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Cultural Identities and Global Political Economy from an Anthropological Vantage Point

DAVYDD J. GREENWOOD[*]

Analyzing the relationships between cultural identities and global political economy in an anthropologically meaningful way is to step beyond the normal boundaries of anthropological analysis. The complexity of multi-layered and dynamic cultural identities, the local and ethnographic focus of anthropology, and the abstractness of formulations of global political economy all militate against such an endeavor. Academic discourse finds comfort in a division of labor that makes such difficult topics disappear. Yet there are good reasons to address these issues.

The world is now interconnected by a greater multiplicity of rapid communication technologies than ever before. Gradually, the global economy is reconfiguring itself into a number of powerful trading blocs. More ominously, the world is experiencing increased levels of ethnic and racial conflict and human rights violations. The hope for world peace and harmony that many expected with the fall of the Iron Curtain has given way to public despair over Bosnia and Somalia and a sense of fear about the future of civil strife in countries in every world region. Generations of political leaders and scholars bent their efforts to the emergence of the moment in which the arms race would end only to find the post-arms race world a more dangerous place than they expected. The dangers are not only international; they now include the world within our borders, as the riots in Los Angeles, murders of foreign tourists in Miami, and a host of other kinds of violence demonstrate.

Despite our academic preferences, then, we will continue to be surprised about the turns that history takes unless we learn to link the cultural, local, and domestic to the economic, international, and global. The ability to make predictions and policies that work better may be the difference between countries and regimes that survive in the future and those that do not.[1]

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    1. Through the historical accidents of my career, I have developed a combined perspective on

the anthropological study of cultural identities and the failure of social institutions and governments to develop coherent views and reasonable expectations about the "cultural politics" of international regime change.

I began my anthropological career examining rural exodus in northern Spain. Because I began fieldwork in the Spanish Basque Country in 1968, I soon became a student of ethnic conflict and ethnogenesis with the onset of the present wave of terrorist assassinations in the town next to where I was working. Since then, studying any and all topics in this region has involved living through and writing about the process of ethnogenesis and ethnic strife.

In such situations, we all make decisions about causality. In the face of such events, it is not possible to leave them unexplained or to treat them as intellectual puzzles. Thus, I had to begin my own search for explanations of the ways such violent, depressing, and ultimately self-destructive situations could have come about and could be sustained. The study of the history of the Basque area and its relationship to the central government seemed particularly relevant to me and I worked on this subject for many years. When I had satisfied my own curiosity, I began trying to develop ways of writing about this for non-anthropological audiences to make sense of the events and correct what I felt were the most egregious misinterpretations I kept seeing in print.

After developing my own views on these matters, I spent much effort reading the literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflict, literature then dominated by political science and sociology. This literature did not seem to resonate at all with what I had experienced. In presenting the Basque case to such audiences, I found it surprisingly necessary to emphasize the malleability and dynamism of ethnicity against both internal and external attempts to envision identity as the enactment of trans-historical cultural essences. *See generally* Davydd J. Greenwood, *Ethnic Regionalisms in the Spanish Basque Country: Class and Cultural Conflicts*, 5 IBERIAN STUDIES 2:49 (1976); Davydd J. Greenwood, *Continuity in Change: Spanish Basque Ethnicity as an Historical Process, in* ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE WESTERN WORLD , 81 (M. Esmann ed., 1977).

While the intellectual situation has improved measurably since then (*See generally* IRVIN L. ALLEN, UNKIND WORDS: ETHNIC LABELING FROM REDSKIN TO WASP (1990); MICHAEL OMI & HOWARD WINANT, RACIAL FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1980S (1986); RICHARD RODRÍGUEZ, DAYS OF OBLIGATION: AN ARGUMENT WITH MY MEXICAN FATHER (1992); KATHY RUSSELL ET AL., THE COLOR COMPLEX: THE POLITICS OF SKIN COLOR AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS (1992); and MARY C. WATERS, ETHNIC OPTIONS: CHOOSING IDENTITIES IN AMERICA (1990)), essentialism regarding ethnic/racial discourse is still a basic element in the public arena. The United States census has created one of the most powerfully empiricized set of platonistic confusions anyone could imagine, racializing and "ethnocizing" everything from blood to geographical origin in an attempt to "enumerate" the people for the redress of social grievance. Minority affairs administrators must divide the population into neat categories and then we collectively are surprised when these neat categories do not match individual cases or when their reality becomes something so real that groups are more than willing to kill each other over them. Thus, despite improvements in the conceptual structures underlying the study of ethnic identity, the public arena still seems to operate with a pre-Darwinian vision of cultural differences.

In my own academic career, I have seen the impacts of these essentialisms in many different arenas. As a co-founder of an inter-college, multi-disciplinary major at Cornell University entitled Biology and Society, I experienced how our students come to us beautifully equipped with biological/cultural determinist frameworks that decrease their sensitivity to each other and increase their inability to deal with cultural differences in other than politically correct enactments of ideologies they neither understand nor believe. They are also equipped with no sense that their domestic experiences are linked in meaningful ways to larger events beyond our borders.

More recently, I have profited immensely from a collaborative venture with Carol Greenhouse that involves comparing the role of legal and administrative regimes in the treatment and construction of cultural differences. With a group of legal and anthropological specialists from the United States and Spain, we are at work on a comparative examination of the ways these two countries are attempting to deal with "difference." We are also trying to untangle the peculiar trajectories of anthropology through this labyrinth on both sides of the Atlantic. Dominant national visions of cultural difference must necessarily affect the development of the academic discipline most explicitly concerned with cultural

I. ELEMENTS IN THE ANALYSIS

A. Relational Relativism

A pivotal concept in my particular view of issues of cultural identity is "relational relativism."[2] It stems from the venerable concept of "cultural relativism" for which anthropology is famous.[3] Stereotypes about anthropology often center on this concept. According to the stereotype, anthropologists say that all cultures are different and all differences are worthy of due consideration. The supposed lesson is that no one can take cultural relativism, and therefore anthropology, seriously.

While it is possible in all fields to find a piece of writing to support almost any argument, viewing cultural relativism in this way makes the mistake of treating it as a theoretical concept. Cultural relativism is both defensible and important, not as a theoretical view but as a methodology with significant ethical implications.

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differences and similarities, namely anthropology.

Finally, for nine years, I have headed a large center for international studies at Cornell University. This center brings together language and area studies specialists, faculty interested in development processes around the world, and many international comparativists. I have also been involved in a variety of national-level collaborative advocacy efforts for international education that have involved me in policy-related discussions with people from campuses all over the country and with representatives of the higher education community in Washington.

I have been struck by a variety of, for me, counter-intuitive facts. Most internationalists lack well-developed concepts of the cultural dynamics of international social change. Beyond their own disciplines, many have nothing more than *New York Times* editorial page levels of knowledge of the domestic scene. Domestic specialists are equally uninformed about international matters. Foreign language and area studies specialists often are both insensitive to world context and static in the cultural frameworks they bring to the analysis of complex problems. International comparativists often have only the most schematic understandings of the history and cultural dynamics of the various world regions they compare.

Since the next generation of internationalists is being trained in programs operating within such frameworks, I now understand that we have a serious "pipeline" problem. We are not going to have a competent new generation of global thinkers because they are not being trained in existing programs. Instead, we are reproducing the international/domestic split and the economic-political/cultural split as if little has happened in the world to challenge such schematizing.

Together these experiences combine to structure my views on the issues of globalization. The interface between anthropology, ethnic studies, biosocial determinisms, and international studies administration is an interesting vantage point from which to provoke reflections on the complex, interrelated processes of globalization.

2. I have coined the term, but not the concept.

3. *See* MELVILLE HERSKOVITS, CULTURAL RELATIVISM: PERSPECTIVES IN CULTURAL PLURALISM 14 (1972); ALFRED L. KROEBER & CLYDE L. KLUCKHOHN, CULTURE: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS 344-54 (1952); *see generally* RATIONALITY (Brian R. Wilson, ed., 1970).

Shifting to a view of cultural relativism as a methodology, we see that it imposes certain rules on observers. When confronted with cultural differences that do not seem to make sense, cultural relativism requires us to continue the search for understanding by assuming that we have made a mistake. Anthropologists are trained to assume that differences may only appear not to make sense because we do not understand them, not because they are inherently nonsensical. This simple methodological rule of thumb launched anthropology's era of discovery of complexly structured linguistic, kinship, political, and religious systems where most other viewers saw either inferior and primitive behaviors and ideas or noble savages.[4] The will to continue asking questions, and to continue collecting and analyzing information, receives reinforcement from the cultural relativist argument. Cultural relativism, of course, has an underlying ethical charge. As a method, it only makes sense in the context of an ethical commitment to the notion that all human beings are fully human. They are all worthy of study for what we can learn about ourselves as a species.

Cultural relativism is not a call to accept behaviors that we find repugnant. It is a call first to be sure we understand what those behaviors are about and to be certain that we do not find them repugnant only because we do not understand them properly. It also imposes a requirement upon us to understand the context of behaviors that we find repugnant. We are required to try to understand how what is done could make any sense to the perpetrators. What we do individually and as political collectivities about such behaviors is then a matter of our private and public ethical and moral commitments. Anthropology frees no one from moral obligations.

Relativism also has an intrinsically comparative dimension which is often lost from view. As important as this notion was in the genesis of anthropology, its epistemological backdrop was not well developed because early professional anthropology developed a very strong positivist twist. In the attempt to overcome the speculative penchant of the so-called "armchair anthropologists," field anthropologists developed a virulent form of naive positivism that legitimated their analysis solely because they had gone out and "gotten the facts" themselves.

In arguing for the value of first-hand experience, these anthropologists lost sight of something they once clearly knew—that the purpose of the

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4. *See* ROBIN FOX, ENCOUNTER WITH ANTHROPOLOGY 47 (1991); and CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS, STRUCTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY 328-32 (1963).

anthropological enterprise was ultimately to study "them" for what "they" could teach about "us" here at home and then ultimately about all of "us" collectively. In other words, these anthropologists forgot that their study of others was always couched in views about themselves and their own cultures.

"Relational relativism" reinvokes this intrinsically comparative dimension of cultural analysis and interpretation. Building on the works of Goodenough and Wagner, this formulation links to a current spate of textual studies and constructivist social science.[5] From this vantage point, all statements about others are couched in images and discourse about ourselves. To gain analytical perspective on cultural differences, we must develop views about how we construct the relationships between us and them textually and theoretically.

Relational relativism also argues that cultures construct themselves in relation to their own constructions of "others."[6] This second meaning of the term is particularly germane to globalization because it focuses attention on the ways all cultural identities center on implicit and explicit comparisons. When we build these constructions around economic, legal, and administrative structures—themselves containing many hidden cultural premises—they can become active forces in conditioning the structure of conflict and cooperation domestically and internationally.

B. Race, Culture, and Ethnicity

A second pivot is that distinguishing between the concepts of race, culture, and ethnicity is all but impossible. Race, as a biological concept, has virtually no meaning for human populations.[7] It certainly provides no basis for classifying the U.S. population. Race, as a cultural concept in the

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5. *See generally* WARD H. GOODENOUGH, DESCRIPTION AND COMPARISON IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY (1970); and ROY WAGNER, THE INVENTION OF CULTURE (1975). For information concerning textual studies, see generally WRITING CULTURE: THE POLITICS OF ETHNOGRAPHY (James Clifford & George E. Marcus eds., 1986); GEORGE E. MARCUS & MICHAEL M. J. FISCHER, ANTHROPOLOGY AS CULTURAL CRITIQUE: AN EXPERIMENTAL MOMENT IN THE HUMAN SCIENCES (1986). On constructivist social science, see generally ANTHONY GIDDENS, CENTRAL PROBLEMS IN SOCIAL THEORY (1979); BJORN GUSTAVSEN, DIALOGUE AND DEVELOPMENT (1992).

6. *See* WAGNER, *supra* note 5, at 4.

7. For extended developments of these arguments, see DAVYDD J. GREENWOOD & WILLIAM A. STINI, NATURE, CULTURE AND HUMAN HISTORY: A BIO-CULTURAL INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY at vii (1977).

United States, has immense cultural significance but no coherent biological referent. Thus, we cannot make the distinction between race and culture itself in any intellectually defensible way. Ethnicity, the contemporary substitute term for race, has even less clear meanings. No one can defend a mapping of the relationships between ethnicity and race. The attempts to make a clear distinction between race, ethnicity, and culture turn into intellectual nightmares. Race, culture, and ethnicity are cultural constructs with immensely important human consequences.[8]

C. Constructivism

From the constructivist vantage point, culture is an ongoing historically and institutionally conditioned process of centering on the human activity of creating complex worlds of meaning. Understanding how groups make meanings is part of the study of what the meanings are. Furthermore, we know that humans make meanings that are "real" enough to die for. We also know that without the world of made meanings, humans cannot live.[9]

Here the immediate import of this perspective is that elaborate political attempts to pin down cultural identities as transhistorical absolutes (an activity that both those supporting and debunking different ethnic groups engage in) cannot succeed because of the very character of the phenomenon in question. The harder anyone works to literalize or stabilize a cultural identity, the more productive and protean it becomes, or it collapses completely.[10] This obviously implies that ill-considered cultural policies can have protean and uncontrollable consequences.

D. Political Economy

Constructing cultural differences in a polity that rewards difference has different consequences from engaging in such a process in a polity that

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8. For good arguments and references in support of this position, see MICHAEL OMI & HOWARD WINANT, RACIAL FORMATION IN THE UNITED STATES FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1980S (1986); MARY C. WATERS, ETHNIC OPTIONS: CHOOSING IDENTITIES IN AMERICA 147 (1990).

9. Clifford Geertz aptly describes man as "an incomplete, an unfinished animal." CLIFFORD GEERTZ, THE INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES 46 (1973).

10. See Davydd J. Greenwood, Ethnic Regionalalisms in the Spanish Basque Country: Class and Cultural Conflicts, 5 IBERIAN STUDIES 2:49 (1976); and DAVYDD J. GREENWOOD, THE TAMING OF EVOLUTION: THE PERSISTENCE OF NONEVOLUTIONARY VIEWS IN THE STUDY OF HUMANS 45-46 (1984) [hereinafter THE TAMING OF EVOLUTION].

suppresses it. Similarly, constructing cultural differences in an environment where there is economic growth is a very different process from constructing cultural differences to compete for diminishing resources. Without a much more developed understanding of the relationship between political economy and cultural differences, we collectively must respond to repeated surprises about the results of our own institutions and interventions in the lives of others.[11]

E. *Domestic Versus International*

One of the most interesting peculiarities of U.S. culture is how hard U.S. citizens work to retain the intellectually and politically incoherent notion that domestic cultural differences are fundamentally unlike international cultural differences. Why would we U.S. citizens try to persuade ourselves that the differences within our nation are completely different from those between nations and within other nations?

Perhaps this distinction permits us to deal with "our" differences through separate policy and moral frameworks, even though such frameworks themselves are not easily found. Perhaps it permits us to criticize ethnic cleansing and other genocidal activities beyond our borders, without looking too closely at the home front where disturbing forms of culturally grounded oppression occur daily.

Because our views on cultural differences, domestically and internationally, are incoherent, so too are our policies. We argue for forms of behavior and set up institutional structures that bedevil us with their consequences. We conduct the census and produce lists of culturally different groups, and we estimate the number of illegal aliens in the United States. Congress wrings its hands and legislates borders that cannot be maintained, even with guns, all in the interest of domestic politics. At the same time, international security and development policies are followed that only worsen these same domestic problems. Together, our approaches manage to exacerbate ethnic tensions domestically and promote continuing illegal immigration. At the same time, we also hold fast to our claims of being the one remaining superpower, the one that stands for democracy and freedom.

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11. *Cf.* IRIS M. YOUNG, JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE, 86-88, 164-68, 185-86 (1990) (providing analysis of impact of cultural differences on political activity).

F. The Need for a "Cultural Politics"

Together, these arguments have two particular foci. First, we must develop a better understanding of the importance of unintentional cultural productivity of both national and international administrative and legal change. Second, relative rates of economic growth play a vital role in augmenting or modulating conflicts over differences, both domestically and internationally. Our goal must be to develop policy-relevant frameworks for anticipating the cultural consequences of regime changes and rates of economic growth (i.e., genuine "cultural politics"). The alternatives are to continue to be surprised by cultural turmoils in the world within and outside our borders (e.g., Los Angeles, Germany, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) and to continue expending money and intellectual effort maintaining a fictional boundary between domestic and international issues.[12] The net result will be augmenting internal conflicts while continuing to weaken our international position through poorly conceived interventions in cultural conflicts elsewhere. Genuine cultural politics is based on relational relativism, an analytical vision of the concepts of race and ethnicity, an understanding of relative economic growth rates, and a recognition of the cultural productivity of institutional change.

II. ETHNICITY AND POLITICS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Memory is inconvenient for a social researcher concerned with ethnicity. Over the last two decades great "truths" about ethnicity have been forwarded audaciously, only to be completely swept away by events. When I began writing about Basque ethnic identity in 1970, the "melting pot" remained the dominant image for social research on differences in the United States, despite tremendous unresolved civil rights issues. A few voices even asserted ethnicity, a primitive form of political movement, was destined to be supplanted by the sophisticated politics of the welfare state and social justice.[13]

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12. Recent events in Haiti show how meaningless the boundaries of political frontiers can be. The deposed government existed in exile in the United States, and many Haitians have immigrated to the United States. Now years of diplomacy have resulted in the return of elements of the government to Haiti, blurring the sharp boundary between what is inside and outside political frontiers.

13. *But see*, Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism in the First World*, *in* ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE

Ethnicity was described as a survivor from an antiquated political past, still visible in primitive polities such as Africa (under the name of "tribalism"). States with strong ethnic conflicts, such as Spain and Ireland, were viewed as mired in a primitive stage of political development. Along with these ideas went an unproblematic adherence to the Western canon of cultural achievements (now often called the works of "dead white men").

These views were not supported by the facts. Ethnicity as a basis of political mobilization was not melting away in the United States or anywhere else. The U.S. civil rights movement's instrument of affirmative action worked strongly against the melting pot notion by seeking to remedy injustice by affirming oppressed groups' identities in law and administrative practice. Through this affirmation of their identities as minorities, these groups received some redress of their grievances, but also hardened the boundaries between themselves and everyone else. Trying to give this ethnogenetic activity a positive twist, some denominated the United States a "salad bowl" rather than a melting pot.

The melting pot was cracking in other ways too. The increasing numbers and concentrations of Hispanics and Asians in many regions of the United States became an undeniable cultural presence. This threatened some people; others welcomed the diversity and dynamism of these groups. Increasing Black militancy also made its mark. With the melting pot already in full retreat, the rising feminist movement further subtracted potentially one-half of the population from commitment to the "canon" of Western culture as previously understood.

Beyond our borders, the notion that ethnic identities were on the wane retreated. Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada had worked out carefully designed systems for managing, rather than eliminating, cultural differences within their borders. A "Europe of the regions" was being constructed, and some romantics thought they would see the end of the nation-state and the rise of a consociation of Europe's "natural" regions as a multiethnic polity.

In the mid-1970s, Spain's democratic constitution embodied ethnic regionalism and cultural rights in the very structure of the state to a greater degree than any other constitution written up to that time. With one of the highest rates of industrial growth in the world between 1965 and 1990, Spain successfully accommodated political democratization and ethnic

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WESTERN WORLD 19, 33-34 (Milton J. Esman ed., 1977) (critique of this view).

mobilization through economic growth and political astuteness. The example was largely ignored, since everybody knew from the tourist posters that "Spain is different!" and, courtesy of Alexander Dumas' nationalistic slur, that "Africa begins at the Pyrenees."

If previous ideas about ethnic identity and history had not sufficiently collapsed, the end of the Soviet system showed that ethnic conflict was not dead in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. If anything, totalitarianism had only held these conflicts at bay. Totalitarianism has stabilized the opponents in relation to each other, making them more powerful and dedicated adversaries than perhaps they were before. Lifting the yoke produced the predictable explosion, though it surprised many experts. These regions are immersed in ethnic feuding that is as close to uncontrolled as we have seen, outside of Los Angeles, in a long time.

The Western democracies completely failed to anticipate and to attempt to do anything about these conflicts. Busy celebrating our victory over the "evil empire," we failed to notice that joy in the streets had given way to the sectional hatreds of decades before. And while we were celebrating peace in Europe, Los Angeles exploded in a carnival of ethnic violence and hatred. These images dominated our attention for a week and then disappeared, overtaken by our fascination with hurricanes, electoral rhetoric, and starving Somalis (who seem to hate each other for some vague reason that the news resolutely does not identify as ethnic). Now we are in the midst of a new presidency. The Clinton campaign raised the expectations of every single ethnic group, but did so in an economic climate that does not seem to offer much hope of providing the wealth required to distribute much of anything equitably.

Equally surprising is that the prolonged experiences of Mexican, Haitian, Cuban, Jewish, Polish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigration and adjustment have not given us a sense of the connection between what we experience domestically and what is happening internationally. All of these immigrants arrive at our borders because of a complex mix of economic and political forces. Where is public policy discussion about why they were obliged to come here in the first place and about the character of their identities and connections to their places of origin?

Robert Reich summed up the dilemma well in the title of the last chapter of his *The Work of Nations*,[14] "Who is Us?" Reich was referring to the repeated statements that are made about what "we" in the United States think, what "we" in the United States should do, and how "we" in the United States should defend ourselves against foreign exploitation. Reich points out that, in this era of global economics and politics, who "we" are in such statements is by no means clear. If we include the principal investors in our economic system, then "we" would include the Dutch, British, and Japanese, among others. If we include Hispanics, Asians, and African-Americans, it is unclear whether an agenda for national effort can be forwarded that "we" could all subscribe to collectively, beyond economic growth for all.

Instead of conceptualizing the global processes which result in the shifting composition of our minority populations and problems, over the past thirty years we have built an increasingly complex system of quotas and other minority-oriented structures in an attempt to redress the very real evils of injustice within our borders. Yet the very instruments we employ unintentionally construct and stabilize new ethnic identities as a way of providing putatively fair and efficient administration. People are forced to define what group they belong to, even if the boundaries of such groups are unclear. Individuals involved may not know to which of a variety of possible groups they should belong or may not want to be anything but who they were before they had to emigrate. The classification systems grow more complex each year. There are multiple Hispanic, Asian, and Black categories. Qualifying as an American Indian or as a native Hawaiian has been reduced to the calculation of a "blood" fraction, a remarkable piece of neo-medievalism.

We have created a competitive ethnic market in which groups who most successfully organize to make claims on resources get the most resources. To make the claims, they must adapt to the U.S. ethnic minority system rules. As the abundance of resources changes, so does the intensity of the competition for them. Not surprisingly, by blindly following this line, we have ended up with a new set of ethnic conflicts created by the system originally designed to overcome inequality and inequity.

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14. *See* ROBERT REICH, THE WORK OF NATIONS: PREPARING OURSELVES FOR 21ST CENTURY CAPITALISM 301-15 (1991).

This group orientation affects all of our organizational systems. Corporations, educational institutions, and local governments are under legal obligations to deal with diversity. An index of the problem is the prominence of the subject, the "management of diversity," in book exhibits and advertisements for people working in management positions. The "difference" industry itself has become a highly lucrative one, and yet most of the material I have seen relies on a common sense distinction between "difference" (a euphemism for race and gender) and "competitiveness" (meaning competition with foreign corporations). Apparently, we wish to consider our domestic problems as cultural and our international problems as economic. The problems are not only interlinked, but both are simultaneously cultural and economic, so this is not a very promising approach.

As this dynamic has gained momentum, people have begun to recognize the fractures in our national community. For some, this is a loss to be blamed on someone. For others, the national community was always a lie. Regardless, each group now has its own canon and accepts no coercive overall canon of "dead white men" imposed by any other group (except a dwindling minority of living white men). What is suitable to read, how it is appropriate to dress or talk, to study history, literature, and social science have become matters for ethnic vigilance.

Though this seems like an impossible simplification, these contradictions did not bother most U.S. citizens while the United States was experiencing sustained and rapid economic growth. This made a larger pie for all. Redistributing marginal amounts of an ever-larger Gross National Product (G.N.P.) did not seem particularly problematic to any but diehard racists.

Because of this economic growth, the United States did not experience severe ethnic conflicts in the sustained way that we do today. In other countries, totalitarian oppression kept the ethnic fires banked. While racism and cultural prejudice were visible on the surface of life, the dominant groups wanted to believe that these phenomena would pass away along with other features of the old order.

In more recent times, the performance of the U.S. economy has provided declining resources to distribute via our system of ever more differentiated cultural rights. This has forced mobilization and social choices that resulted in increased tension between minorities and dominant groups, and among minorities themselves.

This situation illustrates some unintended consequences of the pursuit of social justice through redistributions of rights and goods according to ethnic criteria. What was a progressive, and perhaps integrating, policy under positive economic conditions results in the disarticulation of elements of our civil society when that economic climate changes. We have created an internal market for cultural groups to compete for crucial resources. While racism and cultural prejudice may have been pushed below the surface of public discussion, they seem to have been strengthened by policies designed to overcome them, particularly as economic competition becomes more acute.

Another cost of approaching differences in this way has been the unintended reinforcement of static and legalistic notions of identity. Because census-defined groups must come forward claiming rights to resources on the grounds of their transhistorical identity, their oppression, and their minority status, they are reified by the process set up to provide remedies for them.

This approach led to some important social gains in the United States, and I will not deny them. The alternatives to these policies are not yet clear. Generations of oppression and prejudice yielded nothing to the ordinary politics of social welfare. Accepting this, however, does not require us to accept the consequences of our inability to deal with these issues in other, perhaps more just and humane ways.

We are now in the process of exporting our way of thinking about cultural differences to deal with such complex international issues as the Palestinian question, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and contemporary Germany. We export our peculiar history of dealing with cultural identity by reification, ideas forged in a particular legal, economic, and ethical context, to locations where they do not fit. If we take stock of the trajectory of the last thirty years of this approach in the United States, and place it in global economic context, we might hesitate to make strong recommendations to other governments about how they should handle their differences.

III. WE ARE NOT READY FOR THE COMING "NEW" ORDER

In the future, we will experience increased international economic restructuring in which the United States is an important, but by no means dominant, player. We already see the increasing impact of ethnic politics in the international arena. This process will continue. Judging from our ill-

considered actions so far, it seems likely that we will take an approach to these conflicts very similar to what we have pursued domestically. We will probably argue for ethnic rights as a key component in social justice and try to develop a politics of minoritization within different world regions. Whether or not we will press for ethnic republics is not now clear, but it is possible.

We are entering an era in which international organizations are involved increasingly in administering and adjudicating a wide variety of cultural claims for rights, goods, and safety. The politics of race and cultural pride is likely to move beyond national boundaries and involve movements to "reclaim" identity by redrawing national maps in major ways and by relying on supranational authorities to control the use of force to permit these restructurings.

This will necessarily bring with it further movements to manage diversity internationally. Unless the history lessons from the United States, Somalia, Angola, South Africa, and the former Yugoslavia are taken more seriously, we collectively are likely to develop new international regimes based on hidden notions of race, on rudimentary cultural analysis, and little understanding of the impact of administrative and legal structures and processes on identities themselves.

My guess is that we in the United States will be quite unself-conscious in this process, analogizing from domestic experience (with the contradictions sanitized away) to the emerging world system, without appreciating the complex role ethnicity can play for good or ill or our own implication in ethnogenetic processes through our interventions.

IV. INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD OF UNLIKELY OUTCOMES

Given this pessimistic view of the future, how could we act to improve our performance? There are a number of lines of action that we could follow.

A. *History Counts*

Historically, domestic and international analyses of issues of identity generally have failed to comprehend the tremendous impact of legal and administrative institutions on cultural identities. The confidence that culture is something intrinsic, something real and out there beyond our control is

built deep into the Western cultural tradition, a tradition that "naturalizes" cultural differences by attributing them to biological differences or to environmental differences.[15]

B. Identity is Both Constructed and Real

We now have enough evidence to know that identity is not out there. It is a complex cultural construction that is profoundly sensitive to administrative and legal structures and that also carries its history with it. Identity is real, but is made and remade. Attempts to reconstruct the true identities of the past create a new, unprecedented, but not randomly constructed identity of the future. Remaking identities occurs in the context of previous makings within regime structures that create institutional constraints and opportunities. A further influence is the structure of opportunities created by patterns of economic growth. Those who write and administer the law must come to understand these relationships, or they will simply reinforce the weaknesses of the system.

C. Economic Cycles Affect Ethnic Relations

While no blind economic determinism regarding identity makes sense, failure to appreciate the impact of economic situations on identity formation is a fundamental mistake. Affirmative action as an administrative system was implicitly posited on the notion of a continuously growing economy. Without growth, the costs of affirmative action would have to be distributed from the well off to the less well off, a far more radical solution than most of the approaches envisioned. Affirmative action in a low growth or stagnant economy is a recipe for social conflict and the resurgence of virulent forms of racial ideologies, on both the right and the left.

A similar dynamic exists in the world system. The rates of economic growth in relation to the intensity of ethnic claims suggest a non-random geography of severe ethnic conflicts. A significant amount of conflict is in the area just behind the former Iron Curtain and in mediating countries like Germany. How will the already bad relationships between the Japanese and

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15. *See* THE TAMING OF EVOLUTION, *supra* note 10, at 35-36.

resident Koreans fare if the Japanese economy declines and the South Korean economy continues to develop?

D. No Longer "Us" and "Them"

U.S. discourse draws a clear line between U.S. domestic problems and the rest of the world and its international problems. We talk about a national economic policy and we talk about "our" minorities, yet our economy is owned by people from many parts of the world. Many of "them" reside here, managing their assets and employing "us" in the process. While firms are globalizing, our national debates about multiculturalism and affirmative action are not. We do not analogize the conflicts between the Serbs and Croats in the former Yugoslavia with conflicts between Koreans and Blacks in Los Angeles, or conflicts between neo-Nazis and Turks in Germany with racial attacks in metropolitan New York City, and so on.

E. Learning Where Multinational Corporations Fit In

What is the culture of the multinational corporation? How do the Japanese owners of a U.S. auto manufacturing plant deal with affirmative action? How does the U.S.-based management of Xerox deal with personnel policies and Asian marketing strategies of Fuji Xerox? We do not deal with these questions under the heading of foreign policy or as a dimension of multiculturalism. Instead we tell managers to take a "diversity pill" in the form of books, videos, and consultants who teach them how to manage diversity. We often treat minority hiring and the international operations of a company as separate areas, just as we treat domestic racial confrontations and international ethnic conflicts as separate issues. We make no reference to international diversity, to the national dynamics affecting international regimes, or to the international regimes affecting national dynamics.

V. CONCLUSION

I suspect we will fail to break our old molds of thought. Vested interests, created by earlier generations of policy, are very hard to modulate. The future will bring increasing permeability of international political boundaries, consolidation of major international trading blocks, and

increased speed and diversity of communication. Along with these will come decreasing ability to control the impact of international economic and political change on domestic civil society. As a result, economic restructuring brought about by international competition will increasingly be a problem for our domestic system of difference management. As many companies fail or are forced to fundamentally readjust, we are likely to have a decreasing ability to control the confrontations of peoples to whom we have made conflicting commitments of affirmative action. We will increasingly hear the voices of the once-privileged middle class whites whose sense of desperation is already apparent.

We will have a decreasing ability to manage domestic cultural differences in the light of international economic forces. I sincerely doubt that we will accept the blame for our problems. This would not be the first time we have succumbed to the temptation to blame whomever is conveniently located outside of our boundaries for our problems. In struggling with our internal problems, we are likely to exacerbate our international conflicts in such a way that we compromise our ability to deal with international economic partners who could make some difference to our declining standard of living.

This process can give rise to contradictory scenarios. For example, we can look forward to greater integration of the U.S. economy with that of Latin America, along with increasing conflict between diverse Hispanics in the United States and conflict over the presence of Hispanic culture in the United States. We can expect greater U.S. political involvement in international conflicts that are defined in ethnic terms, while we are unable to resolve similar conflicts within our borders. Taken together, this means that we are likely to face a greater inability to separate strategic and ethnic interests, nationally and internationally, than at any time in our history. Unless we can rise above these problems, we are unlikely to survive socially or economically.

To rise above them requires the development of a complex political economy of cultural difference. This approach must be historical, multicausal, institutionally specific, economically informed, legally grounded, and global. These requirements suggest why the task has not yet been taken up.