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Henri Théodore Fischer, emeritus professor of Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University, died at his home in Utrecht on the 27th of September 1976. He was born of Dutch parents in the Netherlands Indies, where his father worked as a grammar school teacher. Fischer himself received his grammar school education in the Netherlands and registered at Utrecht University in 1921. He decided to study social geography, a subject which at that time included a good deal of ethnography and ethnology. After completing his studies in 1926, Fischer taught at a grammar school for some years. During this period, under the supervision of Professor J. H. F. Kohlbrugge, he wrote his Ph.D. thesis on an ethnological topic, which was submitted in 1929.

In 1931 Fischer was appointed to a readership at Utrecht University in the ethnology of the Netherlands Indies, which was founded by the Indological Studies Fund (*Fonds ten behoeve van Indologische Studiën*). Apart from the possibility of taking a degree in the law of the Netherlands Indies, this Fund provided for a course to prepare candidates for the colonial civil service in the Netherlands Indies. This course, known as indology (*indologie*), included Indonesian languages, law, economics and ethnology. It was established at Utrecht in 1925 with the assistance of a number of large business firms with interests in the Netherlands Indies. It was meant to be an alternative to the existing official course at Leiden University, which was said to be too liberal and to neglect the historical ties between the European and Asian parts of the Dutch Kingdom. The Utrecht course was expected to deal in a realistic way with practical issues rather than to aspire to lofty ideals based on abstract ethical principles.

It is not surprising that the work of Fischer in this period can be related to certain aspects of the prevailing attitude at Utrecht. However, he never ridiculed the Indonesian nationalistic movement nor called for strong measures on the part of the Dutch authorities in the way, for example, as Kohlbrugge did (Kohlbrugge 1927). Fischer believed that it was possible to distinguish between, on the one hand, scientific know-

ledge and, on the other hand, practical politics, which are often based on assumptions that can neither be proved nor disproved scientifically. Nevertheless he thought it his duty to warn people against doing injustice to others and harming themselves by adhering to a political ideology which used ostensibly scientific arguments as a means of trying to justify itself. As early as 1934 he attacked the racism of Hitler and his followers and approvingly quoted Moelia, an Indonesian who, in his Ph.D. thesis, opposed certain current views about the intellectual inferiority of "natives" (Fischer 1934e, Moelia 1933). This attitude compared favourably with, for example, the ideas of Ronhaar, who in contrast to Moelia maintained that Europeans were to be regarded as intellectually superior (Ronhaar 1935).

Fischer's opposition to racism and Nazism was also apparent in later years when Holland was invaded and occupied by German forces. Ultimately this attitude led to his suspension from all duties by the German occupation authorities in 1944. These duties consisted of a chair in the ethnology of the Netherlands Indies founded by the Indological Studies Fund in 1936 and a readership in ethnology, which he received from the university when Professor Kohlbrugge retired in 1935 (due to financial difficulties the Minister of Education had refused to appoint Fischer as professor). After the war he was not only restored to his former functions but also appointed full professor of Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University. This latter function he fulfilled until his retirement in 1970.

The emphasis on the relevance of academic studies to the reality of everyday life of administrative officials, on which the indology department at Utrecht prided itself, can be found in Fischer's study *Zending en Volksleven in Nederlands-Indië* (Missions and native culture in the Netherlands Indies) (Fischer 1932e). This study was the result of a trip undertaken in 1930 to a number of places outside Java where Christianity had had a considerable impact. Apart from considering points of friction between missionaries and administrators and suggesting improvements in the organization of some mission societies, which would make it possible to settle differences in a more impartial way at a high level, Fischer also justified the expansion of Christianity and tried to assess its significance for the Indonesian Christians. He argued that it would be absurd to allow native cultures to be changed through the impact of Dutch administration and external economic interests and at the same time to forbid missions to try to make converts. Many of the people who were affected by these political and economic

changes also wanted a new religious foundation for their changed way of life. At the same time he warned against trying to make these new Christians into rubber stamp copies of Europeans: the cultural identity of the Indonesian peoples should be respected. His positive evaluation of the missions was directed against those administrators who failed to see their usefulness, while his warnings about complete assimilation concerned those missionaries who condemned everything traditional as heathen. Although these points of view were hardly revolutionary, they showed Fischer's concern for reasonable judgement based on established facts and his dislike of dogmatic assertions expressing blind prejudice. In fact, Resident Haga, when he was in charge of the eastern province of the Netherlands Indies, recommended Fischer's book to all administrative officers in that area (Jongeling 1966, p. 186).

A critical analysis of facts rather than reliance on accepted theories also characterized Fischer's work on kinship and marriage. He was the first Dutch anthropologist to apply the insights gained in England (Malinowski) and the USA (Lowie) to the study of kinship in Indonesia, which was then still dominated by an old-fashioned evolutionistic perspective. Fischer rejected the wholesale characterization of societies as "maternal", "paternal" or "parental" and even more the view that such systems were stages in the evolution of kinship. According to his ideas kinship was traced both through the father and the mother everywhere, but in some societies either the side of the father or the side of the mother was emphasized for certain purposes, especially in order to establish legal rights and obligations. He considered it wrong to regard avunculate and matrilineal marriage as typical for "maternal" systems and brideprice and patrilineal marriage as typical for "paternal" systems, because whenever these elements occurred in atypical systems they were regarded as survivals or foreign intrusions, depending on which evolutionary sequence was believed to have existed. This approach made it impossible to see them as elements of a functioning whole, which according to Fischer was necessary for a proper understanding of such elements. "Parental" (bilateral) systems were not necessarily a development of unilateral systems. Anyway, one ought to draw a distinction between societies in which "parental" systems occurred together with corporate kin groups, as among the Dayak, and societies in which the bilateral principle was recognized but where corporate kin groups did not exist, as was the case on Java (even though they might have existed in the past) (Fischer 1934c, 1935c).

In view of later theoretical developments and discussions it is inter-

esting to note that Fischer was one of the first anthropologists who demonstrated that asymmetric cross-cousin marriage had to be seen as a logical consequence of the relationship which typically exists between wife-givers and wife-takers. These categories can coincide with unilineal exogamic groups (Fischer 1935a, 1936a). Fischer used the terms bride-givers (*bruidgevers*) and bride-takers (*bruidnemers*), presumably because the Dutch equivalent of wife (*vrouw*) also means woman. Fischer developed this perspective independently of Van Wouden, who also dealt with the structural implications of cross-cousin marriage in his thesis (Van Wouden 1935). Van Wouden, for his part, tried to demonstrate that a society with a fixed number of clans and prescribed marriage with *mobrda* logically implied a double-unilineal clan organization. This combination of asymmetric connubium and double descent, however, has not yet been proved to exist anywhere in Indonesia (Koentjaraningrat 1975, p. 152). On the other hand, Fischer's interpretation of the meaning of the relationship between bride-givers and bride-takers has been confirmed by later research, at least with regard to the Karo Batak (Singarimbun 1975).

Fischer's interest in marriage was also evident in his discussion with Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark about the definition and explanation of polyandry (Fischer 1952b, 1956b). Fischer started with a narrow definition of marriage: Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are the recognized legitimate offspring of both parents (Notes and Queries on Anthropology, 6th ed. 1951). This allowed him to classify most arrangements which are called polyandrous as no marriage at all. Even if one does not agree with Fischer's point of view, he forced us to distinguish carefully the various classes of rights that are involved in marriage institutions, which is not the case if we use too broad a definition or remain satisfied with a definition which is only valid for one or a few specific cultures (Leach 1961, p. 113).

With the death of Fischer the pre-war generation of Dutch anthropologists, which included amongst others J. P. B. de Josselin de Jong from Leiden University and J. Fahrenfort from Amsterdam University, has passed away. Each of them made his own contribution to the development of anthropology in the Netherlands. At Leiden the views of Durkheim and Mauss were developed into an early version of structuralism. Although Fischer acknowledged those discoveries of the students of De Josselin de Jong which were based on carefully researched facts, he criticized severely the tendency of some of them to reduce existing

social systems to an archaic Indonesian social structure, often through very dubious mythological analysis (Fischer 1934b, 1956c).

At the beginning of his career Fischer was much more of an anti-evolutionist than Fahrenfort (Fischer 1955). He believed that the complicated history of mankind could not be explained through a few simple formulae or laws but through the gaining of knowledge of specific cultures: their internal structure and their external relations with other cultures (Fischer 1936c, p. 20). A careful study of the diffusion of cultural elements could be one step towards this kind of understanding, as was shown in his own research on the distribution of a typical kind of knife for harvesting rice in South-East Asia (Fischer 1937a, 1937b, 1938e).

Later Fischer somewhat moderated his point of view on evolutionism, although he remained critical of attempts to establish evolutionary sequences without regard for known facts (Fischer 1959a, 1960). Fischer certainly put more emphasis than Fahrenfort on the unique character of each culture, but he shared with him the conviction, perhaps more clearly in his later years, that the study of primitive cultures could throw light on our own ideas and attitudes, while the apparently strange customs of exotic peoples could be understood by reference to our own way of life (Fischer 1956a, p. 152). He considered it his duty to make his outlook known to a wider public. Some of his publications, besides providing very readable and clearly written introductions to the subject for beginning students, were clearly meant to popularize the result of anthropological studies (Fischer 1939b, 1952a). It was a great pleasure for Fischer that his contributions in this field were also recognized by the people about whom he wrote, as when his *Inleiding tot de culturele antropologie van Indonesië* (Introduction to the cultural anthropology of Indonesia) was published in an Indonesian translation (Fischer 1940c).

Fischer's efforts to make important anthropological findings available to the general public were typical of his interest in public affairs. He was an active member of various societies and associations, a detailed record of which would take us too far afield here. His talents for co-operation and co-ordination almost destined him to become the founder of the first professional organization of anthropologists in the Netherlands. During many years this association, known as the *Ethnologen Kring* (Circle of Ethnologists) had an informal character. In 1970 it merged with the Section of Non-Western Sociology of the Dutch Sociological Association, which was renamed Dutch Sociological and Anthropological Association in 1971.

His lively and frank character, together with a talent for communicating his thoughts forcefully and convincingly, made Fischer a lecturer who never failed to fascinate his audience. He will be remembered by his students as a dedicated though demanding teacher, who always had their interests at heart and spared no pains in furthering their careers.

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