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Defining Cultural Imperialism in John Steinbeck's Novels

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Culture develops from values, interdependence, and mutual existence. Through it man as a being comes into shape, without which he is not able create its place in the sub-consciousness, featuring the humanity in the whole form. It also refers to the cumulative deposition of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, meanings, and notions of time. This leads to the whole, but complex structure of behavior which got developed in the due course of time. Further, it is a kind of controller, through which the existence of the man takes place, the very nature of man is being executed here in a naturalized manner. The form and manner of execution of culture make it as a tool which gets transformed in the idea of rule and, the natural character of man has been put as that of an unnatural. For this, world is presented with the idea of civilization and in consequence the definition of culture comes into question with the addition of relativity, which directly paves the way for the rule of domination:

The flame of conception seems to flare and go out, leaving men shaken, and at once happy and afraid. There's plenty of precedent of course. Everyone knows about Newton's apple. Charles Darwin and his *Origin of Species* flashed complete in one second, and he spent the rest of his life backing it up; and theory of relativity occurred to Einstein in the time it takes to clap your hands. This is the great mystery of the human mind—the inductive leap. Everything falls into place, irrelevance relate, dissonance becomes harmony, and nonsense wears a crown of meaning. But the clarifying leap springs from rich soil of confusion, and the leaper is not familiar with pain. (Meszaros, 24)

This leads to deconstruction of culture, putting it in an objective manner which affects behavior of human consciousness and define his loci. Simultaneously various definitions of culture cropped up which create many myths which naturally firm up the base of culture, but it is the same type of structure that is rising from it, which culminates in the emergence of power. This is the fault which is created to dislodge the wholeness in to a structure which comes out with the idea of domination. This phenomenon nourishes the domination of few over the whole culture. This domination becomes the primary tool for the exfoliation of culture.

Coming to art and literature there is an evident strain involved in thesis which claims universality, but what claims the universality is art produced for the structure, which is quite other than art. Any attempt to hide this strain only reflects the achievements as domination, but as a whole it results in failure. Art in this phenomenon is welcomed with structural changes and this goes to the extent where it is not even under the basic definition of art. Adorno in his argument emphasized the dialectical entwinement of high and low art, and not just the always complicit 'progressive' aspects of high art alone, which is the true object of his concern:

...light art has been the shadow of autonomous art. It is the social bad conscience of series art. The truth which latter necessarily lacked because of its social premises gives the other the semblance of legitimacy. The division itself is the truth: it does at least express the negativity of the culture which the different constitute. (Adorno, 7)

In the material world the threats of the have-nots give birth to various regulations, which result in to regulations of culture, and for this a structure with relativity has been created in the society. This structure is so much complex that it becomes impossible for a man to decide where he stands and ironically he is not in the league of power but he becomes nucleus of power. Man's strive for identity is perennial, so in result of this, there comes many identities which exert their pressures on man and in result of this strive, he comes into the structure of domination. Further the complexity of structure makes the same man in utter confusion about his identity; he keeps laundering from this side to that side but in a demarcation. The structure is so complex that its dimensions are uncountable which keeps this man laundering in the same territory be it the religion, sect or race which divides him in to numerous identities and put him in a structure where he is devoid of any idea, decision and action. Therefore power comes from him but goes to the one who regulate it:

The culture industry is to be understood from the perspectives of its potentialities for promoting or blocking 'integral freedom'. These positive and negative potentialities are not naively and immediately available; and this because the terms through which we might gauge potentialities for change is themselves not naively and immediately available. According to Adorno the division of labour between disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, history and psychology is not contained in or dictated by their material, but has been forced on them from outside. (Adorno, 2)

This operation of culture as imperialistic force is defined more starkly by John Steinbeck in his magnum opus *The Grapes of Wrath*. The novel starts with Jim Casy narrating the loss of everything of which he was associated and through the narration of loss he also explores the examples of fictitiousness of his earlier associations, whether religion or spirituality, then in the proceeding anger he narrates the actual loss, that is of village or association:

"I ain't preachin' no more much. The sperit ain't in the people much no more; and worse'n that, the sperit ain't in me no more. 'Course now an' again the sperit get movin' an' I rip out a meetin', or when folks sets out food I give 'em a grace, but my heart ain't in it. I on'y do it 'cause they expect it." (Steinbeck, *Grapes*, 14)

The rooting up of people from their roots in the novel does not only signify the micro image of the structural domination but it has the backing from the much larger domination that is cultural. Now from the nucleus of the culture that is family to the atom of the culture that is village, which signifies the wholeness of culture. They are becoming the part of the larger family but in the jungle. It clears out the unity of self that was there in the village and put them in a more enigmatic and complex structure where despite of homogeneity in conditions, and in behavior, they are not feeling one. After sometime when they would fade up with this question, they (migrants) tries to assimilate themselves into one culture, in which they will lose out the history and become operational in one culture that will not allow them in to the wholeness of culture but in the structure of culture:

The more ahistorical and pre-ordained it procedures are, the less temporal relationships become a problem for it and the less it succeeds in transporting these relationships becomes a problem for it and the less it succeeds in transporting these relationships into a dialectical unity of temporal moments, the more craftily it employs static tricks to deceive us into seeing new temporal content in what it does, then the less it has left to oppose to the time beyond itself and all the more fatally does it fall victim to that time. Its ahistoricity is the tedium which it affects to relieve. It evokes the question whether

or not the one dimensional time which is characteristic of the blind course of history is even identical with the timelessness of the ever, same, identical with fate. (Adorno, 76)

These people like in *The Grapes of Wrath* migrate to the new land, they come with no dreams. Survival is the only parameter on which they will move on. This is totally against the agenda and programs that are being presented by the various dominating agencies in the novel, and that there is moving in not moving out from the pain. The new land is full of promises that will put them in comfortable situation and will nurture their dreams. But in actuality the scene is different. Once they are without roots, their culture will not have any existence and the domination over them will come directly, and the repenting comes as it comes on Joseph Wayne in *To a God Unknown*. Moving ahead with Steinbeck we find that the resistance of Jim Nolan in *In Dubious Battle*, which bring out the defense against all dominating and tyrannical agencies but at the end of the novel, the war is not over. This resistance seems to be endless but this is the only way out for this kind of domination and in *The Grapes of Wrath's* Tom Joad is also proving this that at the end of the novel he also becomes a part of resistance in the same situation. Steinbeck's definition of the resistance is not put in one stroke. It is only the constant efforts, which will cure out the pain and once they will be able to deconstruct the whole, structure will crumble down like cards:

The tyranny of *capital's time imperative* finds its appropriate completion on the all-embracing scale of development in the arbitrary closure of history. Thus, there can be no success in breaking capital's time imperative without forcefully asserting—not only in alternative theoretical conceptions but above all through the comprehensive practical strategy of revolutionary transformation—the radical openness of history by consciously challenging the established hierarchical framework of structurally predetermined and entrenched social relations. In this sense the tyranny of capital's *time imperative*, practically enforced in the societal reproduction process by means of the system's alienating *time-accountancy*, and the tyranny of capital's historical closure, stand or fall together. (Meszaros, 56)

After the dissection, this group though their history less present, and also with the formative future, makes out hope of existence. The effects of domination are heavier than their resistances which have plenty of resources, and as quoted earlier, various disciplines will theorize this domination and it will get the results from the domination which become rheumatic in the behavior. "Mass culture on the other hand simply identifies with the curse or predetermination and joyfully fulfils it" (Adorno, 72), and by this behavior the voice of resistance will lose its energy:

All mass culture is fundamentally adaptation. However, this adaptive character, the monopolistic filter which protects it from any external rays of influence which have not already been safely accommodated within its reified schema, represents an adjustment to the consumers as well. (Adorno, 67)

Making of this domination of culture, as discussed earlier is the domination of culture in a structural way, which is being exercised through various tools like that of art, music or architecture. They all focus on the theorization of this structural cultural and thus narrate out the theory of domination in the guise and in this phenomenon the making of myths through these tools get materialized. The most important tool which comes into role for this is art and when there is no history it becomes more crucial because from this all the theories of the controller become the principles and this will ultimately decide the discipline. In America the Jazz Age could be the reply of it and there are various theories of structuralism, post-

structuralism, feminism and post-colonialism which try to raise the flag of deconstruction of this cultural domination, as this is the only hope left for the disciplines:

Art is the emphatic assertion of what is excluded from the enlightenment's instrument rationality: the claim of sensuous particularity and rational ends. Art is the cognition of ends and of sensuous particularity cut off from practice. Pre-modern art hoped to alter reality, while autonomous art is the quintessence of the division between mental and manual labor in the class society. (Adorno, 6)

There are various live examples of this culture domination which have become the principles and, consequently create classes with different colors. Corporate giants whether American or French, which does not have any meaning in classifying them in to nationalities, are present everywhere (examples of cultural domination). Jeans wearing to pizza eating and from homelessness in New York to hunger deaths in Somalia, the transformation of diversities of various cultures in to homogeneity are some of the examples. The working conditions are becoming difficult in any place of the world and to increase the size of this cultural domination, the earlier mentioned tools are applied in domination. Aesthetics is no more in existence and everything related to domination is without it, even the leisure of time. "Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work. It is sought as an escape from the mechanized work process, and to recruit strength in order to be able to cope with it again" (Adorno, 7). Pain of this cultural domination is present everywhere whether it is the pain of Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* or that Tamils in Sri Lanka or that of Narmada dam's displaced people in India. If we move earlier the division of India in 1947 also falls in this theory that by creating nuclear nations this is cultural domination making the control easier, as it recently happened with Sudan in 2012. This same happened previously with the third world in the name of religion or race (examples cited above) than in reverse to it in the first world countries we have the strong union of America or Europe, which ironically consist of different nationalities. It is nothing but just the epitomizing of the first world which consist of corporate, not its citizens. So that relativism could be established with these as the ideals:

In this respect again, Hall's work in this field is by no means of purely theoretical concern; it is deeply rooted in the history and politics of the international flow of labour and migration, and subsequently in the reconfiguration of British society under and after Thatcherism. In this sense, Hall's recent formulations are continuous with his decade-long struggle with Thatcherism. Thatcherite 'new conservatism' attempted to incorporate, into its hegemonic project, a crucial element: the reconstruction of national culture, in order to win the legitimacy of governmentality. In the process of constructing this hegemonic politics, the 'recovery' of the British empire was used to mobilize different social classes. Constructing a 'racially' unified image of 'Britishness', and correspondingly attempting to erase class differences, became the cornerstone of the neo-conservative strategy of 'born-again' nationalism. (Hall, 12)

This story gets momentum when Grand Pa in *The Grapes of Wrath* losses his control at the point of time when the Joads are leaving their village and in this departure he speaks out the very existence of cultural freedom in the terms of associations, love, and belongingness which they have cumulated during the whole course of cultural history and this history is dying in front of him:

"I ain't sayin' for you to stay," said Grampa. "You go right on along. Me—I'm stayin'. I give her a goin'-over all night mos'ly. This here's my country. I b'long here. An' I

don't give a goddamn if they's oranges an' grapes crowdin' a fella outa bed even. I ain't a-goin'. This country ain't no good, but it's my country. No, you all go ahead. I'll jus' stay right here where I b'long." (Steinbeck, *Grapes*, 75)

This same cultural domination is narrated by John Steinbeck in *To a God Unknown* with a different taste. Joseph Wayne in his own desperation lands in to a situation where he loses out everything willingly, the things for which Joads were struggling. These two different situations focus on the same issue of the loss of culture and making of structural domination which are automatically classified in the category of domination by the forces which will only get power when this resistance is wiped out. And when Joseph Wayne failed in his expansion he laments on his actions and found a kind of relief in a tree of which he developed a sense of belongingness, which comes from culture. This is actually his failure which is narrating his fruitless efforts of security and leisure in the wrong direction. This is the microcosmic story where people take the expansion with the objectives of happiness and honor, which comes valuable with the greasing of liberation, within or without state:

It would be a place to run to, away from pain or sorrow disappointment or fear," he thought. "But I have no such need now. I have none of these things to run from. I must remember this place, though. If ever there's need to lose some plaguing thing, that will be the place to go." And he remembered how the tall trunks grew up and how peacefulness was almost a touchable thing in the glade. "I must look inside the cave some time to see where the spring is," he thought. (Steinbeck, *God*, 41)

To get maximum control, various movements and identities put the adjectives of cultures before them. This justifies their actions in conscience of people, which backs with the idea of bigger dreams, but in reality their dreams get smaller. The mistaken adjectives of culture are very much cultural imperialism. They reacts in rheumatic manner when it has been theorized that cultural differences are alone responsible for the conflicts in the world, but as this homogeneity in discussion, it is not like that of which is being taken up. It is the control of the whole world, wiping of cultural diversities, finally making cultural imperialism through this homogeneity:

David Rothkopf, a former senior official in Clinton's Department of Commerce, argues that American cultural imperialism is in the interest not only of the United States but also of the world at large. Rothkopf cites Samuel Huntington's theory from *The Clash of Civilizations and the Beginning of the World Order* that, the greater the cultural disparities in the world, the more likely it is that conflict will occur. Rothkopf argues that the removal of cultural barriers through U.S. cultural imperialism will promote a more stable world, one in which American culture reigns supreme as "the most just, the most tolerant, the most willing to constantly reassess and improve itself, and the best model for the future." Rothkopf is correct in one sense: Americans are on the way to establishing a global society with minimal cultural barriers. However, one must question whether this projected society is truly beneficial for all involved. Is it worth sacrificing countless indigenous cultures for the unlikely promise of a world without conflict? (Galeota, 24)

This wholeness of culture comes with earlier discussed dreams. Titans of a specific culture dominate the other cultures. A confrontation rises among cultures due to domination. This confrontation is nothing but it is the domination of a culture that is coming up. This domination is like the dark forces of money which have created darkness in *The Pearl*. This is the domination which legitimizes the doctor in the novel to refuse to treat Kino's daughter

Coyotito. “Kino stood in the door, filling it, and hatred raged and flamed in back of his eyes, and fear too, for the hundreds of years of subjugation were cut deep in him.” (Steinbeck, *Pearl*, 31)

This domination regulates love, affection, morality, ethics, rights, duties, compassion and many more values of humanity. These values when unregulated could put Steinbeck’s culture in the way which could lead man towards ‘perfectibility’:

For Steinbeck, however, this belief in the human potential for perfection did not imply either that, human beings could attain perfection in the span of a lifetime or that society could advance to an ideal state, as Plato proposed in *The Republic*. Rather, he held that the pursuit of perfection, as an autotelic practice, was the most effective method of assuring the progress both of the individual and of society. (Langione, 2)

He is so passionate about his notion of human perfectibility that he even countered those who do not believe in it and classify them in to those who do not have the ability to be in the realm of literature. “I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has neither dedication nor any membership in literature” (Steinbeck, *America*, 173). He believes in the passive faith of the people, which will put all the burden and crises in a fragmented stage and is taken with a philosophy of a relief. The constant struggles and tragedies becomes a kind of motto of life and the final relief is death:

Throughout his writings, by contrast, Steinbeck sets forth a theory of action, holding in the main that an advanced society can be achieved only through the pervasive faith of its citizens. Many of Steinbeck’s novels assert interdependence—humankind as the savior of fellow humankind. Looking closely at an early novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, beside a major later novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, we may readily observe this dynamic theory of human perfectibility. (Langione, 2)

This has been argued by Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath* where death has been argued not in a form of loss but as a kind of liberation from the existing pain, as earlier mentioned. This is the only final relief. The lamentation of loss/death is there, but one thing Joads are confirmed is about the existing pain. This infliction of pain is natural and in the theory of Steinbeck, this pain is not of individual but of the whole humanity as exemplified with the numbers and diversity of folks on the highways. The heterogeneity of cultures is the particular feature of any society where one’s local color, myths, and other tales get place in the lives. This eventually creates a culture that binds them in a proper environment, it also leads to the defense against any kind of domination neither of itself nor of other self, but the replacement of it by homogenization of cultures will eventually appoints lords on them. There will be no voice against any issue, this homogeneity creates a wave that will lead all the waves under its influence, and then it will flow in a single direction. Globalization is the perfect example of this kind of wave equipped with weapons which will promote a strong modern state with no political or social base so that no one will raise his voice against it. There is nothing to choose in democracy all are in same arrangement and in dictatorship you do not have any option and all the divisions along the fault lines of any identity of nation, ethnicity, or race is actually not heterogeneity but are leagues to put off the voice. There will rise a huge sea of power which in turn will control all the subjects, there will be no separation or division of power, like in *The Grapes of Wrath* where the story comes from Oklahoma and ends in California but bank is everywhere, its nature is same everywhere, the big farm owners remain in tune with these banks, the pain is same in every camp and of every folk:

This group, formed in 1933 through the efforts of the California Farm Bureau Federation and the state Chamber of Commerce, was composed of corporate farming interests and other organizations that profited from the California corporate farming environment, significantly, landholders like the Bank of America (which held mortgages on half the farmland in the valley), Pacific Gas and Electric, Standard Oil, Southern Pacific Railroad, and the Cannery League. (Lingo, 356)

This homogeneity will put domination in more advantageous position. It will control everything and for this control everything should be according to it whether ideas or thoughts. This is a situation where humanity will be governed by these imperialistic forces, and everything will be at its disposal. In his essay "The Globalization of Markets," Harvard business professor Theodore Levitt declared, "The world's needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenized." (Galeota, 22). The same theme has guided the new imperialism which became activated after the Second World War and continues with the silent barrel during the cold war, with the formation of various international agencies like United Nations (UN), World Trade Centre (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The organizing of the post-war imperialist system proceeded through the medium of the international agencies established toward at the end of the war: the United Nation, the World Bank, and the international monetary fund—in each of which the United States was able, for various reasons, to exercise the leading role. The system was consolidated through the activities of UNRRA, the Marshall Plan, and the several economic and military aid programs financed and controlled from Washington. (Magdoff, 47)

Steinbeck's stand on this cultural imperialism as narrated in *The Pearl*, *To a God Unknown* and *The Grapes of Wrath* runs parallel to major theories of it. But with the concept of mutual coexistence and perfectibility he moves ahead of them and for a fiction writer of twentieth century this is an achievement. He comes out finely with these concepts when the domination is crossing every line and the world is shrinking for it.

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