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CULTURE IN THE NEW REALITY: BEYOND ECONOMICS - THE QUALITY OF LIFE

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INTRODUCTION: Contextualization & Genealogy

Culture in the new reality has to be contextualized in its own history and political economy. This broader picture would give us a sense of its genesis and genealogy. In essence, it requires us to reflect critically upon our own biography with the western world (the Industrialised North, or the "Centre"), since it is from the fact of this encounter, mediated initially through the midwifery of European imperialism that both peoples and cultures of the "periphery" have been reconstituted in both homogenous and diverse ways. Indeed long before the term 'globalisation' became a catch term, Worsley, an anthropologist, (1969) already saw imperialism as a phenomenon which created the world into "single social system". For Europe, the periphery was a "people without history" (Wolf, 1982), notwithstanding its repertoire of rich and diverse civilisational contents pre-dating European contact. For Wallerstein, the global social system which emerged was the "modern world-system", which divided the world into the 'centre' and 'periphery' (1980). In this model of the global capitalist economy, it was already clear that the relationship between the centre and the periphery was based on exploitation and domination, in which the periphery was relegated as the providers of raw material and labour required to fuel the expansion and the capital accumulation process of the "centre" (or "central capitalism", after S. Amin). Culturally, the non-European peoples of the periphery became 'the other' - the object of the orientalist discourse (Edward Said, 1978) and representation in much of the European depiction of the peripheral or colonised subjects.

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The ramifications of this initial version of globalisation for the periphery were both radical and totalising, and the effects were felt in all spheres of social and political life. In some, it left the colonised alienated, traumatised, racially and culturally uprooted (Fanon, 1967; 1968). With decolonisation, the so-called independent ‘nation-states’ were left with another heavy burden – the ‘development industry’ (Crush, 1995, p.5) – or the ‘development project’ (McMichael, 1996, pp. 77-143) – “the imaginary of development and ‘catching up’ with the west” (Escobar, 1995, p. 216), the texts of development, written in representational language, are a “language of

metaphor, image, allusion, fantasy and rhetoric" (Crush, *ibid*, p. 4), and they "have always been avowedly strategic and tactical – promoting, licensing and justifying certain interventions and practices, delegitimising and excluding others" (*ibid*, p. 5). Out of this authority-defined discourse, peripheral countries and nation-states become 'classified' as 'undeveloped', 'transient', 'traditional'; indigenous cultures are seen as 'static', 'fatalist', 'non-achievement oriented', and 'natives' are depicted as 'lazy' (S.H. Alatas, 1977). For "deeply embedded within development discourse ... was a set of recurrent images of 'the traditional' which were fundamentally ahistorical and space-insensitive. Collectivities (groups, societies, territories, tribes, classes, communities) were assigned a set of characteristics which suggested not only a low place in the hierarchy of achievement but a terminal condition of stasis, forever becalmed until the healing winds of modernity and development began to blow (Crush, *ibid*, p. 9). Ideas about development did not therefore arise in a vacuum but rather mediated via a hierarchical apparatus of knowledge production and consumption, as Claude Alvares remarks: "knowledge is power, but power is also knowledge. Power decides what is knowledge and not knowledge" (1992, p. 230). Hence it was not just legitimating and empowering any idea of development – it was part and parcel of a paradigm, as echoed by Lohmann:

"The name for this new type of Northern intervention and the solution to the newly-discovered Southern deficiencies was of course, 'economic development'. Plunder and 'civilising' notions of progress were fused into a single program of economic and social improvement through exploitation of resources, potential markets and 'comparative advantage' ... No group being reorganised as part of a money economy could possibly be oppressed since such 'development', by definition, was what enabled people to reach their potential: Exploitation, resistance and liberation were defined out of the discourse"

(Lohmann, 1993, p. 29)

Implicit in the above 'developmentalism' is also the model of "the good life" which prevails in the affluent societies of the North: the USA, Europe and Japan. For the South, 'imagining development' is a vision which embraces the generalizability of the 'good life' model, the living standard or the consumer-oriented model prevailing in the rich countries of the industrialised North, and with it, its whole package of Industrial growth model and its paradigm of permanent growth (Maria Mies & V. Shiva, 1993). At the level of cognition and emotion of Southern subjects, the pursuit of an acceptance of the values, lifestyle and standard of living associated with the above model of the "good life" is "invariably accompanied by a devaluation of one's own; one own's culture, work, technology, lifestyle and often also philosophy of life and social institutions" (Maria Mies, 1993, p. 56). At this