One important set of interrelationships affecting the structure of the contexts of values and selfhood were those between long-distance traders and the localities through which they passed. In this paper to the 1992 annual conference of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations held in Lexington, Kentucky, I presented some gleanings from my lengthy and ongoing research on the interactions of international trade and finance, polities, and cities over the course of history and over the globe.

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Polities, Long-Distance Trade, Social Stratification, Cities: A Social Science Approach to Civilization

ABSTRACT

Since the time of ancient Mesopotamia, in most of the world, cities have usually been dependent variables within political/military and/or economic systems. Scholars differ about the role of social stratification in the formation of polities. Certainly, revenue and status goods from long-distance trade were surrogates for the power of rulers. For much of history and in much of the world, long-distance merchants had social status kept separate and distinct from the rest of society. Often they were foreigners and, as such, members of trading diasporas that often functioned *imperium in imperio,* living in separate trading towns or in special urban quarters. As capitals evolved, they were often dual cities: one a theater for royal power, the other for merchants. The heyday of western European capitals and states was when the two functions overlapped the most. However, trading systems usually have a broader geographic reach than polities. Resultant shifts of relationship between the two systems affect the structure of polities, the functioning and social stratification of individual cities, and of a city's relative position in a larger system of cities. These structural changes produce and require cultural change.

My mission is to understand what makes specific cities rise and fall in relative importance vis-à-vis one another. My conclusion is that cities are dependent variables, primarily influenced by the structure of polities and by long-distance trading systems. Some archaeologists and anthropologists say that social stratification must be present before a state appears.[1] Once a state has been formed, the nature of social stratification depends upon economic and political structure.

Although scholars have conducted an extensive search for the factors that cause states to appear, I am looking at polities after they are already a given. Therefore, vis-à-vis cities, they are independent variables. Nevertheless, polities must be understood in terms of their geopolitical context: e.g., Mughal India vis-à-vis the Marathas, 16th century France vis-à-vis the Burgundian circle, post-1945 Yugoslavia vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the West. Polities include, at the very least, empires, city-states (which are often at the margins of empires), national states, nation-states, and chiefdoms. A polity can be unitary, federative or confederative. Cities, social stratification, and polities are all affected by systems

of long-distance trade. In the history of the world, as Karl Polanyi and others have said, long-distance trade has taken a variety of forms: 1) one-way direct access between two places, where the accessing party obtained his resources without reference to traders at the source; 2) two-way trade where the exchange was at a half-way point at a common boundary; 3) relay trade where each set of traders went only part of the distance; 4) central place redistribution using an intermediary at the central place; 5) central place market exchange, where the parties did not use intermediaries at the central place; 6) freelance trading by middlemen; 7) emissary trading; 8) use of colonial enclaves; 9) use of a port of trade (i.e., a politically neutral place) outside the jurisdiction of the trading parties.[2]

Trade may have been gift exchange, perhaps in a context of tributary relations, or market exchange. Polanyi has referred to modes of trade characterized by reciprocity, redistribution, or market exchange and says that each of these modes has many variants. Typically, he says, any economy uses more than one mode because these terms characterize transactions at all levels of the economy (household, village, state) in different sectors (internal and external, subsistence and prestige), and in different lines of production. He concludes that the kinds of external trade employed in any economy are direct and sensitive expressions of the other modes of transaction within that economy, which in turn are directly related to political organization, social organization, and culture.[3]

Long-distance trade, in turn, has affected polities, social stratification, and cities. By providing luxury items, trade enabled rulers and aristocrats to reinforce their symbolisms of status and power. Trade may have brought in items of mass consumption (e.g., grain) which helped rulers pacify the ruled. Income from trade enabled rulers to hire mercenaries. According to Ronald Cohen, Elman Service, and others, early traders often traveled under the protection of the kings or temples on whose behalf the trading was done and whose emblems were displayed. Usually some special treaty, tribute, or social relationship already existed with the foreigners with whom they traded. Since foreigners were feared, early trade arose from desire for specific imports. Typical early long-distance trade was done through armed group expeditions. Not all communities had professional traders.[4]

After special classes of merchants arose, however, trade contributed to social stratification. Long-distance trade might be done by distinct categories of native or foreign merchants, each category having a different social status.

Trade and geopolitics interacted. When geopolitical patterns changed, so might trade routes. Changes of regime, such as the successive dynasties in the Arab Empire, also influenced trade paths. Trade spread religious beliefs and cultural traits far beyond political boundaries. It could be said that the modern age of trade began with Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam because each had a certain rationalism, and a claim to universalism, that liber-

ated its followers from locality-boundedness. The resultant extended areas of culture provided a convenient backdrop for long-distance merchants subscribing to the same belief system (Indians in Southeast Asia, Arabs along the Indian Ocean rim.)

My contention is that the fate of cities depends on all these other variables. Any typology of historic world cities includes, among others, political and/or religious centers, garrison towns, fair towns and financial centers, and inland or water-based ports. Very often garrison towns housed the troops of conquerors who were ethnically and culturally different from the conquered people (e.g., Arabs in the Middle East or Russians in the non-Russian parts of their empire).[5] The town might be designed to keep the alien troops culturally separate from the countryside. However, as in the case of French forts in the Mississippi Valley or American forts in the trans-Mississippi West, the fort and settlement might also be a base for missionaries and traders.

Structures of polities and systems of long-distance trade have been the main influences on cities. Urban systems (i.e., the ways cities relate to one another) have been different in feudal polities, in non-feudal patrimonial kingdoms, and in more modern territorially-defined national states. Patterns of taxation have linked cities to the polity. The hierarchies of a polity and the institutions of long-distance trade have normally formed two different, albeit overlapping, systems, each with a different scope of spatial reference, and each sustained by a culture somewhat different from the other's. When the chief and his immediate followers did the trading, there may have been no sharp distinction between the culture of trade and the culture of the polity (Marrakesh and Fez come to mind). Yet, even when merchants were state-sponsored, they were customarily relegated to a special quarter with its own law and rituals (one recalls the Aztecs' Tenochtitlán).[6] Often merchants were kept outside city walls, as in the cases of Constantinople or Baghdad in its second stage or many European cities after the fall of the Roman Empire. Or special towns may have been created just for merchants. Or a port may have been given over to merchants, especially if they were foreign (one thinks of Macao, Hong Kong, or the Chinese treaty ports). Usually, if merchants were socially marginal, they were either housed at some distance from the polity's center or they were directly at the service and mercy of the ruler. In either case, they were apt to have their own laws and culture.

Trade increased urban multi-functionality and therefore city size. When changes in geopolitical patterns caused changes in trade routes, city fortunes changed.

Ports may have been sponsored and protected by the state (e.g., Louis XIV's Le Havre), or co-opted by some trading entity with a special status within the state (e.g., L'Orient by the French East Indian Trading Company, La Rochelle at the time of the Huguenots). Some ports were open cities within their state. And

there were neutral ports of trade outside other states or empires (e.g., Whydah in Africa). Sponsored or co-opted ports may have been situated geographically within the state, but they also may have been geographically scattered to sustain a trading diaspora (e.g., Madras under the English East India Trading Company, Bombay, British Calcutta). What began as European overseas trading diasporas, using enclave ports abroad, tended to expand into territorial empires, often not by design but because of ad hoc local circumstances. However, the stationing of factors abroad was a common practice within Europe long before factory enclaves were established in Africa and Asia. The latter were not initially or necessarily established with colonial intent. In the case of present-day multinational corporations using special enterprise zones or free trade zones in foreign countries, the company can be seen as a geographically dispersed and more or less permanent non-territorial private government. It is not necessarily a Trojan horse for neocolonial domination.

In the literature of urban history, the assumption looms large that cities were centers of civilization or originators of civilization (e.g., the University of Oklahoma Press series on great cities). I contest these assumptions, while I do not deny that the so-called great cities have been exemplars of particular civilizations.

In many places in much of the world's history, rulers were peripatetic. The "capital" of the moving court may have temporarily housed a splendid culture, as did Agra, Delhi, or Lahore at various times under the Mughal emperors.[7] Or the icons of a polity may have been concentrated more permanently in a particular center, as they were in Aachen at the time of Charlemagne's empire, even though he himself was not always resident there.[8] Although what we call civilizations often transcended particular polities both in space and time, a political capital may have been a particularly vivid exemplar of a civilization.

The components of a trading system were itinerant by nature. Trading systems very frequently had their own centers quite separate from political centers. For centuries in Europe, cities housing the great international fairs were not political capitals (e.g., the Champagne fair cities or Medina de Campo in Spain).[9] The political ruler might tax the merchants, but they had their own law. They functioned in any given fair city on a temporary basis. Even when a political capital emerged, the disparity between political and trading systems often dictated the use of dual cities or twin centers, e.g., Versailles and the Right Bank of Paris; Westminster and the City of London. This was partly so that the trading system did not distract from the iconography of the capital and vice versa.

My hypothesis is that the city achieved its peak as the capital of a national state when government functions and business-finance functions overlapped the most and were both centered in or near the same center, e.g., in Louis Napoleon's mid-19th century Paris, London in the 18th century when the Bank

of England was fully operative, or Madrid in the 17th century when finance moved there from Medina de Campo. In each case, this overlap entailed some degree of amalgamation between the culture of the political and commercial/financial systems. In England this condition occurred when the landed class engaged in commercial agriculture and financial speculation in trade while also controlling Parliament. In France it occurred when railroad financiers and commercial banking became prominent in Paris. By this time the great merchants/bankers were no longer socially marginal. If one looks with an unbiased eye at European national capitals in these eras, one sees the Bourse, les Halles, the department stores, and Right Bank business buildings of Paris balancing the Louvre, the Palais de Bourbon, the Madeleine, and the Palais Luxembourg; or one sees the Bank of England and the docks along the Thames in London balancing the Houses of Parliament as important architectural symbols. In London, the iconography of commerce was enhanced as international business increased. To this day, the City of London is not only Britain's business center, but it is also a world financial center while its political role in the world has diminished. On the Continent, it remains to be seen how important Berlin will be as a political center and whether it will vie with Frankfurt as an international financial center.

The marriage between political systems and commercial systems is at best tenuous. There is always a tendency (latent or manifest) for these two systems to pull apart. That is why, in the United States, Albany is the capital of New York state while New York City is a national and international commercial center; and that is why New York City remained for so long the commercial/financial capital of the United States while Washington D.C. was a lesser political capital. In West Germany before 1989 Frankfurt, in a similar way, outpaced Bonn. Berlin may or may not wrest financial centrality away from Frankfurt. Washington D.C. has become much more important as a business center than it once was because of the ties between government and business, but it is clear that world trading and financial systems are substantially independent of any political center even though they are strongly affected by the policies of public governments.

At the same time, there are multiple factors at work in Europe and the United States, changing de facto political boundaries. If the North American Free Trade Agreement evolves into a Western Hemisphere free trade zone, this would make national boundaries less significant. But this is only part of the story. Native Americans in Canada want a semi-autonomous self-governing area; for some time, Quebec has been on the verge of insisting on independence. If Canada fragments into more than one separate polity, sooner or later the boundaries of the United States will change, and the fortunes of cities will change accordingly. Miami is a major international banking center because of its function as an informal political capital of Latin America. It is conceivable

that Mexico could recoup some of its 1848 territorial losses, at least on a de facto basis. This will certainly change the role of American border cities.

In the case of Europe there has been some shift of emphasis from national capitals to Brussels, the administrative center of the European Union. Business and finance are not centered in Brussels alone. No single center dominates finance completely. Frankfurt, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, and Paris are financial centers. Zurich and London are world centers of trade in gold. Within Europe, business headquarters are scattered. The pluralism at centers reflects the fact that Europe's leading multinational companies do not confine their holdings to Europe; they operate globally.

In advanced industrial countries, social structure has been changing, as agriculture has occupied smaller and smaller percentages of the workforce (farming is increasingly done by agribusiness), as the number of miners and steelworkers has decreased, as more and more workers are in services, and as technology creates demands for more educated technologically skilled workers. These changes in division of labor and of social stratification have produced urban changes. Steelworks have moved nearer to coastal locations to use imported coal and ore. Population has moved from England's industrial north to the southeast where service activities are concentrated. As the nature of the United States' social structure changes, Detroit, Gary, Indiana, and Youngstown, Ohio lose population while California cities gain.

I am not sure I want to apply such a grand phrase as "civilizational change" to what might ensue as a result of all these other changes, but I certainly would apply the more modest phrase "cultural change." Culture is not monolithic. It varies among different broad occupational groups as well as among different ethnic groups. We are in a phase of world history characterized by fragmentation of polities along ethnic lines. That is essentially what happened in December, 1991 when the USSR dissolved. Old ethnic rivalries have intensified in the British Isles, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. The Basques and Corsicans continue to press for independence. Catalonia wants more autonomy. Sikhs in India ask for independence. Tamils fight Sinhalese in Sri Lanka; Africa seethes with tribal conflict. The workforce of the advanced countries is also polarizing, with some foreign workers or recent migrants comprising a significant portion of the underclass while others are technologically-skilled elites. All of this is occurring while new geopolitical groupings are replacing the old communist-capitalist polarization.

Most scholars define the state in terms of its presumed monopoly of coercive force. In the centuries when national states prevailed in Europe, they were able to submerge ethnic differences. The European Community was formed in the first place around trade issues, and it may not have the moral authority or raw force to impose a dominant political culture that can continue to subor-

dinate ethnic particularisms. A new kind of North American political grouping needs to be designed to reinforce a trading bloc that may lack sufficient cultural cohesion. In other words, structures that facilitate long-distance trade are not necessarily suited to sustain polity. The commercial culture of multinational corporations may be global, but it is not universal. By definition, the culture of long-distance trade has always been a composite of the cultures specific to the groups engaged in trading. The culture of any particular trading group cannot be universalized and still perform its role as a reinforcer of a group's distinctiveness. The relative diminishment of national states leaves a serious cultural vacuum. Many major cities in the world have been multicultural for centuries, but the different cultures occupied different places in the hierarchy of statuses. In the absence of strong mediating forces, demand for political and social equality among peoples of different cultures promises a future of increasing conflict.

Civilizations have not been in fact universal no matter what their claims. They have been the property of some dominant group, usually controlling states and, as Marx said, controlling the means of production. Cities have reinforced any particular civilization's authoritativeness. As ethnic groups contend for power within any given state today, their different cultures contend for moral authority. However, cities and countries are not closed systems. As professional firms have internationalized, and business is entrenched in its growing multinationalism, the culture reinforcing occupational categories crosses national boundaries. A kind of cultural schizophrenia may ensue as a result of conflict between this trend and the localizing tendency inherent in ethnic fragmentation (offset somewhat by the prevalence of ethnic diasporas). Cities are the arenas of the resultant occupational and ethnic conflicts, but cities vary in the groups to which they are host. Some cities will lose, some gain, as the process of change unfolds. Civilizations will also undergo alterations.