

**EUROPE
AND THE
PEOPLE
WITHOUT
HISTORY,
ERIC R. WOLF**

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**Cartographic Illustrations
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1 Introduction

The central assertion of this book is that the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality. Concepts like "nation," "society," and "culture" name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and by placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding.

On one level it has become a commonplace to say that we all inhabit "one world." There are ecological connections: New York suffers from the Hong Kong flu; the grapevines of Europe are destroyed by American plant lice. There are demographic connections: Jamaicans migrate to London; Chinese migrate to Singapore. There are economic connections: a shutdown of oil wells on the Persian Gulf halts generating plants in Ohio; a balance of payments unfavorable to the United States drains American dollars into bank accounts in Frankfurt or Yokohama; Italians produce Fiat automobiles in the Soviet Union; Japanese build a hydroelectric system in Ceylon. There are political connections: wars begun in Europe unleash reverberations around the globe; American troops intervene on the rim of Asia; Finns guard the border between Israel and Egypt.

This holds true not only of the present but also of the past. Diseases from Eurasia devastated the native population of America and Oceania. Syphilis moved from the New World to the Old. Europeans and their plants and animals invaded the Americas; the American potato, maize plant, and manioc spread throughout the Old World. Large numbers of Africans were transported forcibly to the New World; Chinese and Indian indentured laborers were shipped to Southeast Asia and the West Indies. Portugal created a Portuguese settlement in Macao off the coast of China. Dutchmen, using labor obtained in Bengal, constructed Batavia. Irish children were sold into servitude in the West Indies. Fugitive African slaves found sanctuary in the hills of Surinam. Europe learned to copy Indian textiles and Chinese porcelain, to drink native

American chocolate, to smoke native American tobacco, to use Arabic numerals.

These are familiar facts. They indicate contact and connections, linkages and interrelationships. Yet the scholars to whom we turn in order to understand what we see largely persist in ignoring them. Historians, economists, and political scientists take separate nations as their basic framework of inquiry. Sociology continues to divide the world into separate societies. Even anthropology, once greatly concerned with how culture traits diffused around the world, divides its subject matter into distinctive cases: each society with its characteristic culture, conceived as an integrated and bounded system, set off against other equally bounded systems.

If social and cultural distinctiveness and mutual separation were a hallmark of humankind, one would expect to find it most easily among the so-called primitives, people "without history," supposedly isolated from the external world and from one another. On this presupposition, what would we make of the archaeological findings that European trade goods appear in sites on the Niagara frontier as early as 1570, and that by 1670 sites of the Onondaga subgroup of the Iroquois reveal almost no items of native manufacture except pipes? On the other side of the Atlantic, the organization and orientations of large African populations were transformed in major ways by the trade in slaves. Since the European slavers only moved the slaves from the African coast to their destination in the Americas, the supply side of the trade was entirely in African hands. This was the "African foundation" upon which was built, in the words of the British mercantilist Malachy Postlethwayt, "the magnificent superstructure of American commerce and naval power." From Senegambia in West Africa to Angola, population after population was drawn into this trade, which ramified far inland and affected people who had never even seen a European trader on the coast. Any account of Kru, Fanti, Asante, Ijaw, Igbo, Kongo, Luba, Lunda, or Ngola that treats each group as a "tribe" sufficient unto itself thus misreads the African past and the African present. Furthermore, trade with Iroquois and West Africa affected Europe in turn. Between 1670 and 1760 the Iroquois demanded dyed scarlet and blue cloth made in the Stroudwater Valley of Gloucestershire. This was also one of the first areas in which English weavers lost their autonomy and became hired factory hands. Perhaps there was an interconnection between the American trade and the onset of the industrial revolution in the valley of the Stroud. Conversely, the more than 5,500 muskets supplied to the Gold Coast in only three years (1658–1661) enriched the gunsmiths of Birmingham, where they were made (Jennings 1977: 99–100; Daaku 1970: 150–151).

⤵ If there are connections everywhere, why do we persist in turning dynamic, interconnected phenomena into static, disconnected things? Some of this is owing, perhaps, to the way we have learned our own

history. We have been taught, inside the classroom and outside of it; that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Many of us even grew up believing that this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry, crossed with democracy, in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Such a developmental scheme is misleading. It is misleading, first, because it turns history into a moral success story, a race in time in which each runner of the race passes on the torch of liberty to the next relay. History is thus converted into a tale about the furtherance of virtue, about how the virtuous win out over the bad guys. Frequently, this turns into a story of how the winners prove that they are virtuous and good by winning. If history is the working out of a moral purpose in time, then those who lay claim to that purpose are by that fact the predilect agents of history.

The scheme misleads in a second sense as well. If history is but a tale of unfolding moral purpose, then each link in the genealogy, each runner in the race, is only a precursor of the final apotheosis and not a manifold of social and cultural processes at work in their own time and place. Yet what would we learn of ancient Greece, for example, if we interpreted it only as a prehistoric Miss Liberty, holding aloft the torch of moral purpose in the barbarian night? We would gain little sense of the class conflicts racking the Greek cities, or of the relation between freemen and their slaves. We would have no reason to ask why there were more Greeks fighting in the ranks of the Persian kings than in the ranks of the Hellenic Alliance against the Persians. It would be of no interest to us to know that more Greeks lived in southern Italy and Sicily, then called Magna Graecia, than in Greece proper. Nor would we have any reason to ask why there were soon more Greek mercenaries in foreign armies than in the military bodies of their home cities. Greek settlers outside of Greece, Greek mercenaries in foreign armies, and slaves from Thrace, Phrygia, or Paphlagonia in Greek households all imply Hellenic relations with Greeks and non-Greeks outside of Greece. Yet our guiding scheme would not invite us to ask questions about these relationships.

Nowhere is this myth-making scheme more apparent than in school-book versions of the history of the United States. There, a complex orchestration of antagonistic forces is celebrated instead as the unfolding of a timeless essence. In this perspective, the ever-changing boundaries of the United States and the repeated involvements of the polity in internal and external wars, declared and undeclared, are telescoped together by the teleological understanding that thirteen colonies clinging to the eastern rim of the continent would, in less than a

century, plant the American flag on the shores of the Pacific. Yet this final result was itself only the contested outcome of many contradictory relationships. The colonies declared their independence, even though a majority of their population—European settlers, native Americans, and African slaves—favored the Tories. The new republic nearly foundered on the issue of slavery, dealing with it, in a series of problematic compromises, by creating two federated countries, each with its own zone of expansion. There was surely land for the taking on the new continent, but it had to be taken first from the native Americans who inhabited it, and then converted into flamboyant real estate. Jefferson bought the Louisiana territory cheaply, but only after the revolt of the Haitian slaves against their French slave masters robbed the area of its importance in the French scheme of things as a source of food supply for the Caribbean plantations. The occupation of Florida closed off one of the main escape hatches from southern slavery. The war with Mexico made the Southwest safe for slavery and cotton. The Hispanic landowners who stood in the way of the American drive to the Pacific became “bandits” when they defended their own against the Anglophone newcomers. Then North and South—one country importing its working force from Europe, the other from Africa—fought one of the bloodiest wars in history. For a time the defeated South became a colony of the victorious North. Later, the alignment between regions changed, the “sunbelt” rising to predominance as the influence of the industrial Northeast declined. Clearly the republic was neither indivisible nor endowed with God-given boundaries.

It is conceivable that things might have been different. There could have arisen a polyglot Floridian Republic, a Francophone Mississippian America, a Hispanic New Biscay, a Republic of the Great Lakes, a Columbia—comprising the present Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. Only if we assume a God-given drive toward geopolitical unity on the North American continent would this retrojection be meaningless. Instead, it invites us to account in material terms for what happened at each juncture, to account for how some relationships gained ascendancy over others. Thus neither ancient Greece, Rome, Christian Europe, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, democracy, nor even the United States was ever a thing propelled toward its unfolding goal by some immanent driving spring, but rather a temporally and spatially changing and changeable set of relationships, or relationships among sets of relationships.

The point is more than academic. By turning names into things we create false models of reality. By endowing nations, societies, or cultures with the qualities of internally homogeneous and externally distinctive and bounded objects, we create a model of the world as a global pool hall in which the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls. Thus it becomes easy to sort the world into differently colored balls, to declare that “East is East, and West is West, and never

the twain shall meet.” In this way a quintessential West is counterposed to an equally quintessential East, where life was cheap and slavish multitudes groveled under a variety of despotisms. Later, as peoples in other climes began to assert their political and economic independence from both West and East, we assigned these new applicants for historical status to a Third World of underdevelopment—a residual category of conceptual billiard balls—as contrasted with the developed West and the developing East. Inevitably, perhaps, these reified categories became intellectual instruments in the prosecution of the Cold War. There was the “modern” world of the West. There was the world of the East, which had fallen prey to communism, a “disease of modernization” (Rostow 1960). There was, finally, the Third World, still bound up in “tradition” and strangled in its efforts toward modernization. If the West could only find ways of breaking that grip, it could perhaps save the victim from the infection incubated and spread by the East, and set that Third World upon the road to modernization—the road to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of the West. The ghastly offspring of this way of thinking about the world was the theory of “forced draft urbanization” (Huntington 1968: 655), which held that the Vietnamese could be propelled toward modernization by driving them into the cities through aerial bombardment and defoliation of the countryside. Names thus become things, and things marked with an X can become targets of war.

The Rise of the Social Sciences

The habit of treating named entities such as Iroquois, Greece, Persia, or the United States as fixed entities opposed to one another by stable internal architecture and external boundaries interferes with our ability to understand their mutual encounter and confrontation. In fact, this tendency has made it difficult to understand all such encounters and confrontations. Arranging imaginary building blocks into pyramids called East and West, or First, Second, and Third Worlds, merely compounds that difficulty. It is thus likely that we are dealing with some conceptual shortcomings in our ways of looking at social and political phenomena, and not just a temporary aberration. We seem to have taken a wrong turn in understanding at some critical point in the past, a false choice that bedevils our thinking in the present.

That critical turning point is identifiable. It occurred in the middle of the past century, when inquiry into the nature and varieties of humankind split into separate (and unequal) specialties and disciplines. This split was fateful. It led not only forward into the intensive and specialized study of particular aspects of human existence, but turned the ideological reasons for that split into an intellectual justification for the specialties themselves. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the case of sociology. Before sociology we had political economy, a field of inquiry

concerned with "the wealth of nations," the production and distribution of wealth within and between political entities and the classes composing them. With the acceleration of capitalist enterprise in the eighteenth century, that structure of state and classes came under increasing pressure from new and "rising" social groups and categories that clamored for the enactment of their rights against those groups defended and represented by the state. Intellectually, this challenge took the form of asserting the validity of new social, economic, political, and ideological ties, now conceptualized as "society," against the state. The rising tide of discontent pitting "society" against the political and ideological order erupted in disorder, rebellion, and revolution. The specter of disorder and revolution raised the question of how social order could be restored and maintained, indeed, how social order was possible at all. Sociology hoped to answer the "social question." It had, as Rudolph Heberle noted, "an eminently political origin. . . . Saint Simon, Auguste Comte, and Lorenz Stein conceived the new science of society as an antidote against the poison of social disintegration" (quoted in Bramson 1961: 12, n. 2).

These early sociologists did this by severing the field of social relations from political economy. They pointed to observable and as yet poorly studied ties which bind people to people as individuals, as groups and associations, or as members of institutions. They then took this field of social relations to be the subject matter of their intensive concern. They and their successors expanded this concern into a number of theoretical postulates, using these to mark off sociology from political science and economics. I would summarize these common postulates as follows:

1. In the course of social life, individuals enter into relations with one another. Such relations can be abstracted from the economic, political, or ideological context in which they are found, and treated *sui generis*. They are autonomous, constituting a realm of their own, the realm of the social.

2. Social order depends on the growth and extension of social relations among individuals. The greater the density of such ties and the wider their scope, the greater the orderliness of society. Maximization of ties of kinship and neighborhood, of group and association, is therefore conducive to social order. Conversely, if these ties are not maximized, social order is called into question. Development of many and varied ties also diminishes the danger of polarization into classes.

3. The formation and maintenance of such ties is strongly related to the existence and propagation of common beliefs and customs among the individuals participating in them. Moral consensus, especially when based on unexamined belief and on nonrational acceptance of custom, furthers the maximization of social ties; expectations of mere utility and the exercise of merely technical reason tend to weaken them.

4. The development of social relations and the spread of associated custom and belief create a society conceived as a totality of social relations between individuals. Social relations constitute society; soci-

ety, in turn, is the seat of cohesion, the unit to which predictability and orderliness can be ascribed. If social relations are orderly and recurrent, society has a stable internal structure. The extent of that structure is coterminous with the intensity and range of social relations. Where these grow markedly less intense and less frequent, society encounters its boundary.

What is the flaw in these postulates? They predispose one to think of social relations not merely as autonomous but as causal in their own right, apart from their economic, political, or ideological context. Since social relations are conceived as relations between individuals, interaction between individuals becomes the prime cause of social life. Since social disorder has been related to the quantity and quality of social relations, attention is diverted from consideration of economics, politics, or ideology as possible sources of social disorder, into a search for the causes of disorder in family and community, and hence toward the engineering of a proper family and community life. Since, moreover, disorder has been located in the divergence of custom and belief from common norms, convergence in custom and consensus in belief are converted into the touchstone of society in proper working order. And, finally, the postulates make it easy to identify Society in general with a society in particular. Society in need of order becomes a particular society to be ordered. In the context of the tangible present, that society to be ordered is then easily identified with a given nation-state, be that nation-state Ghana, Mexico, or the United States. Since social relations have been severed from their economic, political, or ideological context, it is easy to conceive of the nation-state as a structure of social ties informed by moral consensus rather than as a nexus of economic, political, and ideological relationships connected to other nexuses. Contentless social relations, rather than economic, political, or ideological forces, thus become the prime movers of sociological theory. Since these social relations take place within the charmed circle of the single nation-state, the significant actors in history are seen as nation-states, each driven by its internal social relations. Each society is then a thing, moving in response to an inner clockwork.

Economics and Political Science

This severance of social relations from the economic, political, and ideological contexts in which they are embedded and which they activate was accompanied by the assignment of the economic and political aspects of human life to separate disciplines. Economics abandoned its concern with how socially organized populations produce to supply their politics and became instead a study of how demand creates markets. The guiding theory of this new economics was

a theory of markets and market interdependence. It is a theory of general equilibrium *in exchange*, extended almost as an afterthought, to cover production and distribution. It is not a theory of a social system, still less of

economic power and social class. Households and firms are considered only as market agents, never as parts of a social structure. Their 'initial endowments,' wealth, skills, and property, are taken as *given*. Moreover, the object of the theory is to demonstrate the tendency towards equilibrium; class and sectoral conflict is therefore ruled out almost by assumption. [Nell 1973: 77-78]

Stated in another form, this new economics is not about the real world at all (Lekachman 1976). It is an abstract model of the workings out of subjective individual choices in relation to one another.

A similar fate befell the study of politics. A new political science severed the sphere of the political from economics and turned to consideration of power in relation to government. By relegating economic, social, and ideological aspects of human life to the status of the "environment," the study of politics divorced itself from a study of how the organization of this environment constrains or directs politics, and moved instead to an inquiry into decision making. The political process is one in which demands are aggregated and translated into decisions, much as in the market model of economics the interplay of demands issues in the production of supplies. As in the market model, such an approach easily slips into the assumption

that the organized private power forces of the society balance one another so as to preclude concentrated irresponsible rule. . . . wise public policy is assumed to prevail, explained by a mystique not unlike Adam Smith's invisible hand. [Engler 1968: 199]

Ultimately, in such a model, the willingness to abide by the rules of the political market is necessarily determined not by the market itself but by the orientation and values of the participants, aspects of what political scientists have come to call their "political culture." Much of political science thus focused on the study of decisions, on the one hand, and the study of orientations, understood as constituting together the autonomous political system of a given society, on the other.

Underlying all these specialties is the concept of an aggregate of individuals, engaged in a contract to maximize social order, to truck and barter in the marketplace, and to provide inputs for the formulation of political decisions. Ostensibly engaged in the study of human *behavior*, the various disciplines parcel out the subject among themselves. Each then proceeds to set up a model, seemingly a means to explain "hard," observable facts, yet actually an ideologically loaded scheme geared to a narrow definition of subject matter. Such schemes provide self-fulfilling answers, since phenomena other than those covered by the model are ruled out of the court of specialized discourse. If the models leak like sieves, it is then argued that this is either because they are merely abstract constructs and not expected to hold empirical water, or because troublemakers have poked holes into them. The specialized social

sciences, having abandoned a holistic perspective, thus come to resemble the Danae sisters of classical Greek legend, ever condemned to pour water into their separate bottomless containers.

The Development of Sociological Theory

We have seen how sociology stemmed from an attempt to counteract social disorder by creating a theory of social order, by locating order and disorder in the quantity and quality of social relations. An important implication of this approach is that it issues in a polarity between two types of society: one in which social order is maximized because social relations are densely knit and suffused with value consensus; and another in which social disorder predominates over order because social relations are atomized and deranged by dissensus over values. It is only a short step from drawing such a polarity to envisioning social process as a change from one type of society to the other. This seemed consistent with the common view that modern life entails a progressive disintegration of the lifeways that marked the "good old days" of our forebears. In nineteenth-century Europe, where older social ties in fact disintegrated under the twin impact of capitalism and industrialization, such a temporal interpretation of the sociological polarity carried the conviction of experience. Ferdinand Tönnies saw this movement as one from "community," or *Gemeinschaft*, to "society," or *Gesellschaft*. Sir Henry Maine phrased it as a shift from social relations based on status to social relations based on contract. Emile Durkheim conceived it as a movement from a kind of social solidarity based on the similarity of all members to a social solidarity based on an "organic" complementarity of differences. The Chicago school of urban sociology saw it as the contrast between a cohesive society and the atomized, heterogeneous, disorganized city. Finally, Robert Redfield drew the various formulations together into a polar model of progression from Folk to Urban Society. In this model the quantity and quality of social relations again were the primary, independent variables. Isolation or paucity of social interaction, coupled with homogeneity or similarity of social ties, generated the dependent variables: orientation toward the group, or "collectivization"; commitment to belief, or "sanctity"; and "organization," the knitting together of understandings in the minds of men. In contrast, contact, or high frequency of contact, coupled with heterogeneity or dissimilarity of social ties, was seen as producing the dependent variables of "individualization," "secularization," and "disorganization." In sum, increases in the quantity and diversity of social interaction caused "the moral order" of the folk to give way to "the technical order" of civilization.

Sociology thus took its departure from a sense that social order was threatened by the atrophy of community. As the twentieth century wore on, however, it gradually came to be taken for granted that society was headed toward increased size and differentiation, and hence also

toward the growth of utilitarian and technical relations at the expense of sacred and moral ties. Society was evidently moving toward what Max Weber, using Tönnies's terms, had called *Vergesellschaftung*. By this he meant the expansion of relations resting on

rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgement be absolute values or reasons of expediency. It is especially common, though by no means inevitable, for the associative type of relationship to rest on a rational agreement by mutual consent. [1968: 10]

Although Weber himself used the term with ambivalence and misgivings, his latter-day followers embraced the prognosis with enthusiasm. Whereas "traditional society" had fitted people narrowly into inherited positions, and then bound them together tightly in particularistic positions, "modern society" would sever people from inherited ties and allocate the newly mobile population to specialized and differentiated roles responding to the changing needs of an overarching universal society. Such an emerging society would also require a mechanism for setting social goals and a machinery for implementing them. The way the modernizers saw it, goal setting would come out of enlarged popular participation. Implementation of the goals, such as economic development, in turn would require the creation of bureaucracy, defined as organizations capable of marshalling resources rationally and efficiently toward stated goals. Finally, public participation in setting and meeting goals would require a psychic reorientation that could sustain the enactment of such technical and rational norms. Those capable of generating such new arrangements would find themselves launched into modernity. Those incapable of doing so would find their society arrested at the point of transition or mired in traditionalism. In the succession from Max Weber to Talcott Parsons, therefore, *Vergesellschaftung* was transfigured into "modernization" through a simple change of signs. If *Gesellschaft* had once seemed problematical, after the mid-twentieth century it came to be seen as desirable and forward-looking. The negative pole of the polarity was now allocated to "traditional society," slow to change, inflexible, and lacking in psychic drive toward rational and secular achievement.

Thus, in a reversal of sociology's original critical stance toward the workings of nineteenth-century society, "modernization theory" became an instrument for bestowing praise on societies deemed to be modern and casting a critical eye on those that had yet to attain that achievement. The political leaders of the United States had pronounced themselves in favor of aiding the development of the Third World, and modernization theorists seconded that pronouncement. Yet modernization theory effectively foreclosed any but the most ideologically charged understanding of that world. It used the term *modern*, but meant by that

term the United States, or rather an ideal of a democratic, pluralistic, rational, and secular United States. It said *traditional*, but meant all those others that would have to adopt that ideal to qualify for assistance. As theory it was misleading. It imparted a false view of American history, substituting self-satisfaction for analysis. By casting such different entities as China, Albania, Paraguay, Cuba, and Tanzania into the hopper of traditional society, it simultaneously precluded any study of their significant differences. By equating tradition with stasis and lack of development, it denied societies marked off as traditional any significant history of their own. Above all, by dividing the world into modern, transitional, and traditional societies, it blocked effective understanding of relationships among them. Once again each society was defined as an autonomous and bounded structure of social relations, thus discouraging analysis of intersocietal or intergroup interchanges, including internal social strife, colonialism, imperialism, and societal dependency. The theory thus effectively precluded the serious study of issues demonstrably agitating the real world.

Anthropology

If these social sciences have not led to an adequate understanding of the interconnected world, what of anthropology? Anthropology, ambitiously entitled *The Science of Man*, did lay special claims to the study of non-Western and "primitive" peoples. Indeed, cultural anthropology began as world anthropology. In its evolutionist phase it was concerned with the evolution of culture on a global scale. In its diffusionist phase it was interested in the spread and clustering of cultural forms over the entire face of the globe. The diffusionists also saw relations between populations exhibiting the same cultural forms—matriliny, blackening of teeth, or tailored clothing—as the outcome of intergroup communication by migration or by copying and learning. They were not much concerned with people, but they did have a sense of global interconnections. They did not believe in the concept of "primitive isolates."

Such interests and understandings were set aside, however, as anthropologists turned from a primary concern with cultural forms to the study of "living cultures," of specified populations and their life-ways in locally delimited habitats. Fieldwork—direct communication with people and participant observation of their ongoing activities *in situ*—became a hallmark of anthropological method. Fieldwork has proved enormously fruitful in laying bare and correcting false assumptions and erroneous descriptions. It has also revealed hitherto unsuspected connections among sets of social activities and cultural forms. Yet the very success of the method lulled its users into a false confidence. It became easy for them to convert merely heuristic considerations of method into theoretical postulates about society and culture.

Limitations of time and energy in the field dictate limitations in the number and locations of possible observations and interviews, demand-

ing concentration of effort on an observable place and on a corps of specifiable "informants." The resulting observations and communications are then made to stand for a larger universe of unrealized observations and communications, and used to construct a model of the social and cultural entity under study. Such a model is no more than an account of "descriptive integration," a theoretical halfway house, and not yet explanation. Functionalist anthropology, however, attempted to derive explanations from the study of the microcosm alone, treating it as a hypothetical isolate. Its features were explained in terms of the contribution each made to the maintenance of this putatively isolated whole. Thus, a methodological unit of inquiry was turned into a theoretical construct by assertion, *a priori*. The outcome was series of analyses of wholly separate cases.

There were three major attempts to transcend the boundaries of the microcosm. One of these, that of Robert Redfield, had recourse to sociological theory. It applied the polarity of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to anthropological cases by using "communities" as representations or exemplifications of such "imagined types of societies." Thus the communities of X-Cacal and Chan Kom in Yucatan were made to exemplify the folk end of a universal folk-urban continuum of social relations and cultural understandings. The two locations illuminated the theory, but the theory could not explicate the political and economic processes that shaped the communities: X-Cacal as a settlement set up by Maya-speaking rebels during the Caste Wars of the nineteenth century; Chan Kom as a village of cultivators released from the hacienda system by the Mexican Revolution, settling as newcomers in a frontier area with the support of the Yucatecan Socialist Party. Thus, like *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* theory in general, Redfield's concepts led only in one direction, up to the theory but not back down from it.

A second attempt to generate a theoretical construct for understanding the microcosm studied in a larger context was Julian Steward's concept of levels of sociocultural integration. The concept, derived from the philosophy of "emergent evolution," was meant to suggest that units of the same kind, when subjected to integrative processes, could yield novel units that not only subsumed those of the lower level but also exhibited qualitatively different characteristics at the higher, emergent level. Steward initially used the concept to counter arguments that treated "the community" as a small replica of "the nation," as if these were qualitatively identical structural phenomena. He then proceeded, however, to construct a conceptual edifice in which units at the family level became parts of a community level, units at the community level became parts of a regional level, and units at the regional level became parts of the level of the nation.

Although the term *integration* suggests a process, the concept is not processual but structural. It suggests an architecture of a whole and its parts, which remain to be specified substantively only after the fact. The

model is thus a "hollow" representation of societal complexity, theoretically applicable to all complex sociocultural wholes. Yet it makes no statement about any processes generating the structure, or about the specific features that integrate it, or about the content of any of its parts. Knowledge about processes does not flow from the model but must be added to it. Thus, when Steward turned to the study of "contemporary change in traditional societies," the model remained silent about the penetration of capitalism, the growth of a worldwide specialization and division of labor, and the development of domination by some populations over others. Steward was forced back, unhappily, to the comparative study of separate cases and the unsatisfactory concepts of tradition and modernization.

The third attempt to go beyond the microscopic study of populations in specified locations took the form of a revival of evolutionism. Evolutionary thinking in anthropology, so prominent in the nineteenth century, had been halted by the assertion that "the extensive occurrence of diffusion . . . lays the axe to the root of any theory of historical laws" (Lowie 1920: 434). Evolutionists and diffusionists were not so much opposed as interested in quite different phenomena. The evolutionists had recognized the facts of diffusion, but had felt justified in abstracting from these facts to their model of successive stages of social and cultural development. The diffusionists, in turn, sidestepped the problem posed by major inequalities in the technology and organization of different populations to focus instead on the transmission of cultural forms from group to group. Whereas the evolutionists disclaimed an interest in the history of particular societies and cultures, the diffusionists disclaimed any interest in the ecological, economic, social, political, and ideological matrix within which the cultural forms were being transmitted in time and space. The two schools of thought thus effectively talked past each other. The functionalists, in turn, rejected altogether the "conjectural history" of the diffusionists in favor of the analysis of internal functioning in putatively isolated wholes.

When Leslie White reintroduced the evolutionary perspective into American anthropology in the forties and fifties, he did so by reasserting the validity of the earlier model proposed by Tylor, Morgan, and Spencer. To this model of universal or unilineal evolution, Julian Steward opposed a multilineal model that depicted evolution as a process of successive branching. Subsequently Sahlins and Service sought to unify the two approaches by counterposing general and specific evolution as dual aspects of the same evolutionary process. General evolution was defined by them as "passage from less to greater energy exploitation, lower to higher levels of integration, and less to greater all-round adaptability" (Sahlins and Service 1960: 22-23). Specific evolution they defined as "the phylogenetic, ramifying, historic passage of culture along its many lines, the adaptive modification of particular cultures" (1960: 38). Though cognizant of convergence as an aspect of

cultural as opposed to biological phylogeny, they defined it in old-fashioned diffusionist terms as the diffusion of culture traits, and not as the outcome of multifaceted relationships between interacting culture-bearing populations. When they turned to the detailed analysis of specific evolution, they thus emphasized adaptation as "specialization for the exploitation of particular facets of the environment" (1960: 50). They understood that environment included both the physical and the sociocultural matrices of human life, but they laid primary stress on adaptation to different physical environments. In the sixties and seventies, the study of particular ecological "systems" became increasingly sophisticated, without, however, ever transcending the functional analysis of the single case, now hypothesized as an integral, self-regulating ecological whole. Thus, despite its theoretical effort, evolutionary anthropology turned all too easily into the study of ecological adaptation, conducting anthropology back to the comparative study of single cases.

The ecological concentration on the single case is paralleled by the recent fascination with the study and unraveling of what is "in the heads" of single culture-bearing populations. Such studies turn their back on functionalism, including what was most viable in it, the concern with how people cope with the material and organizational problems of their lives. They also disregard material relationships linking the people with others outside. Instead, their interest lies in the investigation of local microcosms of meaning, conceived as autonomous systems.

This turn toward the study of meaning has been influenced strongly by the development of linguistics, notably by de Saussure's structural theory of language as a superindividual social system of linguistic forms that remain normatively identical in all utterances. Such a view relates linguistic sign to linguistic sign without reference to who is speaking to whom, when, and about what. It was originally put forward to oppose the position that a language consisted of an ever-changing historical stream of individually generated utterances, a perspective associated with the names of Humboldt and Vossler. De Saussure, instead, wholly divorced language (*langue*) from utterance (*parole*), defining signs by their mutual relation to one another, without reference to any context external to them. In the same way, meanings were defined in terms of other meanings, without reference to the practical contexts in which they appear.

Clearly, the opposition between the two views requires for its resolution a relational, dialectical perspective, as Vološinov noted fifty years ago. He called into question de Saussure's view of the static linguistic system carried by a faceless and passive collectivity, noting instead that in reality such a collectivity consisted of a population of speakers with diverse "accents" or interests, participating in a historical stream of verbal utterances about diverse, concrete contexts. Contexts should not

be thought of as internally homogeneous and externally segregated. For Vološinov, they constituted instead intersections between "differently oriented accents . . . in a state of constant tension, of incessant interaction and conflict" (1973: 80). Neither sign nor meaning could be understood without reference to what they are about, their theme in a given situation. The trend within anthropology to treat systems of meaning as wholly autonomous systems threatens to reverse this insight by substituting for it the study of solipsistic discourses generated *in vacuo* by the human mind.

While some anthropologists thus narrow their focus to the ever more intensive study of the single case, others hope to turn anthropology into a science by embarking on the statistical cross-cultural comparisons of coded features drawn from large samples of ethnographically known cases. A good deal of attention has been paid to the methodological problems of how to isolate discrete cases for comparison and how to define the variables to be coded and compared. Are the hundreds of Eskimo local groups separate cases? Are they instances of larger, self-identified clusters such as Copper, Netsilik, and Iglulik? Or do they constitute a single Eskimo case? Other questions deal with the nature of the sample. Can one be sure that the cases are sufficiently separated historically and geographically to constitute distinct cases? Or is the sample contaminated by spatial or temporal propinquity and communication? All the answers to these questions nevertheless assume the autonomy and boundedness of the cases that are selected in the end. Whatever sample is finally chosen, it is interpreted as an aggregate of separate units. These, it is held, either generate cultural traits independently through invention, or borrow them from one another through diffusion. We are back in a world of sociocultural billiard balls, coursing on a global billiard table.

What, however, if we take cognizance of *processes* that transcend separable cases, moving through and beyond them and transforming them as they proceed? Such processes were, for example, the North American fur trade and the trade in native American and African slaves. What of the localized Algonkin-speaking patrilineages, for example, which in the course of the fur trade moved into large nonkin villages and became known as the ethnographic Ojibwa? What of the Chipeweyans, some of whose bands gave up hunting to become fur trappers, or "carriers," while others continued to hunt for game as "caribou eaters," with people continuously changing from caribou eating to carrying and back? What of the multilingual, multiethnic, intermarrying groups of Cree and Assiniboin that grew up in the far northern Plains of North America in response to the stimulus of the fur trade, until the units "graded into one another" (Sharrock 1974: 96)? What of the Mundurucú in Amazonia who changed from patrilocal and patrilineal to adopt the unusual combination of matrilocality and patrilineal reckoning in response to their new role as hunters of slaves and

suppliers of manioc flour to slave-hunting expeditions? What, moreover, of Africa, where the slave trade created an unlimited demand for slaves, and where quite unrelated populations met that demand by severing people from their kin groups through warfare, kidnapping, pawning, or judicial procedures, in order to have slaves to sell to the Europeans? In all such cases, to attempt to specify separate cultural wholes and distinct boundaries would create a false sample. These cases exemplify spatially and temporally shifting relationships, prompted in all instances by the effects of European expansion. If we consider, furthermore, that this expansion has for nearly 500 years affected case after case, then the search for a world sample of distinct cases is illusory.

One need have no quarrel with a denotative use of the term *society* to designate an empirically verifiable cluster of interconnections among people, as long as no evaluative prejudgments are added about its state of internal cohesion or boundedness in relation to the external world. Indeed, I shall continue to use the term in this way throughout this book, in preference to other clumsier formulations. Similarly, it would be an error to discard the anthropological insight that human existence entails the creation of cultural forms, themselves predicated on the human capacity to symbol.

Yet the concept of the autonomous, self-regulating and self-justifying society and culture has trapped anthropology inside the bounds of its own definitions. Within the halls of science, the compass of observation and thought has narrowed, while outside the inhabitants of the world are increasingly caught up in continent-wide and global change. Indeed, has there ever been a time when human populations have existed in independence of larger encompassing relationships, unaffected by larger fields of force? Just as the sociologists pursue the will-o'-the-wisp of social order and integration in a world of upheaval and change, so anthropologists look for pristine replicas of the precapitalist, preindustrial past in the sinks and margins of the capitalist, industrial world. But Europeans and Americans would never have encountered these supposed bearers of a pristine past if they had not encountered one another, in bloody fact, as Europe reached out to seize the resources and populations of the other continents. Thus, it has been rightly said that anthropology is an offspring of imperialism. Without imperialism there would be no anthropologists, but there would also be no Dené, Baluba, or Malay fishermen to be studied. The tacit anthropological supposition that people like these are people without history amounts to the erasure of 500 years of confrontation, killing, resurrection, and accommodation. If sociology operates with its mythology of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, anthropology all too frequently operates with its mythology of the pristine primitive. Both perpetuate fictions that deny the facts of ongoing relationships and involvements.

These facts clearly emerge in the work of anthropologists and historians who have specialized in what has come to be known as ethno-

history. Perhaps "ethnohistory" has been so called to separate it from "real" history, the study of the supposedly civilized. Yet what is clear from the study of ethnohistory is that the subjects of the two kinds of history are the same. The more ethnohistory we know, the more clearly "their" history and "our" history emerge as part of the same history. Thus, there can be no "Black history" apart from "White history," only a component of a common history suppressed or omitted from conventional studies for economic, political, or ideological reasons.

These remarks echo those made by the anthropologist Alexander Lesser who, in a different context, asked years ago that "we adopt as a working hypothesis the universality of human contact and influence"; that we think "of human societies—prehistoric, primitive, or modern—not as closed systems, but as open systems"; that we see them "as inextricably involved with other aggregates, near and far, in weblike, netlike connections" (1961: 42). The labors of the ethnohistorians have demonstrated the validity of this advice in case after case. Yet it remains merely programmatic until we can move from a consideration of connections at work in separate cases to a wider perspective, one that will allow us to connect the connections in theory as well as in empirical study.

In such a perspective, it becomes difficult to view any given culture as a bounded system or as a self-perpetuating "design for living." We thus stand in need of a new theory of cultural forms. The anthropologists have shown us that cultural forms—as "determinate orderings" of things, behavior, and ideas—do play a demonstrable role in the management of human interaction. What will be required of us in the future is not to deny that role, but to understand more precisely how cultural forms work to mediate social relationships among particular populations.

The Uses of Marx

If we grant the existence of such connections, how are we to conceive of them? Can we grasp a common process that generates and organizes them? Is it possible to envision such a common dynamic and yet maintain a sense of its distinctive unfolding in time and space as it involves and engulfs now this population, now that other?

Such an approach is possible, but only if we can face theoretical possibilities that transcend our specialized disciplines. It is not enough to become multidisciplinary in the hope that an addition of all the disciplines will lead to a new vision. A major obstacle to the development of a new perspective lies in the very fact of specialization itself. That fact has a history and that history is significant, because the several academic disciplines owe their existence to a common rebellion against political economy, their parent discipline. That discipline strove to lay bare the laws or regularities surrounding the production of wealth. It entailed a

imperialism and anthropology

concern with how wealth was generated in production, with the role of classes in the genesis of wealth, and with the role of the state in relation to the different classes. These concerns were common to conservatives and socialists alike. (Marx addressed himself to them when he criticized political economists for taking as universals what he saw as the characteristics of historically particular systems of production.) Yet these concerns have been expunged so completely from the repertory of the social sciences that the latest *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* does not even include entries under "political economy" and "class." Today, concern with such matters is usually ascribed only to Marxists, even though Marx himself wrote in a letter to a friend (Joseph Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852):

no credit is due me for discovering the existence of classes in society nor yet the struggle between them. Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. [quoted in Venable 1945: 6, n. 3]

It is likely that it was precisely the conception of political economy as a structure of *classes* that led the nascent social sciences to turn against the concept of class. If social, economic, and political relations were seen to involve a division into antagonistic classes, endowed by the structure of the political economy itself with opposing interests and capabilities, then the pursuit of order would indeed be haunted forever by the specter of discord. This was what led James Madison, in his tough-minded *Federalist Papers*, to define the function of government as the regulation of relations among antagonistic classes. The several social science disciplines, in contrast, turned their back on political economy, shifting instead to the intensive study of interaction among individuals—in primary and secondary groups, in the market, in the processes of government. They thus turned away also from concern with crucial questions about the nature of production, class, and power: If production is the condition of being human, how is production to be understood and analyzed? Under what conditions does production entail the rise of classes? What are the implications of class division for the allocation of resources and the exercise of power? What is the nature of the state?

Although these questions were abandoned by the social sciences, they persist as their hidden agenda. Because Marx raised these questions most persistently and systematically, he remains a hidden interlocutor in much social science discourse. It has been said, with reason, that the social sciences constitute one long dialogue with the ghost of Marx. If we are to transcend the present limits and limitations of the specialized disciplines, we must return to these unanswered questions and reconsider them.

Marx is important for this reconsideration in several ways. He was one of the last major figures to aim at a holistic human science, capable of integrating the varied specializations. Contrary to what is all too often said about him, he was by no means an economic determinist. He was a materialist, believing in the primacy of material relationships as against the primacy of "spirit." Indeed, his concept of production (*Produktion*) was conceived in opposition to Hegel's concept of *Geist*, manifesting itself in successive incarnations of spirit. For him, production embraced at once the changing relations of humankind to nature, the social relations into which humans enter in the course of transforming nature, and the consequent transformations of human symbolic capability. The concept is thus not merely economic in the strict sense but also ecological, social, political, and social-psychological. It is relational in character.

Marx further argued—against those who wanted to universalize Society, or the Market, or the Political Process—the existence of different modes of production in human history. Each mode represented a different combination of elements. What was true of one mode was not true of another: there was therefore no universal history. But Marx was profoundly historical. Both the elements constituting a mode of production and their characteristic combination had for him a definable history of origin, unfolding, and disintegration. He was neither a universal historian nor a historian of events, but a historian of configurations or syndromes of material relationships. Most of his energy was, of course, spent on efforts to understand the history and workings of one particular mode, capitalism, and this not to defend it but to effect its revolutionary transformation. Since our specialized disciplinary discourse developed as an antidote to revolution and disorder, it is understandable that this ghostly interrogator should have been made unwelcome in the halls of academe.

Yet the specter has vital lessons for us. First, we shall not understand the present world unless we trace the growth of the world market and the course of capitalist development. Second, we must have a theory of that growth and development. Third, we must be able to relate both the history and theory of that unfolding development to processes that affect and change the lives of local populations. That theory must be able to delineate the significant elements at work in these processes and their systemic combinations in historical time. At the same time, it ought to cut finely enough to explain the significant differences marking off each such combination from all the others—say, capitalism from other historically known combinations. Finally, theoretically informed history and historically informed theory must be joined together to account for populations specifiable in time and space, both as outcomes of significant processes and as their carriers.

Among those who have contributed to a theoretically informed history of the world to which capitalism has given rise, two names stand

out, both for the trenchancy of their formulations and the scope of their research effort. One of these is Andre Gunder Frank, an economist, who began to question the modernization approach to economic development in the early 1960s. Frank clearly articulated the heretical proposition that development and underdevelopment were not separate phenomena, but were closely bound up with each other (1966, 1967). Over the past centuries, capitalism had spread outward from its original center to all parts of the globe. Everywhere it penetrated, it turned other areas into dependent satellites of the metropolitan center. Extracting the surpluses produced in the satellites to meet the requirements of the metropolis, capitalism distorted and thwarted the development of the satellites to its own benefit. This phenomenon Frank called "the development of underdevelopment." The exploitative relation between metropolis and satellite was, moreover, repeated within each satellite itself, with the classes and regions in closer contact with the external metropolis drawing surplus from the hinterland and distorting and thwarting its development. Underdevelopment in the satellites was therefore not a phenomenon *sui generis*, but the outcome of relations between satellite and metropolis, ever renewed in the process of surplus transfer and ever reinforced by the continued dependency of the satellite on the metropolis.

Similar to Frank's approach is Immanuel Wallerstein's explicitly historical account of capitalist origins and the development of the "European world-economy." This world-economy, originating in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, constitutes a global market, characterized by a global division of labor. Firms (be they individuals, enterprises, or regions) meet in this market to exchange the goods they have produced in the hope of realizing a profit. The search for profit guides both production in general and specialization in production. Profits are generated by primary producers, whom Wallerstein calls proletarians, no matter how their labor is mobilized. Those profits are appropriated through legal sanctions by capitalists, whom Wallerstein classifies as bourgeois, no matter what the source of their capital. The growth of the market and the resulting worldwide division of labor generate a basic distinction between the core countries (Frank's metropolis) and the periphery (Frank's satellites). The two are linked by "unequal exchange," whereby "high-wage (but low-supervision), high-profit, high-capital intensive" goods produced in the core are exchanged for "low-wage (but high-supervision), low-profit, low-capital intensive goods" produced in the periphery (see Wallerstein 1974: 351). In the core, goods are produced mainly by "free" wage-remunerated labor; in the periphery goods are produced mainly by one kind or another of coerced labor. Although he adduces various factors to explain this difference, Wallerstein has recourse to what is basically a demographic explanation. He argues that the growth of free wage labor in the core area arose in response to the high densities of population that made workers competitive with one another and hence willing to

submit to market discipline, while in the periphery low population densities favored the growth of labor coercion. We shall have occasion to look critically at some of these propositions. Yet what is important about both Frank's and Wallerstein's work is that they have replaced the fruitless debates about modernization with a sophisticated and theoretically oriented account of how capitalism evolved and spread, an evolution and spread of intertwined and yet differentiated relationships.

Both Frank and Wallerstein focused their attention on the capitalist world system and the arrangements of its parts. Although they utilized the findings of anthropologists and regional historians, for both the principal aim was to understand how the core subjugated the periphery, and not to study the reactions of the micro-populations habitually investigated by anthropologists. Their choice of focus thus leads them to omit consideration of the range and variety of such populations, of their modes of existence before European expansion and the advent of capitalism, and of the manner in which these modes were penetrated, subordinated, destroyed, or absorbed, first by the growing market and subsequently by industrial capitalism. Without such an examination, however, the concept of the "periphery" remains as much of a cover term as "traditional society." Its advantage over the older term lies chiefly in its implications: it points to wider linkages that must be investigated if the processes at work in the periphery are to be understood. Yet this examination still lies before us if we wish to understand how Mundurucú or Meo were drawn into the larger system to suffer its impact and to become its agents.

This book undertakes such an examination. It hopes to delineate the general processes at work in mercantile and capitalist development, while at the same time following their effects on the micro-populations studied by the ethnohistorians and anthropologists. My view of these processes and their effects is historical, but in the sense of history as an analytic account of the development of material relations, moving simultaneously on the level of the encompassing system and on the micro-level. I therefore look first at the world in 1400, before Europe achieved worldwide dominance. I then discuss some theoretical constructs that might allow us to grasp the determining features of capitalism and the modes that preceded it. Next I turn to the development of European mercantile expansion and to the parts played by various European nations in extending its global sway. Following the global effects of European expansion leads to a consideration of the search for American silver, the fur trade, the slave trade, and the quest for new sources of wealth in Asia. I then trace the transition to capitalism in the course of the industrial revolution, examine its impact on areas of the world supplying resources to the industrial centers, and sketch out the formation of working classes and their migrations within and between continents. In this account, both the people who claim history as their own and the people to whom history has been denied emerge as participants in the same historical trajectory.