthropologist, he filmed scenes of death rituals and then discussed these with the Garo as a means of minimizing his own conceptual biases and to take into account the actor’s view on the events (ibid. 17).

Erik de Maaker’s dedication to visual anthropology can be taken as an example of another strand of Leiden anthropology that I have not mentioned thus far, namely the visualisation of systems of classification. Several Leiden anthropologists have been involved in making documentary films, for example Jos Platenkamp and Dirk Nijland directed the film Tobelo Marriage (1985), while Erik de Maaker together with Nijland and the late Danielle C. Geirnaert directed Ashes of Life: the Annual Rituals of Laboya, Sumba 1996 (2007). The visualisations are, however, not only related to film and photography but also to other aspects of material culture. Geirnaert, who worked clo-

\(^{20}\) Although de Maaker has an eye for changes in the ritual setup and stresses his inclination to present his material in a historical perspective (ibid. 15), his study is mainly synchronic, notwithstanding the fact that the rituals themselves have an intrinsic diachronic dimension.
sely together with Oosten, Platenkamp and the ERASME team, did research on socio-cosmic ideas and values related to textiles on Laboya (Geirnaert-Martin 1992). From the beginning, anthropology in Leiden was closely related to the ethnological museum and especially Adriaan Gerbrands, who was connected to the museum from 1947 and professor at Leiden from 1966, applied the structural approach to material culture understood as “language of things” (Gerbrands 1966).

Conclusion

While in the early 1980s the conviction that the “structuralist tradition is deeply rooted in the Netherlands” (Oosten and de Ruijter 1983b:9) was itself still deeply rooted, a little later the first doubts were raised (Blok and Boissevain 1984) and the prospects for the future were evaluated as bleak – at least by some (de Ruijter 1987). This article considered the question of whether the structural tradition in Leiden continued after the retirement of P. E. de Josselin de Jong in 1988 and, if so, in which way.

Traditions persist because they change. This insight, commonly applied to other cultures (Oosten 1999; Sahlin 1999), also holds true for academic schools of thought and practice. I have argued that the Leiden tradition has in fact continued throughout the last 20 years and up to the present by incorporating new ideas and modifying old concepts and methodologies. However, it did so in a less conspicuous way than before 1988 and the label “structural” attracted increasingly less attention. Again, like cultures, academic traditions define their identity in relational terms. Notwithstanding matters of relational identities within the Netherlands – mainly the contrast between Amsterdam and Leiden – the point of reference for many Leiden anthropologists over the decades were Parisian anthropologists, beginning with Durkheim and Mauss, then Lévi-Strauss and finally Dumont and the younger members of the ERASME team. Certainly, Leiden anthropologists did not always look across the border to their French colleagues, but the relationship may be useful in outlining differences as well as commonalities. I will start with the latter.

Above all, various forms of structuralism and structural anthropology share the fundamental theoretical assumption deriving from linguistics that any cultural element has meaning only in relation to others. This has the significant methodological consequence of anthropologists having to trace the system of relationships in which each element is embedded (Platenkamp 1984:57, 2003). Anthropologists design models that intend to represent these structures, but the ontological status of these structures and models is already a point of debate, as I will discuss below. Going back to Durkheim, another shared feature of structural approaches is their focus on collective representations or systems of ideas. Moreover, structural anthropology, whether in Leiden or Paris, was concerned with two types of holism. On the one hand the approach was holistic because various domains of a culture such as art, ritual, architecture, economy were brought into relation to each other, on the other hand the indigenous cultural
orders display themselves as a totality. These ideal wholes very rarely correspond to empirical reality and the analysis of the relationship – often one of tension – between the ideal and the empirical reality pervades structural approaches.

Throughout the decades a key value of great consequence for Leiden anthropology has been ethnography and thorough fieldwork, generally “mono-sited”. In combination with the interests and assumptions just outlined this gives Leiden structural anthropology its distinctive quality. Although ethnography is certainly highly valued in the French structural tradition, which is particularly true of the members of the ERASME team, who are devoted to detailed fieldwork and ethnographic nuances, the corollaries in both cases are different, i.e. the levels of abstraction aimed at on the basis of ethnography. In the case of Leiden the supreme appreciation of ethnography manifests itself in various forms of theoretical restraint. Theoretical claims are moderate and Leiden anthropologists feel uncomfortable when their hypotheses become too far removed from ethnographic facts. The often sweeping analyses of Lévi- Strauss and other French structuralists are met with scepticism. This holds true, for example, in relation to Lévi-Strauss’s universalistic claims, his scope of comparison or his notion of the unconscious. The universalistic notion of the human mind is rejected and the concept of the unconscious considered problematic. If we construct a model of cultural relationships that the people we study are not aware of, that is fine, but we can neither claim nor prove that such a model is located in their unconscious (Oosten 1981b:248). While Lévi-Strauss as well as members of the ERASME team made comparisons on a worldwide scale, Leiden anthropologists prefer to make comparisons within a specific cultural area. The methodological outline of the Field of Anthropological Study (FAS) is an original contribution to the field by Leiden anthropology, devised almost 20 years before Frederick Eggan’s (1954) “controlled comparison”, and elaborated and modified throughout the generations.

Another theoretical and methodological repercussion of the centrality of ethnography is the relevance of the participant’s view – first formulated in 1956 and then continually revised. Here, I refer to the question of the nature of models mentioned earlier. P. E. de Josselin de Jong, Oosten, Platenkamp and Schefold all emphasized the importance of distinguishing the anthropologist’s models from participant’s models. Indigenous models receive great attention; however, as an outsider applying a comparative view within the region and possibly across history the anthropologist further abstracts from the indigenous perspective and traces similarities and transformations. Moreover, this perspective also entails a focus on the level of practice, a variant of the tension between ideal and real, mentioned above. Many of the authors show a concern in their work, not only for patterns of ideas but also for the ways these ideas are used in practice. Hence, Oosten asks what people do with ideology, de Maaker is interested

---

21 This is not to suggest that the approaches of Lévi-Strauss and ERASME are the same in every respect, on the contrary, the latter were very critical of Lévi-Strauss (e.g. 1994 [1984]).
in the processes of negotiation surrounding a death and Schefold deals with the symbolism of *parole*. Thus, while emphasizing structure and ideas, Leiden anthropologists pay specific attention to their implementation in practice, to tensions, variations and frictions. The methodological implication of the participant’s view entails the involvement of indigenous actors in the process of research. De Maaker discussed his films with the Garo, though perhaps no one in Leiden has gone as far as Oosten, who initiated a project in which Inuit elders were interviewed by the younger generation. He puts Inuit concerns at the centre of the investigation and further fulfils an important social function as well by providing a platform for intergenerational communication. However, this concern with the participant’s view should not be confused with a form of methodological individualism, because the scope of individual action is, from this perspective, always framed by cultural ideas that are collective in nature.

In addition to the main features of the Leiden tradition already mentioned, which are closely related to the key role of ethnography, two other aspects seem to be characteristic. Firstly, many Leiden anthropologists were and still are intensely concerned with history and cultural change, although theoretical elaboration in this regard is rarely found; Locher (1978, 1981) is one of the few who systematically deals with both. Oosten and others make it very clear that the notions of structure or tradition do not imply a static view of culture. This cliché about structural anthropology is certainly disclosed as such by Leiden anthropologists. Secondly, many Leiden anthropologists retain an open-minded and liberal academic attitude, which results in non-dogmatic academic practice and permeable group boundaries, and in particular a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity. The discussion forum called WDO (Interfacultair Ethnologisch Dispuut), founded in 1928 by the first generation of J. P. B. de Joselin de Jong’s students (cf. Vermeulen 1997; 2003b) is one example of this, as is the regular collaboration between anthropology, regional studies and language studies in Leiden. These tendencies received a formal shape in the Centre of Non-Western Studies (CNWS) that existed between 1988 and 2008.

Because structural anthropology is basically concerned with systems of ideas it is crucial for the understanding of culture also in the twenty-first century. Certainly, in the Leiden tradition, anthropologists are not of the opinion that structural analysis can only be applied to “cold societies”. All cultural phenomena, be it “globalisation” or “fundamentalism” are influenced through ideas and values that inform social action. Jos Platenkamp recently showed that the discourse on “foreigners” in Germany can be fruitfully analysed in structural terms (Platenkamp 2004). Even more significantly, particularly through the influence of Dumont, structural anthropologists in Leiden and other places are aware that our own societies are shaped by particular ideologies which, for example, suggest that the individual is the “natural” unit of research and tend to explain human action essentially in terms of economy or power (cf. Sahlins 1999). Platenkamp argues that “globalisation” is precisely such a category, a creature of our own ideology, coined in economic discourses (personal communication). It is the task of anthropologists to outline the relevance of value-ideas in these processes.
A general predicament related to this ideological embeddedness is the determination of the subjects of anthropological research according to problems related to the anthropologist’s own society. Both Oosten and Platenkamp voice grave concern about the trend to evaluate and support research on the basis of its “social relevance” (“maatschappelijke relevantie”), the “flimsy yardstick of the pundits of academic funding” (Platenkamp, forthcoming). Oosten fears that such a scheme based on our own standards turns the values and principles of the cultures we study into epiphenomena. Structural anthropologists in any case should propagate the value of difference as well as investigate the differences in values.

References

Durkheim, Émile and Marcel Mauss 1963: Primitive Classification. London: Cohen & West. (orig. 1903)


Platenkamp, J.D.M. forthcoming From high up North to Paradise and by way of the South back onto the Ice. In: J. Jansen, S. Luning and E. de Maaker (eds.), Traditions on the Move. Leiden: CNWS.


