

**SESSION I**

**ASPECTS OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE PERIOD IN THE  
MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

## CULTURE AS THE IDEOLOGICAL BATTLEGROUND OF THE MODERN WORLD-SYSTEM

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“It is not our human nature that is universal, but our capacity to create cultural realities, and then to act in terms of them.” Sidney W. Mintz<sup>1</sup>

### I

Culture is probably the broadest concept of all those used in the historical social sciences. It embraces a very large range of connotations, and thereby it is the cause perhaps of the most difficulty. There is, however, one fundamental confusion in our usage which I shall address.

On the one hand, one of the basic building stones of social science's view of the world, most explicitly emphasized by the anthropologists, is the conviction that, while all persons share some traits with all others, all persons also share other traits with only some others, and all persons have still other traits which they share with no one else. That is to say, the basic model is that each person may be described in three ways: the universal characteristics of the specie, the sets of characteristics that define that person as a member of a series of groups, that person's idiosyncratic characteristics. When we talk of traits which are neither universal nor idiosyncratic we often use the term “culture” to describe the collection of such traits, or of such behaviors, or of such values, or of such beliefs. In short, in this usage, each “group” has its specific “culture.” To be sure, each individual is a member of many groups, and indeed of groups of very different kinds—groups classified by gender, by race, by language, by class, by nationality, etc. Therefore, each person participates in many “cultures.”

In this usage, culture is a way of summarizing the ways in which groups distinguish themselves from other groups. It represents what is shared within the group, and presumably simultaneously not shared (or not entirely shared) outside it. This is a quite clear and quite useful concept.

On the other hand, culture is also used to signify not the totality of the specificity of one group against another but instead certain characteristics *within* the group, as opposed

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, *The Power of Sweetness and the Sweetness of Power*, 8th Duijker Lecture (Deventer, NL: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1988), p. 14.

to other characteristics within the same group. We use culture to refer to the "higher" arts as opposed to popular or everyday practice. We use culture to signify that which is "super-structural" as opposed to that which is the "base." We use culture to signify that which is "symbolic" as opposed to that which is "material." These various binary distinctions are not identical, although they all seem to go in the direction of the ancient philosophical distinctions between the "ideal" and the "real," or between the "mind" and the "body."

Whatever the merits of these binary distinctions, they all go in a quite different structural direction from the other use of culture. They point to a division within the group rather than to the unity of the group (which of course is the basis of division between groups). Now, this "confusion" of the two tonalities of the concept, "culture," is so long-standing that it cannot be a mere oversight, especially given the fact that the discussion of culture in general and of its definition in particular has been so voluminous throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It is safest to presume that long-standing intellectual confusions are deliberate and the fact of the confusion should itself be the starting-point of the analysis. Since this voluminous discussion has in fact taken place largely within the confines of a single historical system, the capitalist world-economy, it may be that not only the discussion but the conceptual confusion are both the consequence of the historical development of this system and reflect its guiding logic.

The philosophical distinctions between the "ideal" and the "real" and between the "mind" and the "body" are very ancient, and have given rise, broadly speaking, to two perspectives, at least within the context of so-called Western philosophy. Those who have promoted the primacy of the "ideal" or of the "mind" have tended to argue that the distinction points to an ontological reality, and that the "ideal" or the "mind" is more important or nobler or in some way superior to the "real" or the "body." Those who have promoted the primacy of the "real" or the "body" did not however take the inverse position. Instead, they tended to argue that the "ideal" or the "mind" are not distinct essences but rather social inventions, and that only the "real" or the "body" truly exist. In short they have tended to argue that the very concept of the "ideal" or the "mind" are ideological weapons of control, intended to mask the true existential situation.

Let us thus designate as culture (usage I) the set of characteristics which distinguish one group from another, and as culture (usage II) some set of phenomena which are different from (and "higher" than) some other set of phenomena within any one group. There is one great problem about culture (usage I). Who or what has such a culture? It seems that "groups" have. But if "culture" is the term in our scientific vocabulary that has the broadest and most confusing usage, "group" is the term that has the vaguest usage. A "group" as a taxonomic term is anything anyone wishes to define as a group. There exists no doubt, to follow the *ultima ratio* of such a term, a "group" consists of all those who are of a given height, or who have a certain color hair. But can such "groups" be said to have "cultures"? There would be few who would claim so. Obviously, it is only certain "groups" then that have "cultures."

We could try this exercise starting from the other direction. To what kinds of groups are "cultures" (usage I) normally attributed? Nations are often said to have a national culture. "Tribes" and/or "ethnic groups" are often said to have a culture. It is not unusual to read about the "culture" of "urban intellectuals," or of the "urban poor." More

rarely, but frequently, we might read of the "culture" of "Communists" or of "religious fundamentalists." Now what those "groups" presumed to have "cultures" (always usage I) share in common is that they seem to have some kind of self-awareness (and therefore a sense of boundaries), some shared pattern of socialization combined with a system of "reinforcement" of their values or of prescribed behavior, and some kind of organization. The organization may be quite formalized, as in the case of a nation-state, or it can be quite indirect, as for example the shared newspapers, magazines, and possibly the voluntary associations which act as communication networks between "urban intellectuals."

However, as soon as I raise the question of who or what has a culture, it becomes immediately obvious how slippery is the terrain. What is the evidence that any given group has a "culture"? The answer is surely not that all presumed "members" of any of these groups act similarly to each other and differently from all others. At most, we could argue for a statistically significant relationship between group "membership" and certain behavior, or value-preferences, or whatever.

Furthermore, if we press the matter a little further, it is quite clear that our statistical findings would vary constantly (and probably significantly) over time. That is to say, behavior or value-preferences or however one defines culture is of course an evolving phenomenon, even if it is a slowly-evolving one, at least for certain characteristics (say, food habits).

Yet, on the other hand, it is surely true that people in different parts of the world, or in different epochs, or in different religious or linguistic communities do indeed behave differently from each other, and in certain ways that can be specified and fairly easily observed. For example, anyone who travels from Norway to Spain will note that the hour at which restaurants are most crowded for the "evening meal" is quite different in the two countries. And anyone who travels from France to the U.S. will observe that the frequency with which foreign strangers are invited to homes is quite different. The length of women's skirts in Brazil and Iran is surely strikingly different. And so on. And I have only cited here elements of so-called everyday behavior. Were I to raise more metaphysical issues, it would be easy, as everyone knows, to elucidate group differences.

So, on the one hand, differences are obvious—which is what the concept of culture (usage I) is about. And yet the degree to which groups are in fact uniform in their behavior is distressingly difficult to maintain. When Mintz says that we have a "capacity to create cultural realities and then to act in terms of them," I cannot but agree. But I then wonder how we can know who the "we" are who have this capacity. At that point, I become skeptical that we can operationalize the concept of culture (usage I) in any way that enables us to use it for statements that are more than trivial. The anthropologists, or at least some of them, have argued convincingly that the concept of "human nature" cannot be used to draw meaningful implications about real social situations. But is this not equally true of their proposed substitute, culture?

This then is where I begin. Culture (usage I) seems not to get us very far in our historical analyses. Culture (usage II) is suspect as an ideological cover to justify the interests of some persons (obviously the upper strata) within any given "group" or "social system" against the interests of other persons within this same group. And if, indeed, the very distinction of "ideal" and "real," "mind" and "body" were acknowledged to be an ideological weapon of control, then the confusion of the two usages of culture would be a very logical

consequence, since it would no doubt add to the process of making the true existential situation. I would like therefore to trace the actual development of the "culture" (in either or both usages) over time within the historical system which has given birth to this extensive and confusing use of the concept of culture, the modern world-system which is a capitalist world-economy.

## II

Let us begin by reviewing some of the realities of the evolution of this historical system, as they have affected the way its participants "theorized" it. That is, I am concerned with the degree to which this historical system became conscious of itself and began to develop intellectual and/or ideological frameworks which both justified it, and impelled its forward movement, and thereby sustained its reproduction. I shall mention six such realities which have implications for the theoretical formulations that have come to permeate the system.

1) The capitalist world-economy is constructed by integrating a geographically vast set of production processes. We call this the establishment of a single "division of labor." Of course, all historical systems are based on a division of labor, but none before was as complex, as extensive, as detailed, and as cohesive as that of the capitalist world-economy. The political framework within which this division of labor has grown up has not however been that of a world-empire, but instead that of an interstate system, itself a product of the historical development of this system. This interstate system has been composed of, and given birth and legitimacy to, a series of so-called sovereign states, whose defining characteristic is their territorial distinctiveness and congruence combined with their membership in and constraint by this interstate system. It is not the interstate system, however, but the separate states that control the means of violence. Furthermore, their control is in theory exclusive within their respective jurisdictions. Although such total control is a myth, state preemption of violence is at least massive, if never exclusive.

This organization of social life where the predominant "economic" pressures are "international" (a bad term, but the one in common use), and the predominant "political" pressures are "national" points to a first contradiction in the way participants can explicate and justify their actions. How can one explain and justify them nationally and internationally simultaneously?

2) The capitalist world-economy functions, as do most (perhaps all) historical systems by means of a pattern of cyclical rhythms. The most obvious, and probably the most important, of these rhythms is a seemingly regular process of expansion and contraction of the world-economy as a whole. On present evidence, this cycle tends to be 50-60 years in length, covering its two phases.

The functioning of this cycle (sometimes called "long waves," sometimes Kondratieff cycles) is complex and I will not review it here.<sup>2</sup> One part, however, of the process is that, periodically, the capitalist world-economy has seen the need to expand the geographic boundaries of the system as a whole, creating thereby new loci of production to participate

<sup>2</sup> I have spelled out the mechanism of these cyclical rhythms in various places. One such explanation is to be found in my "Crisis as Transition," in S. Amin et al., *Dynamics of Global Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1982), esp. pp. 12-22.

in its axial division of labor. Over 400 years, these successive expansions have transformed the capitalist world-economy from a system located primarily in Europe to one that covers the entire globe.

The successive expansions that have occurred have been a conscious process, utilizing military, political, and economic pressures of multiple kinds, and of course involving the overcoming of political resistances in the zones into which the geographic expansion was taking place. We call this process "incorporation," and it too is a complex one.<sup>3</sup> This process points to a second contradiction which the populations of each successively incorporated zone faced. Should the transformations that were occurring in their zone be conceived of as changes from a local and traditional "culture" to a worldwide modern "culture," or were these populations rather simply under pressure to give up their "culture" and adopt that of the Western imperialist power or powers? Was it, that is, a case of modernization or of Westernization?

3) Capitalism is a system based on the endless accumulation of capital. It is therefore a system which requires the maximum appropriation of surplus-value. There are two ways to increase the appropriation of surplus-value. One is that workers work harder and more efficiently, thereby creating greater output with the same amount of inputs (other than human labor-time). The second way is to return less of the value that is produced to the direct producers. In short, capitalism by definition involves a pressure on all direct producers to work more and to be paid less.

This requirement however runs afoul of the logic of the individual's pursuit of his/her own interest. The most obvious incentive for hard work is higher recompense. One can substitute coercion for higher recompense, but of course coercion also has a cost and thereby its use also reduces surplus-value. It follows that, unless one can substitute (at least partially) some other motivation for work other than recompense or fear, it is very difficult to obtain simultaneously the twin goals of harder work and lower pay. How can one think about this system in such a way as to achieve this objective?

4) Capitalism as a system requires movement and change, at least formal change. The maximal accumulation of capital requires not only goods and capital to circulate but manpower as well. It requires in addition a constant evolution in the organization of production in terms both of the nature of the leading sectors and of the sites of production. We usually analyze these phenomena under two labels—that of economic innovation and that of the rise and fall of nations.

One principal consequence of this reality is the enormous emphasis placed within the modern world-system on the virtues of "newness." No previous historical system has ever been based on a theory of progress, indeed a theory of inevitable progress. But the emphasis on newness, and its constant implementation (at least at the level of form) raises precisely the question of legitimacy—legitimacy of the historical system in general; legitimacy of its key political institution, the various sovereign states, in particular. From Bodin to Weber to Mao Zedong the question of legitimacy has been constantly debated and seen as an extremely knotty issue to resolve. It is particularly difficult because the very advocacy

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the complexities, see Terence K. Hopkins & Immanuel Wallerstein, "Capitalism and the Incorporation of New Zones into the World-Economy," *Review*, X, 5/6 (Supplement), Summer/Fall, 1987, 763-779.

of the virtues of newness undermines the legitimacy of any authority, however laboriously the legitimacy was achieved.

5) The capitalist system is a polarizing system, both in its reward pattern and in the degree to which persons are increasingly forced to play socially polarized roles. It is however also an expanding system and therefore one in which all the absolute parameters have taken the form of a linear upward projection over time. Since its outset, the capitalist world-economy has had ever more productive activity, ever more "value" produced, ever more population, ever more inventions. Thus, it has had ever more outward signs of wealth.

And yet, if it has been a polarizing system, it must at the least be true that this increase of wealth has been going to only a small proportion of the world's population. It might even be the case that real consumption per world capita has not been keeping pace. For example, it is surely the case that there is less physical space per capita and fewer trees per capita now than 400 years ago. What does this mean in terms of that elusive but very real phenomenon, the "quality of life"?

The contradiction therefore that needs to be handled is that between "progress" and deterioration, between visibly increasing wealth and very real impoverishment. The only way to defuse the resulting angers may well be denial, but how is it possible to deny phenomena that are so public, and whose public character is indeed one of the exigencies of the system? That is, the endless accumulation of capital requires as one of its mechanisms a collective orientation towards consumption.

6) Finally, the capitalist world-economy is an historical system. And being historical, it has a life cycle and, as any other such system, must at some point cease to function as the consequence of the aggregated results of its eventually paralyzing contradictions. But it is also a system which is based on a particular logic, that of the ceaseless accumulation of capital. Such a system therefore must preach the possibility of limitless expansion.

Limitless expansion can seem euphoric, as in the image of wafting upward into heaven, or disastrous, as in the image of hurtling downward into space. In a sense, both images constrain action since there seems to be little an individual can do to affect the pattern. The mundane reality however is more complex, more unsettling, but also more subject to human will.

As systems move towards their natural demise they find themselves in "transition" to uncertain futures. And the very uncertainty, which at one level is liberating, is also disconcerting. Thus we are faced with the dilemma of how to think about such transformation, whether to deny the process of systemic "death" or instead to welcome the process of systemic "birth."

### III

The "culture," that is the idea-system, of this capitalist world-economy is the outcome of our collective historical attempts to come to terms with the contradictions, the ambiguities, the complexities of the socio-political realities of this particular system. We have done it in part by creating the concept of "culture" (usage I) as the assertion of unchanging realities amidst a world that is in fact ceaselessly changing. And we have done it in part by creating

the concept of "culture" (usage II) as the justification of the inequities of the system, as the attempt to keep them unchanging in a world that is ceaselessly threatened by change.

The question is, how is this done? Since it is obvious that interests fundamentally diverge, it follows that such constructions of "culture" are scarcely neutral. Therefore, the very construction of culture becomes a battleground, the key ideological battleground in fact of the opposing interests within this historical system.

The heart of the debate, it seems to me, revolves around the ways in which the presumed antinomies of unity and diversity, universalism and particularism, humanity and race, world and nation, person and man/woman have been manipulated. I have previously argued that the two principal ideological doctrines that have emerged in the history of the capitalist world-economy—that is, universalism on the one hand and racism and sexism on the other—are not opposites but a symbiotic pair. I have argued that their "right dosage" has made possible the functioning of the system, one which takes the form of a continuing ideological zigzag.<sup>4</sup>

It is this zigzag which is at the base of the deliberate confusions inherent in the two usages of the concept of "culture." I should like to illustrate the issues by analyzing some comments made by a political intellectual in Jamaica, Rex Nettleford, in a speech he gave in 1983 to a political party meeting, a party that calls itself the People's National Party. The speech itself, when reprinted, bore the title "Building a Nation, Shaping a Society." Nettleford wished to emphasize the importance of a "sense of history" in building a nation against those who "teach our young that they have no history worth studying, only a future which . . . they are expected to conquer." Here is what Nettleford said:

"Black" does not merely mean skin in the history of the Americas. It means culture—a culture woven out of the encounters between the millions of West Africans brought as slaves and the millions of Europeans who came as masters, settlers or indentured labourers. In Jamaica and the Caribbean the substance of a truly indigenous life, for all its texture, has been forged in the crucible of the black majority's early efforts to come to terms with the new environment and to survive. That was a struggle of a fundamental and elemental kind, and it is that struggle which is being denied its proper place in the economic, social and cultural ethos of this society. I sense a *deblackening* of the ethos, a persistent contempt in official and cocktail circles for the fruits of our people's labours, and a hypocritical refuge is being taken in our national motto by those who prefer to emphasize the word "many" since to them the "one" may mean the majority. "Out of many one people" becomes "out of many one." So we keep the country pluralist and divided with the marginalized majority remaining marginal, and a privileged few (with many 'roast breadfruits' among them) holding on to the economic, social and cultural power in the land.

The real truth is that our people are better than we like to think: we are not that unsophisticated to be racist, but we are not that foolish not to be race conscious. And on that delicate balancing of sensibilities rests the unusual sophistication of

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<sup>4</sup> See "The Ideological Tensions of Capitalism: Universalism versus Racism and Sexism," in J. Smith et al., eds., *Racism, Sexism, and the World-System* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988).



the mass of this population. It is that sophistication which misleads not only our own leaders, but those from outside who say they want to help us. Our people who have gone through centuries of struggle know that "what is pertinent today is not simply freedom from foreign oppression (which in our own primitive way we can deal with), but the creation within this country of socio-economic and political frameworks which accord high values to the human personality." We are very uptight about our personae, about our personal recognition and status, and we hold suspect any class of people inside or outside our nation, who would agree with a once influential Jamaican private sector leader, who in criticising the policies of a certain regime in the recent past said that during the seventies "our rich national culture had been reduced, shrunken to fit into the narrow concept of a vigorous black culture." She was saying this in a country where the vast majority are hopelessly of that "culture." Anything that expresses the image of the majority is a "reduction" and a "shrinking"! We are not likely to shape a society or build a nation with such beliefs in place, and especially if they are to be found among those in the power structure; and so I implore this forum to think seriously on these things.<sup>5</sup>

Notice in this analysis that the definition of a culture is central. Nettleford wants to build and shape an entity he calls a nation or a society. This is of course standard language and seems to refer to culture (usage I), a usage which presumably emphasizes the ways in which Jamaicans are alike. But he proceeds to observe that others, "found among those in the power structure" of this same Jamaica, also claim they wish to do the same.

The two groups seem to be using the national motto "out of many one people" to mean opposite things. Those who Nettleford calls the "privileged few" emphasize "pluralism" within and unity without ("freedom from foreign oppression"). Nettleford says this neglects entirely the "black majority" who are "marginalized" and who are seeking "the creation within [Jamaica] of socio-economic and political frameworks which accord high values to the human personality" (which presumably means an increase in economic and social equality).

How are the privileged few doing this? By "a *deblackening* of the ethos," by hypocritically emphasizing the "many" in the national motto, by failing to teach a fact (one that is a fact however not of the history of Jamaica, but of the history of the Americas, and therefore of the world-system). This fact is that "millions of West Africans [were] brought as slaves" while "millions of Europeans . . . came as masters, settlers or indentured laborers." The historic encounters of these two groups "in Jamaica and the Caribbean" forged the "texture" of a "truly indigenous life." "Black" is the term of the resultant "culture," which is "vigorous" and not a "reduction" or a "shrinking."

So, in the end, what is being said is that the assertion of "blackness" as constitutive of the national "culture" of Jamaica (culture here in usage I) is the mode by which the "marginalized majority" can hope to protect themselves against the claims of the "privileged few" to represent a higher "culture" (usage II). Thus what seems particularist at the level

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<sup>5</sup> Rex Nettleford, "Building a Nation, Shaping a Society," in J. Wedderburn, ed., *A Caribbean Reader on Development* (Kingston, 1986), 9-10.

of the world-system ("blackness") serves as an assertion of a universalist theme ("high values to the human personality"). This, says Nettleford, is being "race conscious" but not "racist," which he admits requires a "delicate balancing of sensibilities." In this complicated reasoning, which seems to me correct, the more "blackness" that Jamaica would exhibit, the more color-blindness (or humanist values) it would exhibit.

Yes, you may respond, perhaps so, but where does this argument end? At what point do we cross the line from "race consciousness" to "racism"? For there are clearly many, many cases across the world where the assertion of the particularist "culture" of the (national) "majority" to the exclusion of the minority or minorities could be seen as oppressive. Have Bretons no "cultural" claims in France, Swedes in Finland, Ainu in Japan, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kurds in Turkey, Hungarians in Romania?

Nettleford might agree—I do not know—that all these latter groups have legitimate claims to their "cultural" assertion, and still argue that the situation is historically different in Jamaica. Why? Essentially because in Jamaica it is the majority that has been historically "marginalized," and not the various "minorities." And, as long as that remains true, then negritude or any similar particularism may serve as the negation of the negation, as Sartre argued in "Black Orpheus."<sup>6</sup>

What the Nettleford quote does is to demonstrate how tangled is the skein of cultural debate in the capitalist world-economy, but also how covered with nettles, and therefore how careful we need to be if we wish to understand and evaluate this ideological battleground.

#### IV

I would like to take each of the six contradictions of the capitalist world-economy and show how the ideologies of universalism and of racism-sexism help contain each of the contradictions, and why therefore the two ideologies are a symbiotic pair.

1) Since the capitalist world-economy is a world-system, and for some time now one that has expanded to cover the entire globe, it is easy to see how universalism reflects this phenomenon, and indeed this has been one of the most explicit explanations of the ideologists. Today we have a network of United Nations structures, based in theory on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserting the existence of both international law and values of all humanity. We have universal time and space measurements. We have a scientific community who assert universal laws. Nor is this a phenomenon merely of the twentieth century. Universal science was already being proclaimed in the sixteenth century, and indeed far earlier. Grotius was writing about a universal "law of the seas" in the first half of the seventeenth century. And so on.

At the same time, of course, we have been erecting a network of "sovereign states" with clear territorial boundaries and with national laws, assemblies, languages, passports, flags, money, and above all citizens. The entire land area of the globe is today exhaustively divided into such units, which now number over 150.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Orphee noir," *Situations, III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 229–288. He calls negritude "antiracist racism" (p. 237).

There are two ways we can consider these 150 or so sovereign states. We can see them as very strong institutions whose *raison d'être* is to limit the validity of universal rules. Sovereignty means in theory the right to do within the frontiers of the country whatever the internal (and constitutionally appropriate) authorities decide to do. But of course, at the same time, these 150 or so units are an immense reduction from the number of political authorities (to use a vague term) which existed in the world as of say 1450. Almost every one of the 150 or so units comprises an area that in 1450 included more than one political authority. Thus most of these sovereign states face the issue of how they are to treat this "coming together" historically of what were previously separate entities. All of them, without any exception, do it on the principle of citizenship, a principle which today usually asserts that all persons born in that state are citizens (plus certain others) and that all such citizens enjoy equal rights. (The most notorious exception, South Africa, which as a state refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of this theory of citizenship, is considered for that very reason a world scandal.) Thus, each state is proclaiming the universality of the equality of citizens, and virtually all states are accepting this principle as a sort of universal moral law.

We can assert, if we wish, that the principle of universalism both on a worldwide scale and within each of the sovereign states that constitute the interstate system is hypocritical. But it is precisely because there is in reality a hierarchy of states within the interstate system and a hierarchy of citizens within each sovereign state that the ideology of universalism matters. It serves on the one hand as a palliative and a deception and on the other as a political counterweight which the weak can use and do use against the strong.

But racism-sexism as an ideology equally serves to contain the contradiction involved in creating sovereign states within an interstate system that contains a single division of labor. For racism-sexism is precisely what legitimates the real inequalities, the always existing (if continually shifting) hierarchies both within the world-system as a whole and within each sovereign state. We know that the peoples of color were subjected to formal colonization as well as to slave labor during the history of this world-system. We know that there exist many formal discriminations concerning the movements of peoples. And we know that these phenomena have been justified by racist theories, sometimes based on pseudo-science (thereby deferring to the ideology of universalism) and sometimes based on unmitigated prejudice, as in the talk of a Yellow Peril which was so widespread in the White areas of the world in the beginning of the twentieth century.

At the state level, the phenomenon of justification by racism of an internal political, economic, and social hierarchy is so familiar that it is scarcely worth recounting. I would only point out two things. Where internal hierarchies cannot be based on skin color, they can always be based on other particularist criteria, as say in Northern Ireland. Secondly, everywhere—in all the states individually, and in the interstate system as a whole—the racist ideology takes the same form. It is argued that one group is genetically or "culturally" (note here, culture in usage II) inferior to another group in such a way that the group said to be inferior cannot be expected to perform tasks as well as the presumably superior group. This is said to hold true either eternally or for a very long period into the future (pending, in another deference to universalist doctrine, some very long-term educational process).

So racism is used, as we all how, to justify these hierarchies. But sexism? Yes, sexism too, and in two ways. First, if one examines racist terminology, one will find that it

is regularly clothed in sexist language. The superior "race" is considered to be more masculine, the inferior one to be more feminine. It is as though sexism was even more deeply rooted than racism. Whereas a purely racist ideology might occasionally fail to persuade, the ideologues can find their clinching argument by adding the sexist overtones. So we hear arguments that the dominant group is more rational, more disciplined, more hard-working, more self-controlled, more independent, while the dominated group is more emotional, more self-indulgent, more lazy, more artistic, more dependent. And this is of course the same set of characteristics that sexist ideology claims distinguish men from women.

There is a second way in which sexism doubles with racism. The dominated racial group, because it is said to be more self-indulgent, is thereby thought more aggressive sexually (and more pan-sexual as well). The males of the dominated group therefore represent a threat to the females of the dominant group who, although women and not men, are somehow more "self-controlled" than the males of the dominated group. But since they are nonetheless physically weaker, because they are women, they therefore require the active physical protection of the males of the dominant group.

Furthermore, we can turn this sexist argument around and still justify world hierarchies. Now that, as a result of recent political developments, women have gained more rights of various kinds in Western countries, the fact that they have not yet done as well politically in some Third World countries, say those countries in which Islam is strong, becomes itself a further justification of racist ideology. The Moslems, it is argued, are not culturally capable of recognizing the same universal principles of man-woman relations that are said to be accepted in the Western (or Judeo-Christian world) and from this it is said to follow that they are also capable of many other things.

2) We have noted that the historic expansion of a capitalist world-economy originally located primarily in Europe to incorporate other zones of the globe created the contradiction of modernization versus Westernization. The simple way to resolve this dilemma has been to assert that they are identical. Insofar as Asia or Africa "Westernizes," it "modernizes." That is to say, the simplest solution was to argue that Western culture is in fact universal culture. For a long time the ideology remained at this simple level, whether it took the form of Christian proselytization or of the famous "mission civilisatrice" of France's colonial empire.

Of course, this sometimes took the slightly more sophisticated form of arguing that only Western civilization, of all world civilizations, was somehow capable of evolving from a pre-modern form to modernity. In a sense, this is what Orientalism as a discipline clearly implied. Clothed in the legitimation of particularism—Islam or India or China represented complex, high cultures which a Westerner could only appreciate after long, difficult, and sympathetic study—the Orientalists also suggested that these high Oriental cultures were historically frozen and could not evolve, but could only be "destroyed" from without. Various versions of anthropological theory—the search for the pristine pre-contact culture, but also the universalist distinction of structuralist anthropology between cold and hot cultures—led to the same conclusions. The West had emerged into modernity; the others had not. Inevitably, therefore, if one wanted to be "modern" one had in some way to be "Western" culturally. If not Western religions, one had to adopt Western languages. And if not Western languages, one had at the very minimum to accept Western technology, which was said to be based on the universal principles of science.

But at the very same time that the universalist ideologues were preaching the merits of Westernization or "assimilation," there were also (or others were also) preaching the eternal existence and virtue of difference. Thus a universalist message of cultural multiplicity could serve as a justification of educating various groups in their separate "cultures" and hence preparing them for different tasks in the single economy. The extreme version of this, and an explicitly theorized one, is *apartheid*. But lesser versions, perhaps less coherently articulated, have been widespread within the system.

Furthermore, racism and sexism can be justified by a rejection of Westernization which can take the form of legitimating indigenous ideological positions (a so-called revival of tradition) that include blatantly racist and sexist themes. At which point, we have a renewed justification of the worldwide hierarchy. It becomes legitimate to treat Iran as a pariah nation, not only because Iran uses "terrorist" tactics in the international arena, but because Iranian women are required to wear the *chador*.

3) The problem of getting workers to work harder at lower pay is inherently a difficult one. It runs against the grain of self-interest. The question therefore is whether there can exist an ideological motivation that might help achieve this contradictory objective of world capital. Let us see in what ways universalism and racism-sexism can serve this end.

Universalism can become a motivation for harder work insofar as the work ethic is preached as a defining centerpiece of modernity. Those who are efficient, who devote themselves to their work exemplify a value that is of universal merit and is said to be socially beneficial to all. This is true not only at the individual level but at the collective level. Thus states that are low in the hierarchy of the world-system, groups that are low in the hierarchy of states are adjured to overcome the handicap of lower status by joining in the universal ethos. By becoming "competitive" in the market, individuals and groups may obtain what others already have, and thus one day shall achieve equality. Until then, inequality remains inevitable.

Thus, the universal work ethic justifies all existing inequalities, since the explanation of their origin is in the historically unequal adoption by different groups of this motivation. States that are better off than other states, groups that are better off than other groups have achieved this advantage by an earlier, stronger, and more enduring commitment to the universal work ethic. Conversely, those who are worse off, therefore those who are paid less, are in this position because they merit it. The existence of unequal incomes thus becomes not an instance of racism-sexism but rather of the universal standard of rewarding efficiency. Those who have less have less because they have earned less.

But racism and sexism complement this universalizing theorem very well. Racism and sexism, when institutionalized, create a high correlation between low group status and low income. Thus, those at the lower end of the scale are easily identifiable by what may then be termed cultural criteria (culture, that is, in usage II). Culture (usage II) now becomes the explanation of the cause. Blacks and women are paid less because they work less hard, merit less. And they work less hard because there is something, if not in their biology, at least in their "culture" which teaches them values that conflict with the universal work ethos.

Furthermore, we can enlist the dominated groups in their own oppression. Insofar as they cultivate their separateness as "cultural" groups, which is a mode of political mo-

bilization against unequal status, they socialize their members into cultural expressions which distinguish them from the dominated groups, and thus into some at least of the values attributed to them by racist and sexist theories. And they do this, in a seeming paradox, on the grounds of the universal principle of the equal validity of all cultural expressions.

4) Modernity as a central universalizing theme gives priority to newness, change, progress. Through the ages, the legitimacy of political systems had been derived from precisely the opposite principle, that of oldness, continuity, tradition. There was a straightforwardness to premodern modes of legitimation which does not exist anymore. Political legitimacy is a much more obscure objective within the realities of the capitalist world-economy, yet states of course seek constantly to achieve it. Some degree of legitimacy is a crucial element in the stability of all regimes.

Here is where culture (usage I) can be very helpful. For in the absence of the personalized legitimacy of monarchical-aristocratic systems, where real power normally defines the limits of legitimacy, a fictionalized collectivity with a collective soul, a hypothetical "nation" whose roots are located in days of yore, is a marvelous substitute. Few governments in the history of the capitalist world-economy have failed to discover the power of patriotism to achieve cohesion. And patriotism has quite often been reinforced by or transformed into racism (jingoist chauvinism, opposition of the citizen to the stranger or immigrant) and sexism (the presumed martial nature of males).

But in the real world of the capitalist world-economy with its regular rise and decline of nations, a multifarious set of patriotisms offers little in the way of explanation, especially for the losers in the cyclical shifts. Here then legitimacy can be restored by appealing to the universalizing principles of appropriate political and social change which, by a change in state structure (a "revolution") will make possible (for the first time or once again) national development. Thus, by appealing to culture (usage II), the advanced elements of the nation can place the state in the line of universal progress.

Of course, such "revolutions" work to restore (or create) legitimacy by seeking to transform in some significant way the position of the state in the hierarchy of the world-system. Failing that, the revolution can create its own tradition about itself and link this self-appraisal to a perhaps revised but still fictive history of the state. Thus, if culture (usage II) is inefficacious or becomes so, one can fall back on culture (usage I).

5) The capitalist world-economy does not merely have unequal distribution of reward. It is the locus of an increasing polarization of reward over historical time. Here however there is an asymmetry between the situation at the level of the world-economy as a whole and that at the level of the separate sovereign states which compose the interstate system. Whereas at the level of the world-system, it seems clear that gap of income between states at the top and the bottom of the hierarchy has grown, and has grown considerably over time, it does not necessarily follow that this is true within each state structure. Nonetheless, it is also the case that one of the moral justifications of the capitalist world-economy, one that is used to justify hard work at low pay (the issue just discussed in the previous section), is that inequalities of reward have been diminishing over time, that such inequalities as exist are transitory and transitional phenomena on the road to a more prosperous, more egalitarian future.

Here, once again, we have a blatant discord between official ideology and empirical reality. How has this been contained? The first line of defense has always been denial.

The rising standard of living has been a central myth of this world-system. It has been sustained both by arithmetic sleight of hand and by invoking the paired ideologies of universalism and racism-sexism.

The arithmetic sleight of hand is very straightforward. At the world level, it consists first of all of talking about the numerator and not the denominator, and ignoring the dispersion of the curve. We talk about the numerator when we recite the expanded world volume of production, or total value produced, while failing to divide it by world population. Or we analyze quality of life by observing some linear trends but failing to count others. Thus we measure age of mortality or speed of travel but not average number of hours of work per year or per lifetime, or environmental conditions.

But the real sleight of hand is to engage in national rather than global measures, which involves a double deception. First of all, in an unequal and polarizing world-system, there is geographical dispersion. Hence, it is perfectly possible for real income, as measured by GNP per capita say, to rise in some countries while going down in others and in the system as a whole. But since the countries in which the rise occurs are also those most extensively studied, observed, and measured, it is easy to understand how facile but false generalizations take root. In addition, despite the better statistical systems of such core countries, it is undoubtedly the case that they do not measure adequately the non-citizen component of the population (often illegally in residence). And since this is the poorest component, the bias is evident.

Still, misperception of reality is only a first line of defense, and one that is increasingly difficult to sustain. Hence, in the last 50 years, a worldwide schema of "developmentalism" has been erected and propagated which legitimates the polarization. By this point you will realize how repetitive is the pattern of ideological justification. First of all, there is the universalist theme. All states can develop; all states shall develop. Then come the racist themes. If some states have developed earlier and faster than others, it is because they have done something, behaved in some way that is different. They have been more individualist, or more entrepreneurial, or more rational, or in some way more "modern." If other states have developed more slowly, it is because there is something in their culture (usage I at the state level, usage II at the world level) which prevents them or has thus far prevented them from becoming as "modern" as other states.

The seesaw of ideological explanation then continues into the hypothetical future. Since all states can develop, how can the underdeveloped develop? In some way, by copying those who already have, that is, by adopting the universal culture of the modern world, with the assistance of those who are more advanced (higher present culture, usage II). If, despite this assistance, they are making no or little progress, it is because they are being "racist" in rejecting universal "modern" values which then justifies that the "advanced" states are scornful of them or condescending to them. Any attempt in an "advanced" state to comprehend "backwardness" in terms other than wilful refusal to be "modern" is labeled Third-Worldism, or reverse racism or irrationalism. This is a tight system of justification, since it "blames the victim," and thereby denies the reality.

6) Finally, let us turn to the contradiction of limitlessness and organic death. Any theory of limitless expansion is a gambler's paradise. In the real world, it is not possible. Furthermore, to the limited extent that the theory has seemed to accord with the existential reality of the capitalist world-economy as a world-system, it has not seemed to accord with

the realities of the separate states. Even the strongest and the wealthiest of states, *especially* the strongest and wealthiest, have risen and declined. We are currently living the beginnings of the long-term relative decline of the United States, only recently still the hegemonic power of the world-system.

Thus the world-system as a whole must deal with the problem of its eventual demise and, within the ongoing system, the strong states must deal with the problem of their relative decline. The two problems are quite different, but regularly fused and confused. There are basically two ways to deal with demise or decline: to deny them or to welcome the change.

Once again, both universalism and racism-sexism are useful conservative ideologies. First of all, racism-sexism serves to sustain denial. Demise or decline is at most a temporary illusion, caused by momentarily weak leadership, because by definition it is said it cannot occur, given the strength or the superiority of the dominant culture (usage II). Or, if it is really occurring, it is because culture (usage II) has ceded place to a deceptive world humanism in the vain hope of creating a world culture (usage I). Thus, it is argued the demise or decline, which it is now admitted may really be occurring, is due to insufficient emphasis on culture (usage II) and hence to admitting "lower" racial groups or "women" to political rights. In this version of ideology, demise or decline is reversible, but only by a reversion to a more overt racism-sexism. Generally speaking, this has been a theme throughout the twentieth century of what we today call the extreme, or neo-fascist, right.

But there is a universalizing version to this exercise in denial. The demise or decline has perhaps not been caused, or not primarily caused, by an increased political egalitarianism, but much more by an increased intellectual egalitarianism. The denial of the superiority of the scientific elite, and their consequent right to dictate public policy, is the result of an anti-rationalist, antinomian denial of universal culture (usage I) and its worldwide culture-bearers (usage II). Demands for popular control of technocratic elites is a call for "the night of the long knives," a return to pre-modern "primitivism." This is the heart of what is today called neo-conservatism.

But if the overtly "conservative" versions of the ideologies are inadequate to the task, one can put forward "progressive" versions. It is not too difficult to "welcome" the "transition" in ways that in fact sustain the system. There is the universalizing mode, in which progressive transition is seen as inevitable. This can lead on the one hand to postponing the transition until the equally inevitable "preconditions" of transition are realized. It can lead on the other hand to interim measures whose reality is the worsening of conditions on the grounds that this "speeds up" the realization of the preconditions. We have known many such movements.

Finally, the "welcoming" of the transition can have the same conservative effect in a racist form. One can insist that it is only the presently "advanced" groups that can be the leaders of the next presumed "advance." Hence, it is only on the basis of presently-realized culture (usage II) that the transition to a new world will be realized. The more "backward" regions must in some way wait on the more "advanced" ones in the process of "transition."



## V

The paired ideologies of universalism and racism-sexism then have been very powerful means by which the contradictory tensions of the world-system have been contained. But of course, they have also served as ideologies of change and transformation in their slightly different clothing of the theory of progress and the conscientization of oppressed groups. This has resulted in extraordinarily ambivalent uses of these ideologies by the presumed opponents of the existing system, the antisystemic movements. It is to this last aspect of culture as an ideological battleground that I should like now to turn.

An antisystemic movement is a movement to transform the system. An antisystemic movement is at the same time a product of the system. What culture does such a movement incarnate? In terms of culture (usage I), it is hard to see how the antisystemic movements could conceivably have incarnated any culture other than that of the capitalist world-economy. It is hard to see how they could not have been impregnated by and expressed the paired ideologies of universalism and racism-sexism.

However in terms of culture (usage II) they have claimed to have created a new culture, a culture destined to be a culture (usage I) of the future world. They have tried to elaborate this new culture theoretically. They have created institutions presumably designed to socialize members and sympathizers into this new culture. But of course it is not so easy to know what shall be the culture, a culture, of the future. We design our utopias in terms of what we know now. We exaggerate the novelty of what we advocate. We act in the end, and at best, as prisoners of our present reality who permit ourselves to daydream.

This is not at all pointless. But it is surely less than a sure guide to appropriate behavior. What the antisystemic movements have done, if one considers their global activities over 150-odd years, has been essentially to turn themselves into the fulfillers of the liberal dream while claiming to be its most fulsome critics. This has not been a comfortable position. The liberal dream—the product of the principal self-conscious ideological *Weltanschauung* within the capitalist world-economy—has been that universalism will triumph over racism and sexism. This has been translated into two strategic operational imperatives—the spread of “science” in the economy, and the spread of “assimilation” in the political arena.

The fetishism of science by the antisystemic movements—for example, Marx’s designation of his ideas as “scientific socialism”—was a natural expression of the post-1789 triumph of Enlightenment ideas in the world-system. Science was future-oriented; it sought total truth via the perfectibility of human capacities; it was deeply optimistic. The limitlessness of its ambitions might have served as a warning-signal of the deep affinity of this kind of science to its world-system. But the antisystemic thinkers interpreted this affinity to be a transitory misstep, a surviving irrationality, doomed to extinction.

The problem, as the antisystemic movements saw it, was not that there was too much science, but too little. Sufficient social investment in science was still lacking. Science had not yet penetrated into enough corners of economic life. There were still zones of the world from which it was kept. Its results were insufficiently applied. The revolution

—be it social or national or both—would at last release the scientists to find and to apply their universal truths.

In the political arena, the fundamental problem was interpreted to be exclusion. The states were the handmaidens of minorities; they must be made the instrument of the whole of society, the whole of humanity. The unpropertied were excluded. Include them! The minorities were excluded. Include them! The women were excluded. Include them! Equals all. The dominant strata had more than others. Even things out! But if we are evening out dominant and dominated, then why not minorities and majorities, women and men? Evening out meant in practice assimilating the weaker to the model of the strong. This model looked suspiciously like Everyman—the man with simple but sufficient means, hard-working, morally upright and devoted to family (friends, large community).

This search for science and assimilation, what I have called the fulfilment of the liberal dream, was located deep in the consciousness and in the practical action of the world's anti-systemic movements, from their emergence in the mid-nineteenth century until at least the Second World War. Since then, and particularly since the world cultural revolution of 1968, these movements, or at least some of them, have begun to evince doubts as to the utility, the reasonableness of "science" and "assimilation" as social objectives. These doubts have been expressed in multiple forms. The green movements, the countercultural movements have raised questions about the productivism inherent in the nineteenth-century adulation of science. The many new social movements (of women, of minorities) have poured scorn upon the demand for assimilation. I do not need to spell out here the diverse ways in which this has been manifested.

But . . . , and this is the crucial point, perhaps the real triumph of culture (usage I), the antisystemic movements have hesitated to go all the way. For one thing, the priorities of one kind of antisystemic movement have often been at odds with that of another kind (e.g., ecologists vs. Third World liberation movements). For another thing, each kind of movement itself has been internally divided. The debates within the women's movements or Black movements over such questions as political alliances or the desirability of "protective" legislation for the "weaker" groups are instances of the tactical ambivalences of these movements.

As long as the antisystemic movements remain at the level of tactical ambivalence about the guiding ideological values of our world-system, as long as they are unsure how to respond to the liberal dream of more science and more assimilation, we can say that they are in no position to fight a war of position with the forces that defend the inequalities of the world. For they cede, by this ambivalence, the cultural high-ground to their opponents. The advocates of the system can continue to claim that scientism and assimilation represent the true values of world culture (usage I) and that their practitioners are the men of culture (usage II), the high priests of this culture (usage I). And, as long as this remains true, we are all enveloped in the paired ideologies (and the false antinomy) of universalism and racism-sexism.

The cultural trap in which we are caught is a strong one, overlain by much protective shrubbery which hides its outline and its ferocity from us. Can we somehow disentangle ourselves? I believe it is possible, though at most I can only indicate some of the directions in which, if we moved along them, I believe we might find ways to disentangle.

Beyond scientism, I suspect there lies a more broadly-defined science, one which will be able to reconcile itself dramatically with the humanities, such that we can overcome what C.P. Snow called the division of the two cultures.<sup>7</sup> (Note the term again, here in usage II.) I suspect we may have to reverse the history of science and return from efficient causes to final causes. I think, if we do, that we may be able to scrape away all that is contingent (that is, all that is Western) to uncover new possibilities.

This will make possible a new rendez-vous of world civilizations. Will some "universals" emerge out of this rendez-vous? Who knows? Who even knows what a "universal" is? At a moment of world history when the physical scientists are at last (or is it once again?) beginning to talk of the "arrow of time," who is able to say that there are any immutable laws of nature?

If we go back to metaphysical beginnings, and reopen the question of the nature of science, I believe that it is probable, or at least possible, that we can reconcile our understanding of the origins and legitimacies of group particularisms with our sense of the social, psychological, and biological meanings of humanity and humaneness. I think that perhaps we can come up with a concept of culture that sublates the two usages.

I wish that I saw more clearly how this could be done, or where it is leading. But I have the sense that in cultural terms our world-system is in need of some "surgery." Unless we "open up" some of our most cherished cultural premises, we shall never be able to diagnose clearly the extent of the cancerous growths and shall therefore be unable to come up with appropriate remedies. It is perhaps unwise to end on such a medical analogy. Medicine, as a mode of knowledge, has only too clearly demonstrated its limitations. On the other hand, the art of medicine represents the eternal human response to suffering, death, and transition, and therefore incarnates hope, however much it must be tempered by an awareness of human limitations.

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<sup>7</sup> C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959).