

### 3.

#### HOW? Foreseeing Political Change

*“You and I belong to a people who will not have ideas which we don’t believe in thrust down our throats by bayonets or other force. Why should we assume that this process will work with other people.”*

Lord Mountbatten to Sir Gerald Temple (Silvester, 2006, 41)

Political change has been a well-studied subject of political theorising. However, remembering the conclusions from the previous chapter, foreseeing political change requires that we adopt a holistic approach that includes both understanding and explaining, and considering the past, and the ‘trends’, without assuming that the past can offer any guidance and that the trends will continue. Science prescriptions, which can arise from both explaining and understanding, are acceptable in as far as they are stated in the negative conditional form; this way, they set the limits within which an anticipation of the future can be proposed. The challenge is whether it is possible, and how it can be possible, to outline a framework comprehensive enough to include all of the different approaches, which are based on different epistemological premises. All theories claiming to be scientific should find a place within such a framework, both because they are scientific as much as they proscribe (and not according to other criteria) and because their positive predictions cannot be regarded as non-scientific only because they are un-validated by future facts. In fact, incorrect predictions are stripped of their scientific pretensions but the theories and approaches employed for advancing them could maintain a value as expressions of human understanding. In order to predict, everything is useful or, recalling Fayerabend, ‘anything goes’.

My starting assumption is that is possible to engineer such a framework. Therefore, the central question of this chapter will be how that is possible; in other words, how is it possible to outline an approach that includes both science and non-science. The next chapter will try to employ the framework in a specific case, that of Lebanon in 2004, in order to test if the Political Independence Revolution could have been foreseen. Preliminary, however, it is necessary to outline the approaches that have been followed in

order to make positive predictions, and specifically the positive prediction of political change. Then, I will propose the framework and qualify it.

In general terms, political change has interested students of many areas, and civilisations, and eras: Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Jamal Eddine Al-Afghani, Oswald Spengler, Talcott Parsons, and so on. I will not even attempt to present a full account of all approaches to political change, also because the field has focused, for instance during the 1930s and 1940s and from the 1980s on, on seeing it not as an autonomous process but as one resulting from social, psychological, cultural and economic changes; as a result, the literature concerned is immense.

(After remembering the trend of ‘futuology’, centred on the work of Bertrand de Jouvenel, which maintained that the past cannot be a guide to the future and which relied heavily on technological change and measurable aspects of social life, such as, for instance, demography, in order to predict the future or ‘possible futures’) Robert W. Cox, in a 1976 essay, which represents a preliminary study he carried out in order to formulate his own framework for understanding *longue durée* change in world order, identifies three ways of ‘thinking about the future’: the positivist-evolutionary; the historicist-dialectic; and the natural-rational. It is useful to summarise them, without intending to be exhaustive and taking the risk of over-simplifying – also because many theories over-lap across the three types - and to consider from this perspective the more specific theories that have been advanced and then followed in order to predict political change. All of these general approaches are characterised, in fact, by specific epistemological assumptions.

The first ‘way’ is the positivist-evolutionary way, which considers the social world as being similar to the natural world. In fact, this approach reduces human agents and actions to their outward phenomenal aspects. As a result, science looks for rationalities expressed by regularities existent in the relationships among externally observed phenomena. Therefore, science becomes the cumulative discovery of laws in the forms of consequences that are predictable under prescribed conditions – from this point of view, this is exactly what Popper suggested social sciences should aim to do. Social and human historical events are converted into objects, and everything is measured in order to be compared – while other approaches deal with facts, in other words events or institutions which are intelligible by

people because they have been made by people - positivism requires data. Actions are explained as resulting from a combination of influences, both conscious and unconscious. Reality is segmented into observable phenomena, variables, which are related to others in order to explain their connection while all other variables are maintained as constant, or irrelevant. However, the social world is too complex to be reduced to two or more, variables, and therefore the approach introduces the device of the system.

The system can be conceived as taking, generally, two shapes: firstly, according to a structural-functionalist framework, it can take the shape of an organisation of relationships among social roles that assures the carrying out of functions. Despite David Easton, who had warned against its 'reification', the system is likely to remain not just a useful framework for organising data but to become a real entity with its own finality, which is the maintenance of its own equilibrium. The system is understood as having a normative content, because what ensures the proper behaviour of the individuals who are part of it (in other words, the system's necessary internal coherence) are values. Therefore, it can end up suggesting a research programme that focuses on the regulatory social mechanisms that ensure that agents stick to their roles and that control deviant behaviour. The modification of the system, which through its own construction aims to preserve the status quo, is conceived as a 'progressive integration', which is a teleological concept – a reformulation, barely disguised, of the concept of development. Integration, in other words, is the emergence of a structure “capable of ensuring a harmonious complementarity among functionally specific roles in a society characterized by a high degree of interdependence of its parts” (Cox, 1976, 180). The second variant of the system undermines the concept of equilibrium, introducing the concept of a 'feedback loop', and emphasising the dynamic of the system. The interaction of the system produces certain consequences which 'feed back' by modifying the inputs of the next interaction, and so on. The dynamics are, therefore, the result of a series of interactions.

Within the general approach, the choices that a research project has to face split it into some sub-approaches. Such choices are the followings: what kind of analytical perspective, either retroactive or prospective, should be adopted; what is the meaning that is to be assigned to the cause, either deterministic or probabilistic; and what should be the focus of the research, should it analyse steps – or phases – or recurrent relationships. The retroactive analysis starts from certain specific historical conditions and researches their

causes – succinctly, this analysis is expressed as “Y happens if and only if A, B, C, ... are given”. A prospective analysis, on the contrary, starts from a specific historical situation and researches its likely consequences – this can be expressed as “given A, W will happen if B, C, D... N intervene” (Tilly, 1975a, 14-15). Theoretically, the two analyses are related, but practically they require different focuses and research programmes; the first is more suited for general questions, while the second is more for specific issues. The second choice concerns the meaning of the cause, whether deterministic or probabilistic. For research purposes, that first option is more suited for a very specific enquiry, while the second allows more general explanations. The third choice, which concerns the focus of the research, conduces to modelling or to analysing relationships among processes or variables. However, regardless of the different choices within this general approach, which are mainly methodological, the positive prediction of the future results from the projection of the observed, and observable, tendencies of contemporary society – in the first systemic model above, the future is represented by the regaining of the equilibrium; in the second, a trend is made up by a certain number of interactions.

The notion of social change, as a specific concept, has been derived from nineteenth-century sociology, and particularly from the work of Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies. They conceived social evolution in terms of a movement from traditional, rural societies towards a more complex and industrial, modern, and urban, social organisation. The modern concept of political change draws from their works, but it comes during the second half of the last century, and had a distinctive mark of positivism and evolutionism in it, as opposed to the relative pessimism that had characterised political speculation on change during the 1920s and 1930s; in that period, political change was understood according to a cyclical idea of history and declining civilisation patterns, such as in the works of Oswald Spengler, Vilfredo Pareto and Arnold Toynbee. A general pessimism regarding the future was also expressed in terms of the alienation, anomie, and fear brought about by the process of modernisation (Hannah Arendt or Reinhold Niebuhr). Contrary to what these scholars proposed, post-second world war positive evolutionists went back to the end of the eighteenth-century sociologists to draw their own distinctions between modernity and tradition (Huntington, 1971, 290-292).

The glorious years of this approach date back to the 1960s-1970s, but its framework and some of its concepts, despite being criticised, are still very much alive in political science. In

general terms, according to Tilly (1975b), these approaches to political change can be divided into three groups: firstly, theories of political development (divisible into two sub-groups: those including phases, sequences, or standard patterns of development, and those focusing on relationships among variables without any indication of precise historical coordinates; Huntington (1971, 305-313), on the other hand, divides them into three theories: systemic theory (social processes, and comparative history); functionalist theories; and historical theories. In general, however, studies of political change are centred on a dichotomy, that of tradition versus modernity, and on a process, that of development, later renamed, also but not exclusively by this approach, as globalisation. The process of modernisation determines a transformation in traditional societies, diversely valued by the different scholars and approaches: there is a replacement of political organisations, fragmentation, uniformity, co-existence among different value-systems, reformulation of traditional practices according to new world-views, etc. Roughly defined, the goal was, and is, that of explaining political and social modifications in politics and societies as a reaction to a common process of transformation, which was general but had specific and similar effects across societies.

The more 'modernising' approaches of the beginning have been demolished by the critique of development and of modernisation theory; and, most of all, by the actual historical factual non-achievements of development and modernisation. Indeed, those theories have changed the analytical interest, focusing on other variables such as culture, that interfere more than originally believed with the process, yet without changing the approach. Such 'new' variables shape and transform the process of modernisation; as a consequence, this transformation is not held to have similar effects across countries. Samuel Huntington, who has been a highly influential student of political change, sometimes leading the way, offers a 'paradigmatic' example. He started by studying political change and the process of political modernisation, becoming academically known thanks to *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). He then moved on to analyse, by employing the same comparative framework, processes of democratisation at the beginning of the 1990s (*The Third Wave* was published in 1991), and ended up focusing on cultures, firstly as the main contemporary and likely future forces of political legitimacy and action (outlining his thesis in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article and then in the 1996 *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, the expanded version of the original article); and, secondly, in a work co-edited with Lawrence Harrison named quite boldly *Culture Matters. How Values Shape Human Progress* – I

will deal with this book at greater length below - as factors influencing economic development (and, implicitly but sometimes explicitly by some contributors, blaming them for underdevelopment). His last work, *Who Are We?*, focuses specifically on culture (and cultural engineering and the future of the United States). From a certain perspective, his scholarly journey exemplifies what has been the transformation of the 'modernisation' research programme: starting with political development to arrive at culture and identity.

Despite its advantages, for instance the capacity to build models and to compare, this approach has suffered from some shortcomings: firstly, from an international perspective, it is inherently pro status quo, because the international is assumed to be composed of national states, which are seen as 'given' or, at least, as also offering a strong analytical framework; secondly, the concepts of modernisation and then globalisation enter the framework as processes presenting certain characteristics, in other words without questioning them; thirdly, they imply a pro-Western bias, by comparing the transformations happening in so-called 'developing' or 'under-developed' countries to those of 'developed countries'; and, finally, the role of power in constituting reality is heavily under-considered.

More recently, the blueprint offered by modernization theory has been employed by somehow quite distant approaches. For instance, as far as specifically social change is concerned, post-modernism is actually based on the acceptance of the existence of passages from traditional to modern and post-modern values. These different world-views and power configurations, which shape identity features, are analytical models that can be employed to understand social transformations and change. In these approaches, there are neither steps nor development; in fact, they accept the joint presence of themes and values belonging to different phases, within the world as a whole or a country. On the other hand, recent years have brought to the attention of 'modernisation theory' the role of identities and culture in shaping political life; and so the new categories could be introduced within its framework without major problems.

Others have tried to revive the old institutionalism in order to explain the work of international organisations and their potential for fostering political change. Neo-liberal institutionalism, and all the literature on international political regimes, for instance, has linked institutions to rational choice approaches to explain the possible creation of new international systems as a developing set of tasks, values, beliefs, and understandings as created by multiple interactions that can spill tasks over?. In this vein, studies on the

European Community have developed according to a neo-functionalist framework, focusing on the work of transnational organisations and governments.

The natural-rational approach, the second proposed by Cox in his grand generalisation, is based on the concept of a duality distinguishing the inward nature from the outward appearance of human institutions and events. The inward nature is knowable by reason because of the universality of the human being. Corresponding to the double profile of reality stand two conflicting principles: the subjective principle, which is the direct action of the human being in social and political life; and the objective principle, which is the concatenation of conditions and events against which the subjective principle has to work (and the examples Cox offers are those of St. Augustine and Tolstoy). The problem of how to resolve historically such a duality has been given different solutions: when the objective principle is understood as predominant, and political action is therefore seen as futile, a doctrine of providence could appear in order to justify inaction. On the other hand, when the subjective principle is leading, and there is a strong will to master the objective principle, attention focuses on the ability to manipulate circumstances (for instance, Machiavelli).

Two lines of enquiry derive from this approach: firstly, there is the normative task of designing the most appropriate polities for the human being (utopianism); and secondly, there is the analysis of politics to better understand the conditions that must be taken into account in order to construct the ideal polity. This approach is largely confined to political theory and philosophical reasoning.

The historical-dialectical approach, like the natural-rational one, deals with facts, not data, and thinks in the dualistic terms of subjectivity and objectivity. Unlike the previous approach, however, its perspective focuses on subjectivity, by conceiving the social world as being the creation of the human mind; in other words, while the natural-rational approach contrasts a subjective universal idea with the objective condition of human existence, the historical-dialectical sees the ideas as forces acting in the actual world. It therefore understands history as being divided into distinct phases, which are defined by different organisations of ideas, behavioural patterns, and institutions, expressed by ideal-types – for instance, feudalism, capitalism, liberalism, etc. Historical change is the result of

the conflict between two different organisations; the general concept is that a phase is already characterised by its own antagonist elements that will, through conflict with the previous pattern, lead to change in the second. Within this general approach, different emphases have been placed on the prominence of material aspects (most clearly, Marxism) or, on the contrary, ideas (for instance, constructivism).

As becomes clear, then, each of these general approaches conceives of the future in terms of some combination of current restraints and actions; it follows distinctive epistemological assumptions, which lead it to follow a specific line of enquiry; and, most of all, it assumes a specific idea of history according to which the future can be predicted. More precisely, the natural-historical approach follows a cyclical model of the historical process; the positivist-evolutionary assumes a linear, uninterrupted progression; and the historicist-dialectic is developed according to what is, of course, a dialectic idea of history.

In other words, for all of these general approaches, predicting the future is an activity requiring a basic assumption about the idea of history. This is not compatible with the proposal, as expressed in the previous chapter, that foreseeing requires assuming that there can be no link between the past and the future – because human behaviour cannot be predicted according to the past. All of the general approaches above belong to the activity of proscription, which is that of setting boundaries about what cannot, or is unlikely, to happen. As a result, they are proven wrong if what they had predicted as not, or unlikely, to happen actually occurs. The two profiles, in other words the one concerned with proscription – which involves both explanation and understanding – and the one concerned with prescription – an intuition arising from organised thought – should, as advocated in the previous chapter, find their own place within a common framework. As I have been arguing so far, proscription is the task of science, and requires assuming conditions in order to explain phenomena. In an attempt to proscribe the future, an assumption related to the past is therefore in order. All hypotheses, from this perspective, are perfectly legitimate.

A particular case is that of those theories not concerned with any idea of the future and which, on the contrary, have other concerns, and namely power. These are neo-constructivist and post-modern theories concerned with the social construction of reality and the imbalances of power. These latter approaches are particularly useful for



understanding cultural and identity issues related to politics, and therefore for focusing on 'new political actors' - transnational movements, such as Diaspora and NGO networks. In spite of appearing not to be concerned with the future, however, they are very much based on it. In general, they aim to criticise the current power structure, and therefore to open alternative courses of action, because the future, as seen from now, is a future of domination, injustice, etc. The present and the future melt together here, and the future is a projected present (to be challenged and avoided).

The problem is whether all of these very briefly outlined approaches, methodologies, and epistemologies can be included in one framework that can help organise the thought, and the whole activity that has been called 'foreseeing'. Such a framework needs to both accommodate scientific theories (or claim to do so) and allow 'creative intuition' to be brought into life. Human reality is a complex phenomenon, and a framework attempting to predict it needs to be complex. However, and primarily, in order to organise such a framework, some specific issues need to be addressed. These are the following: firstly, that of generality versus clarity, or complexity versus elegance; secondly, that of the time-span of foreseeing; thirdly, that of historical universality versus specificity; fourthly, that of who can be allowed to foresee; and, finally, that concerning the role of the state and the different levels of analysis.

The first question concerns whether such a framework needs to be as general as possible or, on the contrary, to be as simple as possible. A holistic approach calls for the maximum level of generality in order to include all approaches, yet excessive generality does not allow the inference of one phenomenon from another or, to put it better, to relate one variable to another. Maybe the problem could be expressed in different terms, as clarity versus complexity. An elegant theory is characterised by its simplicity, or the degree to which it is able to explain a phenomenon by involving as few variables as possible without losing explanatory precision. A framework can be exactly that: holistic, and therefore including all of the categories employed by all of the different theories (which grasp the maximum aspects of reality) but re-organising them according to their shared features. The macro-categories so formed could allow for a certain comparison. The aim is to let each theory contribute with its own insights, and to let it assign its own priorities to the different macro-category. However, the framework should be simple, in order to be able to offer elegant theories, and clear anticipations.

The second issue concerns the time-span of foreseeing: long, medium, and short-term. The problem here is that theories that attempt to predict political change focus, analytically, on different 'levels'. Theories that aim to predict *longue durée* change centre their attention on more 'material' categories and on trends. 'Material' means not only resulting from a single actual or intended human action, but requiring a plurality of actions in order to change (for instance, economic structures or technological improvements); theories aiming to predict medium-term change can focus on the strategic manoeuvring of actors and on institutional outcomes, or on conflicts, or on cultural and identity transformations; and, finally, short-term predictions could be advanced well according to short-term agents' choices, cultural and individual features, etc. However, the different macro-categories, which can prioritize differently according to the time that it is intended to predict in, are not easily detachable: a short-term prediction needs to consider carefully the environment in which decisions are made, and the constraints that this places upon agents; similarly, a long-term prediction may need to focus on material factors, but these are nothing other than the result of a historical accumulation of agents' choices (in other words of short-term decisions), and so on. Indeed the three levels, and more generally, all the categories and macro-categories, are interrelated and mutually influence each other. To express this in another way, foreseeing the future requires understanding and explaining all the features of the present, and that implies considering the mutual relationships between different elements and levels. Therefore, I have to assume that the framework would have to be flexible enough to accommodate all categories and therefore to allow any sort of foreseeing – short, medium and long terms.

The third problem refers more specifically to the macro-categories that such a framework should include, both in terms of time and space. The question is: should it be useful for all times and areas? As far as times are concerned, it should be evident that certain categories are suited only for certain times. It could be true, on the other hand, that at a certain level of generalisation human life could be seen as being characterised by the maintenance of certain needs, goals, and variables that have played an important role throughout the history of mankind in all geographical areas. However, such a level of generalisation seems excessive. More generally, by definition, the future is something that follows the present and, therefore, the activity of foreseeing should be based on the categories that play a role in today's world. In other words, a contemporary framework that aims to foresee the future should be based on contemporary categories. This suggestion can offer a solution to the

problem of space, which looks somehow similar. Unlike the early approaches of political development (which was eventually modified in order to understand tradition and modernity not as forming a dichotomy according to which societies could be labelled but as categories that are more blurred and contemporarily at work in every societies), the categories that could explain political change should be applicable to all societies. The point is not just suggested by our common human nature. A bit more specifically, the process of globalisation (understood not as representing a nineteenth-century novelty but as a long term process of interaction among agents) has been interesting, to different degrees, in many, if not all areas of the world. Its outcome has certainly been very different across the globe (it cannot be reduced to a simplistic ‘homogeneity’ or ‘standardisation’) but it has nevertheless offered categories that suit most areas of the world, even if sometimes with necessary qualifications. Analytical primacies can be different according to the areas of the world under study and the political change the researchers aim to foresee, but the expansion of certain political organisations (for instance, that of the state or of Non-Governmental Organisations, etc.) could allow the use of similar categories and, even further, macro-categories. For instance, the role of religion as a political factor can appear to present a stronger analytical force in some areas but it is in fact useful in others as well; similarly, literacy rates can assume a specific importance in some areas, but it is a category that could be important in any. Some processes, such as that of modernisation and globalisation, have indeed touched all parts of the world, shaping them, in one way or another, according to the different theories – this is something all of them agree upon. Finally, there can be a more methodologically straightforward concern: if we intend to allow some comparisons, the framework needs to be common, at least in terms of macro-categories.

The fourth question concerns who is allowed to predict. On a general level, it has been argued in the previous chapter that anybody should be allowed to foresee, because that is not, strictly speaking, a scientific activity. A bit more precisely, however, what has been proposed is something quite different – that the very ‘scientific predictions of the future’ cannot be regarded as scientific. In fact, science’s contribution to foreseeing is to set limits of ‘impossible’ (or unlikely) futures. This is an activity where scientists still reign. However, to be a scientist is not enough. If science can accept statements advanced by people working, for instance, on data or even facts, foreseeing/predicting requires scientist who are very familiar with the environment, history, people, processes, values, feelings, etc. of

the analytical area where the prediction of political change is being attempted; in fact, how is it possible to have 'intuition' if there is no direct link to these aspects?

The problem can be expressed in more precise terms: should the researcher 'belong' to the environment in which the political process takes place, or is that not an absolute requisite? For instance, if we were trying to foresee the future of the political process happening within a specific state, should a researcher have been borne there, have studied there, or be living there now? Or, on the other hand, could he be a foreigner? To begin with, it is clear that he/she, regardless of his/her identification, should know the history, the facts, the data, and the 'trends' concerning the analytical area well. The problem is not one of competence, but of ability to 'intuit' the future. The researcher who 'belongs' to the environment has the advantage of knowing the most intricate details of the political situation, of the specific cultures, of maybe having access to particularly valuable sources of information, and so on; in general, of 'understanding' the area. However, he/she can have the disadvantage of being involved, possibly emotionally, in that very political life and, most importantly, of having been 'constituted' by the work of social power. Therefore, they are 'carriers' of interiorised meanings so intimate that they are very hard to self-defy and to detach oneself from – the advantage turns into a disadvantage. To reach objectivity can be a difficult, and maybe even impossible, goal to reach for the researcher. On the other hand, the researcher who does not belong to the country faces the opposite advantages and disadvantages. For instance, objectivity can be easier to reach; however, they are still carriers of interiorised meanings, different of course from those of the country under study, and may not have access to valuable information and to the intricate and arguably 'instinctive' knowledge of the area that can possibly be accessed more easily by the autochthonous researcher. A solution could be offered by the epistemology of human sciences, and precisely by the idea that is not possible to try to understand an individual experience without 'being interested' in it or, by expressing it through a different concept, without 'empathy'. Both are subjective feelings. Hence, foreseeing can only be attempted properly by researchers who are capable of developing an emphatic bond with the object of study, as derived by their shared human nature. The result is that, to put it briefly, foreseeing/predicting requires intellectual honesty.

The final preliminary problem is how to analytically consider the state and what are the necessary levels of analysis that need to be included within the framework. In its minimal

conception, and in general terms, the state can be analytically considered in two ways: from a juridical perspective, as the institution formed by people, territory and sovereignty (what Ralph Miliband has called ‘the state system’); or, more politically, as an agent that very much represents its own interests, pursues its own goals, and relates to other social, political, cultural, and economic organisations (the state as ‘government’, to keep following Miliband). In general terms, to assign primacy to the first profile implies considering it to represent the most important level of analysis, while highlighting the second widens the analysis to the reciprocal influences between the state and other categories, such as for instance economic factors, or organisations, or structures at work at sub-national and international levels. Is an analysis that aims to predict political change that confines itself to the state level analytically sound? All of the literature on political change, but in particular the literature of the last few years, generally points out that political transformations result from inter-related influences and phenomena, which work on the state and through it – the state is not the only actor fostering political change and, on the other hand, interactions do not happen only at its level. Therefore, the soundest choice appears to be to accept the state as an agent in the interplay of factors, tendencies, organisations, and institutions operating on other analytical levels. The problem that could arise here is the criteria according to which the area of study should be limited and what categories the framework should consider. One of the sayings that appeared during the ‘90s, using the interest in globalisation as an analytical category, stated: ‘when a butterfly moves its wings in China, the result is a hurricane in North America’. The saying did not express the growing power of the Asian - possibly, arguably definitely, the next super-power - but the closer relationships within a supposedly hyper-interconnected world. However, adopting such a perspective would introduce so many variables to a framework as to make it useless. Again, it is the epistemology of the human sciences, and precisely its ‘father’, Wilhelm Dilthey, that could offer a solution.

In what is called ‘the first period’ of his research, Dilthey tried to focus on the study of individual experiences as they have been ‘fixed’ on objects – as, for instance, in written texts – through the emphatic method. During a second period, after being accused of excessive individualism, lack of objectivity, and naïveté, he adopted a more ‘realistic’ approach, which considers groups as an analytic tool. In other words, he tried to place the individual piece of work in its context, physical environment, and historical period, and therefore to understand it as shaped by social groups. Indeed groups are composed by

individuals, who influence the individual, and hence are reflected within his/her body of work. The point is that, for Dilthey, the researcher should frame the research according to his/her analytical needs; the area, category, groups to consider can be modified according to what the researcher, who therefore is assigned a certain freedom, argues as being relevant. To conclude, therefore, the decision of what to include within the framework, both spatially and temporally - the area, the levels, the institutions, the groupings, the structures, etc. - is the researcher's.

Hence, the state can or can not be maintained as setting the analytical limits of the area under consideration, or of its privileged boundaries (in other words, being taken under consideration according to its juridical profile); it is a researcher's choice. However, it should be understood as shaping and being shaped by sub-national, international and transnational forces, which should be analytically valued according to their own importance. For instance, in the Middle East, groupings bonded by ethnic and family ties and allegiances, which cut across state boundaries, are analytically much more important than in other regions, and within the area they are more relevant in some states than in others. Similarly, regional agreements influence much more the choices of (at least some) European states than can appear to be the case in Middle Eastern states.

The framework may be ready to be proposed. In general terms, if it aims to foresee political change, which is a transformation resulting out of human decisions, then it should include categories that influence political human behaviour. I have organised those categories according to three levels: firstly, those that can be understood as referring to 'objects', or 'material' forces; secondly, those referring to human activities that can influence the future as mediated by group interaction; and finally, those resulting from agents in general, and more specifically by the human beings as individuals. In a nutshell, the framework develops from low to a high individual action. This way, I have tried to split the so-called 'macro-micro' dualism or 'structure-agency' dilemma, maintaining the two analytical profiles in a new framework. The term 'agent' refers to an analytical actor (an individual or a group) that is active in creating changes in his/her social and political environment while being aware of social circumstances, ties, and constraints. The term 'structure', on the other hand, is generally seen as a force that is, at least partially, independent of people's reasons and motivations. Systems, which accept agents as being

composed of individuals, are charged with a mediating role between the two; this way, I believe approaches and theories can be accommodated – the framework accepts theories in order to assign primacy to the level they regard as analytically more important.

The first level comprises ‘material’ categories: economic, technological, and institutional ‘structures’. ‘Material’, from this perspective, is simply meant to refer to factors ‘framing’ actors’ decisions and influencing the social organisation of the area being studied. In other words, they are related to proper material objects, or social interactions that can accept being ‘objectified’ while, at the same time, being subjectively perceived as factors a single individual has to face if he/she wants to act; from this perspective, they are assumed to be perceived by the individual as exogenous to him/herself. On the other hand, they shape the social and political world by rewarding specific capacities and, as a result, assigning power to some individuals and not others. Most importantly, they are ‘structures’, but neither in a proper Marxist nor in a structuralist sense, but simply in the meaning of fostering comparable changes in different societies regardless of subjective feelings, values, and cultures. The effects that such structures have on social organisations could therefore be compared.

The economic structure refers to the organisation of economic factors in a given territory. It is not necessary to be a Marxist in order to comprehend that a nomadic economy requires a different society to a post-industrial one. Individuals are rewarded according to different abilities, and they are assigned power consequently. As a corollary, political legitimacy arises from different sources, different social and political groupings are formed, and specific groupings are able to achieve and maintain a social and political leadership – or (the general concept being the same) hegemony (Chase-Dunn et al., 1994, 361-376). As far as political change is concerned, and particularly change resulting from conflict, relevant imbalances between different territories or between classes or social or political functions within a same political entity should be particularly underlined.

The technological structure is related to the economic structure, but it is more fruitful to maintain the two separated. On the one hand, technological achievements and their territorial and class allocation inter-relate with the economic structure, with the latter being both the result and, at the same time, a force that influences the speed of new technological achievements. However, technology has its own impact on change by ‘constituting’ the individual and, therefore, shaping social organisation and collective choices. Not

exclusively, but arguably most successfully, Michel Foucault's work (and more generally the approaches that employ some of his concepts, particularly those that study the identity effects of the introduction of Western technology in the non-Western world) underlines the non-neutrality of technological devices – an idea which the French philosopher summarised through the concept of 'bio-power'. To express the idea simply: any technological tool embodies not only a specific world-view but also requires specific skills, abilities, and actual bodies; for instance, a computer, even if only to use it to type an essay, requires that the individual develop specific psychic and physical abilities that are different to those required by writing the same essay with a pen. Meanings and abilities are therefore (as in the case of economics) socially, politically, economically, and culturally rewarded differently according to the technology used; the process is tied to economics, but it cannot in any sense be reduced to it. In fact, technology can change the sense of space and time of individuals, two fundamental categories for its definition, not to speak of cultural allegiances, and therefore it spills over into change in the political realm.

The last macro-category placed analytically on this level is that of institutional structures, which refer, quite simply, to the legal and enforced contents of the political system. Politics is concerned with the authoritative organisation of society – both in normative and 'factual' terms. For instance, political parties are allowed to operate because they are accepted by a legal framework; social, economic and cultural demands need to acquire a political relevance to become politicised, and when they do they are managed according to the set legal and political framework. From this perspective, the institutional structure is therefore understood as a 'building', according to which political action is granted or refused legitimacy, and organised and 'channelled'. I assume it to have a very similar meaning to that used to refer to the 'Three Pillars of the European Union', or to the whole tradition of comparative studies better represented by Sartori (1994), who effectively uses the term 'engineering' to describe the activity of modifying institutional arrangements in order to improve the performance of the system and to achieve certain results and not others. More generally, in as far as it matters, the idea has constantly featured in political thought, from the Greek political thinkers to liberalism and institutionalism: institutions have an effect on political life and on social and political organisation. All scholars and approaches contributing to what has been called the 'new institutionalism', differ on many points, both theoretically and methodologically. However, they agree on two fundamental points. Firstly, institutions shape politics, by structuring political behaviour, because they shape



actors' identities, power, and strategies; and, secondly, institutions are shaped by history (Putnam, 1993, 7-8).

Institutions do not only shape political life in terms of a framework according to which political demands receive recognition or rejection, but their legal contents are in turn brought to life by agents' actions. In its more general formula, this is expressed by the dichotomy that exists between the concepts of a 'legal' or 'formal' constitution, the foundation of political life in constitutional states, and a 'material' constitution. The former refers to the principles, norms and institutional arrangements explicitly and theoretically organising political life, while the latter refers to the basic principles and norms according to which political life is actually conducted. From another perspective, the former anchors political action to specific legitimising legal principles and norms, while the latter accepts the legitimising principle and norms that agents effectively follow in their interaction, which hence become legal. It is clear, therefore, that a constitutional state does not require a 'formal' constitution, but it does need a 'material' constitution. If we understand a norm is legal because it is sanctioned, then the concept can obviously be extended not only to un-constitutional states (because even in those cases political life is carried out according to certain principles and not others), but also to the informal rules followed by institutions in their own working. The structure that is formed by institutions, that actually works, and is not fixed principles or norms, is what can be referred to as a society's institutional structure. Institutions, in this sense, are not those of institutionalism, which is interested in explaining the role institutions can play in shaping political life, especially in terms of values and beliefs, and therefore regards them as agents of political change. More simply, institutions are here understood as compounding a 'building', thanks to which social and political life flourishes, and political action is channelled, refused or accepted. From this perspective, then, institutions are external to the individual, who can act according to the institutional arrangements or against them, but in both cases he/she has to face specific constraints, limits, and incentives to his/her action.

As far as this first level is concerned, two qualifications are in order. Firstly, structural internal differences are analytically particularly important. In other words, the economic, technological and institutional structures can be homogeneous and mutually reinforcing or not. Firstly, inside an area such as, for instance, that of a state, each macro-category could be characterised by territorial and social intra-imbalances; similarly, inter-macro-

categorically, factors and ways of production, technological tools and institutional arrangements can be unevenly distributed territorially and socially. When that is the case, such unbalances are likely to characterise the social organisation inside the state, affecting society as a whole. Secondly, all three of these structures are constituted by actions of agents – a new technological device is created and is introduced, institutions are modified according to social needs and political action, and economics can be restructured because of political decisions, etc. In a given time and area, those structures are very much the result of collective histories. In fact, those changes, as rapid as they can be, need some time to affect a whole society. Always maintaining open the possibility of a sudden change, what is more likely is that such structures will change on the long run. Indeed scholars who try to predict long-term change focus on transformations that happen within one of those structures.

The second level is made up of individuals, but their actions are taken as being mediated by groups, and it is the latter who are given analytical primacy. The macro-categories that are placed on this level are the political system and cultural groups. The first is well known, but its meaning needs to be qualified in order to better account for political change. In the second, the adjective cultural requires some considerations because culture is not really a contested but more of a confused concept in anthropological, sociological and political literature, with multiple definitions that are not always consistent with each other. In general and maybe imperfect terms, the division between the two macro-categories follows that running between politics and society, which is a dichotomy the importance of which has increased in recent political reasoning - for instance, in the studies on democracy and processes of democratisation, or in the sub-field of internal political structures, which is a category introduced in order to analytically mediate between international inputs and state actions, and which provides models according to the internal interplay between the state and society.

The system, as mentioned earlier, was a device introduced in the 1950s-1960s to simplify political reality, and the political processes, in order to reduce the number of variables to consider, and to quantify. However, the question that defines the whole research program is that pointed out by David Easton: “The question that gives coherence and purpose to a rigorous analysis of political life as a system of behavior is: how do political systems

manage able to persist in a world of both stability and change?” (Easton, 1966, 143) This kind of question suggests a few considerations: firstly, a political system is the result of a reduction to politics; secondly, it is concerned with political behaviour; thirdly, it is interested in explaining the relationships occurring within/between the political system and other systems – psychological, economic, and social; and, finally, a political system is thought to be able to change while being able to persist (Easton follows the ‘feedback loop’ model). In fact, the systemic analyses, linking with functionalism and adopting the positivist-evolutionary general approach, is interested not so much in the functioning of the system but both in the exchanges and transactions between systems and in the way they respond to the outside – social, economical, etc. - environment. The concepts of internal coherence and equilibrium are the analytical starting points, and have therefore to be assumed as ‘givens’. In effect, an external perturbation – which can come from other non-political or political systems, the latter resulting from the systemic researchers’ tendency to employ the state as delimiting the borders of one political system (Tilly, 1975b) – can shake the system, which reacts by changing some internal factors and therefore re-gaining its coherence and equilibrium. The process of change, which is understood as that process through which the political system faces tensions coming from the outside environment and systems, is explained through the concept of feedback: within the system, some agents - the ‘authorities’ or the political power-holders ‘who are individuals who can express for and instead of the whole system’, in order to respond to a demand arising from the environment learn what is happening inside the system; in other words, from the previous round of interactions. Through this process of learning, the resulting output is followed by other input, and so on, in a circle of relative change that allows the system to maintain its coherence and equilibrium. It is unsurprising that such a framework is better suited for modelling and comparing models than for explaining political change: the system is assumed to be a coherent static model.

The system, in itself, is a powerful device enabling us to reduce enormously the number of variables. However, as an analytical tool it does not need to be assumed to be characterised by equilibrium or internal coherence. To better account for change, the response to external input can be thought as following not one but plural rationalities, and the equilibrium can result not through coherence but through in-coherence, representing the unstable and temporary encounter between those rationalities. The system, from this perspective, is characterised by political processes and bargaining and, most of all, conflict.

The question is indeed not that of recording and measuring input and output, but of following the ways responses to external input are formed and are likely to transform the latter into output. In other words, foreseeing change within a system is a matter of foreseeing how that input will likely be perceived and managed by the system and where the different rationales are likely to meet. Rationales are the principles according to which the system is organised and works, but they are static concepts. The dynamic profile of rationalism/rationales is expressed by the concept of 'logic', which is the rational connection of acts according to which agents express their response to input by following the rationale. In other words, rationalism is the way in which agents 'make sense' of input, while the 'logic' is the way they react to the input. If the system is a device marked by conflicts, then there necessarily must be more than one rationale and logic. A specific equilibrium, therefore, is one of the possible outcomes of the interplay of logic and, consequently, is temporally determined.

The final result then, is not that there can be systems without equilibrium but, to the contrary, systems are fundamentally lacking it – in fact, equilibrium is neither stability nor order. In foreseeing the future, and because of the reasons expressed in the previous chapter, it is not possible to await output - and register it in order to classify the system or to outline the trend of responses – and hence anticipate the future as a trend of interactions and exchanges. Trends are important, and can be useful in limiting possible types of output, but it is necessary to situate the activity of foreseeing before them. To give a simple example: if one of the principles at work within a system is one we can call of 'religious contraposition', any input coming from the outside world, regardless of its original meaning or of what it was at its source supposed to mean, could be understood in religious and conflict terms resulting in a complex dynamic that will follow a certain 'logic'. It is just not a matter of agents' perceptions, but of the more general pattern a system follows in reacting to input. Different types of 'logic' are systemic because agents composing a political and social system behave according to values, beliefs and interests that can be analysed as 'objective' – their subjective values, beliefs and interests are societal; collectively, they are not tied to the single agent. Identifying the logic at work within a system at a certain time can allow some prediction of the way the system could react to external input. However, logics are plural – there are several types of logic, and simultaneously at work within a system, and it is therefore essential to avoid reducing them to one as this would result in determinism. Mapping the systemic types of logic at work

could allow the prediction of whether and where they can meet in order to respond to input.

Cultural groups are the second macro-category placed on the systemic level. The concept of culture has received much attention, which has resulted in quite different definitions. In his 1949 *Mirror for Man*, the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn devoted some twenty-seven pages to addressing the concept of culture, defining it in at least twelve different ways, such as ‘the total way of life of a people’, a ‘social legacy’, a set of ‘standardized orientation to recurrent problems’, learned behaviour, a ‘precipitate of history’, a map or a matrix, and so on. In 1952, he and Arthur Kroeber (1952) found more than one-hundred and sixty-four meanings of culture or, rather, more than one-hundred and sixty-four ways in which culture had been employed in the anthropological literature. Things arguably have only got worse since. However, they reported that all those meanings could be distilled into two: a strict conception, in the sense of a description of a group’s symbolic and value organisation; and a large concept, such as the traditions, habits, ideas, technological knowledge, etc. of a group in relation to its environment. By following other criteria, definitions of cultures have been divided into objective and subjective, sociological and anthropological, and high and low, inclusive and exclusive, primary and secondary, etc. Anthropologically, culture can be defined as “l’ensemble des manières de penser, d’agir et de sentir d’une communauté dans son triple rapport à la nature, à l’homme, à l’absolu” (Abou, 2002, 34); sociologically it can be seen as a “système dynamique et transmissible de croyances, de savoirs et d’arts”, characteristic of a “groupe historiquement donné” (Nassar, 1984, 183). In an objective sense, it has been portrayed as “interworked systems of construable signs ([...] symbols)” or, a bit shorter, as a “symbolic structure” (Geertz, 1973, 14); from a subjective point of view, Huntington (Huntington, 2000, xv); defined it as “the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations, and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society”. ‘High culture’ refers to the ‘symbolic structure’ shared by a certain elite while ‘low culture’ to that shared by the mass of people in a society. Finally, primary culture refers to a bond that commands the primary loyalty of an individual (for instance, grounded in ethnicity or nationality) and is able to impose itself on other, secondary, allegiances.

Analytically, culture can be defined in many ways, and the only criteria that should be employed in order to judge a definition are usefulness and precision. Culture is, in fact, only

an analytical category; it does not exist as such as a phenomenon. It is a device, and a relatively recent one (Cuche, 2004), which is relevant only when it is helpful in explaining or understanding something, particularly the way a group behaves, or is expected to behave.

It is really not that important, for the aims of this work, to actually and precisely define what culture is; it should be enough to accept a broad definition of it, which refers to some relatively stable and shared features characterising a group of individuals that are related to their shared subjectivity. Human beings, in their interactions, develop certain patterns of behaviour and shared understandings, and assign different priorities to values; from these, norms and roles are assigned, and a certain bond is created. These patterns characterise any group that regards some other groups as different, difference (the 'Other', if we wish) being that which allows comparisons between groups (Abou, 2002, 35-36). According to Pipes (1975, 454) culture does not exist in 'primitive' and closed societies, because in those societies group members call themselves 'men'. However, in that case a group of 'men' still call themselves so because they define themselves as different from the external environment, from nature. The 'Other' is not necessarily another human being or group; it can be an idea, a history, a myth, etc.

However it is defined, culture expresses the common features of a group, and every group is characterised by a specific culture. The problem with describing a culture is that the effort needs to be based on a decision concerning the group or, on the contrary, on the understanding that certain features are shared by a certain number of people, which form a group. Recalling Clifford Geertz's exhortation to be careful, the study of culture is delicate, because the researchers both 'describe' and 'inscribe' culture. The reference is to the role of science in constituting reality, and to scientific research as an instrument of power.

Politically, defining culture means being able to propose identities to individuals, and to shape them. Culture becomes a phenomenon when a group, as a collective body, is able to guide the behaviour of its members. In fact, from a phenomenological perspective, it is individuals who act. In other words, culture is important only in as much as it refers to identity, and political loyalty. 'Cultural politics' therefore becomes a primary field of political action, and a field of essential interest for political actors, both in terms of coexistence, for instance in multi-national states, or differentiation towards others, such as states in the case of national states. From this perspective, the division among cultures

adopts the criterion of inclusiveness. 'Inclusive' cultures are 'open' cultures, which characterise groups that can be joined by people thanks to a subjective rational voluntary act of will. An 'exclusive' culture is one that defines the common bond according to certain 'objective' and shared characteristic of a group such as history, race, language, religion and it is therefore not accessible to external people to join as they choose (see Huntington and Wolfe, 2004) – the divisions follow very much the difference between 'French' and 'German' concepts of nation, citizenship and, of course, civilisation.

From a political perspective, therefore, culture is relevant in as much as it can be used in order to draw boundaries between groups, according to a differentiation mechanism, to command loyalties, and to shape identities. The construction of an individual identity develops through two distinct processes, called *self-categorisation* and *social comparison* in social identity theory, or through a more general process called *identification* in identity theory, which focuses more than the previous approach on the different roles an individual assumes in his or her development (Stets and Burke, 2000, 224-237). To put it briefly, a double mechanism of differentiation and assimilation toward the environment allows the individual to construe a certain idea of the Self (social or personal). Thanks to the mechanism of identification, the individual interiorizes the 'cultural units of meaning' and the group's values. The way the cultural elements are interiorised is different according to the type of society and group. For instance, if we wanted to follow the modernist differentiation between traditional and modern (individualistic) society, then traditional culture is based on a sacred order, generally characterised by a strong religious connotation. Individualist societies on the other hand, rely less on a common 'patrimony', and privilege the personal values and the esteem of the personal Self. According to Azar (1999), in collectivist societies, to which traditional societies generally belong, the person as such does not exist, because group identity dominates personal identity. The more important the latter is, the less the individual needs a social identity; the two respond functionally to the same need for positive self-imaging. The more groups there are within a society, the more the individual can experience a plurality of proposed identities, and the less a specific group is able to impose itself on the individual, and his/her political allegiance is a matter of personal choice. From this perspective, the passage from traditional to modern and post-modern societies is parallel to an augmentation of groups within societies. Therefore, globalisation is a process centred on identity because the collapse of communication and

movement costs increases the contacts among individuals, who are bearers of group meanings and identity.

Power appears to be relevant also from another perspective. The study of cultural exchanges has emphasised the relationships between power, identity, and culture. From the 1970s on, anthropological studies on culture and identity have underlined the dynamic content of the two latter concepts. On the one hand, no culture is fixed, and therefore definable – every culture is ‘syncretic’, and/or ‘métisse’. Culture modifies itself through continuous processes of ‘acculturation’ and ‘métissage’, which both refer to an appropriation of cultural exogenous elements through their re-interpretation (see Carmen et al., 2001). On the other hand, identity is a ‘relational and situational’ concept. The plurality of identities that ‘make’ an individual means that identity is not fixed; one identity has meaning only according to a precise moment, place, and situation. In addition, identity expresses itself through relationships; and it is relationships that give meaning to it. This way, individuals do not totally accept a culture, but interpret it according to the situation, therefore creating it through interaction. From this perspective, it is identity that gives meaning to culture, and not the other way around. Understanding cultural exchanges, and therefore cultural change, would mean deconstructing culture into its basic phenomenological units – the individuals, who are acting within a social structure (Castels, 2001). From this perspective, then, culture is very much tied to the social organisation, reproducing it; in other words, culture is an expression of power hierarchies, and the object of social struggle (Journet, 2002, 11).

To sum up, power is tied to culture and identity in two ways: on the one hand, from a top-to-bottom perspective, in the measure in which groups are able to shape identities and command loyalties. On the other hand, from a bottom-to-top point of view, because it is inscribed in identities and cultures; as a result, cultural exchange is a multi-faceted power relationship. If power hierarchies and power relationships are phenomenologically expressed by synchronically and diachronically defined individual relationships (in terms of identity transformation), they can be analytically accepted, at a macro level, as cultural exchanges. In other words, group interaction is a power game with an identity outcome: for this reason, I will call groups ‘cultural groups’. The expression aims to emphasise the identity-related feature of any contact between social and political groups, even those that can be analysed as being based on interest. From this perspective, all three of Steven Lukes’



‘faces of power’ and Michel Foucault’s concept of power are included in the analytical framework. To express it a little more clearly: ‘raw’ power, understood in terms of the allocation and ownership of capabilities, are factors that are capable of changing power hierarchies, and they do, but only as much as they are culturally framed in this way – realism argues differently, of course; however, assigning a certain relevance to identity politics suggests the acceptance of a more constructivist perspective, which is theoretically able to include all the different ‘realist’ approaches and not limit itself only to them.

The only way to trace identity transformation within a society is to consider only that transformation that happens at a macro level of cultural exchanges. It is not possible to trace all groups and define their cultural identities within a system; in addition, it is useless, because group identity changes as well. What it is possible to do is to highlight the ‘points of contact’ created by cultural groups’ interactions along cultural borders and prevailing, at certain times, within an analytical system. Social transformation is more likely to flourish from those ‘points of contact’ because it is there that conflict or agreement can be localised. At a certain time, ‘points of contact’ can be objectively traced, because they are the result of common or conflicting interests, values, beliefs, and expectations.

Three concluding remarks are necessary: the first concerns the relationship between culture and political culture; the second is related to the reproduction of culture; and the third deals with the link between the political and the other ‘spheres’.

The work of Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba, especially *The Civic Culture* (1963) and *The Civic Culture Revisited* (1989), has inspired a body of work concerned with political culture. This literature generally employs a subjective definition of political culture in order to provide taxonomies of different kinds and to understand its relationship with political systems’ taxonomies and performances. However, what is important is that political culture is understood as distinct from the ‘anthropological’ culture, in terms of having its own characteristics; it is in fact made up of ‘cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations toward the political system’. However, a link with ‘anthropological’ culture is maintained, because it is there that some explanation of political culture’s features can be found. This tendency is expressed better in *Culture Matters*, from 2000, edited by Harrison and Huntington, than anywhere else – even if Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* is a more famous example. There, the focus is on understanding the relationship between culture and political and economic development; some contributors (for instance, Carlos Alberto

Montaner, Mariano Grondona, and Daniel Etounga-Manguelle) link economic failure to traditional culture, blaming the latter for under-development. The anthropologist Richard A. Shweder (2000) cannot help proposing an excoriating critique whose points are already expressed in his title: *Moral Maps, "First World" Conceits, and the New Evangelists*. Against this idea it should be enough to point out that if, for instance, democracy needs to establish some values in order to be sustainable, then accepting democratic or civic (political) culture as related to 'anthropological' culture conduces to nonsense. On the contrary, political culture is specific, referring only to the authoritative organisation of society, and is created and reproduced by political agents (analytically, 'cultural groups') through their interactions.

Secondly, political culture should not be considered a precipitate of history. Robert D. Putnam, in *Making Democracy Work* (1993), explains empirical discrepancies among Italian regions' democratic performances by linking the presence of 'social capital' (which is a set of informal values and norms shared by members of a group that permits them to cooperate with one another) in certain regions and not others to the political legacy of the *età dei comuni*, under-valuing the centuries that have passed since then (and he has therefore been accused of 'cherry-picking'). The point is that political culture, as much as 'anthropological' culture, results from the action of agents and groups, who re-interpret history and re-create it. This process of reproduction is contemporary, and not historical. Political culture can be either quickly or slowly changed according to social and political agents' actions; it is, in every respect, the outcome of political strategies. Accepting history as an analytical category risks hiding the protagonists of political change, and their responsibility.

Finally, social, economic, environmental, ethical, religious, etc. issues become political through a process of 'politicisation', in other words a process that incorporates issues in the political realm because they come to be regarded as concerning the authoritative organisation of society. The process is impersonal, but is power-related, and is therefore included in the framework as interaction among 'cultural groups'. Instead, its 'personal profile' in other words the actual actions of agents that contribute to issue politicisation, is located in the third level of the framework. Social agents become politically relevant when their interaction is conducive to political outcomes. Families, for instance, are political agents because they reproduce values, and specifically political values, and are therefore sources (regardless of whether they conform or are oppositional) of political identity.

However, the framework is not tied to single actors and groups' identities, but focuses on the points of contact.

To conclude, the interaction of 'cultural groups' contributes to predicting political change because it allows an assessment of the points of transformation of values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations. The analysis focuses on political cultural borders, and it is actual and localised, but aimed at sketching the dynamic profile of identity constructions. The exercise clearly necessitates the mediation of the researcher, and does not easily accept objective data; 'points of contact' can be identified because they can either be present at the time of the analysis or be potential. In addition, they could lead to different transformations. It is the 'art' of the researcher, his/her ability to foresee change through 'empathy' only that can allow a correct anticipation of the political future.

The third level is organised in terms of agents. This macro-category emphasises the role human beings play in fostering political change through their actions. For this reason, it is the level on which the capacity of the researcher to understand political agents becomes, even more than on the previous level, central.

Preliminarily, agents are both individuals and groups – clearly, the state as 'a government', is considered to be an agent. Groups, as opposed to 'cultural groups', are considered to be single entities. Agents foster political change through their actions. From this perspective, processes are not impersonal; on the contrary, they are very much personal. The emphasis here is placed on the autonomy of individuals and groups to shape the course of history. Autonomy, however, does not mean absolute freedom; structures, and systems, do influence agents both by limiting their open courses of actions and by offering incentives and disincentives. However, the problem is who the are agents who should be considered. Preliminary, as far as individuals are concerned, psychological assessments, familiar background, past histories, etc. are all relevant here; as far as groups are concerned, internal organisation, goals, histories, etc. could be relevant (to be clear: studying the internal organisation is important insofar as it allows us to understand, and foresee, the final political decision of the group as a single agent). Yet the real problem is that relevant agents are sometimes, and especially in the period before an important political change, hidden; they assume relevance progressively, while the political change is shaping itself. Without referring to Hegel, it is true that, sometimes, agents become particularly politically relevant

because they are the expression of a collective will. However, in practice, only those agents who are politically relevant at the moment of foreseeing can be considered.

### *Conclusion*

I have tried to outline the framework that could help to allow both 'proscribing' and 'predicting', which together form 'foreseeing'. In order to do so, I have preliminarily recalled briefly the different approaches that have attempted to anticipate the future by grouping them according to their epistemologies and related ideas of history: the positivist-evolutionary, the natural-rational, and the historical-dialectical approaches.

Consequently, I have clarified some issues in order to 'prepare the ground' before proposing the framework. Finally, I have outlined the framework, which has been centred on the human being and organised according to his/her role in shaping reality. This way, I have tried to solve some analytical questions, such as the agent-structure dilemma, the different concepts of power, the diachronic and synchronic dimensions, the contemporary trends and sudden change, objectivity and subjectivity, without assigning any primacy – an exercise that remains within each approach and theory's autonomy (for instance, Marx assigned it to the economic structure, Weber to culture, etc.).

The framework includes macro-categories, which have been organised on three levels, according to the role individual actions can have in shaping them. The first level includes structures: the organisation of the economy, the framework provided by institutions, and the available technology. The second is the systemic level, and it includes the types of logic of the system, and the 'points of contact' among 'cultural groups'. The final level is reserved for the autonomy of the human being in making history, and is therefore that of agents.

In conclusion, I am not sure if this outlined framework could have allowed the prediction of the Political Independence Revolution. The next chapter will attempt to put it to the test.