

AGE, GENDER AND RACE; NATION AND CLASS:
What is the Relationship to Cosmology?

by Johan Galtung

Center of International Studies
Princeton University
Princeton, New Jersey 08544

November 1986

Humankind is one big set of human beings; at present about five billion, of us. That set has a structure: there are sub-divisions, there are relations among the sub-divisions and relations among the human beings inside the sub-divisions. For the purpose of the present chapter we shall only deal with the first aspect, the sub-divisions, not the relations for instance of power or dominance in general, of communication and interaction. We shall stick to the most basic classifications all of us make because we have eyes and ears--so simple, so significant.

Humankind is one. There is unity-of-man as Gandhi would have said, but there is certainly also diversity and disunity. More particularly, five dimensions cut into humankind and create sub-divisions already from birth, in the way a sociologist would refer to as ascription: the sub-division to which a human being belongs being (almost) known already at birth. Three of these divisions are indelible. There is (almost) nothing a human being can do with classification in terms of: age (in the sense of chronology, meaning which year the person was born and birth order within the family), gender (simply the sex of the person) and race (those biologically transmitted anatomical characteristics that have been culturally singled out for attention such as color, physiognomy, type of hair). Two of them are delible, meaning that the individual can, although often at considerable cost, get out of the sub-division of birth and enter another: nation (meaning those socio-culturally transmitted cultural characteristics such as language, religion and socially shared myths about past and present and future); class (meaning where in the division of labor the person is located). Obviously there is

such a thing a changing one's nation through geographical mobility, also known as emigration/immigration (usually between countries, but could also be meaningful within a multinational country) and social mobility (which does not necessarily have to be upwards from the family at birth, it could also be downwards or sideways). Within the group of phenomena referred to as "class" maybe six sub-dimensions could be mentioned, such as income (high vs low), education (high vs low), economic sector (secondary/tertiary vs primary); economic position (manager/self-employed and functionary vs worker), ecological location (urban/town vs rural/village) and geographical location (center of the country vs periphery of the country). Other sub-dimensions and sub-sub-divisions could certainly be imagined.

Of course, a person is characterized along all of these dimensions, not merely along one of them. He has a status on each: all these statuses taken together constituting a status-set. His total social position or social standing would reflect his entire status-set, his economic position being only one component, and not the only one as marxists' seem to imply, his income/education status also being only one component and not the whole story as liberals sometimes seem to imply. The same also applies to gender in spite of what feminists might say on that issue, and to race in spite of what racists might say.

Of the many ways that must exist of trying to capture the total social position of a person let me mention three, one of them

very well known, the other two coming out of my own research.

The acronym often heard in and about the United States, WASP, meaning White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, captures race and nation which is not very much. But, on the other hand, nation is seen along two sub-dimensions: language (anglo-saxon) and religion (protestant). A part of social reality is captured with this formula, another part is certainly concealed: everything relating to class. The myth of the class-free society, in short.

The acronym MAMU, middle-aged, male with university education, captures age (divided into middle-aged as "high" and young and old as "low") and gender, adding to that one dimension of class: education. This is somewhat better, particularly when the society referred to has essentially only one race and one nation.

A richer conceptualization is provided by the Social position (SP) index, giving 1 to "high" and 0 to "low" thus giving a total of 2 for the middle-aged male and 0 for the young or old female. But in addition to these two dimensions the index also takes in six sub-dimensions of class in the way indicated above, giving a relatively rich presentation of the total social position of a person's status-set, at least in an essentially mono-racial and mono-national country. With eight dichotomies we arrive at 256 combinations, with the index value 8 for the complete top-dog and the index value 0 for the complete underdog. The index, which has

been used in several countries, gives very high correlations with attitudinal and behavioral variables as would be expected, reflecting so much of the total social situation of an individual.

Obviously, there should be many more efforts to capture wholistically the total social situation of an individual than the three briefly mentioned here. This approach is particularly meaningful in the context of an exploration of cosmology, itself a wholistic conceptualization of a civilization. Where in the social structure is that cosmology particularly pronounced? This could be the subject of countless opinion studies, trying to develop indicators that are meaningful at the attitudinal/ideological level of the deeper lying cosmology dimension, or of equally countless behavioral studies.

That is not the approach to be pursued here, however. The focus here is on whether the sub-divisions by their very nature introduce a gradient in humanity, predisposing people in one sub-set as opposed to those in the other sub-set, more for one cosmology than for its negation. If that can be shown to be the case we would at least be in the possession of one key to the distribution of cosmology, this time not as a code of structure or culture, as that which deep structure and deep culture have in common, but as a value, disposing for some kinds of (overt) attitudes and behavior rather than their negations. Such hypotheses would have to be verified empirically; but at this point the concern is theory, not data.

Looking at the five dimensions for sub-dividing humankind we can immediately dispose of two of them. We can dispose with

nation by definition since this is where cosmology is embedded per definitionem; only that the focus has been on macro-nations or civilizations. To say that nation predisposes for a certain cosmology or sub-cosmology is a tautology.

We can also dispense with race: there seems to be no indication whatsoever that race, in its purely anatomical sense, should predispose for one cosmology rather than the other. When combined with some of the other dimensions as it often is, particularly with class this may turn out differently. But in that case class is the issue, not race alone.

We are left with age, gender and class, and for all three there are certain interesting hypothesis to be considered.

To start with age: a position in the family/home, presumably the habitat of the very young and the very old, is very different from a position in the society at large. Seen from a family/home other habitats of the same kind are very similar in status; a multi-centric conceptualization of space would appear natural, normal. Inside the family there is certainly center and periphery. But there is also an acute awareness of the fact that there is a world outside the family, an awareness not necessarily easily developed for the equally important fact that there is a world outside one's own country.

The time configuration is also different. Time has a beginning but no end for the very young; an end but no beginning for the very old. But within that semi-closed time interval there is probably no distinct peak, rather an oscillating time configuration for the young and the old. It is given to the middle-aged to endow space with a center, participating as they do in greater society. Correspondingly it is also given to them to equip time with a peak which may still be ahead of them, something they are experiencing right now, or something they have left behind. But a peak there is in this thing called "career" for the middle-aged; the young and the old living (almost) career-free lives.

Cognitively it is more given to the middle-aged to engage in very narrow, single-minded pursuits, such as careers. Children have a very holistic approach to life; and so do retired people if their health permits them to do so, dedicating themselves to aspects of life neglected during education and work. When children do such things it is called "playing", when retired people do the same it is sometimes referred to as a "regression to childhood," and nothing positive is meant by this when pronounced by middle-aged people.

I think the thesis can be defended that the young and the old are more in nature and nature in them; the young being more conscious of conquering mastery over their own body and environment; the old more conscious of losing it--the middle-aged taking mastery for granted. But I am not so sure that the thesis can be defended that the young and the old are less competitive and individualistic

or have a concept of God, if any at all, particularly different from that of the middle-aged.

In short, the conclusion would be a definite hypothetical inclination for the middle-aged towards something corresponding to the occidental expansionist cosmology, and for the young and the old to the occident cosmology in contraction; but this holds only for the first four dimensions, hardly for the last two.

When we now turn to gender the conclusion becomes more clear-cut, at least if we stick to what today is a more classical role for women, as known in occidental societies in Europe and North America. With women being more bound to the family/home a multi-centric rather than unicentric conceptualization of space would appear natural. And four cycles relating to the female function in procreation would point in the direction of a less single-peaked time conceptualization for women: the experience of orgasm, the menstrual cycle; pregnancy; and the raising of children. Males seem to experience more single-peaked orgasms; there is no menstruation; no pregnancy; there is raising of children but in a less intimate, more remote sense than for women.

The role of women in the family/home will impose upon them a wholistic and highly dialectical conceptualization of reality, leaving no opportunity for a single-minded pursuit of a fragmented and segmented division of their environment. Kettles are boiling,

children are screaming, floors demand washing, carpets their vacuum-cleaning and so on--all of this interrupted by people ringing the bell, telephone calls, shopping and what not. Attentiveness to a large variety of factors simultaneously would seem as normal, natural as single-minded concentration on one factor over time for the male careerist working under laboratory type conditions, protected from "irrelevant" factors in the factory, the office.

Obviously, we can argue that the role of women in procreation brings them closer to nature, to the biological, the organic. This should spill over to a higher awareness of their own bodies and that of others, partly predisposing them for an attitude of care, partly being caused by an attitude of care. It can probably also be argued that women are less competitive than men, developing ties of solidarity with fellow sisters, leaving the competition to their husbands, possibly mentally participating in that competition, jealously watching any competitive age other males might gain over their own husband even when those males are married to their best friends (or perhaps particularly in that case).

However, I am not so sure we can argue that women necessarily will have another conceptualization of the transpersonal. Women tend to be more religious than men, but that is not the issue here. The problem is whether the God for females is different from the God for males, more internalized, less awesome, more within, less above--and I doubt that this can be said to be the case. Nevertheless we end up with a more

clear-cut difference in inclination for gender than for age, with males tending more in the occidental expansionist direction and females more in the direction of occident in contraction, and similar cosmologies.

Then, what about class? In general terms the argument would pick up many of the points made above for age and for gender, but give them a more definite class connotation.

From now on all depends on what is meant by "class". Above six dimensions were given, so let us try to make use of them. It is difficult to believe that levels (not kinds) of income and education in and by themselves should be decisive in the sense of predisposing for receptivity to one cosmology rather than the other. But the two economic dimensions, economic sector and economic position and the two geographical dimensions, ecological location and center-periphery should play a role.

Thus, nature imposes on people who work or live in nature, and particularly those who do both, the primary sector and the rural habitat, rhythms that are cyclical, not only linear. The frequency and the amplitude of the cycles depends on location in the world geography: in some places the crop cycle is annual and the same might apply to cattle; in other places higher frequencies can be found. In some places the differences between the seasons is actually not that pronounced, in others it may span 50-60° C and thus be considerable. But the basic point will be the way in which

people under such circumstances would be conditioned to conceive of time in cyclical rather than, or in addition to, linear terms.

Correspondingly, if the economic position is low and the geographical location is peripheral one might at least speculate that a predisposition for a multi-centric conceptualization of space might be present, for the same reason as given for women above. The center of geographical space, as well as the center in social space, are both remote, intangible. They are shrouded in mist. What appears is what you see next to yourself: other groups of people like your own, other communities like your own. The world seems to be populated by such groups and communities. Horizontal solidarity might develop not only inside a group but also among them; well knowing that there are others at more central levels in geographical space, and higher levels in social space, to whom center-periphery gradients in space and verticality in the social structure are definite, clearly perceived realities. But these would only be differences in perception. And, we might also argue that those higher up also see their equals, viewing geographical and social space horizontally rather than vertically whereas precisely those lower down are the people who might become obsessed with the vertical dimensions of the human condition.

It can probably be argued that people living in and off nature are more careful with that basis of their own existence. They know perfectly well that if they deplete and pollute too much

they will be punished, if not in this generation so in the next. Consequently a predisposition for cosmologies different from occidental expansionism will be present in the primary sector or rural habitat, as for women above. The same should to some extent apply to a more wholistic conceptualization of reality, with people lower down and further out in society having to become generalists more than people higher up, towards the center living in highly specialized organizations. Generalists are needed to carry specialists on their backs, in other words.

Some very tentative conclusions can now be summarized in Table 1:

TABLE 1. Cosmology and social structures

	<u>Occidental expansionist</u>	<u>Not occidental expansionist</u>
AGE	middle-aged	young, old
GENDER	male	female
RACE	IRRELEVANT	
NATION	BY DEFINITION	
CLASS	urban secondary, tertiary center manager/self- employed	rural primary periphery worker