

★ THE RIDDLE of all

Constitutions

International Law, Democracy, and the Critique of Ideology



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International Law, Democracy and the Critique of Ideology

SUSAN MARKS



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Preface

This book draws on work presented in a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Cambridge. I was fortunate in having as my supervisor James Crawford, and wish to record my deep gratitude for his encouragement and advice. I am also grateful to the University of Cambridge and Emmanuel College for giving me a year's leave in which to work on my dissertation, and to Harvard Law School's Human Rights Program for its hospitality during that year.

The names of four international legal scholars feature with particular prominence in this book, and I take this opportunity to emphasize my indebtedness to each. Thomas Franck and Anne-Marie Slaughter put the question of democracy onto the agenda of contemporary international legal scholarship. If on occasion I single out their work for critical comment, I hope it will be clear that I do so with the aim of strengthening the immensely progressive potentials which I believe their arguments to have opened up. David Kennedy and Martti Koskenniemi put the question of theory onto the agenda of contemporary international legal scholarship. It was their inspirational writings which, by a somewhat circuitous route, led me to the perspective I offer here. Both also provided specific guidance in relation to my evolving arguments at crucial points along the way.

In writing this book and the dissertation that went before it, I have benefited from the generosity of many people. For help of various kinds at various stages of this project, I want to give heartfelt thanks to Marie-Claire Belleau, Nathaniel Berman, Rosemary Bloom, Julie Brown, Deborah Cass, David Freedman, Dan Hunter, Neil Leach, Jayan Nayar, Stephanie Palmer and Nathalie Prouvez. I also want to thank Simon Olleson and Fiorentina Azizi for valuable research assistance.

I have long been aware that my greatest good fortune was the one that came to me earliest. This book is dedicated to Colin Marks and to the memory of Sonia Marks, my treasured parents, allies, and life-guides.

Susan Marks

Cambridge, October 1999

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for Colin and Sonia

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Introduction

According to some international legal scholars, a 'norm of democratic governance' is 'emerging' in international law. That is to say, democracy is acquiring the status of an 'international human right'; a legal standard of 'democratic legitimacy' is crystallizing; democratic government' is becoming established as a criterion in the recognition of states; and the groundwork is being laid for 'some form of collective democratic security'. According to other scholars, such claims must be viewed with profound scepticism. To proclaim the emergence of a norm of democratic governance is to subscribe to an 'overstated universalism', which ignores the fact that outside Europe and Latin America there is little evidence of any 'trend toward democracy'. More than that, it is to fuel the idea that 'democratic countries should do everything possible to promote democracy in the world', including military intervention. In consequence, the 'risk of imperialism looms large', as does the danger that international law would be deprived 'of its indispensable role as an overlapping consensus among societies that otherwise radically differ on fundamental matters'.

This debate and some of the wider issues exemplified in it are the subject of this book. My concern is not to investigate the basis of the claim that an emerging norm of democratic governance should now be recognized, but rather to determine the claim's implications. I have not conducted an empirical analysis of the extent to which there exists a 'trend toward democracy' of global proportions. What I have sought to explore is the link in this context between empirical analyses and political outcomes, between factual assessments and evaluative considerations, and between academic commentary and social change. I thus sidestep the question of whether the democratic norm is well founded in international practice, and go straight to the issue of whether it represents a good idea. My argument can be stated very simply. I think the sceptics are right to warn that the risk of neo-imperialism looms large. Indeed, I believe that the problems with the postulated norm of democratic governance may go further than these scholars suggest. On the other hand, I do not accept the conclusion, seemingly drawn by some, that the attempt to secure explicit international legal support for democratic agendas should therefore be dropped. I think the proponents of the norm are right to bring democracy into the vocabulary of international law. Indeed, I believe that democracy might valuably be made more central to international law's vocabulary than, for their part, these scholars suggest. Instead of renouncing the project of promoting democracy through international law, I argue that international legal scholars should rethink that project. I offer a tentative proposal of my own in this regard.

In formulating my proposal, and in developing the argument from which it arises, I make use of a distinctive analytical tool: the concept of *ideology*. This is, quite

Franck 1992 and 1995, ch. 4.

⁴ Slaughter 1993, 236.

⁷ Ibid, 266.

² Cerna 1995, 329.

⁵ Crawford 1994, 4.

⁸ Koskenniemi 1996, 231.

³ Fox 1992b, 253.

⁶ Carothers 1992, 262–3.

⁹ Roth 1996, 236.

patently, a tool which can be—and has been—put to a large array of different uses, some of them deeply problematic. As John Thompson observes, 'there is much that is misleading and much that is erroneous' in the tradition of reflection upon ideology. Yet, as he also observes, there is much that is worthwhile as well. From this tradition we can 'distil . . . a residue of problems which retain their relevance and urgency today'. These problems have to do with the way symbolic practices work to constitute and stabilize the position of dominant social groups, the way ideas support power. I indicated above that my concern is with the implications of the claim that an emerging norm of democratic governance should now be recognized. I can now be more specific: my concern is with the relation between that claim and prevailing power. I seek to consider the democratic norm in terms of its potentials both for sustaining relations of domination and for transforming them. I use the concept of ideology to help in this regard. Given that this concept has so often been deployed misleadingly and erroneously, I devote the book's initial chapter to a discussion of precisely what I intend by ideology and how I hold it analytically valuable.

Let me now indicate the plan of the rest of the book. In Chapter 2 I outline the thesis that a right to democratic governance and democratic standard of governmental legitimacy today belong in international law, and summarize the responses of those who take a more sceptical view. In doing so, I set the arguments in the context of wider debates about the occurrence at the twentieth century's end of a 'worldwide liberal revolution'. Chapters 3 and 4 are where I examine the 'democratic norm' thesis with the aid of the concept of ideology. Chapter 3 is concerned with the notion of democratic governance that underpins the postulated norm. Like ideology, democracy is, of course, a hugely contested concept, with many meanings competing for ascendancy. For the purpose of the new norm, 'democratic governance' is understood as government produced in a particular way. What makes governance democratic is that political authority is conferred through the mechanism of periodic competitive elections, backed up by civil rights (freedoms of expression, assembly and association, and so on) and a constitutional order dedicated to the rule of law. That is not an uncommon way of understanding democracy, but it has important limitations, which are analysed at length in the work of scholars from a wide diversity of traditions. The thread which runs through much of this work is that, important though the institutions and procedures of representative government clearly are, they cannot be allowed to exhaust the meaning of democracy. To permit that is to give up on the idea that democracy is about self-government, and not just about legitimating government by others. It is to cancel democracy's historic promise of popular self-rule on a footing of equality among citizens, or at any rate cease striving to enhance the extent to which that promise is fulfilled. Those who argue for the norm of democratic governance are quite aware of these points. However, they consider that, in the context of democratic reconstruction, it is necessary to begin with a more limited account of what democracy can mean. In this international legal scholars echo an assumption

informing many international initiatives for the promotion of democracy—an assumption which some political analysts have criticized as ideology.

Chapter 4 is also concerned with the notion of democratic governance that underpins the postulated norm. Here the focus is on another aspect of democracy's significance. For the purpose of the new norm, democracy is understood as a form of national government. It is taken to have its site or frame within nation-states, just as ancient democracy had its site or frame within city-states. Clearly, the history of modern democratic politics is inextricably linked with the emergence and consolidation of the states system. In recent years, however, theorists have begun to question whether democracy can continue to be conceived exclusively in national terms. As a result of processes of globalization, the fate of national communities is increasingly shaped by decisions taken outside the framework of national political institutions in other countries, but also in international organizations, informal meetings of national and international officials, and the 'private' domain of global markets. And if this is so, then the democratization of national institutions begins to appear a decidedly partial approach to the establishment of democratic political arrange-ments. Though no-one believes that the problems involved are likely to be easy or quick to resolve, many today contend that, if we want democracy in national settings, we must find ways of bringing democratic principles to bear in international and 'transnational' settings as well. Without doubt, those who argue for the norm of democratic governance are aware of this reasoning. For them, however, the central challenge is to secure the extension of democracy to more countries. Their assumption appears to be that global democracy requires to be built through the accumulation of national democracies. Can this assumption too be criticized as ideology?

The thrust of the argument up to this point is in part to vindicate the scepticism with which some international legal scholars have received claims regarding the emerging norm of democratic governance. If this argument is compelling, it is tempting to conclude that international law and democracy do not mix; that the move to turn international law into democracy's champion was a well-intentioned but misconceived project that should now be halted. I believe this temptation should be resisted, and in Chapter 5 I consider how current proposals for a norm of democratic governance might be rearticulated so as to meet the concerns to which they give rise. As this indicates, I do not share the view, sometimes expressed, that democracy is a Western form of government, with little pertinence in other parts of the world, and hence little place in international law. There are, of course, understandable reasons for that view, given the history of Western hegemony and international legal eurocentrism. But, in the words of David Held, '[u]nderstandable as they are, . . . these reasons are insufficient to provide a well-justified critique: it is a mistake to throw out the language of [democracy] because of its contingent association with historical configurations of Western power.'11 There is considerable evidence that those struggling against oppression agree. As Claude Ake remarks, '[t]here is no part of the world where democracy is not relevant, if only as an emancipatory project. There is no undemocratic country I know of where democratic struggles are not being waged.'12 From this perspective, democracy is to be rated an 'ideal that belongs to all humanity',13 a 'universal aspiration, rather than a merely localised form of government'. The reference here, it should be noted, is not to any particular institutional structures or constitutional arrangements, nor even to any consensus with respect to a wide range of values and beliefs. Rather, it is to the basic democratic ideas of popular self-government and political equality—ideas which are universal, not in the sense that they will or should be uniformly interpreted and realized, but in the sense that they circulate globally and play a part in political life across the world.

In the last chapter of the book I leave behind the specific issue of the relation between international law and democracy, and turn to the more general question of the theoretical framework within which that issue is addressed. In international legal scholarship theory often appears as a kind of arcane diversion from the main business of working out what is actually going on at the coalface of state practice and opinio juris. The classic question of international legal theory is 'Is international law really law?' and, as one prominent international legal scholar observes, debate over that question has largely exhausted itself (for the moment, at least). 15 Does this mean that there is less occasion than ever to divert into theory? If so, then the liberal attempt to depict international legal knowledge as a matter of immediate observation has been fully successful. As liberalism's critics convincingly argue, however, knowledge about social practices like international law is not a matter of immediate observation, but is instead mediated by ideas which help the observer to determine what is worth noticing. In establishing the facts of customary international law, I necessarily draw on presuppositions about the world, among them presuppositions about the nature and purpose of the enterprise in which I am engaged. These presuppositions shape my decisions about what is most relevant, important and telling. And these decisions in turn shape my assessment of what is going on. As Terry Eagleton puts this point, '[t]here is no such thing as presuppositionless thought';16 there are only more or less explicit presuppositions.

Theory, in the sense of the ideas that inform enquiry, is not only a problem for liberalism, however. Critical scholars too are apt to avoid explicit discussion of theory in this sense and limit themselves to allusive references, for fear of lapsing into 'totalizing' thought. Yet, as others point out, exposing normative assumptions is by no means incompatible with retaining a context-sensitive and open-minded stance with respect to those assumptions. Even so, why expose them? Why does theory in the sense indicated matter? Because international legal scholars are not just commentators upon international law; they are participants in its making. Some recognition of this can be found in article 38(1) of the Statute of the International Court of Justice, in which the writings of jurists are deemed a subsidiary source for the determination

¹² Ake 1993, 30.

¹⁵ Franck 1995, 6.

¹³ Boutros-Ghali 1995, 4.

¹⁶ Eagleton 1991, 3.

¹⁴ Beetham 1995, 2.

of international legal rules. Some recognition can also be found in the institution of the International Law Commission, through which scholars gain influence in relation to the 'codification' and 'progressive development' of international law. In neither of these two contexts, however, are the extent to which, and the ways in which, scholars help to shape international law fully registered. Using the language of social theorists, in neither of these contexts is the 'reflexivity' of international law fully captured. The consequence of this reflexivity is that, as earlier sections of the book will seek to demonstrate, analyses affect outcomes, knowledge is bound up with power. The issue then becomes: what outcomes will be pursued? what dispositions of power will be fostered? Viewed in this light, theory appears itself a prime target for ideology critique, insofar as it is made to appear extraneous and obscure, yet could scarcely be more material or more worldly.

With these points in mind, I try in Chapter 6 to render explicit the approach which has informed my own investigations in this book. I can convey the general drift of that approach here by referring to an observation made by Eagleton about Marxism. This is that, far from rejecting bourgeois ideals, Marxism 'takes with the utmost seriousness bourgeois society's talk of freedom, justice and equality, and enquires with faux naivety why it is that these grandiloquent ideals can somehow never actually enter upon material existence'. Whatever might be said of the fate of this perspective within Marxism, my approach to international law is similar. I take with the utmost seriousness international law's claim to be part of the modern project, with its 'bourgeois' agenda, and enquire with faux naivety why it is that more is not being done to realize the ideals of freedom, justice and equality. Note that my naivety is false not because I know the answer. The reasons are much too complicated to suppose that. Rather, my naivety is false because I know that asking the question is not the casual and innocent act I pretend it is. I will discuss why in due course.

To this brief synopsis it is perhaps worth adding a few further comments about the book's structure and aims. As is evident from the foregoing description, I devote a whole chapter—Chapter 1—to explaining how I understand the concept of ideology, but do not offer the same treatment with respect to concept of democracy, or for that matter the concept of international law. The reason for this is that the book in its entirety is an exploration of how the contested meaning of democracy is articulated with the contested role of international law. It is not possible simply to define these terms and on that basis move on to deal with the central issues, for the definition of these terms is itself the central issue. I seek, as intimated, to consider how ideology works to entrench particular meanings, and at the same time to provide a basis for transcending the limitations of those meanings. Ideology thus requires preliminary explication because it frames the contest over democracy's significance within international law. But where democracy and international law are concerned, accounts must be left to enter as the discussion unfolds.

Secondly, there is the issue of the time-frame of this study. The focus here is on debate during the 1990s over the status and value of an international legal 'norm of democratic governance'. I have not undertaken any systematic reconstruction of relevant historical antecedents, though I believe these certainly merit investigation. The notion that international law can be seen to require democratic government is a recent one. But the question of how democratic ideas and practices affect, and are affected by, the international order is a matter of long-standing—or, at any rate, episodic—interest to international lawyers. As theorists remind us, things often get forgotten or trivialized because they disrupt the coherence of received ideas. To challenge historical narratives is to challenge the ideas to which those narratives lend support. Thus, in the context of efforts to rearticulate current formulations of the norm of democratic governance, valuable critical resources no doubt wait to be uncovered.

A third comment relates to the sources on which my argument relies. One way of gaining 'critical distance' from prevailing interpretations of international law is, as iust indicated, through research into international legal history. Another way (which can also serve as a stimulus and aid to the first approach) is by stepping outside the circle of international legal thought, and examining international law in the light of ideas and methods developed in other traditions. 'Pure' knowledge—the effort to 'understand ideas solely in terms of other ideas', international law solely in terms of international law—tends to be self-affirming. 18 If the range of referents is extended, however, what seemed obvious might come to seem strange; what seemed inevitable might come to seem optional; what seemed rational might come to seem arbitrary. In the chapters that follow I seek to attain critical distance in this way, drawing eclectically on writings that include many in which the primary concern is not international law or even law at all, but politics, society, culture, economics, or some other sphere. This manner of proceeding is sometimes labelled 'interdisciplinary' research. 19 But the concept of interdisciplinarity must be used with caution, for it carries the twin dangers of conveying at once too much and too little. By directing energies towards extra-disciplinary sources, it risks signalling that disciplinary failures and omissions are deficiencies which might be 'supplied' from outside. On the other hand, by characterizing recourse to extra-disciplinary sources as exceptional interdisciplinarity, it risks confirming 'pure' knowledge as the norm.

And finally, a personal observation and statement of purpose. When I have mentioned to people that I am working on a book which discusses international law with reference to democracy and ideology, the reactions have been remarkably consistent. This is the sort of project, it seems, which someone might be expected to undertake as part of an effort to win recognition for the contribution of former US President Ronald Reagan. I have gleaned that to write of democracy is already to give some hints of this. To compound the situation by writing also of ideology is to manifest unequivocal allegiance to a reactionary outlook, a hegemonic agenda, a culture of

¹⁸ McCarthy 1994, 19.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Slaughter *et al.* 1999, in which the primary focus is on scholarship linking international relations theory and international law.

contentment. It was not always so, of course. Both separately and in combination, the concepts of democracy and ideology have occupied a central place in the work of some of the most radical thinkers the world has known. Karl Marx first brought the two ideas together, but there have been countless others before and since his day who have developed one or both in the service of social transformation. If I dwell on international legal proposals concerning democracy, and if I do so in a way that gives prominence to the notion of ideology, this is because I seek to reawaken a sense of the progressive possibilities which these two concepts—democracy and ideology—*could* help to open up within international law.

Chapter 1

Preface to a Critique of International Legal Ideology

Few concepts come with heavier baggage than ideology. Its tangled history, unedifying role in post-war politics, and plurality of widely diverse meanings, have led many scholars to call for its consignment to oblivion. Because I do not heed this call, I begin with an extended account of how and why—despite the facts just mentioned—I shall use the concept in the chapters that follow.¹ The account is in four parts. The first part sets out the particular conception of ideology I shall employ, and indicates where this conception comes from and how it relates to other familiar notions of ideology. The second part explains why, by the lights of this conception, declarations of the 'end of ideology' cannot be accepted and, indeed, only confirm the persistence of ideology. The third part considers some starting-points that may be used for the analysis of ideology as I understand the term. These correspond to modes in which ideology can often be shown to operate and discursive strategies typically deployed. The final part discusses the aims of ideology critique.

A CRITICAL CONCEPTION OF IDEOLOGY

In everyday language ideology is commonly used to mean something approaching dogma. If I say that your position is ideological, what I am generally suggesting is that your position is reached through the unreflective application of received doctrine. While I approach the world with an open mind, and base my judgements on observation and experience, you are just out to vindicate the preconceptions associated with some system of beliefs. This way of using ideology may have polemical value, but it seriously underestimates the extent to which all thought proceeds from preconceptions. In any event, as will come as little surprise, I do not propose to analyse international law in terms of this conception of ideology. Let me begin by noting some other conceptions of ideology of which I shall not make use. I shall mention six that have, or have at times had, wide currency in everyday or academic contexts.

In the first place, there is the equation of ideology with 'false consciousness', that is to say, the condition of being unaware of one's own true situation. This notion of ideology can be traced to the work of Friedrich Engels.² For Engels,

¹ For a discussion of ideology critique in contemporary international legal scholarship, see Chapter 6.
² This conception of ideology is sometimes traced further to the work of Karl Marx. See, e.g., Plamenatz 1979. As will become apparent from the discussion of Marx's work below, the notion of false consciousness indeed has some affinities with one way in which Marx used the term (even if the phrase itself was coined by Engels and never used by Marx). But, as other commentators emphasize, it cannot capture the complexity and subtlety of Marx's ideas about ideology. See Barrett 1991, 5 and McLellan 1995, 16.

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process. Hence he imagines false or seeming motive forces.³

The depiction of ideology in terms of ignorance and self-delusion has attracted much criticism, especially in recent decades. Today the concept of false consciousness is widely regarded as an unsatisfactory basis for a theory of ideology, on the grounds that it arrogantly and unjustifiably presumes that someone else can know my own motivations and interests better than I do.

Secondly, ideology is linked with *class consciousness*. This understanding was first put forward by Lenin.⁴ In *What Is To Be Done*? Lenin uses the term ideology to refer to a body of thought appropriate to, or expressing, the situation of a particular class. 'The only choice', he writes, 'is: either bourgeois or socialist ideology'.⁵ In making this point, Lenin stresses that socialist ideology, though it expresses the consciousness of the working class, cannot be expected to develop spontaneously. Rather, it must be elaborated 'consciously' by ideologues, that is to say, by intellectuals, or indeed by workers acting in this context 'as socialist theoreticians'.⁶ Lenin's way of approaching ideology profoundly influenced Marxist theory and practice, but presumably has limited significance in post-communist times.

A third notion of ideology associates the concept with a *world-view*. By 'world-view' is generally meant a framework of beliefs, values and concepts about central issues of life that define the outlook of an historical epoch or a social group. In the 1930s Karl Mannheim developed an ambitious account of ideology along these lines, as part of an effort to establish a 'sociology of knowledge'. In Mannheim's work particular ideas are set within the larger context of 'thought-systems' or 'intellectual worlds'. In order to understand ideology, it is necessary—he believed—to go beyond the level of individual false consciousness and try to reconstruct 'the characteristics and composition of the total structure of the mind' of the relevant epoch or socio-historical group. Ideology thus directs attention to a person's 'total *Weltanschauung* (including his conceptual apparatus) . . . as an outgrowth of the collective life of which he partakes'. While the project of uncovering total structures of mind is not generally part of contemporary theoretical agendas, the association of ideology with world-views retains resonance, both in everyday language and in academic writing. 9

Fourthly, ideology is identified with the idea of a *political tradition*. To study ideology in this sense is to study systems of beliefs, values and concepts that are geared to the elaboration of particular political programmes and reflected in the actions of particular political movements. This usage of ideology appeared with the emergence of the discipline of political science, and continues to circulate widely. One commentator

³ Letter from Engels to Mehring (1893), quoted McLellan 1995, 16.

⁴ A more subtle variant can be found in the work of Georg Lukács. See Lukács 1971.

Lenin 1988 (1902), 107 (emphasis omitted).
 Lenin 1988 (1902), 107 n. and chap 2, passim.
 Mannheim 1997 (1936).
 Ibid. 49–50.

⁹ See, e.g., Geuss 1981, 9-11, where this is included as one of the key usages of ideology.

neatly captures the usage, with the observation that it is 'exemplified by the tendency to think of ideologies in terms of "isms" '. ¹⁰ Thus, scholars analyse the 'ideologies' of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, fascism, and so on. ¹¹ Given the subject of this book, I should also mention one 'non-ism' commonly subsumed under the category of ideology in this sense: democracy.

In a fifth conception ideology is understood sociologically, as a form of 'social cement'. This notion was developed in the 1960s and 1970s by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser.¹² It became extremely influential among Marxist theorists, and continues to inform post-Marxist perspectives. Althusser used the concept of ideology to focus attention on the production of social cohesion, through processes by which people come to understand themselves as independent actors, but yet also come to 'know their place' in society. In his account, ideology refers to the everyday practices, rituals and institutions that serve to constitute individuals as social subjects and hold together social structures. In his words, it points to 'the way [individuals] live the relation between them and their conditions of existence'. Althusser was particularly interested in the institutionalized dimensions of ideology. He coined the phrase 'ideological state apparatuses' to denote those institutions which work, partly in the public domain but mostly in the private domain, to back up 'repressive state apparatuses' and stabilize social formations.¹³

Finally, ideology is linked with *culture*, in one of the many senses of that term. This conception of ideology emerged in the context of efforts by anthropologists in the 1970s to emphasize that the study of cultures is an interpretative activity, concerned with the analysis of meaning, rather than simply an empirical one, concerned with the recording of data. For Clifford Geertz, ideology refers to the process by which symbolic forms are used to make the modern world intelligible, absent the certainties of traditional societies. ¹⁴ Through this process are provided 'the authoritative concepts that render [the world] meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped'. ¹⁵ Ideology in this sense is less a matter of pursuing power or reinforcing repression than a way of coping with the sources of social, psychological and cultural strain. It appears as a response to 'a loss of orientation . . . [or] an inability, for lack of usable models, to comprehend the universe . . . in which one finds oneself located'. ¹⁶

Of these various conceptions of ideology, at least some patently hold considerable enduring appeal. But however useful they may be for other purposes, in the context of this book a different conception will aid analysis. I shall use ideology to refer to the 'ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination'. I take this formulation from the work of John Thompson in the early 1990s, ¹⁷ though the general notion of ideology involved has quite wide currency, and is also explicated in the

¹⁰ Thompson 1990, 5.

¹¹ See, e.g., Ball and Dagger 1995.

¹² See Althusser 1969 and 1994.

Concerning 'ideological state apparatuses', see Althusser 1994,
 Ibid. 218.
 Geertz 1993, chap. 8.
 Thompson 1990, 56 (emphasis in original).