

# Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the Capitalist World-Economy, 1750-1839

Barbara Reeves-Ellington

In 1977, Immanuel Wallerstein proposed a research agenda to answer the question: When and by what process did the Ottoman Empire become incorporated into the capitalist world-economy? He also asked whether incorporation was a single event or a series of events for the different regions of the Empire--Rumelia, Anatolia, Syria, and Egypt. He suggested the answer be sought in Ottoman production processes and trade patterns between 1550 and 1850.

By 1980, Wallerstein had answered his own question. When the European base of the capitalist world-economy began to develop its boundaries in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire remained outside the system. Between 1750 and 1839, the process of incorporation into the capitalist world-economy was complete and the Ottoman Empire had been peripheralized. Wallerstein did not comment whether incorporation was a single event or a series of events.

In this paper, I argue that current scholarship fails to support Wallerstein's version of incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the capitalist world-economy. I examine Wallerstein's arguments and critique his discussion based on my own interpretation of recent work by Ottoman and Balkan historians pertaining to Rumelia (Southeastern Europe).

According to Wallerstein, a world-economy is a single social economy containing multiple state or political structures that operates on the basis of a capitalist mode of production and in which ceaseless accumulation of capital guides the system.

Wallerstein recently added the word "ceaseless" (his italics) to his definition in order to distinguish his paradigm of the capitalist world-economy with its origins in the sixteenth century from other paradigms that trace the origins to earlier points in history.

The capitalist world-economy comprises a core, a periphery, and a semiperiphery. Nation-states reach the core by successfully exploiting other geographic areas in the periphery. The semiperiphery forms a buffer zone, where geographic areas can move up into the core or down into the periphery. Geographic areas outside the world-economy are relegated to the external arena. They are eventually and inevitably incorporated into the system, however. During incorporation, a geographic zone is "hooked" so it can no longer escape. Peripheralization follows, whereby the zone is swallowed up in the capitalist mode of production, governed by pressures for capital

accumulation at the core. The zone is exploited chiefly for raw materials and forced to import finished products from the core. The notion of exploitation is key to an understanding of Wallerstein's view of the capitalist world-economy and his interpretation of incorporation into it.

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## **Incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the Capitalist World-Economy, 1750-1839**

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### **Economic Factors**

*Sudden increase in volume of trade*

Citing data provided by Bruce McGowan, Wallerstein and Kasaba claimed that exports of cotton increased approximately two-fold between 1750 and 1789. However, except for France, the majority of the exports were headed not for the capitalist core but instead for Austria, Switzerland, Saxony, Prussia, and Italy. According to Fikret Adanir, Balkan cotton was not of the quality of American and Indian cotton, which England preferred. Moreover, geographic regions in the empire were clearly experiencing different trade patterns. The largest export increases were recorded from the ports of Smyrna and Salonica in the Balkans, but were partially offset by reductions from Syria and Constantinople.

Additional evidence supplied by John Lampe suggests that contribution of Ottoman trade to French and especially British commercial profit and capital formulation was minuscule during the eighteenth century. While cotton exports to France and England doubled between the late seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, exports of semi-processed goods to northwest Europe also increased. As regards trade imbalance, only Constantinople ran an import surplus. Both Lampe and McGowan argued that the empire as a whole, and the Balkans in particular, continued to record an export surplus throughout the period. Thus, increased export of raw materials was not associated with enforced importation of finished goods. Moreover, increased foreign trade has to be put into perspective. According to Sevket Pamuk, in the early 1820s, foreign trade represented only about two to three percent of overall volume of production in the empire.

### *Shift in exports to raw materials*

A shift in exports from luxury goods to raw materials is a factor of incorporation into the world-economy. Wallerstein and Kasaba noted that during the second half of the eighteenth century, "a considerable fraction of the Ottoman exports started to be comprised of commercial crops, especially cotton, maize, and tobacco." They provided no hard evidence to support this claim.

What was occurring was not a shift from trade in luxury goods to export of raw materials but rather a shift in the type of raw materials being exported. According to McGowan, Ottoman trade in raw materials was far more heterogeneous. Founded on wheat and silk in the sixteenth century, at the height of Ottoman power, it grew to include cattle, wool, mohair, hides, and finally cotton and tobacco. By the late seventeenth century Ottoman raw exports were three to four times the value of raw grain exports from Baltic trade. Moreover, although cotton, maize, and tobacco began to be exported in large quantities during the late eighteenth century, cotton in particular had long been cultivated in Anatolia and the Balkans and had been one of the principle exports of the empire since the fifteenth century.

Based on this evidence, Ottoman trade with the core was not limited to luxury goods before the eighteenth century. Moreover, trade was arranged at Ottoman convenience for surplus produce after provisioning of the capital and other large cities, and, according to McGowan, trade treaties in this period could be cancelled unilaterally by the Ottomans. Thus, the empire was hardly "hooked" into incorporation before this time.

### *Expansion of çiftliks associated with second serfdom*

Wallerstein and his co-authors claimed that the increase in cotton exports was associated with the expansion of land use known as çiftliks (translated by them as "plantations"), which, they stated, entailed enserfment of peasants. They argued that, "although small peasant property was not completely destroyed, usury mediated the accumulation of capital in the hands of powerful landlords.

In contrast to the notion of enserfed peasants on plantations, several scholars, including Lampe, McGowan, and Sevket Pamuk, have argued that agriculture throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remained on a small-scale basis. Using the arguments of Bulgarian scholars, Lampe noted that "we can only call this çiftlik regime 'feudal,' with 'semi-capitalist' features in some regions, and not virtually capitalist as suggested by Wallerstein." He contended that the dates of origin, size, and nature of the çiftliks suggest "an internal Ottoman dynamic more fiscal than commercial, more military than civilian in character."

As to date of origin, *çiftlik*s developed chiefly along the Black Sea Coast and in Macedonia early in the seventeenth century and had reached their full extent by 1700. They were hereditary land possessions claimed by the heirs of cavalymen (*sipahi*) who had been granted use of land during their lifetime in exchange for military duty. The Ottoman state was eventually obliged to acknowledge the hereditary nature of these lands given the contraction of the empire, the absence of newly conquered lands, and the need for taxes.

The *çiftlik*s covered no more than twenty percent of cultivated land and engaged no more than ten percent of the population. Most holdings were small and few yielded a large marketable surplus. Their normal size was 15 to 30 acres. They were farmed on a seasonable basis by peasants who paid a semiannual rent. Inalcik has described several different types of *çiftlik*: some were rented by peasants; others operated on a wage-labor system. He also noted that *çiftlik*s were not given over to monoculture (cotton). Some encompassed vineyards and orchards, and many of the larger *çiftlik*s were converted to cattle ranches or dairy farms. Thus, they were hardly plantations and did not entail serfdom.

#### *Decline of manufacturing sector*

Wallerstein and Kasaba claimed that Ottoman manufacturing declined in the nineteenth century as a direct result of the decline of the guilds and the stipulations of the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Convention of 1838. The guild argument went as follows. As early as the seventeenth century, people left rural areas to avoid war and natural disaster, migrating in large numbers to big cities. Unemployment became a serious problem, the domestic market contracted sharply, and integrity of the Ottoman guilds became vulnerable. As a result, the Ottoman state lost control of production and the guilds were left vulnerable to competition from European commodities. The absence of industrial protection "forced Ottoman provinces to become suppliers of raw materials for Europe and buyers of European manufactured goods."

Leaving aside the issue that there were no large cities in the Balkans in the early nineteenth century (let alone the seventeenth), and that movement was chiefly from the lowlands to the hills because of brigandage (*kurdzhalistvo*), an issue to which I will return, the suggestion that European commodities flooded the market and made for a trade imbalance has been refuted by John Lampe.

What Wallerstein and Kasaba failed to mention when they describe guild vulnerability is that the Ottoman state intentionally took steps to produce that vulnerability. According to Donald Quataert, the guilds practiced protectionism, and the best organized advocates of protectionism were the Janissaries, who were slaughtered in Istanbul in 1826 on the order of the sultan. Quataert has suggested that the guilds

stifled commercial competition within the Ottoman Empire thanks to their protection by the Janissaries. After the Janissaries were murdered, the guilds could no longer restrict trade, and the state could promote free trade. Michael Pailaret has termed the event a "well executed bloodbath," and Stavrianos described it as a "holocaust," in which 6,000 Janissaries were killed and 18,000 exiled. It is hard to understand why Wallerstein ignored the event.

As to the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Convention of 1838, Quataert argued that it was part of the Tanzimat, that is, an integral part of the Ottoman reform movement. Its signing confirmed a trend well under way in the Ottoman Empire and was not due to pressure from European diplomats. Wallerstein and Kasaba fell into the trap of Eurocentrism describing the Tanzimat period as one of resistance. According to them, the reform decree of 1839 "marked the end of the resistance on the part of the Ottoman bureaucracy to incorporation." Several western scholars, relying on western sources, have claimed that reform was forced on the empire; whereas scholars who have used Ottoman, western, and regional (for example, Balkan) sources have shown that the movement for reform was the result of complex interactions involving internal and external pressure. The impetus for reform, however, dated from the late eighteenth century and came from within. Quataert has joined a small but growing number of historians who criticize the Eurocentric view.

More important, Quataert has challenged the view that Ottoman manufacturing declined in the first half of the eighteenth century. This view is founded on urban-based, guild-organized production but ignores rural industry, household manufacturing, and workshops. Rural manufacturing was not observed by the European travelers whose accounts of urban manufacturing decline form the basis of Wallerstein's and Kasaba's arguments. Moreover, Quataert insisted that it was internal demand, not Western economies, that drove Ottoman production and trade: the quantity and value of domestic trade surpassed international Ottoman commerce throughout the period 1800 to 1914. Pailaret made the same point, claiming that the boom in rural manufacturing in the second quarter of the nineteenth century served chiefly the domestic market.

Pailaret suggested that urban, guild-controlled, fine-textile industries declined principally in Anatolia. In contrast, a veritable industrial renaissance occurred in the Ottoman Balkan lands. Although the woolen manufacturing in Salonica had been declining since the seventeenth century, the town experienced a boom in silk reeling and the manufacture of cotton towels and carpets. Small towns in the foothills of mountainous areas expanded into industrial centers for the manufacture of woolen cloth, cotton towels, and carpets.

Both Quataert and Pailaret suggested that the combination of Ottoman institutional change and local entrepreneurship in the second quarter of the nineteenth century contributed to impressive cultural and economic advances in the Ottoman Empire, which fail to speak to peripheralization and immiseration. Their work contradicts Wallerstein and Kasaba's claim that "in the long run, the effects of incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the world-economy proved to be catastrophic for manufacturing in the Ottoman realms as a whole."

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### **Political Factors**

*Limits to territorial expansion and breakdown of classical land-tenure system*

Wallerstein and Kasaba claimed that, in addition to losing control over the guilds (an interpretation I have already argued against), the Ottoman state also lost control over agricultural production through the breakdown of the timar land-tenure system beginning in the seventeenth century. They argued that the breakdown in the system led directly to a new method of collecting taxes (iltizam, tax-farming), which resulted in tax-farmers gaining access to the rights of private property on the lands on which they collected taxes. This eventually led to the formation of çiftlik. "These transformations made the concentration of land in private hands and reorganization of production in relation to world markets possible."

Few scholars would disagree that the timar system broke down, that tax-farming was introduced, or that the Ottoman land system was undergoing transformation. But Ottoman land organization was more complex. My argument is based on Fikret Adanir's work.

Under the classic Ottoman system, all land was divided into three categories: miri, or state land; mülk, or private property; and vakif, which belonged to religious foundations. The timar system was based on state land. As the Ottoman Empire

expanded with conquests of new land, timar land was given to sipahi (cavalrymen) in return for military duties. The land reverted to the state upon the death of the sipahi. The land was cultivated by peasants who owned a small area of private land and whose rights and obligations to the sipahi and the state were legally specified.

After the Ottomans failed to take Vienna in 1683, there was no new land for expansion, but this was not critical. Even before this date, the sipahi had become an outdated fighting force and were gradually replaced by an infantry equipped with firearms. Irregular peasant units replaced them in private armies formed by local notables (ayans). Adanir suggested that changes in land-tenure had more to do with over-taxation, brigandage, climate change, crop failures, famines, and epidemics.

Çiftliks emerged in the sixteenth century from private peasant land and abandoned state land. By this time, the sipahi had gained hereditary rights to their land. Çiftliks became more common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when they were devoted chiefly to cattle raising, not crop production. Adanir concluded that "in the Balkans as well as in Anatolia, the part played by the çiftlik estates in the economy remained rather negligible."

### *Rise of local notables*

Wallerstein and Kasaba claimed that disorganization of Ottoman central power led to loss of Ottoman control over provincial officials and ayan. The ayan, whose original function was to represent the people in their dealings with the government, acquired substantial power through tax-farming and established "uncontested power in this region through the processes of çiftlik formation."

Historians agree that ayans were able to defy central authority towards the end of the eighteenth century. Some ayans were less interested in defying central power than in filling a vacuum where the central power was unable to control banditry in rural areas: they attempted to maintain a sense of order and protection. Others, such as Ali Pasha and Osman Pasvanoglu, frequently organized bandit raids themselves, fought each other for control of territory, and generally razed the Balkan countryside causing considerable loss of life.

Without the çiftlik argument, Wallerstein could not connect the ayans to incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the capitalist world-economy. But not all ayans grabbed peasant land, transforming the peasants into slave labor, which they exploited on their "plantations." Quite the reverse. It was the frequent banditry in the Balkans that caused peasants to abandon lowland communities and head for the highlands. Here, they established rural manufacturing workshops and factories that led to the industrial boom described by Pailaret. It cannot be coincidental that these Balkan mountain

towns--Koprivshitsa, Kotel, Sopot, Gabrovo, and others--were the focus of the Bulgarian cultural revival that began in earnest in the mid-nineteenth century.

### *Demands for political autonomy*

Wallerstein and Kasaba indicated that nationalist demands for political autonomy in the Balkans in the early nineteenth were the result of incorporation. Their suggestion that the merchant elite "successfully mobilized the predominantly Christian peasants under the banner of nationalism against the Ottoman rule" is far-fetched, however. The merchant elite in the Balkans was very comfortable expanding trade links under Ottoman rule. While many merchants contributed to educational and cultural pursuits, few of them nurtured revolutionary ideas. The nationalist inciters were the educated elite. And neither the merchants nor the "intelligentsia" had much contact with the peasants, who, in any case, as Marx himself noted, were not revolutionary material.

### *Inadequate diplomacy*

Wallerstein and Kasaba noted that with its loss of military prestige and its reversal of fortunes in war, the Ottoman Empire began to lose bargaining power. As a consequence of the treaties of Belgrade (1739) and Küçük Kaynarca (1774), the Ottomans made diplomatic and economic concessions to Russia, Austria, Britain, and France, allowing no little interference in the affairs of their state. The intensifying relations between the Empire and the world-economy culminated in the Anglo-Turkish Trade Convention of 1838 and the Gulhane reform edict of 1839 which "marked the end of the resistance on the part of the Ottoman bureaucracy to incorporation." To consider the Gulhane edict as a capitulation to a capitalist core that marked an economic incorporation is to miss the point entirely. The Gulhane edict was the result of competing reform forces within the empire. Some reformers looked back to the golden age of empire to institute reform; others looked west to Europe. The westernizers gained the upper hand, but their decree was very general, an attempt at what we might call civil rights today, influenced to be sure by the ideas of the Enlightenment. It emphasized the rights of all subjects of the sultan, regardless of status and called for a regular system of assessing taxes (abolishing tax-farming) and levying troops. It was followed in 1856 by a reform guaranteeing equality regardless of religion and calling for representational government, which was attempted in the Constitution of 1876.

While influenced by the west, these reforms were not imposed by the west. Nor were they the result of inadequate diplomacy. Such views are the result of condescending Eurocentrism. By cutting off their periodization at 1839, Wallerstein and Kasaba chose to neglect the Tanzimat period, an era of great social and political transformation as well as economic change. Their insistence on an economic focus



marginalized Ottoman agency and ignored cultural and intellectual trends. In the late-eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was very much aware of its own need for change. The impetus for reform came from within, and the edicts of 1826, 1839, and 1856 are all part of the same transformation.

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**Questions on Wallerstein's Analysis**

*Some questions on Wallerstein's analysis*

In their arguments on incorporation of the Ottoman Empire into the capitalist world-economy, Wallerstein and his co-authors emphasized export trade, land use, and manufacturing. Their discussion focused on trade between the empire and the northwest European core as if the empire were somehow isolated and had no contact with other parts of the world. How might Ottoman trade with China and Persia between 1750 and 1839 have affected the analysis? In

the early nineteenth century, interstate competition for hegemony in the capitalist core was fiercest between France and Great Britain. But how does the world-system model explain interstate competition between nation-states at the core and world-empires in the European semi-periphery (Austria and Russia) and between the world-empires themselves, all vying for political and economic control in the Balkans at the expense of the Ottomans? And how did the Great Power rivalries influence, contribute to, or hinder incorporation of the Ottoman Empire?

Since capitalist economic relations were spreading through the Balkans by the mid-nineteenth century, how can incorporation of the empire be explained? Could the answer possibly be found in the transmission of ideas, through intellectual property transfer or technology transfer? Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall have suggested that the process of linkage between the European core and the Ottoman Empire be traced more successfully by a study of four networks: the information

network, the prestige-goods network, the political/military network, and the bulk-goods network. William McNeil has also stated that the world-system approach would benefit in clarity and power if it were "tied more explicitly to a communications network."

### *Sources*

Much of the evidence I have cited against Wallerstein's interpretation of Ottoman incorporation into the world-economy was produced by scholars who directed their arguments specifically against him. Lampe, for example, stated that the notion of a "malignant" world system "flies in the face of existing research on Balkan economic history. It also fails to identify the real restraints on the area's development." Lampe argued that the nature of Ottoman hegemony and the military and fiscal imperatives of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires had a "retarding effect" on the Balkans. He suggested that Wallerstein's approach appealed to some Turkish scholars because it absolved Ottoman hegemony of its retarding effect on Balkan development.

Pailaret also targeted Wallerstein directly, noting that "the development experience of the Ottoman Empire has been held up as a sombre example of industrial destruction and the creation of dependency at the European periphery. This already well-rehearsed view has been endorsed by Wallerstein (as one might expect)..." For his part, Pailaret argued that the radical changes Ottoman institutions underwent in the first half of the nineteenth century had a profound and beneficial effect on economic evolution in the Balkans, particularly Bulgaria.

Lampe and Pailaret, whose studies were published after Wallerstein's thesis on incorporation of the Ottoman Empire, based their arguments on archival sources and on the work of Bulgarian scholars published in Bulgarian in the 1950s and 1960s. These works were therefore available to Wallerstein, if only he or his colleagues had known about them and could have read them.

Neither Quataert nor McGowan directed their comments against Wallerstein though their data clearly led them to disagree with some of his interpretations. Wallerstein used some of McGowan's data but chose to ignore some of his interpretations. Quataert's work was produced well after Wallerstein's publications. To the best of my knowledge, Wallerstein has not responded to the findings of the scholars mentioned here. In contrast, Resat Kasaba, one of Wallerstein's co-authors, has reformulated his arguments on incorporation. He has since argued that throughout the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire retained a political and economic structure that continued to operate on a redistributive-tributary mode, that is, goods from the producing elements of society flowed to the non-producing elites (tributes) and entitlements were redistributed according to decisions made by elites. If this is the case, the

Ottoman Empire was still operating as a world-empire and could hardly have been fully incorporated into the capitalist world-economy. One of Kasaba's most interesting discussions concerns the reversals of fortune of çiftlik owners between 1750 and 1820, precisely the period during which Wallerstein had argued for the expansion of çiftliks. Overall, Kasaba's most recent work does not support peripheralization of the Ottoman Empire within the capitalist world-economy in the nineteenth century. In contrast, Pamuk has argued in favor of a two-phase incorporation in the nineteenth century based on fiscal rather than commercial evidence.

### *Conclusion*

I have argued that current scholarship does not support Wallerstein's interpretation of incorporation of the Balkan region of the Ottoman Empire into the capitalist world-economy between 1750 and 1839. The most conclusive evidence against Wallerstein centers on land tenure in the second half of the eighteenth century and the state of Ottoman manufacturing in the first half of the nineteenth century. His argument that a shift in the nature of trade from luxury goods to raw materials in the late eighteenth century, associated with changes in land tenure that led to formations of çiftliks based on coerced labor, does not hold up to scrutiny. His claim that the 1838 Anglo-Turkish Trade Convention was imposed by Britain and led to a collapse of manufacturing has also been refuted by recent archival research.

Wallerstein needs to find new evidence before he can claim that the Ottoman Empire was incorporated into the capitalist world-system between 1750 and 1839, or indeed at any other time. A serious attempt to include the notion of culture, ideas, or communications (in other words, humankind) into world-system theory would surely be rewarding.

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# **The Identity of Black Women in the Post-Bellum Period 1865-1885**

**Carl Greenfeld**

Throughout history, the black woman has always had a multitude of responsibilities thrust upon her shoulders. This was never truer than for southern black women in the period between 1865 and 1885. In this span of twenty years, these women were responsible for their children, their husbands, supporting their families, their fight for freedom as black citizens and as women, their sexual freedom, and various other issues that impacted their lives. All of these aspects of the black woman's life defined who she was. Each of her experiences and battles shaped the life that she lived, and the way she was perceived by the outside world.

Who were these women, and how did the experiences in their life shape who they were? This essay will argue that these women's identities can be surmised by the way in which they handled the different responsibilities and experiences that they were exposed to in the aftermath of slavery. These responsibilities and experiences formed who they were; only by looking at the identities of these women can their lives be studied and explored. In this essay the southern black woman's occupational identity, sexual identity, family identity, and gender identity will be examined. There are, of course, many more specific aspects of these women's identity, but these are the ones that furnish the clearest and most specific view of what these women were about. It is through these four aspects of the southern black women's identity a picture of them can be drawn. One will be able to recognize the hardships they overcame and the effort they put forth in order to be seen as citizens of the United States of America.

## **Occupational Identity**

In the period after the Civil War, work was very important to the southern black woman; she was free for the first time and wanted to assert her freedom and independence. One of the first things that the black woman attempted, after gaining her freedom, was to obtain a job. These women learned quickly, however, that they would not be equals just because they were now free. The job opportunities available to black women, like many other aspects of their lives, would be of much less quality than the jobs offered to the rest of the population. They would be low paying, involve extended hours, and would put them in constant danger; "black women would have to negotiate the literal rough terrain of Atlanta and the social consequences it imposed on their everyday lives as they struggled to earn a living for their families and searched for peace of mind." They would have to persevere in their quest to work and support their household.

After the Civil War, all black citizens of the United States were allegedly free. The thirteenth amendment banning slavery had been passed and the reconstruction of the South was moving along swiftly. This promised freedom, however, was far from what was expected. There were many laws and forces at work to keep blacks in some type of involuntary servitude. Some of the laws that limited black freedom included making it a crime to hire away a worker who had been under contract with a different employer (so called enticement laws), various contract-enforcement statutes that bound the black worker to their employer, and vagrancy statutes in which unemployed blacks were arrested and later forced to work for an employer. These laws operated to deny both black men and black women the ability to search for work or change employers. If a black citizen could not furnish proof of work, he or she could be arrested and later forced to sign a contract with an employer. If a black citizen attempted to change jobs, he or she would be forced into the service of their former employers.

The government of the South was not the only entity that attempted to keep black women from having the freedom to obtain employment. Opposition also came from “white vigilantes, planters, mistresses and overseers, all anxious for the return of a reliable and subordinate labor force.” These opposition forces worked closely with the southern government, inflicted torture upon blacks living in the South, made sure that the compensation of both black men and black women would be kept at a dishonorable level, and did everything within their power to make the lives and working experiences of the newly freed black women as uncomfortable as possible. The atmosphere was one in which “organized sexual-assault raids against black women were especially common in rural areas where terrorist groups like the [Ku Klux Klan] thrived.” The Ku Klux Klan was one of many organizations that attempted to put blacks, and more specifically black women, in their place. These groups thrived on terror to scare, silence, and subordinate these women. Terror was a tremendous incentive for many black citizens to work at the jobs they were told to work at, and to not question their wages or working conditions.

The various terrorist groups and laws that attempted to restrict the black woman’s freedom were not the only barriers set up against her. These restrictions and groups were supplemented by the difficulties that black women had in gaining employment, being offered a salary that was close to that of black men, actually obtaining the wages that they had worked for, and being treated as workers and humans rather than as slaves. The employment experience was rarely a very beneficial one for the southern black woman. Women had to work lengthy hours, at a severely discounted rate, to supplement the salaries of their husbands so that their family could obtain things essential to living. This was the way of life for the black woman whose husband could not earn a sufficient income to support their family (as in most cases).

These women had no choice but to work, and they had to work under the conditions that were set forth by their employers.

The job opportunities available to black women in this time period were often meager and involved menial tasks. One must only look to the statistics in seven southern states in 1870. In this year, 36.4 percent of black women worked at home, 23.3 percent worked as servants, and 10.5 percent worked as laundresses. In comparison, .1 percent worked in semi-skilled jobs, a negligible amount worked in skilled jobs, and .1 percent worked as teachers. In this same year, 59.6 percent of white women worked at home, only 5.7 percent worked as servants, and .4 percent worked as laundresses. The situation that developed was one in which southern black women worked low-skilled jobs, usually the same jobs that they had held before the end of slavery. For example, “by 1880, at least 98 percent of all black female wage-earners in Atlanta were domestics.” It got to the point where “virtually every black girl-child, except for the most affluent, knew that at some time or another she would be cleaning house for white folks.” There were a limited amount of positions available and black women secured the ones they could get.

It would seem logical that people who worked low-skilled jobs would receive lower pay than those who worked high-skilled jobs, and these black women received these lower wages. The problem now, was that these black women did not receive wages that were comparable even to their fellow low-skilled black male workers. There were many situations in which black men and black women who held the same occupation earned different wages. According to historian Dorothy Sterling “freedwomen were always paid less than the men. On one Georgia plantation male hands received \$140 a year, women from \$60 to \$85. In Adams County, Mississippi, Sarah Nelson was promised \$10 a month; John, a man working alongside her received \$15.” Black women in this time period could not achieve equal pay for equal work; they had to be content with what they were offered.

Another problem that black women encountered during their working experience was actually receiving the wages and benefits that they felt they had earned. There were many methods used by southern employers to prevent workers from obtaining the salary they had been promised in their contracts. There were times when “employers would substitute perishables or durable goods in lieu of cash for remuneration, without the workers’ consent.” and other times when “women could also face deductions for behavioral infractions such as lost time and impudence, or for breaking or misplacing objects.” These methods would lead to large deductions from the already low wages of the black worker, whether male or female. One specific example of this is the case of the Baldwin family. This family had contracted themselves out to J.R. Thomas and were supposed to be paid salaries of \$140 for David Baldwin, \$85 for Matty Baldwin (note the difference between the male and female salaries), and

\$60 for Mariah Baldwin. On the day they were to be paid, they received \$12.40, \$48.53, and \$3.15 respectively. Their salaries were reduced for sickness, bad weather, going against orders, and using supplies. Black women were already making less money, but now their salaries were being reduced to almost nothing. There was little they could do about the situation. If they wanted to labor for that employer, they took the salary and benefits they were given and continued working.

The last work-related problem that southern black women had was that they were often treated as slaves rather than as free wage laborers. Often they were beaten or raped with no action being taken against their tormentors. This pattern of abuse can best be shown in the case of Mary Long. As historian Tera Hunter recounts:

Mary Long refused to cook for her employer, Mrs. Montell, in an attempt to receive a holiday one Sunday, and an argument ensued. Long also refused to accede to her boss's command to keep quiet, which angered Mr. Montell. He stepped in and struck the cook twenty-five times with a hickory stick.

Employers still believed that their employees, many of them former slaves, were their property and could be treated as such. The case was the same for incidents of rape and sexual abuse. Women were raped by their employers and humiliated beyond human comprehension. They still had to be frightened that a man, now called boss rather than master, would approach them and sexually abuse or rape them. In both cases of assault and rape, there were two constants; the conditions under which they occurred were similar in slavery and in freedom, and there were few ways in which these black women could redress the wrongs that had been committed against them. It would appear that the southern black female worker had nothing that could even resemble freedom.

This, however, is not true. The southern black woman did have some advantages that emerged with the advent of liberation. She might not have had considerable job opportunities, equal pay (or any pay at all), or freedom from being abused, but she was still able to gain satisfaction through gestures that would irritate her white employers and allow the black woman to regain her self-respect. These gestures were only possible because of the freedom that they now possessed. Eventually, "it was the freedwomen's refusal to work as they had under slavery that planters and northern agents of Reconstruction commented on most frequently and most bitterly." Their freedom may have been limited, but it did allow these women some forms of retribution against their former proprietors. The two main gestures that were utilized by southern black women included relocating themselves and their families away from their place of employment, and withholding their services from their employers.

One of the black women's main goals after the Civil War was to proceed as far as possible from any aspects of slavery that remained. There was a "great desire to leave, to walk away from the plantation, to go in search of a place to live, away from the old reminders of their former status." They did this by physically moving themselves and their families away from the plantations and the homes in which they worked. By moving away, these women made many of their employers upset, as the employers felt they were losing a portion of the control that they exercised over the female black workers. The black working woman did not care, however, and in fact,

The desire to distance themselves physically from erstwhile masters ranked high in their priorities. In a walking city like Atlanta, cooks, maids, and child-nurses could live in areas that were within easy reach by foot, yet were far enough to establish autonomous lives.

This distance was very important to the black woman. It made her feel like she was a real person who had a life outside her job. She did not have to reside with her employer twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, but could instead work a full day and still go home to her family. In this way, the black woman asserted her independence, restored her self-respect, and agitated the white establishment who wanted her to be subservient and who wanted to keep her tied to the employers plantation and/or home.

The other method that southern black women used to assert their independence after the Civil War and emancipation was to withhold services from their employers. There were obviously certain situations when this could not be done, but the opportunity did present itself for women who were not forced to sign long-term employment contracts and who had no reservations about leaving without notice. The two main techniques these women practiced in order to withhold their services were to quit at any time or to go on strike. By relinquishing jobs any time they desired, these women were once again asserting their independence. Unlike in slavery, these women could depart from their jobs for any reason. "African-American women decided to quit work over such grievances as low wages, long hours, ill treatment, and unpleasant tasks." There were also other benefits of relinquishing employment. Not all of these women were assured of obtaining improved jobs, "but [quitting] was an effective strategy to deprive employers of complete power over their labor." The working black woman thus secured a measure of revenge against her white employers.

The same can be said of strikes by black women. The most famous strikes in this period were the washerwomen's strikes that occurred in Jackson, Mississippi in 1866, in Galveston, Texas in 1877, and in Atlanta, Georgia in 1881. In all of these instances, black women held a valuable commodity, their laundry skills, and used them to assert their freedom, regain their self-respect, and inflict injury upon their white employers



and families. These strikes allowed them to procure more valuable benefits, higher salaries, and compelled whites to acknowledge the importance of black citizens in their lives. In the event that strikes did not result in elevated wages or benefits, they did allow these women to stand up for themselves and force the white establishment to work more arduously. Few things could have made the striking women more jubilant than hearing that “rather than give in to the strikers’ demands or burden their husbands’ salaries, ‘some of the first ladies of this city have announced themselves as ready to carry their accomplishments into the kitchen.’” These black women were standing up to those who had oppressed them, and, for a change, making their employers lives more difficult.

The black woman’s occupational identity in the period after the Civil War was one of frustration and reciprocation. There were many barriers preventing them from succeeding, but these women did not buckle. They used the opportunity advanced by emancipation to make their lives conform to their own wishes, to irritate the powerful white establishment, and to maintain their identities as free black women in the South. They did not give in to the pressure that was inflicted upon them, but instead used the importance of their labor to their own advantage.

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## **The Identity of Black Women in the Post-Bellum Period 1865-1885**

**Carl Greenfeld**

### **Sexual Identity**

The black woman’s sexual identity in the post-bellum period was also one that was fraught with a myriad of negatives. Much like the situation that evolved in slavery, freedwomen who worked for or were exposed to white men were often the recipients of sexual assault and rape. The issue of sexual assault and rape towards the black woman was an important component of the white man’s plan to keep them subservient. Rape is not a crime of passion, but an act of power over another. It allowed the man to have control, and thus power, over a woman. This situation developed in the reconstruction period. White males believed that they had to exhibit their superiority and strength over black women. Like the black codes or withholding

payment, rape was a way for white society to place the black woman in a degrading and submissive position.

It should come as no surprise that black women were often the targets of sexual assault and rape. As Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson state, “a huge majority of employed black women worked in white households under the authority of and in proximity to white men, [and] they were continually exposed to sexual harassment.” The sexual abuse also did not end in the workplace. There were many situations in which white men went to the homes of freedwomen and sexually abused them. The Ku Klux Klan was one of many terrorist groups that organized raids in which white men would go into the homes of black families and rape the black women. There are also examples such as when “near Hamburg, South Carolina, five masked whites broke into Chandler Garrot’s home and raped his wife.” One other example occurred when the family of Joe Brown was tortured because he had witnessed a Klan murder. In this assault, the white men made all the women in his family, even his young children, take off all their clothes, after which they were beaten unmercifully with a piece of fishing pole. There was literally nothing that black women could do to avoid these situations. They needed to work so that their families would not starve, but most of the jobs available to them involved the company of white males. They attempted to transplant themselves and their families away from the homes and plantations on which they worked, but organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and other miscellaneous vigilante groups would proceed to attack them in their own homes. The way that they reacted to these abuses, however, exhibited countless attributes of the southern black women’s strength and identity.

The black women in the South who were subjected to rape and sexual abuse had little recourse. Their husbands signed petitions, created organizations, and spoke out about the sexual mistreatment that the women received, but these efforts to protect them fell on deaf ears. There were even examples in which “ex-slave women...pressed charges with the Freedmen’s Bureau against sexual abuse by white men.” These women made an attempt to resist, but little was done on their behalf by the southern white establishment or the northern bureaucrats. Their only recourse was to complain to the authorities and hope that something would happen, or quit their jobs and pray that no men or terrorist organizations would come to their homes with sexual intentions. These southern black women did not just stay back and passively accept the mistreatment, but instead made efforts to tell their story to the police or leave situations that were unhealthy. These women made an effort to protect what was important in their lives. The black woman looked to her legal marriage, her children, and her friends, for inspiration in protecting herself and her loved ones from the sexual deviance of whites.

The black woman's sexual identity in the post-bellum period was one that was composed of constant fear mixed with empowerment. The very real threat of sexual abuse permeated their entire lives from their occupational experiences to their existence in their home. There was almost no escape from the southern white "predator". These women did, however, fight back. They lobbied to make their stories known to the authorities and the freedmen's bureau. They also strived to vacate situations that might have the potential to result in sexual mistreatment. Unlike their experience under the institution of slavery, these women did have some control over their actions and their bodies. They were in the process of reclaiming their sexual identity from pervasive southern forces.

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## **The Identity of Black Women in the Post-Bellum Period 1865-1885**

**Carl Greenfeld**

### **Family Identity**

The role of family was also very important to southern black women after the Civil War. They would no longer have to worry about their husbands or children being sold away from them. They would no longer have to dread a situation in which their husband inhabited a different plantation than the one on which they lived. The freedom these women now had allowed them to live in a situation in which "putting marriages on a legal footing bolstered the ability of ex-slaves to keep their families together, to make decisions about labor and education, and to stay out of the unscrupulous grasp of erstwhile masters." Black women could raise a family in the manner in which they had observed free white women raising theirs. This desire for family life, however, like every other part of the freedwomen's life, did not come without hardships and great sacrifices. A complete family and the ability to provide for this family did not just appear after the flames of the Civil War had been extinguished. The black female, in most cases, needed to locate one or more of her immediate family members who had run away or been sold, and also needed to support her family in an era in which black men were paid little and black women even less.

In the aftermath of slavery, black women often did not have their complete family with them. They had husbands and children who had been sold to distant places where they might have died or married other women. These freedwomen were determined to rebuild their families. One of the first things that these women did after slavery was attempt to locate family members who had been sold or otherwise moved away. If there was a situation in which:

Word came through the grapevine that a daughter—sold off at ten or twelve—was working on a farm sixty miles away, her mother would begin walking and would not stop until she stood at the gate of that farm with her daughter in her arms.

These black women were willing to go anywhere and make any sacrifice to rebuild their families. They persevered for many years after the Civil War, moving around the South and trying to find the remnants of their families.

The black woman, however, was often not successful in rebuilding her family. The situation became one in which “the challenge for former slaves was often not so much rebuilding families as creating them.” In many cases there was nothing left or no knowledge available about the freedwoman’s family. This did not stop the quest of black women, but instead made them more determined to form a family life. If they knew they could no longer be with their husbands because they had remarried, been killed, or could not be located, the women found another husband. If these women were themselves remarried, and a former husband tracked them down, they chose whom they preferred to be with; these women did whatever was necessary to put their families back together or to start new ones. As Hine and Thompson state, “The fact that African Americans were able to put their families together as well as they did is a tribute to the abiding respect for family in the culture.” The success and the hard work involved in their endeavor to recreate their families illustrate the importance of family to the southern black woman. The black woman wanted and needed family; she used whatever means were necessary to secure the family life that she craved and that was so valuable to her. Once the freedwoman had rebuilt or recreated her family, she needed to aid in its economic support. According to Anglo-American gender roles, the man went to work to provide financially for his family and the woman took care of the home and the children. This ideology, however, did not conform to the structure of the black southern family in the post-bellum period. The main reason for this is that “black husbands have had lower labor income and higher unemployment than white husbands, and non-labor income for blacks has also been less than that for whites.” The black husband, for the most part, did not have the financial ability to support his family while his wife stayed home. In addition to taking care of the home, raising the children, and tending to the needs of her husband, the southern black woman now had to provide for her family economically.

The effect of this new responsibility on the black female was thus two-fold. First, as discussed earlier in this essay, the women now had to contend with the difficulties and the unfairness that was inherent in the work experience of freedwomen in the South. They would be exposed to the beatings, the sexual abuse, and the lost pay. Second, black women would have to work harder than ever in order to complete all the tasks that they now had committed themselves to; “part of the price [for freedom] was enormously long hours, for black women ended up working in the fields when they were needed-as they often were-in addition to their work at home.” The freedwomen, however, did not complain about the extra effort. They saw the negatives of extra work as being strongly counteracted by the positives of family life. These women now had their freedom, their husbands, and their children, and were not going to permit some inconveniences to stand in the way of their happiness.

Family identity was a strong presence in the African American woman’s life. She was willing to travel any distance or make any effort to regain lost family members or recreate a new family structure. After she rebuilt or created her family, she was willing to sacrifice all the time that she had in her life, whether it was by working, staying home, or as in most cases, both. She would spend all day laboring in the fields or in an employers dwelling, and then come home and take care of her house, her children, and her husband. The freedwoman’s dedication to the institution of family displays the importance of this part of her identity.

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## **The Identity of Black Women in the Post-Bellum Period 1865-1885**

**Carl Greenfeld**

### **Gender Identity**

The gender identity of southern black women was also important in the post-bellum period. The voting movement among freedwomen will be used as an example of how women fought for their rights as females, and as African Americans, as well as showing their proclivity for doing what they believed was best for them and their family. In this period, black women believed that the right to vote, whether it was for

them or for black men, was the key to their continued freedom. They looked at suffrage as a means to an end. Much of the importance of suffrage after the Civil War was polarized around the newly proposed fifteenth amendment.

The battle for the right to vote was a good example of the gender identity of black women after the Civil War. In this time period, the battle for the black woman's right to vote revolved around the fifteenth amendment. The fifteenth amendment, first proposed in 1868, was to guarantee black men the right to vote. There were two camps, however, that disagreed upon the proposed wording and effect of this amendment. There were those women who fought for the right of black men to vote, with black woman waiting their turn. There were also those women who believed that they deserved the right to vote without delay. Those who wanted to wait believed that "women should step back and wait their turn, lest they jeopardize the fare of men who so desperately needed political power." In fact, Eric Foner, a professor of history at Columbia University states, "most black women seem to have agreed that the enfranchisement of black men would represent a major step forward for the entire black community." These women believed that their interests could best be provided for by first making sure that black men achieved the right to vote. The other group of women believed that the right to vote for black women, as well as for black men, should be included within the fifteenth amendment and should be immediate. Many of these women attended rallies or tried to register to vote. They were not content with allowing black men to acquire the right to vote first, as they believed they were equal citizens and therefore should have equal privileges.

Although there were different views on whether women should fight for the immediate right to vote, there was an important similarity between views. Each group believed that they were doing what was in the best interests of the black woman in this time period. The question of the rightness or wrongness of these groups is immaterial. Both groups showed their strength of character and belief in doing what was most advantageous for their race and gender, regardless of the position that they took on this issue. The women who wanted to wait believed it was more important to make sure that black men got suffrage so that they would have a political base of power for their family. Those who wanted immediate suffrage believed that the only way to guarantee their freedom was through instantaneous suffrage for all, whether white or black, male or female. Either way one observed it, the issue involved was one of continued freedom and long term prosperity. Ultimately, in 1870, the fifteenth amendment was passed and only black men were given the right to vote. The important issue, however, was that "black women had not been granted the vote along with their husbands and fathers. But they did manage to make their presence known." They showed that they would fight for what they believed was important in their lives, even if it included disagreeing with other members of the same race or sex.

There is one more point to be made on the gender identity of these black women. Only one specific example, the women's suffrage movement, has been given in this essay to show the gender identity of the freedwomen in this time period. The gender identity of these women, however, is also composed of the three identities, (work, sexual, and family) that have been discussed previously in this essay. The examples such as lower pay at work, sexual abuse, and being expected to take care of the home, are all experiences and responsibilities that were forced upon the African American woman and which contributed to her gender identity. This concept is important because it shows that not all the identities that were representative of black women in this era were mutually exclusive, but worked together and in combination with each other. Although it might appear in this essay that each of the identities presented only exist apart from one another, they are indeed connected.

The southern black woman went through many hardships with the conclusion of the Civil War. At the outset of this time period, the freedwoman learned "that emancipation was only the first step on the road to freedom, not the last, and the obstacles along the way would be formidable." These women were forced to work for little pay, sexually abused, forced to recreate and support their families, and were exposed to a multitude of other degradations and insulting practices in their lives. The constant throughout these experiences, however, was the strength and grace that these African American women displayed through these living conditions. If she was compensated less than she deserved or was showed disrespect on the job, she either quit or went on strike until she secured what was rightfully hers. If her family had been sold away during the age of slavery, she would go wherever necessary in order to reclaim them. These women had the strength of character that was necessary to toil in the fields or in an employer's home all day, but would then allow them to journey home and care for their husbands and children.

One would most likely describe these women and their identity as both strong and persistent. The result of their experiences, their responsibilities, and ultimately their identity was their ability to accept the difficulties in their lives, knowing that this acceptance was the key to living the kind of life they coveted. These women learned to fight the battles that they could and postpone the battles that would harm their future prospects for happiness. The identity of these women was not one of subservience to the more powerful white establishment, but one of attaining the necessary freedom in life that made the African American woman content. Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson put it best when they said, "they [southern black women] were willing to pay a high price for these things, so crucial to the sense of freedom." The southern black woman worked unmercifully and accepted the burden of being an African-American woman in the South in order to acquire the freedom that was so important to her.

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# **Universal Churches and the Role of Religion in Arnold J. Toynbee's *A Study of History***

**Phyllis Amenda**

## **Introduction**

Religion has always been one of the universal attributes of human society. All civilizations look for an explanation of how the world works and try to decipher their own place in that world. No world historian should attempt to study either individual societies or a global society without seriously studying the place that the search for the divine has played in the human story.

Arnold J. Toynbee paid particular attention to the role of religion in the later volumes of his twelve volume work, *A Study of History*. He became particularly interested in the relationship between what he called universal religions and universal states.

Toynbee's interest in religion mirrored the publication history of *A Study of History*. Volumes I-VI were published in 1939 and have little mention of religion as Toynbee develops his civilizational paradigm. The next four volumes, VII-X, were published fifteen years after the first six, in 1954. Toynbee makes no secret of the fact that the war changed his outlook on civilizations and their history. His writing on religion is a significant part of this change, some might say that Toynbee becomes obsessed with religion, but there certainly is no doubt that religious concerns become a dominant theme in the later volumes of *A Study of History*. To understand Toynbee's understanding of religion, this paper will first summarize the role of religion in the first six volumes of the work and then undertake an analysis of the section on "Universal Churches" in Volume VII.

## Basic concepts in *A Study of History*

In the first six volumes of his history, Toynbee lays out his "Challenge-Response-Mimesis" paradigm, concentrating on the Challenge and Response phases in Volumes I-III. Volumes IV through VI deal with the breakdown of civilizations. In the first three volumes, there is little mention of religion, except as a characteristic of a given civilization. In Volumes IV-VI, Toynbee begins to look at what makes civilizations decline. "The Disintegrations of Civilizations" is Toynbee's title for the fifth section of his work which comprises both Volumes V and VI. In Volume V, Toynbee begins

to look at various social groups which comprise a civilization, particularly, “external” as well as “internal proletariats.”

In using the term, “proletariats,” Toynbee draws on the Latin etymology:

derived from a Latin word coined for the statistical purposes of the Roman census to describe a category of Roman citizens ‘who had nothing but their children to enter in their returns as their contribution to the common weal.’

Proletariats, as conceived of by Toynbee, are those who are on the outside; those who are not in control or who have a large stake maintaining the social order.

[A] social element or group which in some way is ‘in’ but not ‘of’ any given society at any given stage of society’s history . . . The true hall-mark of the proletarian is neither poverty nor humble birth but a consciousness—and the resentment which this consciousness inspires. . .

This consciousness can be exhibited by groups both geographically within as well as without the society.

External proletariats are those who have geographically separated from the society by some act of withdrawal with a clearly defined frontier separating them from the dominant minority. Toynbee usually characterizes the external proletariat as “primitive” or “barbarian war bands.” The barbarian hordes provide an external threat to a disintegrating society and will continue to pester the society from without until they can break through its defenses and conquer. Their ultimate victory will occur when the society is sufficiently weakened from within that it cannot fight off the external threat any longer.

This internal weakening will be the result of class warfare between the dominant minority and the internal proletariat. Toynbee’s concept of the internal proletariat is much closer to the conventional meaning of ‘proletariat’ that we associate with Marx and socialism. In Volume V, Toynbee describes the internal proletariats of the various civilizations he has identified. In discussing the dynamics of the internal proletariats in various societies, Toynbee begins to develop his thesis that this disaffected social group plays a role in introducing new religious ideas. According to Toynbee, philosophy and the concept of public service come from the dominant minority, but “[a]mong the works of the Internal Proletariat the counterparts of the philosophies are ‘higher religions’, while the counterpart of the universal state is a universal church.”

Toynbee distinguishes between primitive and higher religions: “[F]or a primitive religion is merely one expression, among many, of the corporate life of some local

human community, whereas a ‘higher religion’ is the worship of a Godhead that is conceived of as transcending the whole of human life as well as the whole of the Material Universe.” For Toynbee, it is the study of these higher religions and their role in civilization that will become a larger focus in the later volumes of *A Study of History*.

### Breakdown and the Rise of Universal States

In Toynbee’s Challenge-Response-Mimesis paradigm, creative responses to the challenges facing a society enable a society to grow. The group that leads the society through the challenges is called the creative minority by Toynbee. As long as these supermen (in the Nietzschean sense) are the impetus for the society, that society will be on the ascendant phase of its evolution. But what happens if the creative minority loses its edge, for some reason no longer has the “mystically inspired personalities” which are needed to maintain the creativity of response that gives a civilization its uniqueness? Toynbee calls this point the “breakdown” of the Challenge-Response-Mimesis paradigm. Costello defines this as “the breakdown of civilization [which] occurs in the moral failure of the leading minority and the consequent secession of their potential successors.” The creative minority, through its leadership, becomes the dominant minority, but when the dominant minority loses its cultural hegemony, the response of the proletariat becomes mechanical and ritualistic. It is at this point that the internal proletariat begins seeking for a new value system, a new aspiration, to replace the rigid, unsatisfying gods that have been forced upon them by the dominant minority.

The polity that is controlled by a dominant (but no longer creative) minority is called a universal state by Toynbee. He devotes the first half of Volume VII to describing universal states. Toynbee begins Volume VII by describing the features of a universal state:

In the first place, universal states arise after, and not before, the breakdowns of the civilizations to whose bodies social they bring political unity. They are not summers but ‘Indian Summers’, masking autumn and presaging winter. In the second place, they are the products of dominant minorities: that is, of once creative minorities that have lost their creative power . . .

Toynbee goes on to quote a lengthy passage by Amand Bazard which states that the hallmark of their establishment is negativeness. A third feature is that universal states are the answer of the society to “a Time of Troubles” which earns the gratitude of the populace by establishing order and seemingly stopping the disintegration of the society.

The paradox of universal states is that they appear to be immortal just at the moment they are about to commit euthanasia and succumb to an alien intruder. For examples, one needs only look at the Roman Empire or the British Raj in India. By the time they appeared immortal, they had already swallowed the poison of their ultimate demise. If Toynbee views the universal state as civilization in decline, does he see any positive virtue to them? He finds two purposes of the universal state. The first is as peacemaker. "Whereas parochial states prey on one another . . . universal states come into existence to put a stop to wars and to substitute co-operation for bloodshed." The second purpose is to spend itself in service to others. The second purpose raises the question: Who are its beneficiaries of this service? Toynbee answers that there are only three choices, a contemporary alien civilization, its external proletariat or its internal proletariat, "and in serving the internal proletariat a universal state will be ministering to one of the higher religions that make their epiphany in the internal proletariat's bosom."

It is in serving the higher religions that find a home in the internal proletariat that universal states find their highest purpose in Toynbee's thinking. But how do universal states provide the conditions (or services) that allow alien higher religions to flourish?

As mentioned above, the first benefit provided by a universal is a time of peace from both internal and external threats. Toynbee labels this benefit, "The Psychology of Peace." Toynbee claims that while eliminating fratricidal warfare, the dominant minority is unable to impose a "fancy religion" or philosophy from above, but that the "pacific atmosphere" will allow internal proletariats to establish their own religions from below upwards. Both the freedom to travel permitted by peace itself, and the communications network created by the universal state, will allow religious ideas to move in and gain a hearing in the society. Within the society, who is more willing to hear new ideas? Is it the dominant minority which seeks to maintain the existing power structure? Or is it the already alienated internal proletariat, who have no stake in the state religion or the power structure that state religion inevitably supports? The answer is obvious, while enjoying the peace established by the dominant minority, the internal proletariat is going to be willing to examine new religious ideas which will eventually challenge the dominant minority's power.

### The Establishment of Higher Religions

As noted above, Toynbee does not place much emphasis on religion in the earlier volumes of *A Study of History*. However, with the publication of Volume VII in 1954, fifteen years after the publication of Volume VI, the work takes a major turn in examining the post-breakdown phase of civilizations, which Toynbee calls universal states. It is at this point in the work that Toynbee becomes focused on religion. In his

view the primary beneficiary of a universal state is unequivocally the universal religion that arises from it. Halfway through Volume VII, Toynbee begins a new section entitled “Universal Churches.” It is in this section that the change in Toynbee’s thought after World War II becomes more pronounced. While still discussing past civilizations and attempting to find a universal paradigm of development, it is clear that Toynbee’s focus has shifted to the spiritual side of human existence.

One reason for Toynbee’s emphasis on religion is the rejection he saw in post-war intellectual thought of spiritual values. He argues that man has discarded the worship of primitive nature for the worship of “the man-god Caesar” and has transformed nature “from an object of worship into an object of exploitation.” The antidote for such idolatry is the message of the higher religions.

The message of the higher religions had been that Man, like Nature, is not God but is God’s creature; and this message had won Man’s ear at the moment when the collapse of a man-made mundane civilization had been demonstrating to Man the limitations of his power through the first-hand evidence of a painful and humbling experience

While this could obviously be true of the fall of the Roman Empire, it could equally be true of post-war England.

### Parasitic Religion

Another reason that Toynbee emphasizes the positive role of higher religions in the human story is that he wants to refute modern scholarship that denigrates religion, especially Christianity. He opens the beginning the book on “Universal Churches” with a section entitled, “Churches as Cancers.” Toynbee admits that because the universal churches that have developed out of the higher religions are the primary beneficiaries of the universal states, they might be perceived as a parasite on that site, sucking the life out of it until the universal state drops dead. But he counters that “[t]his diagnosis is as attractive as it is exacerbating; for it always easier, both intellectually and morally, to debit one’s ills to the account of some outside agency than to ascribe responsibility to oneself.” He then spends the next ten pages debunking two well known scholars who attack Christianity as being an outside parasite, Edward Gibbon and Sir James George Frazer.

Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was published in 1932. Toynbee sums up all seventy-one chapters with a nine word quotation, “I have described the triumph of Barbarism and Religion.” Because Gibbon sees that the decline of the Empire was synonymous with rise of Christianity, he concludes that the latter is responsible for the former. Toynbee rebuts Gibbon by

claiming that Gibbon misread the point of breakdown in the Roman Empire. The Empire (or as Toynbee would say, the Hellenic civilization) had passed the point of breakdown long before the entrance of Christianity. Without the breakdown of Hellenic civilization, Christianity and other Oriental religions would have found no market in Rome for their ideas.

Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* takes what is implicit in Gibbon about the parasitic nature of Christianity and expands the concept. Toynbee includes a lengthy quotation from *The Golden Bough* in which Frazer claims that Oriental religions completely undermined the "conception of the subordination of the individual to the community" and replaced it with the "selfish and immoral doctrine" of individual salvation. The selection quoted by Toynbee ends with hope that with the revival of classicism in the Renaissance and post-Renaissance eras will restore Roman virtue in the modern world. According to Frazer:

The revival of Roman Law, of the Aristotelian philosophy, of ancient art and literature at the close of the Middle Ages marked the return of Europe to native ideals of life and conduct, to saner, manlier views of the world. The long halt in the march of civilization was over. The tide of Oriental invasion had turned at last. It is ebbing still.

To which Toynbee ironically replies,

It was indeed still ebbing . . . on the 4th March, 1948...the present writer was wondering what that gentle scholar would have had to say . . . about some of the ways in which Europe's return to 'native ideals of life and conduct' had manifested itself during the forty-one years that had now passed since . . . 1907.

Toynbee sees a straight line between the "rational, unenthusiastic" neo-paganism of Gibbon and Frazer to the "demonic, emotional, violent-handed" neo-pagans of Hitler's Germany.

Toynbee argues that the love of God and love of Man are joined together in all the higher religions and therefore doing one will require doing the other. The difference between the pagan and the Christian (or the Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist) is that the Christian can see beyond his own small kingdom to the world as a totality. By seeking the will of God on earth, the Christian is shooting for a larger goal than the small-minded pagan, and therefore has a greater chance at hitting at least some part of that target. He quotes Robert Browning, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for?"

As an example of that goal of serving man by serving God, Toynbee gives an account of Saint Daniel the Stylite, a Syrian anchorite, who left his pillar and journeyed to

Constantinople to save the Christian faith, and thereby the Empire, and compares this example to the Hindu sage, Purun Baghat, who left his hermitage to warn villagers of an impending landslide, thus saving their lives. Both holy men sought to live in isolation to better contemplate the divine, but when their fellow man needed them, they gladly returned to the world to serve their fellow man, and thereby gain a fuller understanding of divine providence.

Having made his case against Gibbon and Frazer that religion is not a parasite on the universal state, Toynbee seeks to explore the possibility that religion may actually be a “higher species of society.” To understand what Toynbee means by that, we first need to understand what Toynbee means by “higher religions” and the role those religions have played in the evolution of society.

## Religion and Society

In his chapter, “Churches as a Higher Species of Society,” Toynbee differentiates between what he calls “lower religions” and “higher religions.” These different stages of religious development have different types of relationships with the dominant minority and the state apparatus they exist under. Furthermore, these two stages have different relationships with rationalism and rationalism’s study of science. In studying these stages and why the conflict with rationalism is important, Toynbee makes a very powerful polemic for man’s need of religious truth and worship.

## Lower Religions

As mentioned earlier, Toynbee identifies lower religions as a local phenomenon while higher religions view the deity as a global unity, concerned about all mankind, not just an individual tribe or nation. Toynbee argues that lower, primitive religions are the by-product of parochial states, but “the establishment of universal states obliterates the *raison d’être* of these religions. . .” There was no concept of personal choice in belief because the point of lower religions is not orthodox belief, but orthodox praxis. Toynbee explains: “The pith of Primitive Religion is not belief but action, and the test of conformity is not assent to a theological creed but participation in ritual performances.”

The emphasis on praxis over belief is why Toynbee believes that there is no disagreement between philosophy (the search for intellectual truth) and religion as defined by ritual. The people in primitive societies understand that their creation myths are “not statements concerning matter of fact that can be labeled ‘true’ or ‘false’.” Therefore the philosopher who does make statements which have truth claims suffers no collision with the dominant minority “so long as the philosopher continues to carry out his hereditary religious duties.” Toynbee’s example is

Confucius, who reconciled his moral philosophy with the traditional practices of Sinic religion by presenting his ideas as the meaning of those rites. Praxis over belief was Toynbee's presentation of primitive religions. When the higher religions emerged, their novelty was the emphasis on belief over praxis. This led to what Toynbee refers to as the "paradox," that the greatest advances in religious thought were usually seen as lapses in religion by their founders' contemporaries. Thus the incredulity of Pompey when he found no object of worship in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, and charges of atheism against early Christians by their pagan neighbors while the Jews denounced these same Christians as blasphemers.

### The Superiority of Higher Religions

If these early Christians were not bound by the rituals of either the Jews or the pagans, then what was their appeal? Likewise, how did the philosophy of Gautama Siddhartha become the Buddhist religion of today? In other words, what accounts for the rise of the higher religions?

Toynbee seeks to place the rise of the four higher religions (Christianity, Islam, Mahayana and Hinduism) in his paradigm of civilizational breakdown. Thus, in general, the higher religions came out of the breakdown of the second generation of civilizations. These civilizations did not all break down at the same moment of history, so as the four higher religions emerged, they often took elements from prior religions and civilizations. For example, Christianity arose during the breakdown of the Hellenic civilization from both Jewish and Zoroastrian roots. The Zoroastrian root merged into Judaism during the Jews' Babylonian exile, which occurred during the time of troubles that led to Cyrus founding the Achaemenian universal state. The earlier, Jewish roots of Christianity, arose out of the breakup of the "New Empire of Egypt" when Moses led the Hebrew internal proletariat away from that troubled land and founded their own parochial state.

Toynbee argues that religious developments are more likely to occur during a time of troubles than during times of peace and prosperity. He goes so far as to call it a "law" that "the circumstances favourable to spiritual and to secular progress are not only different but are antithetical." His explanation will sound familiar to those familiar with the phenomenon of "no atheists in foxholes."

Spiritual and secular ideals are at variance; they are perpetually striving with one another for mastery over human souls; and it is therefore not surprising that souls should be deaf to the call of the Spirit in times of secular prosperity, and sensitive to the neglected whisper of the still small voice when the vanity of the This World is brought home to them by secular catastrophes and when their hearts are softened by the sufferings and sorrows that these catastrophes inflict.



Toynbee is obviously not only thinking of the past, but also of the post-WWII present:

When the house that Man has built for himself falls in ruin about his ears and he finds himself standing again in the open at the mercy of the elements, he also finds himself standing again face to face with a God whose perpetual presence is now no longer hidden from Man's eyes by prison walls of Man's own making.

If Toynbee seems to be saying that post-war Europe was in a time of troubles (which included both World Wars), then he has hope for the future.

If this is the truth, the interregna which punctuate secular history by intervening between the submergence of one civilization and the emergence of a successor may be expected to have, as their counterparts in religious history, no breaches of continuity or pauses in the pulsation of life, but flashes of intense spiritual illumination and bursts of fervent spiritual activity.

Religious insights come out of troubled times. Each troubled time is different, just as societies are individual even while they follow the same basic paradigm of rise and fall. Each civilization's troubles are unique, so each civilization's religious response will highlight a different facet of the Deity.

Toynbee has made a case for churches springing up out of a civilization's decay. But might things work the other way? Could churches have a role in creating new civilizations? Toynbee argues that they do, and an exploration of his ideas on the subject will further illuminate the importance of religion in human history.

### Birth out of Death: Churches and the Creation of New Civilizations

If the universal state is already dying by the time a higher religion becomes a universal church, then what role does religion play in the funeral of the dead civilization and the birth of a new one? Toynbee's concept is that of the church as a chrysalis for new civilizations. Toynbee confesses that at one time, he believed that this was *raison d'être* for universal churches, but that when writing Volume VII, he had come to believe that universal churches had a much larger reason for existence. As mentioned before, it is obvious that the experiences of World War II had a significant effect in expanding Toynbee's appreciation of religion. Still, Toynbee admits that while the universal churches serve a much greater purpose than simply as a chrysalis for new civilizations, it is useful to study that facet of their mission. It is important to understand Toynbee's ideas regarding civilizational cycles and the role that religion plays in those cycles.

### The Chrysalis Concept

Toynbee claims that all of the extant civilizations in 1952 were affiliated to earlier civilizations through universal churches. He traces the Western and Orthodox Christian civilizations back to the Hellenic civilization through Christianity; the Far East back to the Sinic through Mahayana; the Hindu back to the Indic; and the Arabic through Islam to the Syriac. He goes on to argue that the fossils of several extinct civilizations were preserved in a religious expression, for example, Judaism, Jainism and several offshoots of Buddhism.

The transition process from old civilization to new begins with what Toynbee calls the “conceptive” role of the church. In this phase, the universal state has been established out a time of troubles. The state has seized all political power and left the bulk of the population as an internal proletariat. They have willingly given up their freedom in exchange for peace and safety, but they have paid a price. This cost of freedom is frustration, a loss of that creative impulse that Toynbee calls “a psychic stream” and modern psychologists call “libido” by the alienated majority. This “life-force” will seek expression, and one way it does so is in new religions. Toynbee quotes Lord Macaulay: “It [Christianity] excited all the passions of a stormy democracy in the quiet and listless population of an overgrown empire . . .it changed men, accustomed to be turned over like sheep from tyrant to tyrant, into devoted partisans and obstinate rebels.”

In this first conceptive phase of the chrysalis, the state has suppressed the energies and creativity of the masses. The successful new religions are those which can take those energies and use them to further their message. When the new religion is able to channel these unleashed energies, it enters the “gestative phase” of its encounter with the universal state. This is an institution-building phase of the religion’s life cycle. Toynbee compares this to the building of secular institutions that accompany the building of the civilization. The universal state is not using this creative energy, so the churches appropriate it and provide an outlet to “those men of mark who have failed to find scope for their genius as public servants.” Toynbee claims that at this stage, the masses sense that the state is sinking and are looking for some institution that promises them hope for the future, thus the gestative phase is marked by mass conversions. Toynbee provides examples from his second generation civilizations of the growth of the new higher religions. It is during this phase that civilization which gave birth to the religion completely “dissolves into a social vacuum.” To illustrate his point, Toynbee uses an Islamic myth, which teaches that the bridge over Hell to Paradise is as narrow as a razor’s edge. The avatar of the Prophet Mohammed appears as a ram who will surefootedly cross the bridge with the true believers clinging to him as a tick in the ram’s wool. Unbelievers are left to cross on their own, which they are unable to do, therefore falling into eternal damnation. The ram, representing the

universal churches, is the vehicle by which the benefits and learning of the prior civilization will cross the abyss between the old and new civilizations.

Once the old universal state is dead and gone, a new dynamic is needed. Toynbee calls this the “parturient” phase. During this phase, the church opens the floodgates and releases the energy it has been keeping within its own institutions during the death throes of the prior state. Church leaders are released to serve in secular roles, and new parochial states begin to build out of the creative energy stored by the religious institutions, responding to new challenges and beginning the whole Challenge-Response-Mimesis paradigm all over again. At least, that is the general idea. On this phase of his argument, Toynbee admits that the evidence breaks down. Unlike the neat examples he was able to provide for the first two phases of his paradigm, he admits that the evidence is not universal for the parturient phase. It worked in Western Europe during the Medieval period and to a degree in India with the Brahmins, but not very well with either Ottoman Orthodoxy or Islam. This leads Toynbee to discuss the inadequacy of the chrysalis concept.

The main drawback of the churches as chrysalis concept is that only works for one generation of civilizations. Going from the first generation to the second generation, Toynbee can only describe rudimentary higher religions. He says in fact that it “never occurred in the corresponding transition from the second generation from the first.” (See Chart of Civilizations and Religions at conclusion of paper.) It is only after the second generation of civilizations that Toynbee can detect the emergence of universal churches. He attempts to delineate a group of secondary higher religions arising out of the third generation of civilizations (see Chart), but none of these secondary religions has truly taken hold in the way that the primary four higher religions did.

Toynbee admits that the chrysalis concept is very limited even looking at the second and third generations. Looking at his Chart, he comments that while all the tertiary civilizations came from secondary civilizations via chrysalis churches, not all the secondary civilizations parented tertiary civilizations. Only four of the eight secondary civilizations gave birth to a succeeding generation. He also admits that he did not see the cycle repeating in his own time. Writing after World War II, he does speculate as where Communism fits into his schema. He does call Marxian Communism a religion, speculating that if the Soviet Union was the universal state for the Western World, then Communism would then be the religion of the dominant minority, and reap a reward of “Dead Sea fruit.” In other words it would not triumph, but would languish as all dominant minorities do, waiting for their internal proletariats to discover a vision of the divine that meets their needs, not the needs of their commissars.

In analyzing Toynbee's concept of the chrysalis, it appears to be even more limited than he thought it was. While Toynbee's list of tertiary civilizations makes sense, his secondary religions are purely derivative of the four higher religions (Christianity, Islam, Mahayana and Hinduism). Looking at this paradigm in 1998, it does not hold up. At least two of the four primary religions (Christianity and Islam) are continuing to win adherents around the globe, even as Western Christian Civilization (at least the Western part, with or without the Christian) is becoming a global civilization. Buddhism and Hinduism are continuing to hold their ground as major world religions and have spread world wide as a result of increased global immigration. By contrast, while some of his secondary religions such as Baha'ism and Sikhism are still in existence, they have not become major world religions and these two sects have been severely persecuted in their lands of origin (Iran and India).

Toynbee has discussed the function of churches in birthing civilizations, but what about the function of civilizations in birthing churches. If religion is as important to mankind as Toynbee came to believe that it did, what might be the role of secular institutions in illuminating the divine?

#### Civilization as an Egg to Hatch A New Religion

As Toynbee's conviction that religion was the overarching link between civilizations, both in time and space, grew after WWII, his writing in *A Study of History*, reflected that change. In the chapter discussed above, "Churches as a Higher Species of Society," Toynbee urged his readers to

"open our minds to the possibility that the churches might be the protagonists and that vice versa the histories of the civilizations might have to be envisaged and interpreted in terms, not of the own destinies, but of their effect on the history of Religion."

In the next chapter, "The Role of Civilizations in the Lives of Churches," Toynbee asks the reader to invert the paradigm he used in the first six volumes. Instead of considering civilizations paramount and religion subordinate, he wants to "make the new departure of dealing with civilizations in terms of churches." Toynbee believes that this approach will answer a question posed by Plato, "[w]hich . . . are the true catastrophes: the breakdowns of civilizations or their births?" Toynbee's answer is that the birth of a civilization is a catastrophe if it results in a regression from higher religion, but a success if the new civilization gives rise to a new church. Toynbee's example of a successful new church is Christianity, which took vocabulary and customs from the Hellenic (both Greek and Roman) culture and infused them with sacred significance. He uses the metaphor of an egg, which must be broken for the new life within to grow and mature. The Hellenic civilization existed for one reason, to bring forth Christianity. In so doing, its death was not in vain, but a life cycle

expended for a noble purpose. But what about the other side of the drachma, the case where a civilization does not give rise to a new church, but regresses back to a prior civilization?

### Unsuccessful Civilizations

After Toynbee sets forth his example of the Christian church transforming the Hellenic world into a new entity, devoted to showing the divine light to the people, he considers whether a civilization which arose out of such a religious ethos might have regressed back to the level of its parent civilization. Using the same methodology of tracing word etymology from one source to another, Toynbee traces a number of words and customs from the church to a purely secular connotation. He concludes that much of the sacred has reverted back to a purely secular meaning. In a revision of the normally accepted view, Toynbee views the so-called Renaissance as a regression of European civilization because it rejected the religious base of that society in favor of the secular works of the Hellenic civilization. He further claims that this is not merely a Western problem, but it has also occurred in the Far East, where the rejection of Mahayana in favor of the prior Sinic culture has been more complete than the rejection of Christianity in the West.

What causes this rejection? Why do societies reject the higher religions that Toynbee feels are clearly superior to any other choices they have? Toynbee seeks answers to these questions in the chapter, "Causes of Regression." He looks at the Hildebrandine papacy, Saint Benedict and Pope Gregory the Great. He concludes that to the degree those in charge of the Civitas Dei get ensnared in the affairs of the world of men, their legacy is a degraded spirituality. He acknowledges that the three holy men he studies were not attempting to take worldly power for its own sake, but were forced into taking that power by the challenge of exercising their spiritual authority. Therefore he reasons that the real problem is not with the institutions per se. The real problem is innate in human nature, Original Sin.

If our problem is Original Sin, an intractable evil in the human soul, is there any hope of progressing either in terms of civilization or religion? Was the flowering of the four higher religions the apex of human development? Toynbee is very concerned with these questions in the chapter, "The Bow in the Cloud." The chapter title comes from the account in Genesis where God tells Noah that the rainbow is a sign to man that God will never again destroy the world by water. He reminds the reader that secular progress and spiritual progress are polar opposites, so if civilization has seen great secular advances, it is to be expected that the spiritual life of that society would have declined.

Looking at the Western World after both world wars, he offers two choices to the Western civilization: The first is to let the Neo-Paganism that almost destroyed the West in the twentieth century have its way and grind our civilization into the dust. The second is for modern man to awake from his slumber, repent of his Man-worship and return to the higher religions revealed to his forefathers. Toynbee believes that one will end in the death of the West, the other offers a hope of new life.

Toynbee believed that the future of civilization depended on man's religious choices and that our previous civilizations were merely a vehicle for the spiritual side of man to develop and flourish. It would seem from Volume VII that the only unit of study worth the historian's time or effort would be man's quest for God.

In fact, one might ask, given Toynbee's focus on religion as the prime element in civilization, why did Toynbee not just categorize his civilizations by their religions, instead of all the other criteria of space, time, etc. He answered that very question in an annex to Volume VIII, titled "The Relativity of the Unit of Classification to the Object of Study." He notes that the modern societies based on Christianity and Islam arose out of the same parent society at about the same time, and that both of them are apt to conjure up renaissances of the dead parent society. Why not treat them as the same society? Toynbee answers because they conjure up different aspects of the dead parent society in response to different challenges. So Toynbee returns to his Challenge and Response paradigm from the first three volumes. Even when societies have the same religion and the same heritage, each time and each place presents different challenges to the society and to grow and thrive, each society must respond creatively and appropriately, based on the need and capabilities of the moment. Likewise, when a society goes into breakdown, it will break down for reasons unique to its own time, its own failed challenges, and the course of that breakdown will be unique to that society. Even the universal churches that arise from the breakdown are not the same. While Toynbee finds striking similarities between Christianity, Islam, Mahayana and Hinduism, they all have very unique features that met the challenges of their own times and places of origin.

The unit of study for a historian will always be bound by time and geography. While on one level, one could discuss only two second generation civilizations, the Syriac (Christian/Islam) and the Indic (Mahayana/Hindu), in fact, one would be painting with too broad a brush. One would have a unit of study that is so large that one could never catch hold of it. By necessity one would have to break it down by time or region just to look at a piece small enough to examine.

In discussing the history of large civilizations whether the Syriac and Indic of Toynbee, or the world systems of later world historians, one runs into the same problem. One must either skim the surface of many times and places, looking for a

very simple paradigm to organize history, or one can dive in to a specific time or place and look for patterns of history. While earlier twentieth century historians like H. G. Wells or Toynbee wrote multi-volume works that purported to do both, in reality they failed. Even with twelve volumes, Toynbee could only cover a few time periods in the most superficial manner.

The later volumes of *A Study of History* become a polemic for what Toynbee sees as the gaping abyss facing Western man. He uses his paradigm of universal states, universal churches and proletariats to urge his readers to wake up and find God before the Western world kills itself in an orgy of violence. This teleological, even eschatological urgency overwhelms Toynbee. The urge to preach is an inherent one for the world historian. Toynbee is not the only twentieth century prophet who has used a world history to promulgate his individual gospel. H. G. Wells desired a world state. Oswald Spengler figured that the West was done for, but wanted to explain why. Pitirim Sorokin wanted everyone to shake off Sensate Culture and discover how to love each other. Immanuel Wallerstein wants us to see how we are bound by the Capitalist World-System so we can stop exploiting the periphery states and live in Marxist peace and harmony.

The question becomes, not if a world historian has an agenda, but why does the discipline appear to demand one. Arnold J. Toynbee can furnish us with one possible answer to this question. To study a very large unit, even one civilization at a specific time, one needs some kind of organizing device, a meta-narrative. The quest to study many civilizations over the course of human history requires not merely a meta-narrative, but an all encompassing vision of human existence. Religion can provide this kind of encompassing vision, as can pseudo-religious ideologies, such as Marxism. Religious visions whether of the overtly spiritual type, such as Christianity, or the putatively materialist variety, such as Marxism are by nature teleological. They have a vision of where mankind is going and what awaits him at the end of his road.

Toynbee's vision is rooted in his Christianity. Even his universalist tendencies were rooted in the similarities between the other higher religions and Christianity. His vision of history is therefore by nature, religious. In a spiritually motivated view, God or man's attempts to find God (religion), will be the organizing principle. It is not surprising that he changed course in his view of civilization between volumes VI and VII. Given the calamity that was Europe during the fifteen year interregnum between those volumes, it would have been more surprising if there was no change in vision; because it would have meant that Toynbee had not been part of his world, not just as a historian, but as a human being.

[Last Updated: 6/20/18](#)





# **Oral History: Revealing the Mind through Conversation**

**Ute Ferrier**

In the United States the institutional beginnings of oral history can be traced back to Allan Nevins's Oral History Project at Columbia University in 1948. As a field it developed in the early 1980s and at this time advocates started to seriously reflect on its methods and implications. Today oral history and public history are considered the growth engine of the historical discipline, absorbing many historians who are competing in a tight job market. However, the importance of oral history goes beyond practical considerations. Its methodological innovations enhance yet at the same time challenge the discipline. In this paper I will discuss some of the key issues anyone who intends to "do" oral history ought to consider. While I will briefly address some of the methodological concerns, the main focus of the paper will deal with the meaning and implication of oral history.

Oral history, especially in its import on public history, has tremendous potential. It can give a voice to those who have previously been excluded from historical narratives. By incorporating everyday, ordinary people in the historical dialogue it gives them an opportunity to formulate their own meaning. A sharing of authority can take place and through this grass roots approach the "making" of history can become more democratic. Approaching history from the bottom up also encourages that a new set of questions be asked, and it can break the old molds of historical scholarship in numerous ways.

Oral history has been practiced by professionals on both sides of the academic divide and has been used for diverse purposes, from purely academic information to statistics utilized by government agencies. Oral history can be used as a supplement to traditional historical writings because it can offer a different type of source and therefore can be interpreted as a way of making more history. It has also been viewed as an alternative that allows scholars to get around the historical discipline altogether. For Michael Frisch, who has reflected on the craft and implication of oral history for two decades, these two visions of more history or no history are not entirely satisfactory. Oral history has a greater potential because it can make history more meaningful—it can be a qualitative improvement, it can make for better history. Functioning within the realms of history, this approach can enrich an already extant knowledge base. It can also be more responsive and reciprocal than the history that is

written exclusively for an academic audience and lacks relevance for the public at large.

Even if oral history is conducted within institutional confines, it has potential to reach the masses. In other words, oral history can be used for social and political purposes more readily than a monograph on an obscure study that is only interesting to a handful of scholars. Frisch sees the challenge of oral history in learning how “social history, community studies, and public presentation can combine in scholarship that is at once intellectually trenchant, politically meaningful, and sharable with the communities from which it comes.”

Frisch’s call for political sensitivity and the democratization of history has been echoed by many of his colleagues, including the British sociologist Paul Thompson whose work is driven by the tenet that “All history depends ultimately upon its social purpose.” Thompson’s activist, populist stance has inspired many historians who have endeavored to let the common people participate in their histories and to give them a central place in it.

This sharing of authority and incorporation of commoners requires that the information be handled responsibly. In this respect an oral historian faces similar challenges than a historian who analyzes written documents. Both have to be sensitive in regards to their sources and consider who is speaking, what the people or documents reveal and what the historical context was under which the records were created. Oral historians have additional challenges; for example, how to reduce a tape-recorded interview to a written transcript, how to account for facial expressions, body language and pauses. Non-verbal clues get lost during transcription. The question of selectivity also plays an important role because recordings are not necessarily translated in their entirety, so there is considerable leeway to skew an interview by selecting certain answers and excluding others.

Information presents other problems as well, because memory and recall are subjective, which makes it all the more important to understand the context. Without context oral history would merely be swapping stories but “conversations become historical in the truest sense when a context is formed for the dialog.” This can be challenging because often informants are interviewed about events that transpired some time ago. When recollections are not fresh they may be faulty and the events may be reconstructed in a distorted way. Having a temporal distance can sometimes be beneficial though, because it allows for greater reflection, which is hardly possible while people are in the midst of the experience. However, since events recalled at a later date are interpreted in the mind-set of the present, this begs the question, “What time period does such an interview represent: the time investigated or the time of the interview?” All these matters need to be considered. It is important who is talking,

what the informants are discussing and how they make sense of it all. And this in turn is embedded in a cultural context, inextricably shaped by forces such as the mass media.

Introspection and careful analysis, while arguably necessary for all disciplines, is even more essential for public historians because they are part of the public discourse and their work can have significant social and political repercussions. The interpretation of events is not simply a matter of who has the more accurate version. It can also demonstrate who exercises political power and how that power can be abused. A good example is the story of Luigi Trastulli, a 21-year old steelworker from Terni (an industrial town in central Italy), who died on March 17, 1949 after clashing with the local police. The actual incident was minor, compared to the high-casualty police violence of the 1950s, but the way the event was appropriated was significant. It “became the ground upon which collective memory and imagination built a cluster of tales, symbols, legends, and imaginary reconstructions.”

The different ways in which this particular event was recalled tells volumes about the power relationship between the workers and the police. The official account made by the police stated that the steelworkers went on a major strike without having obtained permission for it, and that the violence started with the mob. Workers who were interviewed recalled on the other hand that it was no strike at all, instead several workers were just getting off work leaving the factory at the same time, and that the police initiated the violence. In this instance recall and political power are inextricably bound and cannot be separated. The actors’ state of mind at that time helped determine how the event was interpreted and what it meant.

Portelli who interviewed workers several decades after the event found that Trastulli’s death was later even connected to events that had nothing to do with the police clash in which he died. The protest in 1949 was directed against NATO but many workers came to associate his death with the massive labor strikes of the 1950s. Consequently Trastulli was remembered as a martyr who died during worker strikes in the cause of labor. When Portelli brought this discrepancy to the attention of his informants, they seemed little perturbed. After all to them it made more sense to think of Trastulli’s death in the context of labor strikes since these had a more profound effect on the community than the NATO protest several years earlier. Chronology thus seemed less important than the meaning which the workers bestowed and in this respect memory as history can be seen in terms of the symbolic and psychological.

The discrepancy between the official accounts and the recollections of the workers points to another dilemma: the tension between public life and private memory. Class appears to be particularly pertinent here because people’s accounts are evaluated according to their social position. While lower-class people may be invited to share

their experiences, they are seldom asked for an analysis of the events. Such discrimination is standard practice and “reinforces the already deeply-rooted, class-based ideology that sees ordinary people as sources of data, rather than as shapers and interpreters of their own experience.”

Class is particularly important if we try to get a view from the bottom up. Some people speak anonymously and their experiences are merely historical in the sense that they reflect many experiences. This seemed to be the case with numerous people Studs Terkel interviewed on their experiences during the Great Depression. Many of his informants interpreted the depression in terms of personal failure. These testimonies of survivors loaded with the scars of psychic suffering give great insight into why there has not been a more critical assessment of the Great Depression, why it did not produce “more focused critiques of American capitalism and culture, more sustained efforts to see fundamental change.” As time passes, these experiences of personal failure are seen through the lenses of success and survival, a legacy for the generations that were to follow. A structural criticism was bypassed and history was thus filtered twice, “by time and subsequent experience.”

Not all of the survivors of the Great Depression spoke anonymously, though. Some had a direct impact on historical developments and their involvement was clearly in the public realm. Most of the time, the “spectrum of private and public experiences and subjectivity parallels the spectrum of power and position,” and those who exerted little political power were most likely to interpret the depression primarily as a private tribulation. Nonetheless there were exceptions, and many of the rich could live quite privately, while some among the poor were politically active and functioned in “a public dimension well beyond their own subjectivity.” The kind of information obtained by interviews can thus range from the particular to the general, from specific private experiences to a discussion of what it meant—it can be highly anecdotal or fairly analytical.

For the oral historian evaluating what people are saying is perhaps the most difficult aspect of the inquiry but it is also the most important. Here it becomes pertinent to understand how people make sense of their experiences and how they construct meaning out of them. By looking at this “oral history reveals patterns and choices, that, taken together, begin to define the reinforcing and screening apparatus of the general culture, and the ways in which it encourages us to digest experience.” Attitudes and opinions that are formed in a cultural context will emerge from these interviews.

However, oral history is not just employed to detect the formation of public opinion, it is also used to shape them. Frisch points out that this was the case with the PBS series *Vietnam: A Television History* where primarily those individuals who held powerful

positions were prompted to interpret historical events. Peasants and foot soldiers were interviewed for their personal experiences but not asked to put those into a larger context. “The higher or more important the position of the subject, however, the more likely he or she is to be seen offering historical judgments of a broader nature, sweeping evaluations of what an event meant, what caused it, or what the public felt.” To Frisch, even more disturbing than this selectivity regarding interpretation is the fact that personal experiences are often presented without ever being put into their historical context. Vietnam is not uncommon; more recent documentaries also fail when it comes to “preventing a momentarily glimpsed reality from slipping back behind a curtain of amnesia, or from receding into a blurry distance.” The problem is that by presenting events such as the Vietnam War without ever seriously discussing the underlying causes, society can maintain its denial and disengagement. Consequently it can avoid taking responsibility.

In projects such as historical documentaries, oral history can be used for political purposes and cultural hegemony. “In the political arena, for instance, where major conflicts in a democratic society are presumably engaged, the war and its roots were never legitimately discussible.” The causes and ideological underpinnings could not be debated while the war was still going on because this was considered to undermine the war effort. Once the war was over the nation supposedly embarked on a healing process and in this postwar environment a discussion of the war was also treated as subversive. Consequently dissenting voices were silenced, or at least given the least amount of exposure possible. The prevalent manner of dealing with these issues was not to engage in a multi-dimensional discussion but instead to package this complex historical experience and market it through the mass-mediated popular culture for “acceptable public remembering.”

The issue of public memory has also been contentious in Germany, where people are still coming to terms with the Nazi era and the Holocaust. Even today, more than half a century after World War II, the question of responsibility is still controversial and hotly debated by academics. Initially at war’s end the German nation was preoccupied with reconstruction and there was little public debate on the Nazi legacy. A massive discussion in the public sphere was not initiated until the television series Holocaust premiered in 1979. Public reaction was strong and interest in the Holocaust peaked, only to ebb shortly afterwards. This short-lived engagement with the issues implies that “the intensity of measurable reaction is a highly questionable indicator of the quality of ‘mass’ memory work.”

It may be difficult to gauge the final impact a historical documentary will have but in Germany oral history has made an important contribution to the debate. One of the driving forces, through which much oral history has been introduced, is the history of everyday life (Alltagsgeschichte), which has been the most important

historiographical development in Germany during the last two decades. Its emphasis has been on everyday, ordinary people, in German called *kleine Leute*, which can be translated to mean little people, or small people—a term “as suggestive as it is imprecise.” Historians of everyday life (*Alltagshistoriker*) intend to dispel the misconception that the common people have little to contribute to the nation’s historical narrative. As their Anglo-American counterparts they stress subjectivity and experience, as well as the social construction of meaning.

*Alltagsgeschichte* has many of the same goals Frisch identified for oral historians: a willingness to examine history from the bottom up, to give voice to those who have traditionally been overlooked and consequently to democratize the writing of history. In Germany, however, advocates of *Alltagsgeschichte* operate in a political and academic environment that has been resistant to innovative approaches. The struggles have been hard fought and after two decades *Alltagshistoriker* have made small “inroads into the institutional centers of the profession” even though they enjoy considerable recognition abroad. A discussion about the pertinence of oral history and everyday life has been highly politicized in Germany. Consequently when Alfred Lüdtké, one of the leading advocates of *Alltagsgeschichte*, speaks about its import, he is arguing from the position of a dissenter.

Writing history from the bottom up is particularly contentious because it supposedly threatens the academic establishment, in particularly social-science history. *Alltagsgeschichte* emerged in the mid-1970s as a dissenting movement from the left and gained momentum during the 1980s. Actually it had much in common with social-science history and the so-called Bielefeld school. Both were committed to coming to terms with the Nazi past and both criticized the “traditionalist methodology and intellectual outlook of the established West German profession,” meaning they opposed the older historicist methods that focused on politics and diplomacy. The Bielefeld school, however, sought to explain history by analyzing society and history through “big structures, large processes, huge comparisons” and this is where *Alltagsgeschichte* diverges. Its goal was to develop a qualitative understanding by examining the material conditions of everyday life and by “entering the inner world of popular experience” in those contexts which have been considered the cultural domain. For the social-science historians embracing cultural history was clearly an abandonment of scientific principles and over this issue the two camps have exchanged words. Lüdtké and his colleagues have consequently been on the defensive and have argued that they do not intend to supplant the structural study of social change but try to transcend the “sharp dichotomy opposing objective, material, structural, or institutional factors to subjective, cultural, symbolic, or emotional ones.”

For *Alltagshistoriker* studying the lives of ordinary people does not mean that politics is left out; in fact their lives cannot be separated from the larger questions of power

and appropriation. History from below sheds light on the lives of “historical losers” and perhaps more importantly demonstrates the internal costs of social transformation. Again, it is a question of political power and how this comes to bear on the lives of everybody. Microhistory has the potential to decentralize analysis and interpretation and it also adds qualitatively to our historical understanding because it captures the ambiguities and contradictions of behavior in ways structural analysis is not able to do.

In Germany the barefoot approach has taken history beyond the institutional confines of scholars and scientists. The public has been involved in discussions regarding museum exhibits, memorial sites and the National Memorial Day (Volkstrauertag), which have been contentious issues because they involve national remembrance of the Holocaust and the Third Reich. The public’s involvement in these negotiations is “intended to make it more difficult to repress and forget, to sweep the past under the public carpet.”

When it comes to debates of such magnitude, it seems necessary to involve the public. This, however, can also be potentially hazardous. In the case of Germany, should modern-day Nazis be allowed to participate in the discourse and to what degree should their views be given credence? It can be argued that their opinions need to be made public to alert people to the dangers of such rhetoric. On the other hand, increased exposure may have the opposite effect and attract some people to their cause. Silencing the Nazis is certainly within Germany’s constitutional rights (even arguably a constitutional obligation) but critics charge that such efforts are repressive.

Perhaps a less stark example is that of complicity during the war. How guilty were those millions of Germans who did not participate in the resistance? And can millions of German civilians be portrayed as victims? The memories of the survivors have put a human face on these issues and once their personal suffering is acknowledged, it becomes increasingly difficult to speak of national responsibility.

Theoretically it is essential to include the voices from below, at least if we seek to approach the most accurate reconstruction of historical events possible. Yet, what exactly does it mean to incorporate the views from the common people? How is this authority transferred and what are historians giving up? In this respect there are no clear answers and these problems need to be solved as specific projects arise. A German historian who deals with issues of genocide will likely arrive at a different answer than a labor historian who examines workers’ lives under particular conditions. As such there are general theoretical guidelines for oral historians to consider, and thinking about the potential societal impact of one’s work is, in my view, a necessity. The detail, however, has to be worked out in the specific context in which the work is done. Method is, undoubtedly, an important consideration but not

the preliminary one. More importantly, in the words of Ronald Grele, is “the mind revealed through conversation.” And in this respect the oral historian is as much part of the unfolding story as the informants whose experiences he or she seeks to incorporate into the historical narrative.

[Last Updated: 8/12/16](#)