

Introduction

Preben Kaarsholm

International Development Studies, Roskilde

"Modernisation of Culture and the Development of Political Discourse in the Third World" was the eighth researcher training course to be organised as part of the Ph. D. programme on "Political and Cultural Institutions in Development". The course was convened by Shamita Basu, Bodil Folke Frederiksen and Preben Kaarsholm and held at Sandbjerg Manor from 8 to 13 December 1991.

As in the case of earlier researcher training courses, networks of cooperation around the Ph. D. programme played an important part in its organisation. Participants at the course represented a wide spectrum of Danish and Nordic networking institutions, and the recruitment of lecturers was facilitated by the relations established with development and social studies programmes in Norway, Sweden, England, France and India.

The brief to presenters circulated prior to the course was formulated as follows:

"For an earlier generation of development researchers and theorists, the change of cultural institutions, forms and practices was a central area of concern in attempts to understand trends of political modernisation. For writers like Clifford Geertz, A. L. Epstein, J. Clyde Mitchell, Phillip Mayer, Peter C. W. Gutkind and Abner Cohen in the 1950s and 60s,¹ questions concerning the articulation of cultural identities and the emergence of new social and institutional frameworks suited to that articulation were important in the analysis of possibilities for democratisation and political self-determination. It seems as if such a perspective on culture and development has been somewhat lost in the prolific writing on de-

¹ Cf. for example Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution" in Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States*, New York 1963, Arnold Leonard Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, Manchester 1958, J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Kalela Dance. Aspects of Social Relationships among Urban Africans in Northern Rhodesia*, Manchester 1956, Iona and Phillip Mayer, *Townsmen and Tribesmen: Conservatism and the Process of Urbanisation in a South African City*, second ed., London 1971, Peter C. W. Gutkind (ed.), *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa*, Leiden 1970 and Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa. A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns*, London 1969.

velopment in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead it has become the fashion to identify culture with much more static and less historically defined totalities of habits, life styles, beliefs, manners, rituals and formalised modes of expression regulating social reproduction and to either focus on seemingly homogeneous bodies of unitary culture at village, local community and "tribe" level from a perspective of anthropology or try to delineate broad structures of geographically specific political cultures as exemplified by Lucian Pye's influential writings on Asia or by the recent boom in analyses of the African state.

The suggested researcher training course will address the process of differentiation of culture which takes place in societies as part of a broader process of modernisation. One aspect of this process is the establishment of new levels of local, regional, national and global culture which interact and offer conflicting media of articulation and models for self-understanding.

A second aspect is the general relativisation of cultural values which goes hand in hand with the differentiation of "traditional" unified culture into a conglomeration of part cultures - the emergence of entropy, which according to Gellner accompanies the transition to modern, "industrial" society - the loss of "aura" and the over-all secularisation which demystifies and makes it possible to ironise and debate cultural messages and institutions which have previously had a hallowed and unquestionable status.² What Berman, quoting Marx (who is certainly not the only authority on this issue), identifies as the central experience of modernity - that "all that is solid melts into air", a loss of cultural orientation which is both experienced as tragic and as providing individuals with new potentials for freedom, interaction and socialisation, no matter whether it occurs within the "history" of Western societies or the "development" of the Third World.³ If modernity was originally a Western project, it constitutes today, in the words of a recent book by Anthony Giddens, a global "institutionalisation of doubt".⁴

A third aspect of the differentiation of culture in the context of modernisation concerns the gradual gaining autonomy of a sphere of specifically and self-consciously "cultural" institutions, genres and discourses within society which are no longer tied directly to func-

² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983.

³ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, London 1983.

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Oxford 1990, p. 176. Cf. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Oxford 1991, p. 3.

tions of economic reproduction, religious ritual or political expediency.

Cultural forms such as literature, pictorial art and music may transitionally be wound up with projects for the formulation of nationalist or political class ideologies, but the pervading trend in the process of modernisation is for culture to split into separate and semi-autonomous spheres of industrialised mass culture on the one hand and elite "high" culture on the other - each finding expression in its own set of media and genres and performing according to specific "laws" of aesthetic rationality.

While, in the first instance, this development helps to separate culture from other spheres of social and political life, it establishes at the same time the preconditions for new types of social identity creation, of political control and subversion and of universalist as well as separatist discourse.

The influence of modern international mass media on the Third World is seen by many as devastating in its impact on traditional social mores and cohesion, in its promulgation of "cultural imperialism" and its general stimulation of consumerist behaviour. At the same time, the combination of modern mass media facilities and autocratic systems of state governance may provide the basis for widespread political manipulation and misinformation. The development of new, aesthetic "high" cultures in Third World societies can be seen as a parallel process providing just another element in the over-all break-up and destabilisation of social life and contributing to the internationalisation and "ballooning-away" from the rest of society of a restricted elite.

Such a view, however, underestimates the creative energies of reception and interpretation of local popular communities in appropriating the messages, styles and discourses of the new mass culture and in fusing them with already existing systems of symbolic expression. And while it may be true that a substantial body of Third World "high" cultural art, sculpture and literature is addressed at international rather than local consumption, this does not detract from the fact that by insisting on Third World cultural discourses being part of a universal world culture, artist and authors in Africa, Asia and Latin America have contributed significantly towards changing the foundations of political culture and discourse in their own societies and towards stimulating an insistence on the same human and democratic rights for fellow citizens as would apply to human beings in the rest of the world."

The key-note address to the researcher training course was delivered by Ulf Hannerz who spoke on "The Globalisation of Culture". This was followed by theoretically oriented double lectures by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch on "Urbanisation and Modernisation in Africa" and "Cities as Cultural Mediators" and Sudipta Kaviraj on "State, Society and Discourse in India, I & II". The programme was continued by Marc Schade-Poulsen's presentation of his case research on "The Rai Music of Algeria" (which unfortunately has not been available for inclusion in this collection) and by a lecture and a seminar by Tapati Guha Thakurta on "Nationalist Ideology and Iconography in Late Nineteenth-Century Calcutta" and "Calcutta Artists, Artisans and Mass-Picture Production", the latter accompanied by a slide show. Helge Rønning delivered a lecture on "Media and Democracy in Africa" and Karen Risager spoke on "Inter-Cultural Relations and the Ambiguous Concept of Empathy" (neither of them unfortunately available for inclusion in the present collection). This was followed by a seminar and a lecture by Raoul Granqvist on "Travelling as a Trope for Change in the Post-Colonial World" and "Aestheticism in African Art and Literature: A Problem of Perspective". Finally, Martin Zerlang presented a lecture on "The Development of Magical Realism in Latin America", while presentations by Bodil Folke Frederiksen and Preben Kaarsholm were tabled to allow for more debating time and working group activities.⁵

At the beginning of the researcher training course, according to research interests, participants were divided into thematically delimited working groups which would meet regularly throughout the length of the course and report back at a concluding plenary session. As on earlier occasions, the programme was organised as alternations between lectures, seminars, meetings of working groups with lecturers acting as resource persons, and individual consultations of Ph. D. students with resource persons to discuss ongoing project work.

The researcher training course at Sandbjerg Manor was made possible by a grant from the Danish Research Academy.

⁵ Published previously as Bodil Folke Frederiksen, "Joe, the Sweetest Reading in Africa. A Presentation and Documentation of a Popular Magazine in Kenya", *African Languages and Cultures*. IV, 2 (1991), and Preben Kaarsholm, "The Development of Culture and the Contradictions of Modernisation in the Third World: The Case of Zimbabwe", *European Journal of Development Research*, II, 1 (1990).