

MARXISM AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF CIVILIZATIONS

I. ON THE ODYSSEY OF THE MARGINALIZED SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF “CIVILIZATION”

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx takes place in a setting which differs fundamentally from that in which his critical theses were worked out. These theses, from his “juvenilia” to *Das Kapital*—in turn celebrating its centenary—and the foundation of the International, changed the destiny of the world, of its peoples, States and nations. One is readily aware of the modifications in historical, economic, and political conditions, buffeted by revolutions and confrontation. But it is with difficulty that specialists—whether of theory or practice—take cognizance of other dimensions of this difference, which we consider to be *fundamental* to, and constitutive of, the very formulation of the theoretical problem which forms the subject of our study. Finally, however, the *nationalitarian* phenomenon asserts itself, day

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after day, as an objectively central factor in the multiform dialectics of revolutions, of evolutions, of counter-revolutions, and of apparent stagnation. Here a geographical thread is added to the historical one. But this new element is not, as some would wish it, a topographical one. The aim of the geographical dimension, or rather that of historical geography, is not to accommodate the geopolitical analysis of the contemporary world, but to serve as a framework for the emergence on the sociological level of a key concept, that of civilization, which seems to us to be necessary in order to determine the general theoretical pattern of the evolutionary process of human societies in this time of ours, the second half of the twentieth century.

Seen from the "periphery," from the Three Continents which are today inhabited by more than three quarters of the human race, Marxism appears as a *Weltanschauung*, a theory—philosophy, ideology and methodology in one—which represents the most advanced critical synthesis of western civilization and western cultures. More specifically, it represents that of Europe in the Age of Enlightenment and of the great political, social and economic revolutions. This vision of Marxism, which was—very precisely—that of Marx, Engels and Lenin, places it in terms of civilization: that is to say, it permits us to define its characteristics and its relation to the sum of the conceptual and practical problems which do not relate to the European, western world.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, what was the central problem facing European and western civilization? There was a complex of national States, certainly very different from each other, which for several centuries had been self-assured, or which were entering on the decisive phase of national unity; of economic systems based on the industrial revolution and the technology of modern science; social regimes descended from the slow apprenticeship of feudalism which had been broken down by the bourgeoisie that carried at that time the message of liberty and of social rationality: a whole spectrum of national cultures, together with a common basis of cultural accumulation and a homogenized conceptual apparatus; political hegemony over peripheral parts of the world—the great colonial empires—as a result of this unique concentration of the means of power which

was subdivided through the network of finance, of the mastery of the seas, of the operation of powerful military forces, starting from the strategy of the epoch of the industrial revolution, as formulated by Napoleon and Clausewitz. It seemed that nothing could, at the time or in the foreseeable future, challenge this dominant civilization. From outside, at least. At the heart of the system itself, an abundance of incoherences, contradictions and conflicts gave rise to bitter class struggles between the wealthy and the deprived—usually the proletariat, bearers of the future—struggles which, in their turn (from the Peasants' War to March 1917, via the Paris Commune) led to the insurrections and the armed revolutions against the hegemony of the bourgeoisie on the internal front. The very rationality of the system which claimed to be rationalist—and humanist—was contested, by the people of the west themselves, using that same “armed critique” which is today in action from one end to the other of the Three Continents.

An agonizing, indeed an unthinkable, revision became necessary. How, indeed, was one to dare to question again so striking an achievement as Napoleon's, Hegel's and Victoria's Europe? In the name of what? To whose advantage? To what end? The irrefutable and irreversible merit, on the theoretical and historical planes, of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels is that they clearly perceived that this fundamental criticism was needed, starting from the most advanced elements of Europe's very civilization and culture (German philosophy, English political economy, French socialism). They conceived and specified the central role of the *praxis*. They understood the revolutionary role of the social group which was then the best equipped and the least well off (optimally, by comparison with the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie of Europe). They proclaimed aloud that the message of socialism and of the classless communist society was indeed to give man back to himself, as the no longer alienated master of his destiny—not, let it be remembered, in utopian terms, but on a warm, human, concrete basis. To resolve the crisis of an eminent civilization (“the civilization” at that time), it was necessary to strike at the very heart of the dehumanizing socio-economic system. This was, indeed, the central theoretical problem of Marx's Marxism; this is, indeed, the root of his very

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character: that is to say, a theoretical, militant, *endogenous* critique founded on the ideological and political direction of that equally endogenous process, the struggle between social classes.

Nevertheless, although the fundamental theoretical problem of Marxism is indeed endogenous, it must be observed that it cannot be called centripetal. For this Marxian humanism which Europe, after long insistence on “universalism” alone, has discovered and marvelled at, has always constituted the very objective of Marx’s and Engels’ socialist revolution; and this objective has never ceased to illuminate with a warm glow of light the socio-economic analyses in lands such as Asia, Africa and Latin America, where men have to survive physically—in a maximized sense—and therefore, so to speak, can only formulate the satisfaction of their needs in humanist terms.¹ In these lands, one’s daily bread takes on the colours of independence, of liberty, of dignity, of fraternity—of *happiness*, that ever-new idea.

The beginnings of ethnology, and then of anthropology, coincide with the work of the founders of scientific socialism. In the first instance, the problem is one of describing the uncivilized. What is exotic must become a computation, a descriptive inventory, or the restitution of a human atmosphere. The perspicacious irony of Montesquieu’s comment: “How can one be a Persian?” leads naturally to a research into the *differences*, into the division and the categorization of realities. But according to what criteria?

Historical evolution, and first of all² *historicism*, with E.B.

¹ This explains the blossoming of unknown or misunderstood works on socialist humanism, and particularly Marxist humanism, in many countries (Mexico, Argentine, India, Indonesia etc.). No trace of this (except one text out of '35, by L. S. Senghor) in the interesting book *Socialist Humanism*, edited by Erich Fromm, Allen Lane, Penguin Press, London 1967.

For the relationship between war and civilization, cf. the interesting contrast established by B. H. Liddell-Hart between Sun Tzu (4th century B.C.) and Clausewitz, entirely favourable to the former, in *Strategy, the Indirect Approach*, Faber, new ed., London 1967; and Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith, Oxford University Press, London 1963:

“What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy... Thus, those skilled in war subdue the enemy’s army without battle. They capture his cities without assaulting them and overthrow his state without protracted operations” (pp. 77-99).

² Articles on “Ethnology” (J. Beattie) and “Social Anthropology” (John L. Fisher), in *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, Julius Gould & William L. Kolb eds.; Tavistock Publications, 1964, pp. 245-7, 644-6; and Paul Mercier: *Histoire de l’anthropologie*, P.U.F., Paris, 1967; etc.

Tylor (1871) and L.H. Morgan (1877), the latter taken up first by the original, then by contemporary Marxist anthropology (F. Engels, V. Gordon Childe, R. and L. Makarius).³ The model is that of “the” civilization, that is to say Europe and North America, during the imperial and imperialist period. In Tylor’s work, we find a civilizing proselytism which continued in our day in the form of American social ideology. All in all, this approach remains an *ethical* one. It came to an end with the introduction of the notion of *coherence* or of *internal efficacy*, notably in the works of V. Gordon Childe (1951), who defined the specific characteristics of civilization simultaneously in sociological and Marxist terms: “The aggregation of vast populations in the cities; the primary producers (fishermen, cultivators etc.), the full-time specialized craftsmen, the merchants, the officials, the priests, and the rulers; an effective concentration of economic and political power; the utilization of conventional symbols to register and transmit information (writing), and equally that of conventional criteria for weights and measures, for space and time, leading to a certain mathematical and calendar science.”⁴ The properly ethical dimension—the moral one—dominates the work of A.L. Kroeber (1949) and R. Redfield (1953) in particular. The classical approach is effectively summarized by J.H. Robinson in the article “Civilization” in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1928).⁵ The process of differentiation reaches its climax on the conceptual plane with the well-known distinction of Alfred Weber (1935) between “social structure,” “civilization” and “culture”: “Civilization represents the human effort to conquer the world of nature and of culture by means of intelligence in the spheres of science, technology and planning (...). Culture, as distinct from civilization, is based on the realization of the mind, of the philosophical and emotional self.”⁶ Naturally, this effort constitutes a “vital aggregate,” a European and Occidental *Lebensaggregation*.

³ On these last authors, see: *Les origines de l'exogamie et du totémisme*, Gallimard, Paris, 1963, which marks the renewal of contemporary Marxist ethnology.

⁴ *Social Evolution*, Watts, London, 1951, p. 161.

⁵ Retained in the latest edition (1963), vol. V, 824-31.

⁶ Notably in *Kulturgeschichte als Kulturosoziologie*, Piper & Co., München, 1950.

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The turning-point of the century, as regards the relations between Europe and the west on the one hand, and the colonial world on the other, is not—or not yet—a characteristic crisis situation. The hegemony and supremacy of Europe and North America persist. However, the “other” world comes of age: revolts and wars against colonialism and imperialism (India, Egypt, Algeria, China, Iran in particular) receive a surprising and unexpected viaticum in the shape of Japan’s victory over czarist Russia in 1905.⁷ From the moment it asserts itself, the “other” world exists, and, in this latter example, proves itself by force. The field of sociological study which concerns itself with essentials—the sociology of knowledge, historical sociology, and social philosophy—is a discipline in a formative state, which, quite naturally, takes a fresh look at non-traditional phenomena; while historiography remains at best a positivist study. The link is made through the study of inferior societies (E. Durkheim, M. Mauss in particular), in conjunction with social and cultural anthropology, which appears on the scene at about the same period. A new sector of sociology, baptized “colonial sociology” (R. Maunier) appears, precisely in 1922.

Can one, therefore, speak of a new theoretical contribution, a specific category of problems? During this period, the chief works—none of which is Marxist even in inspiration—are very poor in theoretical content. However, around 1880 in the United States a concept appears, that of “acculturation,”⁸ which enjoys a certain measure of success, in so far as it expresses the central nucleus of deep western thought, formerly explicit and now always implicit, as is strongly implied by B. Malinovski’s critique (written, it is true, in 1940): “The term ‘acculturation’ is an ethnocentric term with a moral significance. (... It) implies, by the preposition *ad* which begins it, the concept of *terminus ad quem*. The uncultured man must receive the benefits of our culture; it

⁷ This dimension, an unexpected one for Europeans, is clearly illuminated in all recent works on the history of national movements and on the culture of the principal Afro-Asian countries.

⁸ Introduced by J. W. Powell, director of the Bureau of American Ethnology, in *Introduction to the Study of Indian Languages*, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1880, p. 80.

is he who must change, and be converted into one of us.”⁹ This could not be better put.

There is no evidence of Marxism. In the works of V.I. Lenin on imperialism and the national question, the superstructural dimension remains of secondary importance. “Autro-marxism” pays more attention to it, on the basis of the tradition of German cultural history and philosophy; but the question is still that of the problem of nationalities in Europe.¹⁰ Jaurès develops a generous Socialist humanism which remains unnoticed. In recently unified Italy, the problem of the South gives rise to a intense but incomplete theoretical elaboration by A. Gramsci;¹¹ through the medium of Italian cultural dualism, European Marxism glimpses the problem of the dialectic of civilization, the incompatibility of the North, industrialized and cultivated, with the South, which has its roots in the human landscape of the non-European Mediterranean. Only the theorists and the sociologists of the imperial lands directly involved are aware of the existence of the problem—albeit in the aforementioned restricted sense. The “other” world is, it is true, perceived. But it is, literally, “barbaric,” un-“civilized”: it behoves one to “reduce” it to the plane of reality and that of theory. The central problematic of Marxism provides the instrument of the analysis and the appropriate action-lever by means of which the element that we have defined as constituting the central problem—the crisis—of western civilization at this stage in its historical evolution can be faced and solved. It is the progress of Marxism in the corpus of the social sciences and of sociology that constitutes the essential element; meanwhile,

⁹ In his Introduction to F. Ortiz, *Contrapunto cubano del tabaco y del azúcar*, La Habana, 1940.

¹⁰ On Marxism and the theoretical problems of the nation, cf. the excellent thesis of S. F. Bloom: *The World of Nations, a Study of the National Implications in the Work of Marx*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1960. A recent conference of the Marxist Studies and Research Centre of Paris on “The idea of civilization” (Nov. 1965) is based on the following assertion: “The idea of ‘civilization’ has not been elaborated in classic works on Marxist thought (...). There, where one expected to find it, is the concept of ‘nation’ in its place.” (Jean Boulier-Fraissinet). But this neglect is not ascribed to the nucleus of civilization where the thought of Marxian then classic Marxist are elaborated.

¹¹ Notably in Antonio Gramsci’s *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, Einaudi, Torino, 1954; and the interesting issue on: “Prassi rivoluzionaria e storicismo in Gramsci,” *Critica Marxista*, Quaderno No. 3, Roma, 1967.

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the State born from the October Revolution of 1917 is destined to shake the world—and not only the “civilized” world.

II. THE ERA OF WORLD REVOLUTIONS: SOCIOLOGY AND CIVILIZATIONS

After October 1917, the history of the world—both “civilized” and peripheral—comes under the sign of the revolutionary phenomenon. We have socialist revolutions; revolutions of national liberation—which we cannot list here even in the form of a typological sketch—but also, naturally, counter-revolutions, wars of extermination, genocide. The world rediscovers its unity, and at the same time its diversity. One might claim that every age has known violence. Violence, in the 20th century, is seen as an instrument for the realization of an aim that is human, millenarian, utopian, voluntarian, revolutionary-romantic, or, more simply, concretely and historically inevitable, given the data of reality. And the very elaboration of this aim, of its inherent problems, as well as the elaboration of the global counter-objective of imperialism and reaction, is based on an ideology, viz. Marxism which they wish either to embody or to arrest. It must be understood, of course, that we are not dealing here with the influence of the first of the great socialist revolutions, but with the impact of the sum of these national and social revolutions, animated, or influenced, by Marxism from the Paris Commune to Vietnam.

In the field with which we are dealing here—that of the very content of sociology and its relation to the dialectic of civilizations—several evolutionary factors merit our attention.

First of all, the differentiation of sociology into sectors affects sociological research and theory and programmes of instruction. The current rift between theoretical and operational sociology—for the gap does not lie between their respective methodological tools (i.e. mathematics, history, field research, ideological postulates, etc.), but between the objectives which these two great trends of modern sociology set themselves; between the definitions of the nature of work and the sociological missions adopted by the epigones of either side—dates back in our opinion to the years of the great world economic crisis of 1929-1932. At this stage, European positivism had played its part in the field of the sciences

of man and society; and the deep-rooted ideology of pragmatism and of the empiricism of the State—and of the Culture—that is most directly affected by this crisis, viz., that of the United States, enters the field. It takes two principal forms. On the one hand, sociologists formed in the disciplines of European philosophy and history represent the form of a- and anti-historical structuralism, which consists in the enumeration of “types,” “models,” “schemes” and “structures,” in distinguishing between inextricable interrelations, and in finding shades of meaning in descriptions and analyses as a function of rigid criteria, claiming justification by virtue of the exigencies of the sociological “methodology”; henceforward the latter is pledged to describe that which is, to quantify it, since it believes that historicism can only lead to causal interpretations and praxis. The chief exponent of this way of thought, of course, is Talcott Parsons; his numerous emulators often lack his inspiration. On the other hand, the second form must not be confused with this structuralist sociology; it consists of a social science which grew up from the vulgar scientism of the late 19th century. Here we enter the fertile field of social surveys, and of statistical aggregates of all kinds. The resolutely formalist, anti-historicist and anti-theoretical quality of these studies results in tables, typologies and concepts whose interpretative value is almost nil; these professional sociologists have given us commercial evaluations¹² and have given rise to science’s present reticence towards sociology.

It is true that this crisis diverted a significant proportion of rising sociologists. The culminating point appears to have been reached between 1930 and 1952, when first the Second World War and then the Korean War allowed one to think that the nucleus of western supremacy has overcome the danger from within: the “Great Society,”¹³ fixed in the cold war, reaffirms its grip, while the productivist way of life, and productivist ethics, seem to become a compulsory model for everyone. Theoretical sociology goes on its way, in the shadow of its great founders, among whom two prime influences stand out—Max Weber and Karl

¹² As exemplified by Paul H. Lazarsfeld, William H. Sewell, Harold L. Wilensky, eds.: *The Uses of Sociology*, Basic Books, New York, 1967.

¹³ Accompanied by the “Grand Theory” of Talcott Parsons...

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Marx. The quality of Weber's disciples and the number of works inspired by him are well known, although his own work is today heavily contested. Raymond Aron said of him that he was "our contemporary," a thinker "who gives a dogmatic character to the rejection of dogmatism, who accords to the contradiction of values a definitive truth, and who, finally, recognizes nothing but partial science and strictly arbitrary choice": a tortured thinker, more than the philosopher of industrial society—a "Marx of the bourgeoisie" (E. Fleischmann).¹⁴ An idealist philosophy of history leads him to assign to culture a central role in the dialectic which arises from the State; his approach is strongly marked by the formalism of his age, which is also the formalism of German Expressionism: hence his influence on American structuralist sociology.

Weber starts from and bases himself upon Marx—as do the *whole* thought and science of man and society in the 20th century. The influence of Marx expresses itself in a number of ways: directly, through the thought and research of avowedly Marxist sociologists, sometimes engaged in revolutionary political activity; and indirectly in the works of those who explicitly recognize the contribution of Marxist theses, but without proclaiming themselves Marxists. It expresses itself implicitly, in the works of the great majority of sociologists—mainly theorists; but also in a fair proportion of operational sociologists, insofar as the central theses of Marxism are, so to speak, taken for granted (everywhere: in works dealing with the importance of the socio-economic infrastructure; in the works of theoretical sociologists dealing with the relations between infrastructure and superstructure; in far more complex terms, in works on the dialectic of classes and social groups, and on the historical evolution of societies; the role of *praxis* is played down). Here we must draw attention to a fourth group: that of sociology in the Three Continents, where the majority view is explicitly Marxist and where Marxism inspires theoretical and concrete research which is beginning, in a number of

¹⁴ R. Aron, *Les étapes de la pensée sociologique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1967, pp. 497-583; E. Fleischmann, "De Weber à Nietzsche," *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, V (1964), No. 2, pp. 190-238.

countries (Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, Tunisia, India, etc.),¹⁵ to lead to new theoretical formulations, often of great innovatory value.

These considerations illuminate the problems of the differentiation into sectors of sociology as a discipline, and also the problem of how to set up a sociology of civilizations. After the Second World War, four types of classification merit our attention: first of all, that of the Durkheim school, in the critical and socialist extension by the G. Gurvitch; the recent elaboration, under the aegis of Unesco, of the Anglo-American classifications; the classification of the Marxist sociologist T.B. Bottomore; finally, the list of the research committees of the International Association of Sociology, after the VIth Congress at Evian (1966).¹⁶ Two facts are to be noted: firstly, the proportion of disciplines and branches relating to superstructural sociology is markedly greater in the first, second and fourth classifications, than in the Anglo-American one (which is in fact essentially American); secondly, although superstructural sociology becomes increasingly important, the very notion of the possibility of a sociology of civilizations bears witness to definite uneasiness on the level of elaboration. Already in 1950, a useful sociological manual, inspired by Durkheim, isolated the "sociology of civilization" in the framework of a discipline known as "political sociology" ("the State, the nation, the civilization"); here, problems were presented in the terms of the dialectic of non-western civilizations, together with "the" civilization, in a humanist perspective of progress.¹⁷ The *Traité de sociologie*, published under the direction of G. Gurvitch in 1960, marks the consecration of the sociological concept of civilization (two sections out of the ten that make up the two volumes); but its real concern was the various problems posed by the "sociology of the works of civilization" (religions, knowledge, morals, law, criminality, childhood, language, art, music, literature). However, it also in-

¹⁵ For Brazil I would mention particularly the remarkable special issue published under the direction of Celso Furtado of the journal *Les Temps Modernes*, devoted to this subject (XXIII, Oct. 1967, No. 257, pp. 577-760).

¹⁶ Respectively: Georges Gurvitch, *Traité de sociologie*, P.U.F., Paris, 2 vols, 1960; J. Gould & W. L. Kolb, *op. cit.*; T. B. Bottomore, *Sociology, a Guide to Problems and Literature*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1962; International Sociological Association: *Annual Report 1966*, Geneva, 1967.

¹⁷ Armand Cuvillier. *Manuel de sociologie*, P.U.F., Paris, fourth ed., 1960, ii, 666-86.

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cluded a study by R. Bastide on the “problems of the intersection of civilizations and of their works.”¹⁸ The comparative approach is also found in the tenth section, which deals with the “problems arising from the relationship between so to speak ‘archaic’ societies and ‘historic’ societies” (three chapters), and also in the chapter on the “sociology of underdeveloped areas”. Basically, the subject under discussion is the modern civilization of Europe and North America; the others are called “societies” or “regions” and are the objects of nascent political anthropology. Thus the problem of the dialectic of civilizations has been formulated. In 1966, out of the 13 main disciplines officially recognized by the A.I.S., eight (plus political sociology) belong to *superstructural* sociology, in particular the new disciplines: mass communications, education, leisure and popular culture, the sociology of medicine, psychiatry and the sociology of science. Shortly afterwards, a Committee is created for research into the “sociology of the new nations”: it aims at concentrating on research into national formations, some of which are the oldest in the world, and also into contemporary underdeveloped societies. The sociology of civilizations is not yet internationally recognized.

The manual of T.B. Bottomore finally leads us to the heart of the problem. This is the *first*, and hitherto the only manual of general sociology in which all aspects of this discipline are studied on the basis of the *double problematic* of western sociology (of countries with capitalist and socialist socio-economic régimes), and on that of the underdeveloped world represented on this occasion by India.¹⁹ Not only is a chapter on “social structures, societies and civilizations” (III: 7), included in this work, but there is also a study of standard problems based on the dialectic of sociological problems; here the problems of the ex-colonial world are used as cases in point, as indices, for measuring the truly scientific (that is to say universal) coefficient of the two main tendencies of

¹⁸ An excellent study in *Traité*, ii/315-30, which links up with the whole work of R. Bastide. Cf. also the *Contributions à la sociologie de la connaissance*, published under his direction, Anthropos, Paris, 1967.

¹⁹ India is the only country in the colonial world that Marx—and also M. Weber—mention in a few scattered works. Concerning India, a sociologist devotes a general manual to centering its sociological problems on the United States (H. T. Muzumdar, *The Grammar of Sociology, Man in Society*, Asia Publ. House, London, 1966)...

traditional sociology. The author's double rooting is significant: he belongs on the one hand to one of the great ex-colonial powers (Great Britain); and on the other hand to Marxism at grips with the problems of the Three Continents.

These problems are *essentially* problems of civilization, and not of "development." Before embarking on this subject, which forms the nucleus of this article, it seems appropriate to review the historiography of its conceptualization. Taking up an intuitive idea of E. Durkheim and M. Mauss,²⁰ Arnold Toynbee has since 1934 adhered to a typology of civilizations (he numbers 21 and dubiously calls them "societies"). One of his main theses must be remembered: different societies maintain relations in so far as they share a common culture and cultural tradition.²¹ The super-structural factor thus becomes, for the historian and the sociologist, the key to an understanding of a different world, that is to say of other civilizations, formerly peripheral, barbaric or colonial. But something more than a hypothesis of method was needed. Once more, a case study in depth was to give one fresh matter for theoretical reflexion. For this we are indebted to Cambridge's great biologist Joseph Needham. In his monumental encyclopaedia, *Science and Civilization in China*, which began to appear in 1954,²² the aim is, precisely, that of exploring that other, major civilization of the East of today, start-

²⁰ "Note sur la notion de civilisation," *L'Année Sociologique*, XII (1909-12), pp. 46-50.

²¹ *A Study of History*, 12 vols., Oxford University Press, London, 1934-56. In his recent *Change and Habit, the Challenge of Our Time*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, the author lists the civilizations as being between 15 and 30 in number, depending on the criteria adopted (p. 69).

²² Cambridge University Press, London. Out of seven parts, in several volumes, the following have already appeared: I, II, III, IV-A, IV-B. The author gives us the theoretical basis of his work in: "The Past in China's Present," *The Centennial Review*, IV (1960), 2, pp. 145-78; No. 3, pp. 281-308. Cf. also Raghavan Iyer, ed.: *The Glass Curtain between Asia and Europe*, Oxford University Press, London, 1965. Also the precursory essay of Chang Tung-sun: "A Chinese Philosopher's Theory of Knowledge," *The Yenching Journal of Social Studies*, I (1939), No. 2. The integrationism of the Right is well expressed by General Golberri de Couto o Silva, one of the principal theoreticians of the military highschool of Brazil, who bases himself on T. S. Eliot ("If, tomorrow, Asia were to be converted to Christianity, that would not mean that it was converted into part of Europe") and the Lusitanian ideology of Coimbra: "the west as ideal, the west as proposition, the west as programme (...), that current of ideals, propelled by

ing from a millenary history, that of China; and if its aim is indeed that of constructing a new universalism—"To dissipate the shadows, to break down the ignorance, to bring together the divergent streams of human enterprise—to discover perhaps that they are not so divergent as is sometimes thought"—the method is sociological and Marxian: "Only an analysis of the social and economic structures of Eastern and Western cultures, not forgetting the great role of systems of ideas will in the end suggest an explanation of both these things." Certainly, to this day, no work of this magnitude has been undertaken on the non-Western world, a work which combines the most extreme scientific rigour with insight, with the voice of reason, and with feeling. Volume after volume, an "other" world rises up in all its grandeur, at once specific and universal: a civilization unfolds before us with its conception of man and its scale of values, with its own philosophy and ideology, interpreted on the basis of the specific history of this land, a history in which the analysis is sustained by the economic and social structures which make the Chinese phenomenon intelligible, and illuminate to an unusual extent the great controversy of our time. In commending this work of prime importance, we must also note that another civilization—Islam—has been the object of comprehensive studies by C. Cahen and M. Rodinson, which illuminate the situation in the light of Marxism. The latter writer succeeds in establishing the problematics of the relationship between the classical legacy and the contemporary Islamic and Arab world.²³ Numerous works, some of which contain new mate-

history, that source of all creative energy (...): science as an instrument of action; democracy as a formula of political organization; Christianity as the highest ethical model of social life." After Islam, the Moors and the Turks, and then Stalin's Russia, it is "the China of Mao (wohich) by relying vigorously, on the one hand upon a surprising degree of accelerated technological and scientific progress, and on the other hand upon an enormous demographic potential gathered together under a totalitarian system, has made of it the standard-bearer of a fulminating counter-offensive and a principal arm against the west, already so shaken (by Marxism) in its fundamental beliefs." (*Geopolitica do Brasil*, ed. José Olympio, Rio-de-Janeiro, 1967, 226-34. It would be impossible to express better the deepest thoughts of a whole spectrum of key European thinkers—from Right to Left.

²³ Cf. in particular the numerous single articles by C. Cahen; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in the Modern World*, McGill University Press, Montreal, 1960, in which one finds Marxist elements; M. Rodinson, *Islam et Capitalisme*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1967.

rial (J. Berque, N. Berkes, etc.), have clearly illustrated certain aspects of this civilization,²⁴ without, however, aiming to provide a consistent interpretation in the general framework of the sociology of civilizations. The great domains of India, Japan, Vietnam, Persia, Turkey, the relations between the great civilizations of Andean America and modern Latin America, and the corresponding relationships in Black Africa, have been partially explored; but we still do not possess an exhaustive and significant interpretation.

The sum of these works—sociological and historical, or written from a sociological point of view—allow us to arrive at a clarification of our definitions, to which we will subsequently keep. “By *culture*, we mean the ideal aspects of social life as distinct from the relationships and the forms of association existing in reality between individuals; and by *a culture*, the ideal aspects of a particular society.” In this sense culture belongs to the field of study of the sociology of knowledge and of culture, in its widest sense; that is to say, of the sociology of superstructures.

How are we, in this case, to study “a culture”? By what principles or what criteria can one distinguish one culture from another? The same author, in his definition of civilization, provides the outline of an answer: “By *a civilization* we mean a cultural complex made up of the main identical characteristics of a certain number of individual societies.”²⁵ But the author resolutely abjures the “culturalist” approach, and insists on the organic relations, within every society, between the “material and non-material elements of culture.”

We are now at the turning point. We should pause on the dates: they are all *after 1950*, that is to say after the triumph of

²⁴ Particularly those of Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*, McGill University Press, Montreal, 1963; those of Jacques Berque and Jean-Paul Charnay and others: *L'ambiguïté dans la culture arabe*, Anthropos, Paris, 1967; Mohi Eddi Çaber, *Al-tagħayyur al badâri wa tanmiyat al-moujtama* (The transformation of civilization and the development of society), A.S.F.E.C., Sir el-Layân, 1962; Abdallah Laroui, *L'idéologie arabe contemporaine*, Maspéro, Paris, 1967; etc.

²⁵ T. B. Bottomore, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-6. Several comprehensive works, particularly: M. Mauss, “Civilisation. Le mot et l'idée,” *Semaine du Centre de la Synthèse*, Paris, 1930, pp. 31-106; A. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology, XXXXVII (1952), No. 1.

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the socialist revolution in China—the largest country of the Three Continents, and more specifically of the “East”—and amid the throng of mighty movements of national liberation, national and social revolutions which smashed the essence of the hegemony of the traditional imperialisms, and which victoriously defy American neo-imperialism. For sociology, historically speaking, is the last-born of the sciences of man and society. It claims, albeit implicitly as a rule, the role of disciplinary *mediator* between these different sciences. As a result, theoretical exponents of the discipline, when faced with non-traditional problems, could not escape the root of the problem posed by the concrete working of human societies. It is not that of “development” (in the technological sense) of “cultural lag” (a reincarnation of paternalist proselytism), of “modernization” (which expresses technocratic ideology in the “colonial” field). It is, specifically, that of the dialectic of different civilizations, which now clash on the political plane and which, more fundamentally from one end of the globe to the other, put forth the problem of man, of his new image, of the values which it is his intention to bring up to date, for which he wants to live and is willing to die—the problem of happiness, on the global scale.

What then is the fundamental problematology of this sociology of civilizations, whose essential importance has been pointed out? And, starting from this problematic, what is the role and the contribution of Marxism, and how are we to conceive it?

III. THE DIALECTIC OF THE SPECIFIC AND THE UNIVERSAL

There is no better illustration of the failure of the pseudo-universalist approach to the phenomena of civilization—which is really a cosmopolitan and hegemonic phenomenon—than the crumbling of the stillborn “theory” of W.W. Rostow on the so-called “stages of development.”²⁶ The White House’s chief adviser on the politics

²⁶ “The non-communist manifesto of W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960) is concerned with five ‘stages,’ which really oppose a purely nominal antithesis to the Marxist ‘stages.’ The five stages in fact concern *one* transition only, and not, as the Marxist quintet does, the whole history of the race.” (Ernest Gellner: *Thought and Change*, The Univ. of Chicago Press/Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Chicago-London, 1964, pp. 129-30, No. 1).

of the Far East is forced by the very logic of the social thought he expresses, into the tragic impasse in which the greatest power of history is now bogged down. The point is that, face to face with imperialist assimilationism, and with the structures which cannot help following on one after the other (“development”), we have the peoples, the nationalitarian phenomenon, the Marxist ideology, i.e. civilizations.

1. *Position of the theoretical problem*

A. The technicist’s approach—or one might term it the developmentalist approach—is founded on one central postulate: there is no civilization except Western civilization, principally European, with the axis of power now diverted towards North America. The peoples, lands, countries, regions, cultures, States which are not part of this civilization must conform—if this is within their capability—to “the” civilization, that is, to the Western way of life, American variant. At best, in dealing with the more coherent and more restive entities, it is possible to consider the existence of “cultural areas.” But one must, at any price, keep out the spectre of the existence of different civilizations. For this is where the central challenge of history resides, when national and social revolutions arm themselves with scientific thought and modern technology.

B. Modernity allows the *depth of the historical field*, the civilization factor, to realize its potentialities—latent, extinguished, or initiated and then denatured, during the period of decadence of non-Western civilizations, from the (European) Renaissance to the mid-19th century.

The existence, the temporal co-existence, of different civilizations is hard to deny. The emergence, sometimes the rebirth, of these civilizations as contemporaries is a process whose unchangeable might is only temporarily masked by the hazards and difficulties in its path.

Once independence has been reconquered, the historical objective of the nationalitarian phenomenon clearly resides in enabling the nations and national-cultural units—or civilizations—to enter into dialectical interaction with “the” dominant civilization, and to make their own specific contribution. And the instrument for

thus collectively taking charge of the destiny of mankind is none other than the national independent State, which only a popular political content can make efficient in its action and in its vision of what is to come. It is precisely these factors which condition the emergence of marginal civilizations into contemporary life to a full extent (and not in their capacity as what is known as the “third” world, rich in numbers but powerless in deed and without influence in the field of civilization).

C. Henceforward, the principal problem is that of the dialectic of the *specific* (the nationalitarian factor, of national culture and of civilization), and of *the universal* (the future syncretic civilization of the human race, through the medium of scientific technology). To start with, the chief danger does not lie in the accentuation of the nationalitarian dimension; but rather in the imposition of hegemonic moulds said to be universal, which, more effectively than before, will ensure the denaturation of non-western world civilizations, pledged to their status as by-products of technicity and productivism, of economic, demographic and ethnological reserves, the sub-world of an alienated world.

Hence the central coincidence between the revolutions of liberation—national and social—on the one hand, and the aim of the ineluctable dialecticisation of the dominant Western civilization, in order to create an authentically humanist civilization in which the great national-cultural units, the principal civilizations will act by confrontation and over the long course of history to restore to all men their fullness and their existential sovereignty.

D. It necessarily follows that the fundamental categories, the general tone of the sociology of civilizations will be dynamic and dialectical in nature: “revolution,” “change,” “flux,” “transformation,” “mutations,” “evolution,” “liberation,” “industrialization,” “national culture,” “reconquest of identity,” “national rebirth,” “modernity,” etc. Gross or net national revenue, productivity, aid for development (bilateral, multilateral, etc.), the formation of technical cadres—all these elements are often important but never decisive, from the moment that one buttresses oneself upon oneself, and seeks the essential resources for rebirth in the depths of popular national collectivity (in terms of history, and not only of demographic density).

The formulation of the theoretical problem in historical-concrete terms allows us now to turn to the critical side.

2. Critique of the various non-Marxist approaches

These can be divided into two great groups, though of course it is clearly possible to adopt a more varied categorization.

A. Philosophies and methodologies of an *idealist* nature, among which we may distinguish the following subgroups:

(a) Philosophies of history. Hegelianism continues to inspire many works, particularly aimed at accounting for the importance of superstructural factors, which remained obscure for a time owing to the profoundly erroneous interpretation of Marxism as economic materialism. The notion of the dialectical cycle, the couple “analysis—synthesis,” are not unconnected with the ambitious project of Toynbee; and one can find these themes in a number of doctrinal works on the national “mission” or national resurgence, within the framework of spiritualistic influences, both in the East and the West.

This view of the problem is not without value. I have previously mentioned the positive contribution, in certain respects, of Toynbee’s work. Others, albeit inferior in quality, give us an insight into those factors of social and national psychology which do not lose their value when studied in depth. However, the interpretative value of such works remains limited. Indeed, in general, philosophies of history postulate a concrete record of the societies which they are dealing with, which, albeit highly diversified, is based on ideal principles treated as so many functionally different entities. The resulting *exceptionalism* is in fact bordering on an ethno-racial typology and a structuralist fixism, although it is said that history evolves—but only within this structure based on abstraction.

(b) Spiritual philosophies, essentially religious in inspiration. Although their source is different, the character of these philosophies is similar to that of the preceding type. The civilizing mission of Christianity shares the same conception with fundamentalist Islam and contentious Judaism. Here, however, the philosophical framework must be specifically universalist—perhaps

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more so in Islam than in the two other great monotheisms, as concerns the very genesis of each of these religions. The interpretation of civilizations and of their evolution is, however, derived from the environmental civilizations in which these religions are born; and the universalism to which they claim to aspire is that of the integration of elements, of environments, of societies, and of cultures, all of which are reducible—precisely as a function of their belonging to the same, or similar, civilizations—to the model which is, so to speak, eminent, and which is authentically representative (the Christian West, despite the *aggiornamento*; Arabic Islam, despite the Afro-Asian area).²⁷ The mediation towards modernity, towards the evolution of civilizations, can scarcely be analyzed in these ideologies;—at best it can be moderated: it is impossible to require these theological doctrines, founded on intemporality, to be centred on the changing face of the contemporary world, most of which is at grips with problems of physical survival in the literal and temporal sense of the term.

B. Philosophies and methodologies with a *positivist* character, in which one can distinguish the following subdivisions:

(a) The phenomenological approach (phenomenology, existentialisms, etc.). It is ambiguous in character, since it seems to consist at the same time of a realist philosophy and of subjective idealism. Realist, because phenomenology—in the accepted definition of A. Lalande—is the “descriptive study of a complex of phenomena as they manifest themselves in time or space, as opposed either to the abstract and fixed laws of these phenomena; or to transcendent realities of which they are manifestations; or to the normative critique of their legitimacy.” Subjectivist idealist: in the direction of the Husserlian conception, in which the objectivity of the world appears as a “transcendental intersubjectivity” (G. Berger), and in particular in the existentialist philosophies, from Kierkegaard to recent times.²⁸ At all events—without taking part in the philosophical controversy—phenomenology does not provide a principle for interpreting the evolutionary process and that of continuity, or a method for confronting the

²⁷ M. Rodinson, *Mahomet*, 2nd ed., Le Seuil, Paris, 1968.

²⁸ André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, P.U.F., 8th. ed., Paris, 1960, pp. 768-70.

specific and the universal. Although it provides a rich and profound description which considerably enriches our perception of the “present moment,” and of the echoes of this perception in the subjective individual, it does not seem of use for causal interpretation. In a final analysis, we are clearly tending towards positivism as far as the nature of the philosophical project is concerned—although the latter is violently rejected by phenomenologists. No catalogue, however subtle, could provide an illuminating summary which would give us the clue to the movement in its continuity.

(b) The structuralist approach, which wants to hold the limelight, face to face with Marxism. I lay no claim here to a general critical approach to this: the recent works of H. Lefebvre, L. Goldmann, E. Hobsbawm, M. Rodinson, in particular, serve as a valid scientific basis for this. I would like to analyze the nature from the structuralist approach in the domain of the sociology of civilizations and to place the contribution which they make. Everything takes place as if the aim were none other than that of refuting historicity at any price—of pronouncing the world to be non-historical. Hence the studies undertaken chose marginal societies, described as “without history”, and chose a method which is implicitly or explicitly generalized to cover the totality of the sociological field. Whether human groups can have no history remains to be seen: the (historical) marginalisation of human groups, of societies in relation to the great fluxes of change, the great evolutions of the world, is itself a historical phenomenon, that is to say that history alone allows one to understand its causes. A. Toynbee’s²⁹ recent conclusions—which echo those of C. Wright Mills, E. Gellner, and G. Balandier³⁰—make the

²⁹ “The approach to the study of human affairs in the time-dimension is necessarily genetic, and its form of expression is therefore necessarily narrative (...). In comparing and analysing a number of parallel life-streams, we must take care still to keep them all moving. If we mentally arrest their movement in order to study them ‘in cross-section,’ we shall be denaturing them and consequently distorting our view of them. Life does not stand still. It has to be studied on the run.” (*Change and Habit*, pp. 88-9). Strong words, which, on this point, meet up with the Marxist method.

³⁰ In his recent book, *Anthropologie politique*, P.U.F., Paris, 1968: “All human societies produce political, and are all permeable to historical fluid. For the same reasons.” (p. 230).

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point in what appears to be a decisive manner: the very choice of so-called non-historical groups and societies is an ideological one, that is to say it is dictated by the desire to fix the “present moment,” in a structure. Naturally, structuralists refuse this description. But in that case, the very fact of restricting themselves to marginal societies, said to be without history, prevents them from postulating their methodology in a field ruled by history and its dialectics. By stating its wish to limit itself to marginal human groups, structuralism marginalizes itself with relation to “the vast wind of history.”

3. Critique of the Marxist approach

In Marxism—in which, with M. Rodinson, I distinguish between “a philosophical orientation, sociological theses, and an ideological inspiration,” within a single whole, of course,³¹ methodology proper being situated between the first two terms—the central concept for our purposes is that of “historical specificity” taken up by numerous authors (C. Wright Mills, Arthur Briggs, T.B. Bottomore, etc.) and, nowadays, by the majority of the sociologists and theoreticians of the Three Continents. I will reconsider C. Wright Mills’ development of this:³²

(a) “What Marx calls the ‘principle of historical specificity’ designates a landmark in the first instance: all societies must understand themselves in function of the specific period in which they exist (...). Where contemporary society is concerned, it is well to begin by explaining its contemporary characteristics, that is to say by considering them as the integrating part or as the consequences of other contemporary characteristics. It is better, if only to circumscribe them and delimit them clearly and to isolate their component parts, to take one’s stand on a relatively narrow temporal platform—which must always of necessity be a historical one.”

(b) In the second instance, this principle means that “within the framework of this historical type, different changing mechan-

³¹ *Islam et capitalisme*, p. 15.

³² *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1959, pp. 143-164.

isms intersect in a specific way.” Why “specific,” when all science is general?

(c) And in the first place, why “necessarily an historical one”? Because “history is the nerve of social science.” Because “all social sciences—or rather all those which are well-thought-out—require a conceptual historical field and ample recourse to historical documentation.” Indeed, one sees that “unhistorical studies are generally studies of restricted environments; they are static or short-term. One must expect this, because one becomes aware of broader structures only when they change, and we only perceive these changes if we encompass a reasonable length of time, historically speaking.”

This is true “in the present moment, (when) the problems of western societies are almost inevitably world problems.” But the historical dimension is far more powerful as an interpretative factor in the non-western world: “any economist, political scientist or sociologist fully understands that knowing the history of a society is often indispensable for understanding it, from the moment that he leaves his advanced industrial nation to examine institutions which exist in certain different social structures—in the Middle East, in Asia, in Africa.” The fact is that the *coefficient of the causal interpretative value* of the historical factor is not always and everywhere identical: “I think that periods and societies differ on the plane of knowing whether understanding them requires direct reference to historical ‘factors’ or not (...). Naturally it is perfectly clear that the understanding a slow-moving society, bogged down for centuries in a cycle of poverty and tradition, of disease and ignorance, requires the study of historical terrain, and also the historical mechanisms caused by the frightful clogging (of this society) in its own history. Explaining this cycle, and the mechanism of each of its phases, requires a very profound historical analysis. For what must above all be explained is the mechanism of the whole cycle.”³³

One sees more clearly why the historical factor borders in the first instance on specificity. And the “sociological principle of

³³ Cf. amongst others, in the case of Africa, G. Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, P.U.F., Paris, 1955; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Human Factor in Changing Africa*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962; etc.

historical specificity” applies both in studying American society and in non-Western societies: “it is only by means of comparative studies that we can become aware of the absence of certain historical phases in a society, which it is often essential to understand in its contemporary form.” Comparative studies of which phenomena? “Insofar as it is a unit which makes history, the dynamic nation state is also a unit in which men and women in the whole spectrum of their variety, are chosen and formed, freed and repressed—it is the unit which makes the man. This is one of the reasons which make the struggles between nations and groups of nations into struggles also around the types of human beings who will finally achieve supremacy in the Middle East, in India, in China, in the United States, that is why culture and politics are now so intimately linked; and that is why there is such a great need and such a great demand for sociological examination.” The use of the Marxian principle of historical specificity relates directly to the concept of “civilization”—as elucidated above.

(d) Can one then visualize a dialectic of the specific and the universal? There can be no universal without comparatism; there can be no universal within the framework of Europeo-centrism. “In the very formulation of that which is to be explained, we need a more complete terrain than that which can be provided by knowledge of the historical varieties of human society.” In acting thus, “in adopting a larger field of vision, in comparing (the sociologist, the historian) becomes aware of the historical element as something intrinsic to the very thing he wants to understand, and not simply as a ‘general framework’.” This is also why “part of the best sociological work nowadays deals with the areas and the regions of the world.” From this we get the fundamental principles of method: “the historical point of view leads to the comparative study of societies (...). The mind is unable even to formulate the historical and sociological problems of a given social structure (notion) without understanding them in contrast and in comparison to other societies.” Hence the importance of long-term history which is structural, not structuralist (F. Braudel): “Long-term tendencies are normally needed, if only to overcome historical provincialism, the postulation that the present is in some sense an autonomous creation.” “For historical

change *is* the changing of social structures, the changing of relationships between their constituent parts.” And he adds: “Just as there exists a variety of social structures, so there exists a variety of principles for historical change.” Is the universality of scientific criteria once more being challenged?

(e) One must consider this more deeply. Were we to take this latter phrase literally, one could detect in it Weberian echoes (“*Idealtypus*”); for, as Asa Briggs clearly shows, “the national mould of the constitution of history encourages the use of stereotypes, including those which deal with the national character.”³⁴

One should, I feel, distinguish between two subdivisions of interpretative factors when considering the work in this field:

(1) Traditional factors, in particular the “infrastructure-superstructure” couple, retained in essence by the majority of contemporary research-workers. These two factors come more visibly into play both during revolutionary periods, or periods of profound mutation, and during more equable, regular, “normal” periods (structures).

(2) Within the context of this general social and historical dialectic—which I shall not discard since it constitutes the central nucleus of historical materialism—there is good reason to pay *much greater attention* than has been done so far (by reason of the very framework of civilization in which Marxism was born and developed up to 1930-49) to superstructural factors on the one hand, and to the new dialectic which is finding a place at the very heart of the traditional couple, leading to the synthesis known as the “principle of historical specificity.”

The superstructural factors which appear “super-determined” and “super-determining” (L. Althusser) are those of national ideologies, explicit and implicit, (M. Rodinson, V. Lanternari), of social national psychology, particularly in the framework of the old nations or national formations (Egypt, China, Persia, Mexico, etc.).³⁵ “Super-”, because they often act apparently more

³⁴ *History and Society*, N. Mackenzie ed., *A Guide to the Social Sciences*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1966, pp. 33-53 (49).

³⁵ Cf. our “Esquisse d’une typologie des formations nationales dans les Trois Continents,” *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, XLII (1967), pp. 49-57.

powerfully than infrastructural economic and sociological factors. But what one must see—and this is the second phase of our answer—is that the nature and precisely the effective power of these factors is a *consequence* of the depth of the historical field of the national community itself. Thus, as I have shown, this amazing symbiosis between economics (the mastery or the control of water and the earth), politics (the autocratic and highly centralized power, based on the army) and ideology (from the religious to the political ideology), which controls the history of Egypt's seven millennia: this "principle of historical specificity" is couched in an Egyptian mould, but is universal (and intelligible in Marxian terms) through the dialectic which describes it, that is to say the socio-geography of Egypt, "the most compact of the hydraulic societies" (K. Wittfögel), placed at the crossroads between East and West, surrounded by desert and by the squadrons and the networks of commerce and of civilizations struggling and competing around it. It now becomes possible to "study history in order to get rid of it"—that is to say, to modify it rationally, deliberately and patiently, and hence, the specific factors, and from there, their long-term dialectic objectives—but always within the general framework of this historic specificity itself. In the case of Egypt, for instance, we are concerned with a selective dialecticization of the ideological and then the political elements by means of a concerted pluralism. The aim of this is to summate the most radical, as yet unemployed, transformation factor, that is to say the massive action—in the literal sense of the term—of the population of the country and of the towns, together with the whole (pluralist) gamut of potential and existing ideological and political factors, which alone can break the hold of the centralizing malediction in the guise of static and reactionary bureaucratism. But this action is not itself possible if one loses sight of the general framework, if one denies the role of the State and of the sociological symbiosis in Egypt. One does not turn one's back on historical specificity by dialecticizing it, quite the contrary: here, as everywhere, "liberty is necessity which has been understood." Hard necessity. Harsh lesson. But also: the future.

Is it an accident that the intelligentsia of the Three Continents—which repudiates, fundamentally and on principle, the idea of Europecentrism—finds its fundamental theoretical support in Marxism? Is it by chance that sociological works and political action inspired by Marxism strike the observer by their acuity and their originality?³⁶

The fact is that the Marxism in question is, essentially, *the general method and sociological conception—historical materialism*. The results of the application of this scale to advanced industrial societies can scarcely make any lasting contribution to the non-Western civilizations at the time of their rebirth. But the same truly scientific vision and method, applied to other data, starting from the principle of historical specificity, make Marxism in our time into the most perspicacious instrument of analysis of civilizations, and the privileged mediator in this context. For it remains understood that “it is in practice that man must prove the truth, that is the reality and the power, the depth reality of his thought.”³⁷

There is no doubt that for the Marx of 1845, whose high and humane stature we salute today from one end of the world to the other, the *Diesseitigkeit* in question was in another region than that of the Three Continents. But that the theses and the spirit which animates Marxism can be, a century and a half later, the essential factor of the revolutions, the privileged instrument in the rebirth of the civilizations; this proves, perhaps above anything, the effective and theoretical truth of a work which is barely starting on its *universal* historical course.

³⁶ M. Rodinson, “L’Égypte nassérienne au miroir marxiste,” *Les Temps Modernes*, No. 203, April 1963, pp. 1859-87. The same remark, on a theoretical level, in Georg Lukács, C. Wright Mills, Maurice de Gandillac, and others.

³⁷ K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, Thesis No. 2, in Marx-Engels, *Œuvres Philosophiques*, Editions sociales, Paris 1968, pp. 61. The word *Diesseitigkeit* must be understood as “on the side of,” rooted in the idea of “here below.” One reads with interest the recent attempt of Jean-Jacques Goblots: “Pour une approche théorique des ‘faits des civilisation’,” *La Pensée*, No. 133, June 1967, pp. 3-24; No. 134, August 1967, pp. 3-34; No. 136, Dec. 1967, pp. 65-88.