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CULTURAL IDENTITY, SELF-RELIANCE,
AND BASIC NEEDS

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CONTENTS

	Introduction	1
1.	Cultural Identity in Particular	3
11.	Hypotheses on the Interrelationships of Cultural Identity, Self-Reliance, and Basic Needs	8
111.	Circular and Cumulative Models of the Inter- relationships	17
	Conclusion	19
	Notes	20

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Geneva, June 1979

Johan Galtung

This paper is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the effort to define "another development" consists, at a certain stage, in breaking down this very broad concept into as many sub-categories as possible. The resulting proliferation of contributions on analytically separate topics is necessary and helpful to the point where outcries of "totality!" and "holism!" are heard again.

The following is, in accordance with the GPID approach, only a "tentative," "preliminary . . . attempt" to bring together three subconcepts which have come to the forefront of the development debate in recent years.

As with every social science concept, its inventor is never sure what other social scientists, or politicians and businessmen, are going to do with it. Sooner or later, someone is bound to read the opposite intention into almost any proposal one may come up with. To illustrate this, we could briefly define the three sub-concepts by showing how each of them has been interpreted, or actually used in practical policies, to serve either purposes of liberation or purposes of domination (table 1).

		·
Basic needs (BN)	Enable an entire population, not just a privileged few, to attain a decent living standard in material terms. Self-actualization or emancipation of every human being. Also participation of the most needy in decisions about the allocation of available resources.	Attempt at uniformization of consumer behaviour all over the world, thus allowing already dominant producers and distributors to open new markets, particularly in the rural areas and the slums of the Third World. Also understood as global welfare programmes (goods "dumped" on people at the expense of taxpayers in rich countries).
Self-reliance (SR)	Using one's own resources and ingenuity. Acceptance of selected inputs from outside in the form of capital, technology goods, and knowbow. Confidence in one's ability to develop. Adaptation of means of production to local environment and resources. Power to the internal periphery.	Denying basic rights and access to resources to entire segments of a population, pretending that they can help themselves, when in fact the purpose is to reserve privileges to other groups of the population.
Cultural identity (CI)	Positive attitude towards one's own historical values, institutions, and accumulated knowledge. Resistance against excessive penetration from outside. Rejection of values, institutions, and forms of behaviour which destroy social cohesion. Adaptation of mode of production to the specificity of local human and social development.	Using cultural differences as a justification for rejecting minorities into reservations, and as a basis of legitimation of of racist practices even against majorities. The concept of "traditional" used as a rationale for marginalization.
	Used as tools of liberation	Used as tools of domination

I. CULTURAL IDENTITY IN PARTICULAR

In view of past contributions of GPID network members to theories of self-reliance and basic needs, we shall not further elaborate on these here. However, it may be necessary to say more about cultural identity and to justify its inclusion in this tripartite combination.

When viewing development not just as a matter of growth and production, but as a process of global social change, it becomes indispensable to consider transformations which take place in all spheres of human life. Despite centuries of European expansion, we notice the continued existence of societies differing profoundly in values, forms of behaviour, and institutions. Foreign capital, technology, and know-how affect all of these, but not necessarily in the same direction in all countries. What has so often and quite arrogantly been called "obstacles to development" is in many cases a profound resistance to a type of socio-cultural transformation considered incompatible with the survival of the receiver. What is so politely termed "international co-operation for development" is most often a painful confrontation between different cultures (call it civilizations if you prefer), the net result of which may be more social disruption and cultural dislocation than economic benefits.

This view encounters two strong types of resistance. In the industrial world — East or West — the implicit and very often non-conscious assumption about social change is that all societies must move through certain prescribed stages to reach the same goal (cultural evolutionism). The famous "gap" between the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" is perceived as a simple time lag, hence the need for transfers of all kinds to the underdeveloped. On the

other side, the conviction that the industrial model is the only desirable and possible one is widespread among most Third World leaders despite frequent disclaimers on their part. It suffices to compare the rhetoric of some leaders about "authenticity," for example, with their policies in such fields as foreign investment, importation of technology, and consumption of goods. It is sometimes said in the Third World that opponents to the simple transfer of the industrial model intend to keep the poor countries down while the rich get richer. But isn't this rather what is happening with present concepts of "development"?

From a normative point of view, the alternative to the dominant development strategies of today could be based on the acceptance of cultural diversity. According to this principle, the goals of development are set by different societies in their own ways, taking into account their history, their values, institutions, and forms of social interaction. This does not mean that a static view is adopted in which any kind of tradition is preferred to change. Neither is it a reference to the romantic image of the bon sauvage.

If so much emphasis is placed on cultural identity, it is necessary to indicate categories which can be applied to determine just how similar or different various societies are. This is by no means an exhaustive catalogue, but rather an attempt to show how extensively the concept of culture can be understood (table 2).

The list that follows must be cautiously examined, since it is in itself a culture-bound product. It should be expected that someone from an entirely different culture would have drawn up a different list. Another word of caution is necessary when it comes to the indicators used to describe each category. In most cases, these are simply dichotomous, referring to extreme opposites. In a more elaborate framework, dichotomies should be overcome and more refined notions added.

Faced with the problem of delineating cultural boundaries, one must

TABLE 2 Indicators Categories Values and beliefs Man-man relationship hierarchical, egalitarian Man-nature relationship exploitative, harmonious degrees of anthropocentrism Place of group in the world expansive, defensive degrees of ethnocentrism Place of world in the universe degrees of cosmocentrism evolutionist, dialectical Ideas of history evolutionary, revolutionary Visions of social change linear, cyclical Concept of time Religious beliefs monotheistic, polytheistic materialism, spiritualism Importance of material goods Institutions Ownership of means of collective, state, communal, production private planned, market Distribution of goods Government centralized, decentralized, democratic, dictatorial degree of co-operation Community and general service level of satisfaction institutions Religious institutions churches, sects, relation to political power nuclear, large, Family patriarchal, matriarchal Behaviour man-dominant, egalitarian, Place of man and woman in woman-dominant society Relations between generations conflictual, hierarchical, harmonious Treatment of handicapped perisolation, integration sons, elderly, and orphans Relations in production of public, private qoods man-oriented, object-oriented Work, leisure, ceremonials, rites

high, low

Type of consumption

Categories	Indicators		
Artistic and intellectual production	intensive weak		
Form of communication	oral, written		
etc.			

ask: who is in a position to decide where they begin and where they end? Let us look at a few particular situations. In some regions of the world, common interests, historical bonds, and shared values can lead to inter-state groupings which claim to have a regional cultural identity. Or, in a particular state, a ruling class may impose a self-defined national identity and project it abroad as representative of the entire population. Also, all over the world, micro-cultures revolt against imposed national identities and assert their specificity, often through the creation of liberation movements.

In each of these situations, it is difficult to determine which specific development strategy best suits a particular population. Outsiders are increasingly unwelcome or unqualified to judge, while national elites are often estranged from the people. As we all know, mass participation in making choices and decisions remains an unsolved problem in most parts of the world. What criteria do we have to make a serious assessment of the cultural representativeness of anyone who makes pronouncements about a given region, state, or ethnic group?

The question mark here already indicates that we cannot adhere to absolute cultural relativism, a view according to which any group must accept the values, laws, social structures, or further cultural products of all other societies as valid for those societies.

Relativism has a limit, as examplified, at least for most people, by slavery, Hitlerism, or apartheid. The notion of relative cultural relativism is therefore not an abstract, intellectual product. It means that there are certain minimal general values which members of one culture choose to adhere to when looking at another culture even

at the risk of appearing to be ethnocentric. Such values might prevent them from condoning, both within and outside their own cultural sphere, such forms of behaviour as genocide, torture, racism, blatant exploitation of the poor, cruelty to women, mistreatment of children, or neglect of the aged. It has been argued, with some justification, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a product of western ethnocentric thinking insofar as it does not leave enough room for cultural diversity. Even if this is so, there are certain minimal standards which it is legitimate and necessary to apply in the analysis of human behaviour if one does not want to accept all the atrocities committed by so many people against so many others. The concept of relative cultural relativism is supposed to combine the idea of the respect for the cultural identity of each society with that of the limits which should be imposed on exploitative and aggressive behaviour. It is thus relevant to the everyday lives of most people, even if the academic debate on where the limits could be fixed is destined to be an endless one. But such problems as "cultural representativeness" or "cultural relativism" are not among those that science, in a strict sense, can "solve."

II. HYPOTHESES ON THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY, SELF-RELIANCE, AND BASIC NEEDS

The simplest way to connect the three concepts, and re-connect the social realities they attempt to analyse separately, is to take them two by two. Initially, this gives us six combinations.

1. The affirmation of cultural identity favours the satisfaction of basic needs (CI \rightarrow BN)

Since nothing is ever self-evident, it must be restated here that we obviously see the definition of basic needs as a culture-specific operation, not as the drafting of a standardized list for universal consumption. Comprehensive lists are acceptable as long as they present no normative claims and are even useful if they provide us with an idea — without giving an order of priority — how a universal list might look after each culture has contributed its share to it.

Paul Streeten mentions a number of countries (among them both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, as well as Korea, Costa Rica, and Japan) who would confirm the Cl → BN hypothesis: ''. . . the success of these different political regimes in meeting basic needs cannot be attributed to their having written BN on their banner. But they share certain 'initial conditions'. . . ." These include distribution of assets and levels of education. We could say more generally: social institutions, attitudes, and values. The same author considers "self-determination, self-reliance, political freedom and security, participation in making the decisions that affect workers and citizens, national and cultural identity, and a sense of purpose in life and work (all termed 'non-material' needs) . . . as

conditions for meeting the more 'material' needs. . . $\cdot 11^3$

The affirmation of cultural identity supports the implementation of a self-reliant development strategy (CI → SR)

This hypothesis is almost tautological in certain historical cases. If we accept the fact that <u>different</u> cultures can provide the "initial conditions" for whatever we call development, then we cannot attempt to define the exclusive type of culture we (i.e., anyone from any culture) consider to be the best. Thus the accent is really on the <u>affirmation</u> of cultural identity, whatever the content of the latter. With collective self-affirmation, we move, in some cases, very closely to self-reliance. In others (expansionist cultures), we see the opposite result.

Two negative examples may illustrate the point. Cultural arrogance expressed by city dwellers against others, depriving peasants of pride in their own ways (religion, housing, clothing, food) may make the latter resistant, resentful, and apathetic. Chances of asking them to participate in a collective effort to achieve self-reliance for the whole nation, including the culturally arrogant city-zens, are therefore reduced. This is happening even in Tanzania. The other case is from Peter von Gunten's film Cry of the People, in which one Indian villager from the Peruvian Andes says, "We who know how to work with the hands subsidize those who only know how to work with their heads and tell us how to work with our hands." In both these conflict situations (city/countryside or heads/hands) there is cultural arrogance on one side, leading to loss of identity on the other with ensuing apathy.

An extreme case of cultural resistance, that of the North American and Caribbean Indians, has led to virtual extermination. Where genocide did not succeed, ethnocide did. But some cultures have shown a capability of resistance (symbolized by the Chinese wall) without suffering the same fate.

In today's situation, we may say that a society with the following cultural attributes stands an excellent chance of achieving a dissociative development strategy such as self-reliance (selected items from social cosmology and political institutions):

- The group, village, or valley is more important than the individual.
- Collective interest prevails over personal aggrandizement.
- Social justice prevents gains for a privileged few.
- The diversification of the capacity to produce essential goods is preferred to over-specialization in functions and dependence on exchange of goods.
- Egalitarian distribution prevents individual accumulation of material goods.
- The group has enough self-confidence to keep down its dependence on others for ideas.
- Local decision-making is at least as important as centralized power.
- Ideas generated at the basis can be channelled to the top and openly confronted with elitist views and values.
- Self-help in local communities is stronger than the promotion of foreign-induced social change or a paralyzing demonstration effect.
- Satisfaction of local needs is not highly valued when it is made at the expense of others.

There is probably no society where we find all these attributes, but, as we all know, it is sometimes useful to imagine a type of society which differs from the dominant model.

3. The search for the satisfaction of basic needs strengthens cultural identity (BN \rightarrow CI)

If a government or, which is more likely, a strong opposition, a reformist group or a revolutionary movement, adheres to a basic needs approach, it will have to shift the emphasis from external economic relations to production for domestic consumption. This brings along a necessary concern with internal social cohesion and a re-orientation

of the neo-colonial and self-colonized mentalities towards working for the well-being of the collectivity. Such a change cannot be accomplished by simple appeals and administrative decrees. It must find a deeper foundation in values and institutions which are present somewhere in the history of a people.

When asked whether his programme of political and economic liberation stands any chance of success, Russell Means, a leader of the American Indian Movement, replied, "If we can scratch together the remnants of our history and culture, we stand a chance."

In practice, it is difficult to envisage the BN \rightarrow CI combination separate from the issues of self-reliance and cultural identity. We are therefore not entirely passing to a different topic with the next hypothesis.

4. A self-reliant development strategy strengthens cultural identity $(SR \rightarrow CI)$

With this proposition we are, of course, not very far from the reverse one (CI \rightarrow SR). The difference lies in the starting point from which the analyst or political actor chooses to launch his project or action.

Dissociative strategies, foremost among them self-reliance, are now the object of lively debates not only within the "development set," but increasingly among politicians and in international organizations. An awareness of the impact of such a strategy on cultural identity usually appears at a later stage.

President Ratsiraka of Madagascar has perceived the relationship from the beginning. His predecessor had already denounced the treaties concluded with France on the occasion of independence. Reducing external dependence, diversifying foreign relations, and working towards food self-sufficiency were among the first preoccupations of Madagascar since the early seventies. When he came to power in 1975, Ratsiraka explained the inevitable implications of such a policy. First: local self-reliance. The nation could not be self-reliant towards the outside world if local communities were not able to mobilize their own resources for their own benefit. Second: revitalization of traditional, communitarian institutions (fokonolona), which had almost been crushed under the colonial regime. Indeed, the introduction of local self-reliance could not come from above (imposed self-reliance is a contradiction in terms), it had to be grounded in still existing values and institutions. 5

Self-reliance is not a uniform concept, applicable in a standard formula to all societies. Albert Tevoedjre says this pertinently when speaking of the "Chinese model":

The Arusha Declaration which proposed for Tanzania a system of self-reliance in all areas, seems to me today the only sensible choice for Africa and many other Third World countries. In the first place, this is because although it is inspired by the Chinese experiment, it is not a slavish copy of it. It is new, Tanzanian, African. It relies not on constraints but on the enthusiasm of the people. Far from being arrogant, it is open to improvement.

5. A self-reliant development strategy favours the satisfaction of basic needs (SR \rightarrow BN)

There is now more than ample evidence that at least some basic needs, notably food, could be satisfied locally anywhere in the world, if land or food were not taken away from the people and diverted into elite consumption and exports. Lappé and Collins aptly put it as follows:

Hungry people do and can and will feed themselves, if they are allowed to do so. This qualifying phrase — "if they are allowed to do so" — is the heart of our answer. . . . Instead of "How can we feed the world?" we now ask an entirely different question: "What are we doing — and what is being done in our name and with our money — to prevent people from feeding themselves?" And "How should we work to remove those obstacles?"

The same authors, incidentally, show how a process of increased corporate control over US agriculture has led to a lower standard of living for the farmers. Their reaction:

A natural concomitant of land reform in America would be the development of local and regional food <u>self-reliance</u>. In other words, work to redistribute control over our land and food must also initiate a movement to reinvolve more Americans on a local level in supplying <u>basic needs</u>. 8

The integration of poor countries into the import-substitution/export-promotion syndrome leads not only to what Samir Amin has shown to be an unequal exchange (internationally), but also to an elite-oriented exchange (domestically). Probably the most scandalous move in this direction is going on right now with the attempt to massively increase food exports from Africa to Europe. In July 1978 it was announced that the International Civil Aviation Association, with a grant of US\$34 million from UNDP, proposes to "assist" 42 African countries (which contribute US\$180 million themselves!) in increasing air-freight services to export fruit, vegetables, flowers, and fish. Fruit and vegetable exports are supposed to rise from 20,000 tons in 1974 to 60,000 tons by 1980, those of fish from US\$4.5 million to US\$25 million, etc.

Two months later, the Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome and the Economic Commission for Africa announce severe food shortages for "all but two of the 54 countries in Africa." Says a commentator: "The lag in domestic food production led to reduced nutritional and dietary standards, continued reliance on international food aid and rising food imports."

This grotesque example not only illustrates (did we need it once more?) that the work of one international organization can be 100 per cent counter-productive to that of another. It also reveals that the myth of development through exports is still one of the most powerful ones around. More than just a few "experts" to whom this situation was exposed, found it perfectly normal, even necessary, to export

food from hunger areas to overfed countries. "What counts is the foreign exchange," they say. Foreign exchange to do what? To buy agricultural equipment and . . . why not food, according to the iron law of comparative advantage.

Unfortunately this is not what happens in most cases. The results of a recent look at import figures for fourteen African countries 12 are shown in table 3.

TABLE 3. Some Imports of 14 Francophone African Countries (in US\$1,000)

Productive imports	1964	1971	Unproductive imports	1964	1971
Tractors	15,160	22,682	Alcoholic		
Fertilizer	6,150	12,210	beverages	29,555	31,288
Agricultural	,	,	Personal cars	22,660	50,676
equipment	4,862	13,209	Cosmetics and perfumes	5,142	19,821
Total	26,172	48,101		57,357	101,785

Source: Yearbook of International Trade Statistics (UN), vol. 1, Trade by Country, 1967 and 1974.

The conclusion to be drawn from these examples in the field of food supplies is that a drop in certain exports, foreign exchange, and consequently in imports is not necessarily a sign of a country's stagnation. On the contrary, if those are indicators of more self-reliance aimed at meeting the basic needs of an entire population, it may be for the first time that such countries are on their way to development.

6. A basic-needs approach favours self-reliance (BN \rightarrow SR)

A policy aiming at the satisfaction of basic needs has to deal with

rural areas and slums. Thus, more people and more local resources are mobilized, while production becomes more labour-intensive. Local agricultural goods will be consumed by the industrial labour force, which in turn produces agricultural equipment. The surplus produced will be absorbed for local investment. A link appears "between mastering needs and mastering the accumulation of capital."

If this need-oriented policy is applied consistently, it will obviously lead to a certain degree of dissociation from the international system. The name for it might be self-reliance.

7. The triple combination: CI-SR-BN

It is not too adventurous now to assert that the three sub-concepts of development we have tried to combine here do indeed form a whole, while each preserves its own realm. This could be expressed as in figure 1.

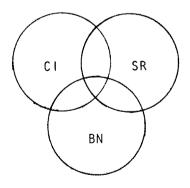


FIG. 1

Among the greatest socio-cultural achievements of mankind are those of desert nomads and Eskimos, who fit exactly into this triple combination. Claude Lévi-Strauss, objecting to the western habit of classifying other societies according to their "degree of civilization," says:

If the criterion chosen had been the degree of ability to overcome even the most inhospitable geographical conditions, there can be scarcely any doubt that the Eskimos, on the one hand, and the Bedouins, on the other would carry off the palm.14

Lappé and Collins, having emphasized the ecological wisdom of pastoral nomadism in areas of scarce resources, show how the combination breaks down through attacks on several fronts: national borders created by the colonial administrators and taxation threatened the satisfaction of basic needs and forced the nomads into a monetary economy.

Self-reliance was thereby reduced. And how much cultural identity is left today?

But there are many examples where the triple combination still works. Apart from the obvious case of China, particularly under Mao, there are attempts in other countries. Some, so well known that they need not be named here, adhere to it only through the verbal pronouncements of their leaders. They are not as interesting as the rapidly spreading local self-reliance efforts in many countries of the world which do not officially declare that such a policy is pursued at the national level.

III. CIRCULAR AND CUMULATIVE MODELS OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS

What has been said so far can be expressed in still another way, using Gunnar Myrdal's circular and cumulative perspective. For this purpose, two new factors are added to the triple combination: value of goods/services and resource distribution. These are not entirely chosen at random among the many other factors, variables, or sub-concepts of development which could be combined on the difficult path towards holism. They are in fact essential to the understanding of the functioning of the triple combination itself.

Let us look first at negative aspects of present reality (figure 2). The circles could be arranged in different orders. No element is meant to be a primary "cause" and arrows could be added. But let us leave it as simple as possible.

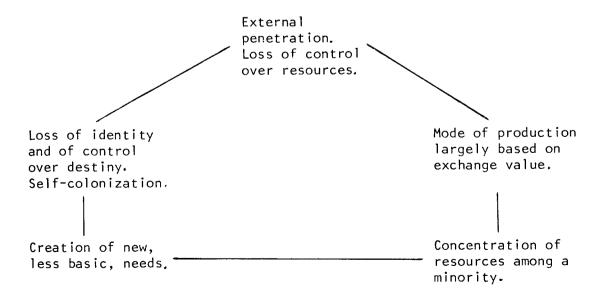


FIG. 2. The Negative Circle

The opposite model is the one we have attempted to present as an alternative still viable in today's world (figure 3).

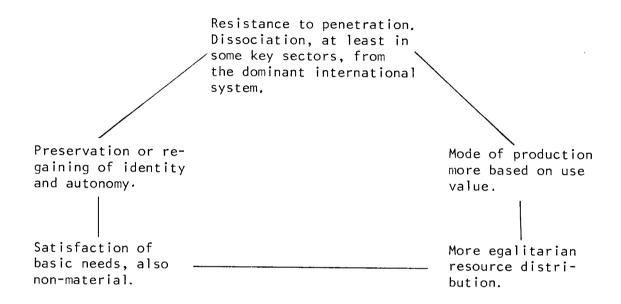


FIG. 3. The Positive Circle

Depending on the degree of selectivity applied to external inputs in a dissociative development strategy, the two models are combined: some goods/services valued for use, some for exchange, some for both, higher or lower degrees of dependence, etc. What counts is to know which one of the circles is the dominant one; they are usually both present, but the mix is different.

CONCLUSION

We could summarize our position with this sequence of hypotheses: the satisfaction of basic needs should be given first priority in development policies today, but basic needs must be defined within specific cultural contexts and can be best fulfilled when people use their own ingenuity and resources. This is possible only when dissociative strategies, such as self-reliance, are pursued by communities in the Third World (local, national, regional) in their relations with the industrialized countries. Which dissociative strategy is most appropriate in each case must be determined in accordance with the resource endowment, the ecological conditions, and the economic situation of the community concerned.

Many questions could be raised by pointing to cases indicative of realities other than those suggested by the hypotheses. Basic needs strategies exist both in combination with self-reliance (China) and without it (Taiwan). There are cases of dissociation without satisfaction of basic needs (Haiti) as well as of association without satisfaction of basic needs (the list is too long).

The variety of these different situations should guard us against coming up with <u>one</u> new development strategy. Cultural diversity must be an in-built consideration in each debate about development. The argument stands, therefore, that important qualitative changes could occur if the triple combination was taken seriously in those official circles where new international orders are now concocted.

- 1. On basic needs, see in particular the papers by Johan Galtung, "The Basic Needs Approach" and by Katrin Lederer, "Reflections about Needs" of the October 1978 meeting. On self-reliance, see Johan Galtung, Peter O'Brien, and Roy Preiswerk (eds.), Self-Reliance, St-Saphorin, Georgi, 1979.
- 2. Paul Streeten, "The Distinctive Features of a Basic Needs Approach to Development," <u>International Development Review</u>, 1977/3, p. 13.
- Ibid., p. 9. We quote this passage although the concepts used do not entirely coincide with ours.
- 4. Marja-Liisa Swantz, "Does It Work? The Scope of Local (Primarily Internal) Solutions: A Tanzanian Case," paper presented at the Special Session on Basic Needs Oriented Development Strategies, Conference of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI), Milan, September 1978.
- 5. Charte de la Révolution socialiste malgache à tous azimuts, 1975.
- 6. Albert Tevoédjre, <u>Poverty-Wealth of Mankind</u>, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1979, pp. 115-116.
- 7. Answers are indeed forthcoming, both in Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, <u>Food First</u>, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1977, p. 8, and Susan George, <u>How the Other Half Dies</u>, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976.
- 8. Food First, p. 245. Italics added.
- 9. Of course, the phenomenon is not a new one, as Susan George points out when saying that during the famines of 1876-1879 in India, that country exported 3.75 millions of tons of grain to Britain (in Stratégies d'intervention des pays industrialisés, spécialement des Etats-Unis d'Amérique, dans les systèmes alimentaires des pays périphériques, Paris, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 1978). But what is particularly scandalous is that exactly a century later, the same process is actively encouraged by governments of independent countries and by international organizations.
- "Africa Announces Its Air Aims," <u>Development Forum</u>, July 1978,
 p. 11.
- 11. "Food Crisis Is Seen throughout Africa," <u>International Herald Tribune</u>, 15-16 September 1978.

- 12. S. Marijsse and W. Schoofs, "Some Questions on the Link between International Trade and Basic Need Strategies," paper presented at the Special Session on Basic Needs Oriented Development Strategies, Conference of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (EADI), Milan, September 1978, p. 8. The 14 countries are Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Upper Volta, Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Central African Empire, and Madagascar. It could be debated whether tractors and fertilizers should in all cases be considered "productive imports." Certainly, the authors quoted in note 7 above are convinced of the opposite. Furthermore, it would have been appropriate to add imports of military equipment on the unproductive side.
- 13. Patrice Robineau, "Orientations de recherche pour un autre développement," Travail et société, April 1978, p. 259.
- 14. Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Race and History," in <u>Race</u>, <u>Science and Society</u>, London, Allen and Unwin, 1975, p. 113.
- 15. Food First, pp. 38-42, 99-100.