
Editorial

“Culture”, says a lecturer in a cartoon by the New York artist Ben Shahn, “is Actones, Episodes, Nodes, Nodal Chains, Scenes, Serials, Nomoclonones, Permaclones, Paragroups, Nomoclonic Types, Permaclonic Types, Permaclonic Systems and Permaclonic Supersystems. Culture is also Phonemes, Morphemes, Words, Semantically Equivalent Utterances, Behaviour Plans and MANY OTHER EMIC THINGS”.

The lecturer, under his academic robes, is a solemn, long-necked, myopic stork. Only a bird-brain, is the message, could be capable of such stupendous gobblydegook.

It is sad that a concept should be so abused as the word “culture” is, both by those who so enthusiastically make a living out of it, and by those stern British sociologists and anthropologists who are about as ready to admit that culture has a legitimate part to play in social explanation as a Luther that indulgences might be a means to salvation. Though they have mellowed somewhat recently, there was a time when if you called a British social anthropologist, a “cultural anthropologist”, he would react with contemptuous amazement, unable to believe that anyone could fail to recognise the difference between a scientific student of social structure such as himself and, say, a Margaret Mead or some other purveyor of entertaining speculations to the Book of the Month Club. Nor have their sociologist cousins been immune from the feeling that culture, attitudes, value systems are somewhat improper concerns. A recent Ph.D. thesis on the British engineering profession devoted its first, and only eloquent, chapter to pouring scorn on the notion that the low status accorded to engineers in British society might in any way be explained by the cultural ethos of Oxbridge in particular or of the British upper middle class in general.

Why the flight from culture?

One element in all this is presumably the desire to be scientific, to deal, like the natural scientist, in hard, quantifiable, *structural* data. (Though God knows not all the arguments of those who consider that, say, the analysis of class structures is the beginning and end of sociology deal in data that are hard and quantifiable—or, indeed, in any data at all.) Perhaps, more fundamentally, it is just a matter of wanting to be academic, to distinguish one’s own *professional* sociology from the pop-sociology of the newspaper columnist.

After all, that the Germans are methodical, the Ghanaians gay, the poor feckless or the upper class self-confident, is what everybody says. The academic justifies his existence by pointing out the non-obvious. He scores even more points by demonstrating that what seems obvious to the layman is in fact untrue.

Perhaps, too, there is an element of machismo involved. The academic world has the reputation of being somewhat cissy. Some of the aggressiveness of America’s Vietnam policies has been attributed to the need of the White House intellectuals, imported from academia, to show that they too had hairs on their chests. Social scientists may affect a certain cynicism for the same reasons. That may be why a model of man as activated exclusively by motives of material self interest (a useful heuristic simplifying assumption for anybody to use *on the road* to a more comprehensive explanation) may be taken as an actual picture of reality—as it is, by and large, by both of those partial heirs of the (much richer) classical tradition of political economy: the Marxist sociologist/political economist and the neo-classical economist (who curiously believe themselves to be so fundamentally opposed to each other.)

The flight from culture among students of development has an important added element of course—white man’s guilt. American academics used not to be so subject to it, and it was primarily Americans who in the 1950s and early 1960s created, out of elements of older sociological traditions and a little empirical observation, a sociology of development which gave considerable importance to attitudes, value preferences, world views and the nature of the affectual and moral ties that bind men together in society. When they talked about the social changes which were both the consequence of economic growth and usually also preconditions for further growth (or, if less often, about the preconditions for an egalitarian social order)—whether it was in terms of the enlargement of empathy, or a switch from particularistic to universalistic norms, or a move from ascription to achievement—they were not talking nonsense. But they did often vastly oversimplify—in two important respects.

First, they omitted to mention all the other obstacles to the development of poor countries apart from those countries’ own structural and cultural deficiencies—like the fact that many of

their economies had become cripplingly geared to the export of primary products, or that they had to try to trade in a world in which the rich countries controlled monetary and trading systems in their own interests. They were perfectly right to leave these things to the economists to analyse, but their failure even to mention them did lay them open to the charge of pollyanna optimism. Secondly, there seemed to be more than a whiff of ethnocentrism in their frequent implied contrast between a general syndrome of (desirable) modernity which characterised the rich countries and one of (backward) traditionalism which characterised the poor countries. Why, they seemed to be saying, can't those wretched Venezuelans, Indians, Ruandans, be achievement-motivated, future-orientated, universalistic—in short modern—just like us.

And, indeed, that was roughly (or rather, “how can one accelerate the forces that would make them achievement-orientated, etc., etc., like us”) what they *were* saying—and in a sense legitimately so. (What is it, after all, that most people have in mind when they would deny to affluent Kuwait the title ‘modern’ or ‘developed’ society?) But by the late sixties those ceased to be politic or congenial things to say. White man’s guilt, which had always made ex-imperial Englishmen hesitate to say things that might be construed as derogatory to the inhabitants of former colonies, began to afflict Americans too. (“White man’s guilt” being, here, shorthand for a complex phenomenon, one important element of which is the revolt of affluent society youth and their urge to pin the blame for as much of the world’s sins as possible on their *own* fathers/rulers.) In an America in which the Vietnam war was becoming increasingly condemned as naked imperialism, the ‘dependency school’ or the ‘under-development school’ was on strong emotional ground in attacking the modernization theorists for smugly glossing over the external constraints on economic growth. And in a world in which more and more Third World countries were getting *their own* universities and their own sociologists of development, new and different ethnocentrisms were brought into play. Peru’s sociologists, or Senegal’s or Tunisia’s, were not so happy to have their country’s troubles diagnosed as basically laziness or narrow-mindedness, however jargonised the diagnosis might be in terms of achievement-orientation scores or empathy ratings.

The current orthodoxy

And so the tide has turned. Values, culture, behavioural dispositions are out. The reading lists of Sociology of Development courses in this country are dominated by amateur economics:

the talk is all of hard ‘structural’ matters like metropolises and peripheries, and hegemonic and subordinate modes of production. The message is that the real villain of the piece is global capitalism; that we are all—the working class and the oppressed academic under-class in the rich countries, the Moroccans and Indians and Puerto Ricans—equally its victims, equally brothers in misery. And that there is nothing much to be done about it except to try to raise the level of consciousness.

What is taught and written under the rubric “sociology of development” in Britain is not of much consequence to anybody but its self-indulgent teachers and students. But what is taught and written in Quito or Delhi, or Dar es Salaam *is* more important. A view of development problems exclusively informed by the ‘victim consciousness’ of the dependency perspective (*they* have ruined us, *they* are preventing us from claiming our birthright) can be a splendid cop-out for middle class intellectuals enjoying a (relatively) high standard of living in a developing society. It can be a standing temptation to engage in denunciatory rhetoric rather than the detailed planning of institutional devices (like, say, the Andean Pact’s arrangements to control the import of technology) which *can* do something to protect Third World economies against those who would try to exploit them. Sociologists have their contribution to make to such detailed planning. They can contribute not only ‘structural’ interest-group analysis of who would stand to gain or lose by sabotaging such institutions, but also cultural and attitudinal analysis of the motivational resources, the patterns of loyalties, and the deep structures of cultural norms which can be mobilised to help in their operation—and of possible ways in which, if those motivational resources are *not* there in the existing cultural traditions, they might be fostered by better planning of, say, the educational system.

Intertwined

In short, any analysis of social situations which does not look at both structural and cultural factors is liable to be partial and misleading—and the way in which the two sets of factors can be inextricably intertwined—in constraining or promoting the building of successful private businesses in Ghana on the one hand, in fostering successful sugar co-operatives in Maharashtra on the other—is well illustrated in the papers of Paul Kennedy and Baburao Baviskar.

Intertwining is one thing, causal interrelationship is another. And, of course, one frequently can trace cultural features *historically* to structural ones, which is not the same thing as to say that

one can *reduce them* to structural ones. "Structuralists" have little trouble accepting that part of the "culture of poverty" thesis which suggests that material deprivation produces similar cultural traits in a wide variety of societies. What is often rejected as *a priori* inadmissible is the idea that those cultural traits can have any independent influence either in perpetuating the condition of poverty, or in continuing to affect behaviour if the poverty were cured. (The parallel thesis that the British upper middle class continues to socialise its young as if there was still an empire to be ruled may not be thought quite so unacceptable.) It is such a *priori* dismissal that Robert Wade's article is concerned to challenge—a complement to an earlier article in which he challenged the validity of the more extravagant versions of the culture of poverty thesis itself.

Peter Lloyd is also in part concerned with the culture of the students of culture—with observing wryly the subtle variations in the uses made of the term 'marginality' by Latin American social scientists, but he also has some interesting things to say about the usefulness of the concept itself. John Peel illustrates some general problems of cultural relativity by reminding us that not only are the means by which social change is achieved subject to cultural variation, but so, most importantly, are the objectives, and that any sociology of development which does not take off from a respectful examination of what 'development' means to other people is very seriously open to the charge of ethnocentrism. Finally, Mick Moore reflects on some aspects of the culture of a particular and very interesting social group—rural development administrators. Such particular characteristics as their 'programmatisation' are not easily to be explained, he suggests, solely in terms of their location in the economic structure.

Culture, class and policy

Our reviews include a film review from Dudley Seers which is not only a contribution to the continuing debate on what happened in Chile and why, but also a penetrating discussion of the responsibilities of the left-wing media—whether to deal in 'consciousness-raising' myth or in instructive history. (A question, perhaps, to be pondered also by others who would not normally classify themselves as part of the 'media'.) José Villamil takes a cold hard look at an optimistic Third World symposium on the possibilities of creating a new international economic order, and finally we have a variety of different perspectives on the latest British White Paper on aid policies. Whether three

Englishmen and one Indian represent a balanced panel may be questioned, but at least they offer interesting contrasts which students of both structures and cultures might find interesting to explore.

All three reviews (to draw this grist too into the mill of our central theme) raise interesting questions about culture. How much of the Allende tragedy can be traced to a cultural gulf inhibiting communication (*vide* Mick Moore on peasants and bureaucrats for a parallel) between groups such as the copper miners on the one hand and on the other the middle-class university-trained leftists who predominated in the UP administration—and whose counterparts form the potential audience for the Franco-Bulgarian film which Dudley Seers reviews? (It is not likely, apropos of his concern with the film's effects, to be the Renault workers among Communist Party members who flock to see it in Paris.) José Villamil ends his review with a sceptical reference to the transnational élite represented in his symposium. But one might say, too, that it is precisely the development of a transnational cultural unity among Third World élites which is necessary if perceptions of common interests are to be developed strongly enough for the Third World countries to press home what realistic 'structural' advantages they do have in the post-OPEC world (albeit that, realistically, that culture is bound to be a variant of Anglophone international-organisation culture). As for the White Paper, an interesting question is how much the easy acceptance of the new "more aid to the poorest" strategy in rich country aid agencies owes to a new-found egalitarianism, and how much to older cultural traditions which have always seen charity as being properly reserved for the deserving poor.

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