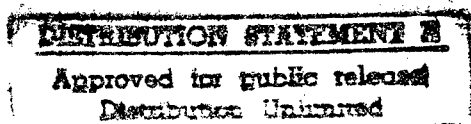


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THE INVOLVEMENT OF PEASANTS IN INTERNAL WARS

By GIL CARL ALROY



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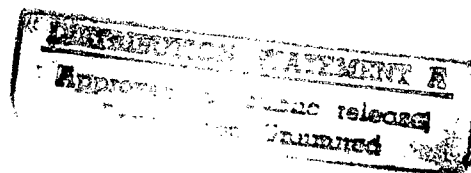
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THE INVOLVEMENT OF PEASANTS IN INTERNAL WARS

By Gil Carl Alroy



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THE INVOLVEMENT OF PEASANTS IN INTERNAL WARS

I

Never before has the involvement of peasants in internal wars seemed so important as now. As far as we can tell, perhaps only two historic cases rank alongside those today in which peasants are involved. One was the Great German Peasant War which engulfed almost all of Europe, from Alsace to the Carpathian Mountains and from Scandinavia to the Alps, and even parts of Spain and the eastern Baltic region. From 1524 to 1526, this terrible war involved millions of peasants and others, engaged the armies of many states, and cost the lives of well over fifty thousand German peasants alone. In sheer numbers, however, even this was dwarfed by the Chinese experience, whose awesome proportions are exemplified by the T'ai-p'ing ("Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace"), which claimed over twenty million lives between 1850 and 1864.

Perhaps such awesome losses will never occur again. But now, for the first time, the involvement of peasants in internal wars has been made the cornerstone of global revolution by a major world power possessing vast human resources and nuclear capabilities. A startling statement by the Chinese Communist leadership has recently affirmed that "the peasants constitute the main force of the national-democratic revolution

against the imperialists and their lackeys. . . . The countryside, and the countryside alone, can provide the revolutionary bases from which the revolution can go forward to final victory, " a victory on the global scale, ultimately to result from an encirclement of North America and Western Europe, "the cities of the world, " by the overwhelmingly rural and backward continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.¹

By no means a casual statement, the Chinese declaration merely dramatizes a profound shift in Marxist revolutionism, at least since the Maoist conquest of the country, from the industrial proletariat to the peasantry. Strengthened recently by the success of Castro in Cuba, and more recently still by the Vietnamese insurgency, this remarkable reversal of orthodox Marxism has been helped along by literati of international stature, whose writings glorify and even romanticize the peasant insurgent in the "non-white" world as the prime mover of global revolution.²

As the involvement of peasants in internal wars around the world seems to gain unprecedented significance, our habitual ways of thinking about, even of conceptualizing, that phenomenon prove increasingly wanting. Certainly the very broad acceptance of such traditional terms as "peasant rebellion, " "peasant uprising, " "peasant revolt, " or "jacquerie"

1. Excerpts from a statement by Marshal Lin Piao published in the New York Times, September 4, 1965, 2.

2. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre, Sartre on Cuba (New York 1961); Franz Fanon, Les damnés de la terre (Paris 1961).

has not been successfully extended to their more recent, updated variant, "peasant revolution." More than any other, that concept has been resorted to in order to make sense of the massive involvement of peasants in modern revolutionary wars--but with disappointing results. The effect of its use in the case of Cuba, for instance, was more to propagandize, and otherwise obfuscate, the peasants' involvement than to illuminate it.³ The considerable resistance to the term, expressed by many writers on several specific grounds, may ultimately prevail either because the term is unclear and oversimplified, or simply because of a reluctance to link the modernity of revolution with notoriously traditionalist peasantry. Rebellion or revolt--yes; in fact, to some, "peasant rebellion" even serves to typify traditionalist, backward insurrectionism. But "peasant revolution" seems a contradiction in terms. Nor are some conceptions used interchangeably with it very much better.⁴

But are the old conceptions satisfactory even for conceptualizing the involvement of peasants in internal wars that took place before the appearance of such complex modern movements as the Chinese, Yugoslav,

3. See my article "The Meaning of 'Peasant Revolution': The Cuban Case," International Review of History and Political Science, II (December 1965), 187-99.

4. Conceptions of any revolution as "agrarian" or "rural" seem only little less questionable. If sound analytical grounds exist for them ("rural revolution" appearing somewhat more promising in this connection than "agrarian revolution"), they certainly are not obvious in the current confused usage of the terms.

Cuban, Algerian, or Vietnamese revolutions? True, the still very considerable resort to the traditional terms by scholars and others suggests that they indeed serve certain real needs. They seem to say something about the social composition of insurgencies, and even to connote, if vaguely, the idea of primitive insurrectionism. But the confused nature of these seemingly self-explanatory terms alone suggests that even in the good old days the peasantry in insurrection presented certain conceptual difficulties. A number of the difficulties are revealed by even a brief examination of the pertinent literature.

II

Almost wholly episodic in nature, even the literature on peasants and prerevolutionary internal war consists of works concerning one or more particular cases of internal war; rarely does it address itself to any general phenomenon. As regards terminological looseness, the literature could hardly be surpassed.⁵

While most historians seem to have followed the apparently simple rule that an internal war waged by the peasantry may be described as a

5. This is true of the later literature as well as the earlier. Even in a veritable classic on peasants and politics, a "peasant revolution" turns into a "rural revolution" (in the same paragraph), only to appear later as a "peasant war" (by citation from another source); then in another place (where it is further used interchangeably with "agrarian revolution") it is used to refer to phenomena of a seemingly quite different order (David Mitraný, Marx Against the Peasant, Chapel Hill, 1950, 58).

"peasant rebellion" (or a similar term), few seem to have regarded this rule alone as sufficient--or almost all internal wars in history would have been so characterized.⁶ The importance attached to the peasantry of rebels, relative to other considerations, has varied so greatly from case to case as to impair seriously the utility of the simple and undifferentiated concept of "peasant rebellion," and with it the seemingly self-explanatory character of the term. The results seem sometimes to verge on caprice, as when one medieval rebellion involving few peasants is described as a "peasant rebellion,"⁷ while another medieval rebellion with overwhelming peasant participation is said by another historian to have been no peasant rebellion at all.⁸

6. Sometimes the rule applies to war involving more than one autonomous political system, sometimes also to war within systems of uncertain political definition. Examples of the former are so-called jacqueries in the Hundred Years' War, such as the revolt against the British (near Caen in 1434), the earlier one (in Auvergne and Poitou in 1384) said to have been waged in their behalf, and also many Bauernaufstände involving the invading Swedes in the German lands in the Thirty Years' War. Examples of the latter were numerous in medieval Europe: for example, the armed resistance of the Stedinger "peasant republic" to the papal crusade (Bremen region, 1229-1234); also the armed resistance of the Dithmarschen "peasant republic" to the Holsteiner counts (1319, 1404) and to the Danes (1500).

As my earlier cited article has shown, the terms "peasant rebellion" and "peasant revolt" have been applied even to the radical revolutions led by Tito and Castro.

7. The Split (Croatia) Rebellion of 1398; see Ferdo Čulinović, Seljačke bune u hrvatskoj (Zagreb 1951).

8. The West Flanders (Zannequin) Rebellion of 1323; see Victor Brants, Histoire des classes rurales aux Pays-Bas jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIème siècle (Brussels 1881).

The problem of mixed participation--how much weight to attach to the involvement of peasants relative to that of others--indeed appears to be a perplexing one in the literature. While it is not clear why many socially mixed insurrections were termed "peasant rebellions," neither is it clear why such terms should be reserved only for purely, or almost purely, peasant affairs. Social purity may be found only in the relatively few internal wars without peasant participation (typically, coups d'état) or in those few with exclusively peasant participation. The latter are increasingly becoming less probable and less significant than are other kinds of internal wars. Wars in almost exclusively peasant societies, as those of the fabled Dithmarschen and Stedinger "republics" in medieval Germany, are not likely to occur again, and even when they did occur their purity may prove to have been mythical.⁹ Perhaps unmixed participation will arise nowadays only in primitive, or near primitive, societies (but do they have peasants?), or in historical societies in such marginal outbreaks as village clashes or land invasions--and in respect to some of these, too, there may be doubts.¹⁰ Perhaps only banditry may prove really "pure."

9. The 1291 Swiss War of Independence, long regarded as a purely peasant affair (and thus termed a Bauernrevolution as late as 1952, in Hermann Wahlen and Ernst Jaggi, Der schweizerische Bauernkrieg 1653 und die seitherige Entwicklung des Bauernstandes, Bern, 11), has been shown to have been remarkably well-led and coordinated by another social stratum, the petty nobility: see Hans Zopfi, Das Bauerntum in der Schweizergeschichte (Zürich, probably 1947).

10. Land invasions may be urban rather than rural, or peasant, in character; see John P. Powelson, "The Landgrabbers of Cali," The Reporter (January 16, 1964). Conversely, industrial unrest, invariably regarded as archetypal urban unrest, may actually involve, in a partly rural setting, masses of men who may be described as at least partly peasant; thus the famous Noda Soy Sauce Company strike, Japan, 1927-28.

Even the historic, classic "peasant rebellions" involved a more substantial participation of non-peasants than many think. The archetypal French Jacquerie itself, the 1358 rebellion in the Beauvais, involved some clerics, petty nobles, and bourgeois. The Hussite Wars, commonly regarded as the first of a series of great historic "peasant wars" or "peasant rebellions," actually involved almost all of the Bohemian people. The English Peasants' Rebellion of 1381 (Wat Tyler's Rebellion) and the Great German Peasant War were also almost national in participation. The ranks of such reputedly peasant insurrectionary movements as the Bundschuh and the Armer Konrad were actually replete with burghers, knights, and artisans.

But because of mixed participation, some of the classic "peasant rebellions" have also been characterized in various ways. Wat Tyler's Rebellion, for instance, has been described by some as a workers' rebellion, while others have chosen to regard both workers and peasants chiefly as Lollards.¹¹ The same vexing problem seems to have led many historians to resort to more general terms of description, such as "popular" or "social" rebellions, even where peasant participation was overwhelming.¹²

11. Compare these titles: Ch. Petit-Dutaillis, Les prédications populaires, les lollards et le soulèvement des travailleurs anglais en 1381; O. Eberhard, Der Bauernaufstand v. J. 1381 in der englischen Poesie.

12. Thus George Kriehn, in his several writings on the medieval insurrections; also Edward P. Cheyney, who made an exception only of Wat Tyler's Rebellion (a "peasants' insurrection"), in his The Dawn of a New Era, 1250-1453 (New York 1936).

Moreover, peasanthood does not everywhere describe the same rural social categories; its meaning varies from one culture to another. As a result, cultural differences greatly affect the perception of "peasant rebellions." The Germans, who subsume under peasanthood certain miners, merchants, and even nobles, not only perceive such rebellions where few others do, but actually appear to think of peasant warfare as a generic category; the Spaniards, on the other hand, seem to find such ideas quite uncongenial.¹³ (In some respects, the perception of "peasant rebellions" may also reflect even intra-cultural differences.)¹⁴ The Japanese, moreover, throughout much of their history have seen all their rural internal wars, regardless of the social classes involved, as belonging to the same category.¹⁵ But if the inclusiveness of the Japanese

13. Hispanic cultures seem to predispose toward the perception of only particular configurations. Their jacqueries, so to say, have been known variously as Fuenteovejuna (named after a locality in Andalusia, the subject of Lope de Vega's famous play); or Los Comuneros de Antioquia (a group of freeholders in colonial Colombia); or Guerra dos Farrapos (the "men in rags" of the Brazilian Rio Grande do Sul); or Os Sertões (as Euclides da Cunha has immortalized Antonio Conselheiro's "Rebellion in the Backlands" of Brazil in the 1890's).

14. Lacking any real insurrectionary experience, the Germans in the lands to the east tended to perceive "rebellion," and even "war," in petty rural clashes not usually so described in the more militant provinces to the west. Thus a small clash between a few peasants and soldiers in Saxony was ominously recorded as a Bauernschlacht (connoting "massacre" as well as "battle"); see E. Schaller, "Die Jerisauer Bauernschlacht im Jahre 1676," Sächsische Heimat, V (1922).

15. Hugh Borton, Peasant Uprisings in Japan of the Tokugawa Period (Tokyo 1938).

approach was systematic (and perhaps also analytically superior to the others), in the general usage "peasant rebellion" may or may not describe, almost at random, internal wars in societies ranging from the tribal to the so-called "rurbanized," or post-peasant, ones. At the same time that many Frenchmen characterize the late unrest in their highly mechanized agrarian sector as a révolte paysanne, others describe in similar terms the unrest among African tribesmen and Peruvian aborigines.¹⁶ Somehow this may be really justifiable. But how?

III

At least as perplexing as the problem of social composition has been the problem of the "proprietaryship" of rebellions. Whether or not rebellions, even with overwhelming peasant participation, were conceived of as "peasant rebellions" appears often to have depended on the purposes for which the peasants (and others) were seen to rebel. When they were thought to rise for their own interests, simply as peasants, few problems of

16. Roland Young and Henry A. Fosbrooke have described the 1955 rebels in the Uluguru Mountains of Tanganyika as "African peasants," or simply as "peasants" (Smoke in the Hills, Evanston, 1960); in his report in the New York Times (February 6, 1964) of "a battle [near Cuzco] in which at least 17 peasants were killed," Edward C. Burks also refers to the rebels as "Indian campesinos," "Indian peasants," and simply "Indians" (who are, he explains, still "speaking the Quechua tongue of the long-ago Incas"). In his Les damnés de la terre, the late Franz Fanon spoke of paysans and jacqueries in the Algerian countryside and in the "colored" world generally.

definition existed. According to a fading tradition,¹⁷ these rebellions were termed "jacqueries" (jacques rebelling as jacques) and more recently "agrarian rebellions," as distinct from, say, religious or national rebellions also involving the great mass of the peasantry.

But why make such distinctions? It is not at all certain that the behavior of peasants rising as agrarians differs substantially--enough to justify the kinds of distinctions usually made--from their behavior when rising as patriots or religionists. Moreover, these distinctions appear dubious especially in the light of two of the most cogent generalizations to be made concerning land, peasants, and insurrectionism. Since land is a paramount value in peasant culture, it is bound to play a part in even religious or patriotic insurrections in which the peasantry are involved. But even in insurrections in which the agrarian theme predominates, to say that the peasants fight for land may oversimplify matters to the point of distorting them altogether.¹⁸ The matter of agrarian ends may be even

17. In a recent classification, Chalmers Johnson uses "jacquerie" for the most primitive of all his categories of internal war, which typically, but not necessarily, involves peasantry (Revolution and the Social System, Stanford, 1964). In Harry Eckstein's "Internal War: A Taxonomy" (unpublished memorandum, Center of International Studies, Princeton University), "jacquerie" describes a relatively primitive type of insurgent formation, also regardless of social composition. I have encountered some earlier similar uses of "jacquerie," specifically identifying a loosely structured and spontaneous mass outbreak in either the cities or the countryside, in the works of H. Taine.

18. One such instance is discussed in my forthcoming article "The Peasantry in the Castro Revolution."

more ambiguous when non-peasants control the insurgents.¹⁹ Besides, "agrarian" is used as often as not to refer simply to an insurgency occurring in a rural setting, while "jacquerie," as many understand it, need not even involve peasants at all.

Moreover, determining the aims and roles of peasants caught up in rebellion seems to be risky business. Peasants, as rebels or otherwise, have almost everywhere been notoriously inarticulate, if not wholly illiterate. The outsider has almost always had to speak for the peasants, to record their deeds. How reliably have the men of the cities performed this historical role? There certainly is good reason for doubt, for suspecting unsympathetic bias, and most recently for suspecting sentimentality and the fanciful bias of romance.²⁰

But, whether obscured or not, the aims and roles of peasant rebels appear for the most part to be mixed. Sometimes this is quite obvious. In the colonial areas of the world these rebels invariably appear also as national rebels. In the areas of colonial settlement in Europe they often appear as religious, as well as national and agrarian, rebels. The great

19. If we needed further evidence for this proposition, there are Guevara's widely publicized and ingenuous words to the effect that when victory is achieved in a revolution such as Castro's, which Guevara himself termed "basically agrarian," the leaders "tell [the peasants--and others] of the goals of the revolution, explain why they fought, why their comrades died" (Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare, New York, 1961, 70, emphasis mine).

20. The fact that to the men of the cities these events are in the other, the rural, world, may have more to do with their perception of them as a particular kind, as "peasant rebellions," than does their awareness of more cogent reasons warranting such distinction.

insurrections in the Baltic lands were fought against foreigners (Germans and Poles) who were also all at once the landlords, rulers, and proselytizers of the indigenous (mostly peasant) population.²¹

Determining whether or not an insurrection "belongs" to the mass of the rebels--a difficult test in any case--is particularly difficult in regard to peasant rebels. They are so very dependent on the military (and other rare) skills of outsiders as to be forced in many cases to "requisition" their leaders by drafting, kidnapping, or other means. This notorious weakness of peasant rebels leaves open the question of the proprietorship of rebellion even after other qualifications seem to have been met. When German peasants captured Goetz von Berlichingen, the reluctant Bauernkrieg hero immortalized by Goethe's play, did he become their agent or their principal? Can peasants (or any mass) ever control such a borrowed leader; and can they really control even a natural one, a leader sprung from their midst?

Naturally, appearances may be extremely deceptive. The historical literature thus conveys the impression that the so-called croquants in seventeenth-century France, who impressed an outsider²² to lead them, were more authentically peasant fighters on their own behalf than, say, the thousands of English peasants who marched on York in 1469 under their "own" Robin (of Redesdale), or those marching under Jack Cade nineteen

21. Estonia, 1343; Lithuania, 1418; Latvia, 1558.

22. La Mothe La Forêt, in 1637.

years earlier. We can only guess why.²³

Yet when we consider those manifestations of illegitimate violence in the countryside which perhaps occasion least doubt as to the rural (if not always peasant) nature of its leadership, we may still be on slippery terminological grounds. This refers to the so-called rural brigandage, or banditry, which sometimes appears as "peasant rebellion," and sometimes not.

To be sure, this confusion reflects far from negligible difficulties. The conceptual distinction between rebellion and brigandage is an uncertain one, at best. Both terms often describe similar occurrences, sometimes even the same ones. The same forms of petty violence have been called "brigandage" when isolated from such acts as large-scale movements of many men, and "rebellion" when associated with them. As far as the incumbent governments almost everywhere are concerned, rebellions in the countryside generally appear as brigandage in either case.²⁴ Furthermore, the incidence of both rebellion and brigandage in the countryside is so close as to be virtually inseparable. Historically, large-scale insurrection is epidemic in the rural areas in which brigandage is endemic. Or, put another way, where there is Robin Hood, Wat Tyler is not far away.

23. In cases such as these, when the peasantry has been drawn into dynastic wars or other armed intra-elite struggles, even under their "own" leaders, historians have tended not to perceive "peasant rebellions."

24. A report in the New York Times of August 4, 1964, from La Paz, Bolivia, of an ambush against security forces, reads in part: "About 80 guerrillas have been operating in the Santa Cruz Department, where San Simon is situated, in recent weeks. They had been largely ignored by the Government, which referred to them as cattle rustlers."

With such extremely proximate phenomena the important question may well be whether (not merely where) to draw the line between them. Some have explicitly drawn it. H. Pergameni thus said of the cotereaux, medieval rural brigands against whom other peasants had risen in self-defense, that their actions "do not deserve the name 'peasant war.'"²⁵ This is so, it seems, because, since they preyed on their fellow jacques, the cotereaux ("knifers") clearly lacked consciousness of their common peasanthood. In most other instances, similar conceptual choices are not explicit. They are simply made without much awareness of making them.

Some writers have minimized the distinction. As concerns rural brigandage in China, the view prevails that it was a prelude to, and often an integral part of, the great periodic "peasant revolutions" in China's history. In this perspective, "rural brigandage" appears as a professionalized, or "frozen," early phase of a phenomenon frequently called "peasant rebellion" when escalated and otherwise further developed. In Eric J. Hobsbawm's own terms, "social banditry" is simply "endemic peasant protest."²⁶ In this perspective, incidentally, one may have to add to our handful of familiar traditional terms such exotic ones as hajduk, pandur, komitadji, tuchin, écorcheur, coquin, and many other historic manifestations of rural banditry around the world.²⁷

25. "La crise féodale et les jacqueries françaises du XIV^e siècle," Revue de Belgique, XXXIV (1880), 15.

26. Primitive Rebels (Manchester 1959), 5.

27. The first three terms derive from the Balkans (Serbia, Macedonia, Wallachia respectively) under late Ottoman rule; the other three from medieval France.

IV

Our customary ways of thinking and speaking of the involvement of peasants in internal wars have long been mainly imprecise. Now they are increasingly becoming irrelevant. Whatever use it may have served in the past to speak of "peasant rebellions," there simply are fewer and fewer opportunities for doing so in the modern world.²⁸ As men see fewer and fewer "peasant rebellions" happening, and scholars increasingly submit the entire phenomenon of insurgency to systematic, theoretical study, our old, congenial commonsense terms are certain to lose increasingly more ground. Only one, "jacquerie," has been deemed worthy by some scholars of their efforts to convert it into a social science term. As far as the traditional terms are used to connote primitivity in insurgencies, they are not entirely useless, but neither are they without considerable ambiguity. For the idea of insurrectionary primitivism itself remains to be clarified.

But there remains the undeniable fact of peasant involvement in internal wars. Why not conceive of this involvement more in accordance with reality, as more or less significant aspects of internal war, rather than as a type of internal war? These aspects can be studied systematically by analyzing the major variables involved. We can already briefly discuss a substantial

28. Of "peasant revolts" we read in one source that they "no longer are part of the contemporary Latin American scene and are of historic interest only" (Atlantic Research Corporation, A Historical Survey of Patterns and Techniques of Insurgency Conflicts in Post-1900 Latin America, Washington, 1964, 40).

number of these aspects in the light of the foregoing examination and other preliminary work under the following three principal variables:

A. PARTICIPATION

The participation of peasants in internal wars involves the consideration of numerous variables the different "values" of which in specific cases have different consequences.

1. Leadership

Whether or not the leadership of an insurgency consists of peasants not only seems an important determinant of the basic character of the insurgency, but also involves a significant characteristic of peasants' behavior in all insurgencies: their dependence upon non-peasants for political, military, and other leadership skills, a dependence which increases with the increase in the scope of insurgencies. When the leadership of an insurgency consists entirely, or essentially, of peasants, it is very likely to remain merely revivalist, conservative, or reformist in its basic character; as such insurgency transcends its typical character, the leadership is also likely to be changing its social composition.

With only two kinds of apparent exceptions to be discussed presently, it is, indeed, difficult to think of any truly revolutionary movement as ever having been led by peasants. Actually, it is difficult to think of many leaders of even less developed but noteworthy insurgencies who were peasants. Sometimes, as with Karle (or Calle), the famed leader of the great Jacquerie of 1358, we know almost nothing about the man, not even whether

he really existed. Sometimes we know enough about such leaders to doubt whether they may properly be termed peasants. Thus we know little about John (or Jack) Cade's early life except that he probably was an Irishman by birth, and that later, after a brief stay in Sussex, he seems to have fled the country, to have fought in the French wars, to have settled in Kent under the name of Aylmer, and to have "married a lady of good position,"²⁹ which hardly makes him a peasant at the time of the insurrection of 1450, if ever he had been one in the first place. We know even less about Wat (or Walter) Tyler before the bloody events of 1381; but since "Tyler" (or Teghler) was a trade designation (he actually was a brickmaker) and not a surname, we may assume that he was a peasant merely in a very broad sense of the word--a rustic or a rural dweller.

Sometimes we do know that the leader had been a peasant, at least in his early life, or was a peasant by birth, and yet we may still doubt whether he could be so designated also on the eve of the insurrection. Emelyan Pugachov was the son of a small Cossack landowner, and perhaps even lived an ordinary Cossack life until he joined the military (at age 17?), but certainly not afterward. Following some exploits as an ensign in Prussia and the Turkish wars, he returned to his homeland, not to settle on the land but to roam the Empire until the outbreak of insurrection in 1772. Assuming that the other great Cossack rebel, Stepan (or Stepka) Razin, had like

29. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., IV (1910), 927.

Pugachov a similar humble start in life, which is doubtful, we soon find him, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "on a diplomatic mission from the Don Cossacks to the Kalmuck Tatars"; later on a pilgrimage of a thousand miles to the great Solovetsky monastery on the White Sea; still later as a warlord in Persia and throughout the Russian Empire--none of which describes peasanthood as we normally understand it.

However, this is just as we should expect it to be, since the leadership of any substantial movement, no matter how limited its goals, requires attributes not normally acquired in the course of an ordinary peasant existence. Even before a more extensive analysis of the peasants as leaders in internal wars is undertaken, we can already say that military service appears to be a very important qualification for the leader's role: it is more readily available to peasants than are other qualifying experiences; it involves the acquisition of skills vital to insurgency; it is in fact frequently mentioned in connection with men who actually played the leader's role.³⁰

Deviants from the ordinary life-pattern of the peasantry may well be prominent in even such minor leadership roles as are usually described in the literature as "hotheads" or "ringleaders." It is usually difficult to establish the true identity of incumbents of such minor leadership roles in the countryside. The written records are inaccessible or poor, or both,

30. Such observations lead the German historian Günther Franz to hint at the possibility of a significant pattern, though merely to hint (Der deutsche Bauernkrieg, Munich and Berlin, 1933, 6, note 1).

but the discontinuity inherent in the roles themselves would in any event make for only casual, sporadic mention of the men involved. In an otherwise unusually informative account of a small rebellion near Salzburg, in seventeenth-century Austria, one individual (Pankraz Noel) described as a rural gendarme appears twice in some leadership role--once as ringleader of a small group of marauders, then as a member of a deputation. Several others are singled out for mention in similar roles by name only, perhaps because they were just ordinary peasants.³¹ A typical account of a smaller insurrection in the western part of the nineteenth-century Russian Empire merely gives the surname of one man and the full name of another, who is also identified as a Latvian, as the probable leaders of the serfs and the tenant farmers respectively.³²

One can think of peasants leading truly revolutionary movements only in these two apparent exceptions:

a) Peasant-led subsidiary revolutionary movements, such as those of Zapata and Arango ("Pancho Villa") in the Mexican Revolution, which are really only more or less integrated phases of large revolutionary movements. To clarify the conditions of such integration would be interesting (think merely what intriguing character the communication between the

31. See Josef Karl Mayr, "Bauernunruhen in Salzburg am Ende des Dreissigjährigen Krieges," Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Salzburger Landeskunde, XCI (1951).

32. See B. R. Brezhgo, Otcherki po istorii krestianskikh dvizhenii v Latgalii, 1577-1907 (Riga 1956), 54-59.

different leadership levels must possess) and is urgently needed, especially now that revolutionary warfare, or so-called wars of national liberation, is so important--and also now that traditionalist peasant-led bands are often integrated within modern guerrilla movements.³³

b) Revolutionary movements led by men with at least some rural background or experience, as the Chinese revolution, whose chief leader, Mao Tse-tung, has ~~been~~ described as being of peasant birth. Such cases may appear as even less exceptional to the low revolutionary leadership capacity of peasants than the foregoing ones, for it is ridiculous to speak of, say, Mao's being a peasant in any precise sense. Yet even some peasant background in revolutionary leaders may matter in not insignificant ways. In the first place, it may enhance their ability to manipulate peasant masses. The noted effectiveness of the "folksy" manner of the late General Mohammed Neguib in dealing with the Egyptian fellaheen illustrates this proposition well. In the second place, some peasant background may, as has been claimed in connection with Mao and some of his associates, even affect the revolutionary leaders' own orientations.³⁴ Naturally, for both these purposes, a "peasant background" may be acquired by means other than parentage--for instance, by acculturation.

33. This integration occurred on a large scale in the Chinese Communist revolution. More recently, it has been reported to be taking place in Colombia (James Nelson Goodsell, "Colombia's 'la violencia,'" Christian Science Monitor, January 14, 1966).

34. Mark Gayn, "Peking Has a Yenan Complex," New York Times Magazine, January 30, 1966.

As the scope of peasant-led insurgencies expands, the likelihood of non-peasants' supplanting the original leaders is high. Of the early historic instances of this leadership change, perhaps the best known is the Great German Peasant War. The frequent repetition of this pattern in more recent times has been noted by Gaetano Mosca, who said that when such an insurrectionary movement "acquires power and weight, other leaders of a higher social status step forward very soon."³⁵ Naturally, insurgencies need not be peasant-led in order to fail to attain true revolutionary scope or to be just ineffectual. We have witnessed a vast number of such cases, with varying degrees of peasant participation in the mass. There is nothing peculiarly "peasant" in these failures.

2. Mass

a) Active involvement. The fact that the peasantry has provided the bulk of the troops on both sides of most internal wars in history is surely one of the most impressive facts about warfare; but how really significant is it? As the greatest source of manpower, the peasantry would seem to have been as invaluable yet at the same time as external to waging warfare as cattle are to managing our meat supply. On the other hand, the fact that the peasant background of troops is not entirely inconsequential may be gathered from their variable effectiveness in internal war. Thus the suppression of industrial, urban unrest has been traditionally and deliberately

35. The Ruling Class (New York and London 1939), 213.

entrusted most of all to peasants in uniform.³⁶ Yet since time immemorial peasants in uniform have been fighting other peasants in uniform--fairly reliably, too, although it has also proved possible to breach the control of professional military cadres over peasants in uniform by appealing to their peasanthood.³⁷ But whatever significance there may be in peasant participation in most internal wars must be sought as much as possible outside the formal control of alien cadres upon peasant behavior. For this reason, peasanthood should usually be more consequential in the mass on the side of insurgencies than on the other side. The more the peasant fighters are left to their own devices, the more the patterns peculiar to them should become manifest.

A belief in the existence of just such patterns has long existed, but remains as vague as all other popular lore. In part, it merely expresses the familiar low evaluation of the insurrectionary capacity of the peasants; in part, it describes more specific behavior said to be characteristic of

36. Referring to 1848 in Germany, A. J. P. Taylor writes: "In the end, the peasant masses cleared the stage; but these masses were disciplined conscripts in the Prussian army" (The Course of German History, New York, 1962, 69). Taylor even attributes the later breakdown of the Bismarckian system of governance to, among other things, its alleged inability to rely as strongly upon an army substantially recruited from the working class. We know, of course, that the Czarist regime traditionally sought out Cossack troops for counterinsurgency purposes.

37. According to Leon Trotsky, the great unrest in the countryside in the fateful summer of 1917 spread into the rank and file of the Russian army, seriously endangering the Provisional Government under Kerensky. Especially interesting are Trotsky's observations on the disintegration of Cossack discipline (The History of the Russian Revolution, Ann Arbor, 1961, II, 268ff.). A similar jeopardy threatened the Soviet regime several years later. The situation arose toward the end of the 1920's at the height of Stalin's drive on the peasantry, when, as David Mitrany puts it, "The Red Army itself, with its peasant sons, reflected the prevailing restlessness (Marx Against the Peasant, 73).

peasants involved in war. An example of some of the best bits of knowledge of this behavior in the literature is Leon Trotsky's brief but interesting discussion of the peasants' notorious destructiveness in war, in his monumental History of the Russian Revolution. Theirs is not wanton, orgiastic destructiveness, as it seems to be, argues Trotsky, but rational behavior aimed at radically depriving the enemy of his fortified positions.³⁸

We obviously need much more work on these questions, more rigorously done; but whether we should explore how peasanthood may affect active participation in war, rather than study the more inclusive influence of ruralism, is an important analytical choice to be discussed presently.

b) Active support. It does indeed make a difference whether or not it is peasants, rather than others, who lend active (but noncombatant) support to either side in internal wars; the difference is in some ways greater, and more significant, than that made by the peasanthood of the combatants themselves. As active supporters of either side in internal wars, peasants are perhaps more likely to act spontaneously, to behave in ways peculiar to peasants, than are peasants actively participating in such wars. The kind of active support they can lend not only differs, but differs dramatically, from the active support other social categories can provide.

Unlike urban dwellers, peasants can provide foodstuffs for extended periods of time and can arrange information networks covering extensive

38. History of the Russian Revolution, III, 13.

areas. They can generally make whatever resources they possess available at the periphery of the incumbents' controls, at their weakest points. Urban dwellers, by contrast, can offer resources and skills rarely possessed by peasants, but must act under conditions of optimum control by the incumbents. Thus as a general proposition, when distributed in almost any proportion between the sides, active support by the peasantry should favor the insurgents, particularly by providing resources that facilitate the waging of protracted warfare. All that we know about guerrilla warfare seems to validate this proposition.

The conditions that generate the peasants' active support remain to be clarified. But we already know that the more conventional explanations, such as land hunger, may well be crude oversimplifications or worse.³⁹ In modern revolutionary wars particularly, active peasant support seems to be available by manipulation to a considerably greater extent than apologists for these revolutions normally concede; yet it also appears to be granted in part with more genuine sympathy than antirevolutionaries envisage.

c) Tacit support. As we normally understand the term, tacit support is not something ordinary peasants would seem able to generate. To coordinate one's seemingly normal, everyday behavior with the political or military requirements of either of the belligerents requires a degree of sophistication that peasants do not normally possess. They may of course

39. AlRoy, "The Peasantry in the Castro Revolution."

appear to demonstrate just such ability, particularly in the frequently reported cases of non-cooperation with agents of government in many guerrilla-infested regions in the world. In the case of some peasants, this surely indicates the existence of an extraordinary awareness of events other than those of a strictly parochial nature. In many instances, peasants may simply follow directions; but since such cases occur mainly in areas in which non-cooperation with government is the norm anyway, outsiders could well be reading too much into what they see. What appears as tacit support among the peasantry for one side in an internal war may be in fact a rather typical aloofness from both of the belligerent sides.

d) Peasants as victims of internal war. The traditional conceptualization of peasant involvement in internal war, with its exclusive focus on essentially active, voluntary modes of participation, totally ignores the considerable involuntary involvement of peasants in such war. It directs our thought to the peasant as one who commits insurgent acts, never to the peasant as one who suffers both the insurgency and counterinsurgency of others. Even considering the manner of involvement only in the sense of ordinary war victims, a sense which excludes the forced participation of peasants in direct involvement and in support, victimization remains a form of involvement of massive proportions, the consequences of which for the outcome of internal wars have recently reached unprecedented importance. The conduct of modern revolutionary warfare mainly in the countryside is actually premised on advantages flowing to insurgents from the victimization

of peasants. By settling in among the peasantry, and waging war from their midst, the insurgents implicate the peasants willy-nilly, exposing them to the hazards of counterinsurgency measures. The hazards resulting from this, the "parasitism" of guerrillas,⁴⁰ are further magnified by "mimicry," or the guerrillas' more or less superficial resemblance to the peasants among whom they move, which, while securing for the guerrillas precious concealment, exposes the peasants to even greater jeopardy.

We have established elsewhere that the involvement by victimization of the Cuban guajiros in Oriente province has greatly affected the fortunes of the Castro revolution, above all perhaps by generating more active forms of peasant involvement against the incumbents, such as joining the guerrilla fighting forces.⁴¹ That it is also "one of the major problems of the war" in Vietnam has been made abundantly clear as well.⁴²

B. GOALS

Our earlier discussion of the "proprietaryship" of insurgencies should suffice to convince us that this variable must be handled with especially great care. Following Harry Eckstein,⁴³ we should perhaps distinguish the

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Neil Sheehan, "Vietnam Peasants are Victims of War," New York Times, February 15, 1966, 1.

43. "Internal War: A Taxonomy."

purposes of the peasants' involvement in internal wars, their substantive, concrete objectives and general categories of objectives, from the explicit formulation of the goals of the combatants, but taking the formulation of goals to include a wider range of promotional activities than the more conventional expressions, such as statements of war aims, programs, and formal demands.

1. Purposes of Involvement

Why peasants involve themselves in internal war may really be as difficult to ascertain as many men think it obvious. According to one popular notion, peasants usually (if not always) fight for land; according to another, they may easily be aroused to fight for almost anything else. As far as we can tell now, peasants indeed seem to get involved in internal wars for innumerable reasons; but these reasons are almost invariably circumscribed (or mediated) by parochial, local, rural factors--among which there is, of course, land. Hugh Borton's earlier cited analysis of over one thousand rebellions in pre-modern Japan further indicates that peasant purposes are typically grievances of a practical, almost petty, immediate, and earthy character. This is indeed as we should expect them to be.

2. Formulation of Goals

The manner of formulation appears to depend above all on the access of the peasants to the function of leadership.

a) Peasants as participants in leadership. To the extent that this condition obtains, the formulation of insurgency goals (for it is difficult

to see this condition obtaining also on the side of the incumbents) is most likely to appear in two different but closely related ways: (1) Statements of practical demands. The traditional manner in which these demands appear combines a certain formality of style, typically expressed in articles or petitions, with great concreteness of substance. The latter ranges from such esoteric trifles as the right to use leather-soled footwear (in Tokugawa Japan) to the more ubiquitous matter of taxation, which one finds as prominent in, say, the earlier cited unrest in seventeenth-century Austria as at the present. (2) Invocations of chiasm and the occult. One finds, sometimes appearing separately, but usually intermingled with demands so practical, direct, and unassuming as to verge on pettiness, expressions of a more or less chiliastic character, such as visions of the millenium, cataclysmic denouements, messianic purposes, and other fantastic phenomena. A vast number of illustrations may be cited, from the Albigensian war on, but some good general studies and studies of recent cases in Europe and elsewhere are particularly worthy of mention.⁴⁴ There is general agreement among its students that such chiasm constitutes the primitive man's counterpart of what among more advanced peoples we term revolutionism.

b) Peasants as non-participants in leadership. Non-participant peasant involvement affects the formulation of goals in two principal ways, depending

44. Among them, Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium (London 1957); Vittorio Lanternari, The Religions of the Oppressed (New York 1963); W. E. Mühlmann, Chiasmus und Nativismus (Berlin 1961); F. B. Welbourn, East African Rebels (London 1961).

on whether the peasants serve as a reference group or a target group for the goal formulators. This distinction is justified even though peasants often serve simultaneously in both capacities.

(1) Peasants as reference group. We are speaking, in the first place, of conventional statements of insurgency goals concerning the peasantry, such as the enumeration of things which leaders of insurgencies promise to do at some time for or to the peasantry. Typically these are agrarian programs, as illustrated in the Cuban and Chinese revolutions. We are thus speaking about statements produced by urban, literate men, generally for consumption by similar individuals. In the second place, peasants also serve as a reference group when outsiders presume to speak for them, to represent them in ways other than the above. Thus, in addition to his championship of agrarian reform, Castro promoted the revolution by identifying it with the victims of the Batistiano counterinsurgency operations in the backlands of Oriente province.⁴⁵ The defense of the peasantry thus appears to become simply another goal of the insurgency. Here, too, it is essentially a matter of non-peasants talking to others like themselves about peasants. The fact that the peasants are increasingly used, and apparently successfully, in this sense to arouse sympathy for insurgents reflects a remarkable shift in urban, literate opinion, from habitual contempt to a new compassion for peasants, which finds its counterpart in the recent

45. For documentary evidence, see Jules Dubois, Fidel Castro (Indianapolis and New York 1959), 196, 200-201, 315.

romanticization of the peasant as insurgent cited in the beginning of this study.

(2) Peasants as target group. When it is to peasants that the formulation of goals (and other promotional activity) is particularly directed, it may take peculiar forms in both presentation by outsiders and reception by the peasants themselves, especially the latter. Although the data for the former are scarcer, it should be possible to explore and evaluate more thoroughly than heretofore the manner in which outsiders slant their appeals to peasant audiences, both as concerns language and content.⁴⁶ But whatever that manner may be, the conception of the goals of internal wars by the large mass of the peasantry can surely be expected to differ to a certain degree from their conception by members of other social categories. We can gather this from a Mexican peasant's account, in Oscar Lewis's study, telling of the appearance of "bolshevism" in a village in the aftermath of the more agitated phases of the revolution.⁴⁷ Following the involvement of some trade unionists in the village dispute, several villagers were called bolcheviques by their antagonists. At first, they thought that this was a dirty word; but they were asked not to resent it because it meant "union." The black and red flag of the unionists was supposed to mourn those "peasants" in Chicago who had been massacred for protesting against their rich hacendado.

46. Enough material for a modest beginning has long been available in the social science classic, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, II, chap. 5, by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki.

47. Pedro Martfnez: A Mexican Peasant and His Family (New York 1964).

The Mexican peasants, too, would fight for justice, equality, and an eight-hour day of labor for themselves. Those who had wealth were going to share it with those who did not. Then money would go out of use; peasants would swap their produce for the things the workers made; the churches would be turned into warehouses; all would work, eat, and dress the same. The peasants, who thus became bolcheviques in what had been mainly a dispute over the exploitation of municipal forests, were soon disillusioned because these "promises" were not fulfilled.

C. LOCATION

We might reasonably assume that the involvement of peasants in internal wars occurs mainly in purely rural settings; however it also occurs in both partly rural and urban settings, and increasingly so. Some of these variations may be more important than we suspect.

1. Urban Settings

A distinction must be made between peasants residing in cities and those whose involvement in internal war takes them into that setting (though they may have been there before in another capacity).

a) Peasants as city dwellers. This is a phenomenon of acute importance especially in times of rapid industrialization, when we find in all but the most stagnant societies substantial numbers of peasants settling in urban centers. According to prevailing propositions on the relationship between social change and participation in internal war, particularly the "uprooting" thesis, peasants as city dwellers would seem to merit special

attention on our part. Their social integration in the new setting is obviously an important variable in any analysis of peasant participation in internal wars in cities.

Curiously enough, the most uprooted peasants may well be much less likely to participate in urban insurgencies than has been thought. An appraisal of some recent historical writing indicates that this was probably the case in the French Revolution and the subsequent upheavals in Paris. Even if those peasants most recently arrived from the countryside, the most uprooted ones, probably stimulated some politically sensitive groups in Paris to extreme actions, they themselves apparently stayed only on the periphery of the insurgencies.⁴⁸ While we need to know more about this group, we must in any event explore the involvement in internal wars of the better integrated newcomers to the city, either within the framework of transplanted rural organizations, as exist in the bidonvilles of North Africa or the favelas and barrios in Latin America, or within urban organizations such as unions, political parties, and clubs. We know something about these conditions, but not enough. On the basis of prevailing theory one can only assume, for instance, that the latter form of integration is generally more conducive than the former to participation in insurgencies. But we do not really know this, nor the answers to other urgent problems.

48. Charles Tilly, "Reflections on the Revolutions of Paris: An Essay on Recent Historical Writing," Social Problems (Summer 1964).

b) Peasants brought to cities by internal wars. We could subsume here such aspects of internal wars as the movement of peasant refugees into urban centers, but the main concern would have to be with the more substantial (in numbers if not also in other respects) appearance in the cities of peasants more actively participating in internal wars.

While peasants must have appeared in cities in this manner on both contending sides on innumerable occasions in history, there is little written evidence that they have consciously been observed in that capacity. This remarkable gap may be explained mainly by the prevailing feeling that there is little noteworthy about peasants in this capacity, except for their notorious awkwardness and helplessness in the urban milieu, which is apparently considered too banal to discuss. We certainly gather from accounts that portray peasants in these conditions that they indeed seem to be, in a word, "lost." We must ascertain more precisely how the unfamiliar urban setting affects their behavior--whether, for instance, it tends only to heighten their insecurity, as one might expect, or also in some way alleviates it. If it is the former, or mainly the former, ought the peasants not to be even more vulnerable, more susceptible to manipulation than in the more congenial rural settings? Ought they not to try to abandon, or entirely avoid perhaps, the cities, which, on the other hand, as the location of both market and government are essential to the settlement of the insurgency itself?

2. Partly Rural Settings

The most significant cases here are those of peasant involvement in industrial strife in rural areas. These cases constitute an area in which the study of internal war overlaps with the study of the industrialization of rural labor forces. Students of internal war thus find a substantial amount of groundwork already laid out for them by economists, sociologists, and others. Questions that particularly interest students of internal war, such as the fit between the peasants' habitual behavior in conflict and the techniques of industrial strife, also interest students of rural industrialization. Some work already done along these lines may in fact be subsumed under all these categories.⁴⁹

3. Purely Rural Settings

For the most part, peasant involvement in internal wars occurs in mainly, if not purely, rural settings. Is this condition of any consequence?

It is one of the fundamental propositions of sociology that there exist traits and relations typical for the rural social world generally, in addition to traits peculiar to a given peasant society, as distinct from urban phenomena generally. Some of these differences thought to be constant and repeated in time and place involve population density, size of communities, occupation,

49. For example, "Worker Protest in Prewar Japan: The Great Noda Strike of 1927-8," a paper presented by George O. Totten at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (March 1961).

extent of social interaction, and many more. Moreover, traits peculiar to ruralism have been held to affect the involvement of men in internal wars in significant ways at least since Edmund Burke, and probably even earlier.⁵⁰ Their debilitating effect upon the revolutionary capacity of peasants, especially as concerns psychological factors, underlies Marx's known contempt for that class, whom he once derided as "potatoes in a bag," not a real community.⁵¹

But ruralism may be an even more important datum than these interesting, but hardly novel, propositions suggest. It may actually provide us with some generalizations about internal wars which might apply, first, to social categories which are broader and less ambiguous than "peasanthood"; and, second, to a wider range of historical experiences. Much as the

50. Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (Garden City 1961), 211-12: "The very nature of a country life, the very nature of landed property, in all the occupations, and all the pleasures they afford, render combination and arrangement (the sole way of procuring and exerting influence) in a manner impossible amongst country-people. Combine them by all the art you can, and all the industry, they are always dissolving into individuality. Any thing in the nature of incorporation is almost impracticable amongst them. Hope, fear, alarm, jealousy, the ephemeral tale that does its business and dies in a day, all these things, which are the reins and spurs by which leaders check or urge the minds of followers, are not easily employed, or hardly at all, amongst scattered people. They assemble, they arm, they act with the utmost difficulty, and at the greatest charge. Their efforts, if ever they can be commenced, cannot be sustained. They cannot proceed systematically. . . . In towns combination is natural. The habits of burghers, their occupations, their diversions, their business, their idleness, continually bring them into mutual contact. Their virtues and their vices are sociable; they are always in garrison; and they come embodied and half disciplined into the hands of those who mean to form them for civil, or for military action."

51. For Marx's complete statement, see The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York 1951), 156-57.

involvement of men in internal wars in rural areas may vary from one social category to the next, and from one level of social development to another, it may well share certain similarities peculiar to ruralism generally. The precise nature of these similarities remains to be determined, but there are two further reasons for engaging in such work. One is simply the impression of sameness obtained from even a first reading of numerous accounts of internal wars in the rural milieu of both peasant and non-peasant societies at various stages of social development. In these accounts, there appears a peculiar pattern of scattered, minor clashes. The other reason for further exploring just such demonstrated patterns is that there indeed seem to exist traits of ruralism which could explain their existence; a pattern of scattered, minor clashes in internal wars in all rural settings may thus be a very likely consequence of the fact that the governmental presence, the most likely object of clashes, is itself both scattered and of minor strength in almost all rural areas. But this is merely the first step of a promising exploration.

V

To recapitulate the main points of this essay and to conclude:

Conceptualizing the involvement of peasants in internal wars in terms of the old, conventional categories of "peasant rebellion," and similar ones, has on the whole been inadequate even for the past. It is now also becoming

increasingly irrelevant, just when the involvement of peasants in internal wars appears to acquire unprecedented significance. The solution to the problem lies not in updating already deficient concepts, as some are doing, but in conceptualizing peasant involvement more in keeping with good theory and the real world. This requires that we conceive of this involvement as more or less significant aspects of internal wars rather than a type of such wars.

A brief discussion of three principal variables involved in these aspects--participation, goals, setting--demonstrates some analytical advantages of this approach. Besides making it possible to handle even the active involvement of peasants in terms comparably more commensurate with its actual variability than the conventional concepts, this approach also directs our attention to other kinds of peasant involvement which are no less important--for instance, involvement by victimization.

Yet nothing that is useful in the conventional approach is lost in the new; we can do all that was worth doing before, and more, for we have a conceptual framework that systematizes every existing proposition concerning peasant involvement, from inchoate riots to sophisticated revolutionary warfare, and encourages the formulation of new ones. At the very least, we should be encouraged to ask what is problematic about data on peasant involvement in internal wars, more especially when we are tempted--as many still are--to resort to deceptively self-explanatory familiar terms without close attention to the imposing number of major and minor variations that they encompass.

What has been sketched here is, of course, merely a justification for making a new start on an ancient subject, and an indication of how that start can be made. Ultimately one wants yet more discriminating concepts, many more hypotheses in which the concepts are used, further attempts to interrelate variations on the dimensions used here, and, above all, more data in terms of which concepts can be put to work and hypotheses and models tested--admittedly a large agenda, and one that might usefully employ many more than the present writer.

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