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## **Relativism vs. Absolutism in the Fire Next Time By James Baldwin**

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## *Dedication*

I dedicate this study to my precious little family, my father and my dear mother, my brother and my sister who spared no effort to motivate me to study and finish my studies. I would thank my teacher from highschool Mrs. Sultani, I hope I made you proud and achieved what you always wished for me to achieve. I also dedicate this to my friend Ada from Sweden and my friends who kept telling me not to give up and that it will pay off someday in the future. Eventually, I dedicate this to the person that I consider my sub-supervisor, my classmate and the most special person that I met in college, who has been providing me with daily feedback and highly motivates me. At the latest, I dedicate this to all the peace seekers around the world that dream of a world in which being different is acceptable, equality is what motivates everyone, and freedom is not a problem anymore.

*Marouane*

## *Acknowledgment*

At the very beginning of this work, it was very difficult to know how to start. I had little time left as I did not start early due to out-of hand circumstances. Luckily, my supervisor put me on the right path. I would like profoundly thank Mr. Amrani, and all the teachers that helped me in one way or another, because it would have been impossible without their guidance and assistance. And of course, I thank all the authors and researchers who have provided the world with the knowledge that I occupied in order to accomplish my reaserch. I really hope my contribution through this study will help someone else in the future.

## **Abstract**

The core of this study is to determine whether it is effective to sanguine liberty over dictation when it comes to the governing of a society that holds different cultural groups, how are the views that a certain culture holds on another a decisive reason in the status of the whole nation. The doctrines of absolutism and relativism, represent two different extremes in their approach to social differences, in this study, we learn about those approach in various contexts, and in the light of a literary text, (the fire next time by James Baldwin 1963), we provide a practical application of the ideas of each theory, to conclude which theory will help society prosper.

## **List of Abbreviations**

**OMB** : Office of Managment and Budget

**CRM** : Civil Rights Movement

**L14** : Louis xiv

**OT**: Old Testament

**NOI** :Nation of Islam

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# **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**



## General introduction

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This study is going to be directed towards examining the philosophical conflict between relativism and absolutism, how they are defined, and what is the cultural and social dimensions of both of these doctrines, and how they differ in their approach to human life in general. we will see the difference if found between the theory and practicality, between intellectuality and reality. and in order to expose the major differences and effects, it could have on a certain society, in which two different groups live together and try to coincide and accept their differences in order to avoid chaos. According to the OMB, there are five racial groups that are recognized in America. this study will focus on the American society with its major two racial groups, the white people that originate from Europe and the African American people.

African American literature is a major element in the African American community's pursuit of equality and freedom, it primarily focuses on struggles and topics that affect the black people in America like social classes and discrimination. Considering American history, and in regard to the fact that America is a country that is populated by plenty of different racial groups, I choose to base my study upon a literature text that is written by a famous African American figure that is James Baldwin.

James Baldwin is an essayist, novelist, playwright, born on 2nd august 1924 in Harlem, new york city, he is known to be one of the major literary voices in the civil rights movement, his works shed light on the struggles of the African American society. Baldwin's works earned him a lot of recognition and he was awarded the Guggenheim fellowship for creative arts, us&canada award in 1954. Baldwin's role in the CRM made his work a favorable choice to use as a reference in this study.

One of Baldwin's major works is a book long essay by the name « the fire next time,1963 », in order to criticize the theory of absolutism versus the theory of relativism in a literary work, the fire next time will be our reference book, it represents us with various groups of the American society that all belong to either one of the two races, the African American and the white people. the novel was written passionately, it is a combination of two letters previously published by James Baldwin, the first one is *my dungeon shook: letter to my nephew on the one-hundredth anniversary of the emancipation* in which he tackles the systemic degradation of black men through self-hatred, and the second one *down at the cross: letter from a region in*

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*my mind* in which the author tells of various stories that he experienced with religious figures since his youth.

This study aims to prove the delicacy of the theological, social and cultural prompting in the production of civilization and individuals that are capable of coexistence With other social groups that belong to a different race and follow different religious beliefs, and have their own cultural variation.

The reason behind choosing this topic is that I have always been interested in the differences between us as humans in terms of our culture and identity, what makes the most of us view their culture as the ultimate way of life and how we sometimes eliminate any alternatives, this made me indulge in a dissertation topic that will help me prove that it is acceptable to be different, that being, all the same, will not provide insurance for order and prosperity.

The data used in this study will be collected from online articles in order to define the theories, a case study will be performed to compare relativism and absolutism. Content from the text will be extracted and analyzed in a Marxist approach. I choose to go with the Marxist literary criticism because it is appropriate in examining the literary text in a certain historical context and as it relates it to the social and economical background of the author and his social class. The Marxist criticism will help us determine the social effect of the exhibition of the absolutism and relativism doctrines that will be found in different forms in our book, for each form of absolutism and relativism we will use a sample from the text and examine its social and economical effect.

Three major questions are raised in this study:

1. Which theory could be considered effective in creating harmony and coexistence between different groups of people and avoiding chaos?
2. How James Baldwin's book *The Fire Next Time* (1963) projects relativism and absolutism?

Based on the prior questions presented.

- It is hypothesized that absolutism is not a validation of a nation's unity, but it is rather a call for dictation and oppression of a certain group of

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people that would be considered the intruder group, while relativism is not necessarily a provocation of anarchy and segmentation among individuals.

- It is supposed to promote acceptance and diversity that is crucial for the productivity and creativity of a society.

This study consists two chapters. The first is the theoretical part in which the definition of the current doctrines takes place and try to learn about them from different historical contexts and in light of the previous study. In the second chapter, which is the practical part, we will analyze passages from the novel are going to be selected and analyzed. The extract samples represents the pre-defined doctrines in order to reach a conclusion about which doctrine is effective in creating a healthy, equal and developed society.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **RELATIVISM AND ABSOLUTISM**

### **FORMS AND HISTORY**

## **Introduction**

The following chapter will be devoted to exploring two doctrines which are absolutism and relativism, readers will be provided with appropriate definitions and various genres and forms, and examples of how these theories have been applied in various historical contexts. we will try to explore the pros and cons of each theory, and we will adopt the Marxist theory, thus we will also give an understanding of the Marxism criticism and then try to relate it to each of the former theories the Marxist literary criticism is appropriate as it concerns with the social, political and cultural backgrounds, While the absolutism and relativism doctrines are both primarily concerned with the political views and cultural beliefs and they try to determine which approach should be taken towards different views which is the essence of their conflict.

### **An introduction to relativism**

“Ethical relativism reminds us that different societies have different moral beliefs and that our beliefs are deeply influenced by culture. It also encourages us to explore the reasons underlying beliefs that differ from our own, while challenging us to examine our reasons for the beliefs and values that we hold” Andre and Manuel (1992).in “ethical relativism” at Markkula center for applied ethics at Santa Clara University.

Relativism is a philosophy that claims that concepts like the true and the false, and the good and the evil and the right and the wrong are all flexible and only viewed as what they are according to one’s perspective, meaning that what is considered false to a certain individual might be as well considered to be true in another person’s opinion, Depending on various factors like the perceiver's background, religious beliefs, and cultural effects.

relativism emerged during the 5th century, its elements were promoted by the sophists during that age. Various ancient Greek philosophers like Protagoras believed that humans are responsible for their own beliefs without external guidance, that choice is possible, and based on our choices we decide what we are going to consider the truth and what we are going to consider false, which action we will consider morally right and which one we will consider morally wrong, even if we consider ourselves to be right we are only entitled to our opinions.

## **Types of relativism**

There are several types of relativism, of which this study will primarily focus on moral and cultural relativism, but first let's briefly define other genres of relativism and try to understand just how wide are the dimensions of this doctrine.

### **1. Individual moral relativism**

Individual moral relativism is the belief that every individual has a different personal understanding of right and wrong, and that depending on his own opinions and experiences, there are no universal moral codes that we should respect and follow and none of each of us individual beliefs are true, or wrong, the only method of assessing what we should do or don't comes back to our own desires without any outside authority or sort of guidance.

### **2. Historical relativism**

According to Henry Louis Gates, jr and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham Baker Motley said that "something which we think is impossible now is not impossible in another decade" (African American lives 2004: 613). This quote by Constance Baker Motley simplifies the idea of historical relativism, historical relativism considers it impossible to judge a certain era based on our current standards, it is also referred to as historicism. It claims that proper data investigation cannot be fulfilled as it will most likely be influenced by the background of the historian and the standards of his era.

### **3. Conceptual relativism**

Conceptual relativism emphasizes the relationship between the brain and the world, it suggests that the world is not found organized and ready to be perceived but we rather contribute to shaping it. Philosophy professor Emrys Westacott, perspicuously and adequately proclaims conceptual relativism is a narrowly delineated form of relativism, where ontology, or what exists, rather than ethical and epistemic norms, is relativized to conceptual schemes, scientific paradigms, or categorical frameworks. In this sense, conceptual relativism is often characterized as a metaphysical doctrine rather than a variant of epistemic or cultural relativism, the

underlying rationale of this form of relativism is the anti-realist thesis that the world does not present itself to us ready-made, rather we supply different, at times incompatible, ways of categorizing and conceptualizing it.

#### **4. Cognitive relativism**

also known as factual relativism or alethic relativism or epistemic relativism claims that the argument that attempts to deny or to prove a certain matter is only related to the perspective of those with the attempt, good reasoning cannot be used in order to measure something that is beyond our social and cultural boundaries, or outside a certain context.<sup>1</sup>

#### **5. Moral relativism**

The wider form of the individual moral relativism, as it is the belief that people either groups or individuals are ought to believe what they prefer when it comes to ethical principles, and that everyone should have the capacity to tolerate the different moral codes that other people choose to follow, meaning that if a person or a group, consider something to be moral or unethical, they should not expect different persons or groups to perceive it the same way as they do, since there is no such thing as a total agreement upon what is right and what is wrong the matter is subjective to one' own opinions, it has always been a controversial topic among, politicians and religious and non religious people, as this directly conflicts with the teachings of religions in general, or what is perceived by many as the religious truth, a moral relativist way of thinking could be better understood in the following statement “with no fact as a referent, what is normative is purely a matter of preference” (Ravi Zacharias 2004: 56).

#### **6. Cultural relativism**

In order for us to have a convenient comprehension of the cultural relativism principle, it is an obligation to begin with presenting an extensive explanation of the term culture, culture is a term used to describe a combination of certain habits, customs, values and beliefs and language that are exclusively embraced by a certain group of people, that belong to a certain society, and adopt a similar vantage point, cuisine, and art in its various forms, that originate from the same school of thought of

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<sup>1</sup> [https://psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Cognitive\\_relativism](https://psychology.wikia.org/wiki/Cognitive_relativism) (last accessed on 12-05-2021)

that society, and is inherited from a generation to the following one, through lecturing and learning, culture was defined by many authors and scientists from various fields.

dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (1991:5) the idea of this statement is simply that humans develop cultural patterns based on the behaviors they observe that shape their mind into a similar frame of thinking of their family and surroundings that belong to the same group of ethnicity.

The term culture is considered to be given its best definition by English anthropologist and pioneer Edward Burnett Taylor, in his book primitive culture 1871. He said "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" in regard of his book, edward taylor is considered the founder of cultural anthropology, in his book he demonstrated that the technological advancement and the growth of human societies from ancient times to modernity should not only be exclusively studied based on the genetical changes, but also the cultural progress contribution should be examined in regard of the hypothesis that mankind both physically and mentally belonged to the same origin.

Through the concept of survivals presented in his book, edward taylor's concept examines cultural features that were set in certain time due to a certain necessity or a cultural belief and managed to remain as a custom in future times, or those that remained their function still, such as mate attraction methods that men used that depend on physical strenght and that is still functional in our current times, primitive culture is those spiritual based non scientific beliefs that the early man utilized in order to gain an understanding and exploit the world around him. "A man from a primitive culture who sees an automobile might guess that it was powered by the wind or by an antelope hidden under the car, but when he opens up the hood and sees the engine he immediately realizes that it was designed" (Micheal Behe 1998: 461). This statement is a hint that earlier human beings used to develop theories, superstitious ones but he did so in order to explain what he observes, which is due to a moral feature that takes part of our modern culture and existed even in primitive societies, which is the seek of knowledge and discovery and reasoning even if social differences



are huge in comparison. “Two infants a few months old will be much alike in their physiological and physical development; two youths of equal age will differ much more; and two old men of equal age may, the one still be in full possession of his powers, the other on the decline, due mainly to the accidental acceleration or retardation of their development” (Franz Boas 1911: 24).

Cultural relativism was founded and established by Franz Boas, Franz Boas is a German-American anthropologist who is considered as the father of modern anthropology, and he is kindred to cultural relativism due to its presence in various of his work, the mind of a primitive man 1911, is considered his primary contribution to anthropology, in his book the mind of a primitive man, Franz Boas try to answer many questions about the relation of race and civilization, and whether civilization is a measure to the civilized societies culture, meaning whether or not those who manage to achieve developed status did also manage to achieve a better cultural status, the book tackles the myth of white supremacy and that certain races are intelligent and ethnically superior to others, in the light of earlier civilizations, that have flourished way before the European societies, and he takes on the idea that the genius of the current civilized races which is in this certain case the white race, means automatically that that same races mental and physical features are spontaneously the better ones too, he challenges this idea for the fact that it lacks proof, and that the only argument of the superiority of the white man is based on the social and moral processes that white societies follow and consider them to be the favorite since the white societies are more advanced and therefore their status is the one to be seen as the standard of judgment upon any human beings quality. he makes a point that aptitude is not a measurement of civilization, for the fact that civilized nations in history were targeted by conquerors that managed to purloin and copy their advancement and the progress of the civilization continued with the conqueror. which is evidence that the superiority and flourishing of certain races is not necessarily a consequence of drudgery, but could very much be the result of their ability to rule with power.

the progress of mankind in general according to Boas is the result of a history of creation and each civilization has its own contribution to the general advancement of mankind, the cultural value that is brought to the world in form of architectural art and

the political organization is measure to define the advancement of the culture itself, leading us to historical relativism, the idea that suggests it is only possible to judge an action in its historical contexts, Boas illustrate a good example of historical relativism, when he refers to the cultural achievements in terms of language and the invention of writing in what he refers to as ancient civilizations of the old world are evidence of probably a higher status civilization. Boas idea is that cultural variations are do not decide the prosperity of a race at the expense of another, he argues that in order to evaluate the development of a race u need to provide a non-existing evidence of continuous flourishing.

In order to be able to judge a whole race ability to develop you are required to show different cases of civilization of the same race throughout history, and to be able to prove a race retardedness, you can't measure based on a certain period of time if we consider the chances of current times primitive societies in economical progress, the challenge would be accommodating of the worldwide demand and the productivity would not be sufficient and profitable in comparison to the consumed time and energy, while a different race is economically and technologically advanced enough to create supply on daily basis regardless of distance and seasons, they don't stand a chance of keeping up with big corporations and high rate production using their classic limited tools of harvesting or manufacturing. exposure to knowledge is a determining element in the advancement of a certain race, meaning that tribes for example that have not had the opportunity to encounter the civilized world, cannot judge in their terms of isolation. if we reverse the situation regardless of the cultural unique features that a civilized society familiarizes with, the outcome would be the similar in both cases, the race that gather more information is qualified to thrive and contribute in the advancement of mankind, thus the myth of cultural supremacy is not real, and assessment of a culture from a biased point of view is not a valid way to judge people, as the uniqueness of culture is due to various geographical and social differences, and the standard of one's own culture cannot be applied to other cultures and because a favorable culture exists only in the mind of those that belong to it, which is the case in every society whether if it is an advanced or a primitive society.

## Absolutism

Absolutism is a philosophical theory that believes in the existence of absolute reality, and universal truth, and political form of government, it takes many different forms that we are going to explore, but first we will provide it with the following general definition from the Cambridge dictionary to gain a perspective about the theory “absolutism is the holding of absolute principles in political, philosophical, or theological matters.”

### 1. Absolute monarchy

Absolute monarchy is a political theory that suggest that the king of the state should have a supreme authority over the government, and is opte to posses all control over the decision making in an autocratic manner,it emerged in this form during the 16th century in Europe, with the rise of Louis xiv as the monarch of France in 14 may 1643, he established political system in which the state is ruled from capital which is also known as centralised state, and perseud to abolish feudalism in order to posses power over land that the nobelty controlled and exchanged for services of the fighters that protected them and peasants that worked the land.

Centralised state empowered the king while it incapacitated the aristocrats class, movements of revolt emerged in France due to the economical changes and tax raise of questionable constitutionality agreed by king Louis and his continuing growth of authority, this was known as the fronde, it was directly triggered when the French goverment issued seven fiscal reforms.<sup>1</sup> Although in the beginning of his reign his policies generated revenue and succesfully lowered the states debth, his various wars and especially the Spanish-French in which at the same time the fronde started, the state wasn't capable of sustaining the economical improvements due to the cost of war and also because of the kings luxurious manner of living,the fronde failed however and that paved the way for king L14 to impose his absolutistic ideas on ground as the people of France after the anrachy of the fronde so the solution in stability.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/absolute-monarchy-definition-and-examples-5111327> (last accessed on 12-05-2021)

King L14 believed in the necessity of uniting the state under one religious belief, he implied the same policy he followed in politics, he saw that the king was above everyone except god himself, and that church is obliged to obey him as it is supposed to be a tool for to sustain control over the people, therefore he held no tolerance for theological diversity and religious minorities were in his view a potential source of revolt and anarchy, based on the concept of uniformity, (L14) controlled the catholic church.

Prior to King Louis xiv reign, the wars of religion had divided the french society and destroyed the state, not until 1598 when the edict of the Nantes was signed which accorded the protestant minority of France, Huguenots essential rights to restore solidarity in the french society, in 1685 Louis xiv issued the edict of Fontainebleau, which obliterated the edict of the Nantes and instituted the dragonnades policy, and ordered the prosecution of the Huguenots, and the destruction of the protestant institutions began, which resulted in a flee of protestants to other European countries and king Louis claimed that he downgraded through his policies the amount of protestant in France, and that affected the economy of the state negatively.

The experience of king Louis's reign set the cornerstone for the rule of absolute monarchy in France until the french revolution, a direct link is referred to by oscar wild when he said "The error of Louis XIV was that he thought human nature would always be the same. The result of his error was the French Revolution. It was an admirable result. All the results of the mistakes of governments are quite admirable." (oscar wild 2007: 1062)

### **a. Absolute monarchy examples from history**

Looking back the history of mankind we can find various examples of the absolute monarchy, in the Ancient Civilization of Egypt, the government in Ancient Egypt was what we would call a theocratic monarchy, meaning that the pharoah ruled by mandate of god, however the pharaohs held the ultimate power and were regarded as the conciliator between the gods and the world of men by the people.

an article publish on the BBC , about judaism refers to the time when Jews were enslaved in Ancient Egypt, and according to egyptologist Jim Hoffmeier, the Paroahs kept records from around the same era that Jewish texts claim Moses was

introduced to the Pharaoh palace, the records suggest that the Pharaohs palace had nurseries where royal children were educated, and foreign children were also brought to these nurseries, which supports the religious legend that says Moses grew up in the Pharaohs palace. Another theory tries to provide a scientific explanation for the parting of the red sea in the Abrahamic religions legends, it refers to a 1994 tsunami and earthquake that hit the Philippine Island, the earthquake caused a massive crack in the bed of the lake and after a while the eye witness said they could see the bottom of the lake, thus it could be reasoned that the Pharaohs did oppress the Jewish minority of Egypt and did not tolerate the religious diversity in an absolute monarchy policy.

Other examples are found but with differences, for example, if we look at the Ottoman empire, the same principle is held in comparison to the France monarchy, the difference lies in the fact that Ottoman emperors policies were claimed to be policies of heavenly value, but the Emperor still held the same principle of centralized government, yet the religious minorities were tolerated in a way that conflict with the absolute monarchy policy.

A modern-day example of absolute monarchy is found in the North Korean government, the constitution of North Korea defines the country as a dictatorship of peoples democracy', although Korea is officially an atheist country, although the constitution preserves the freedom of religious beliefs, according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, religious freedom in North Korea is among the worst in the world, anyone that is proven to embrace religious views is subject to punishment, an article published on the BBC news, in memory of Robert Jermain Thomas, the former was one of the early figures that brought Christianity to North Korea, he was captured and executed, after an altercation between the crew on the ship that he boarded and the Korean ashore, the limited data available on every matter in North Korea, and the high discretion policy, is further evidence that dictation in Korea is one that surpasses any former absolute monarchy.

## **2. Moral absolutism**

Moral absolutism the opposite of moral relativism, it is an ethical theory that advocates the existence of universal everlasting moral values, and that every deed or behaviour is either right or wrong. Moral absolutism disregards the context in which a

course of action took place and does not justify immoral action. for example, stealing is wrong if you are either rich or poor, but even if you are on the verge of dying, it does not justify the act of stealth.

Forms of moral absolutism could be found as far back as ancient greek, but many consider the german philosopher Immanuel Kant the one to set the cornerstone for the ethical absolutism theory based on reasoning and in exclusion of divine authority. Immanuel Kant founded the deontological ethics morality theory, he presented the categorical imperative principle that suggests in simple terms that we should behave in the same manner that we would like others to behave, and act to others the same way we like them to act to us, dissociating the course of action from our desires and limiting it to certain rational conduct. Kant suggested that a united law of morality does exist in the world and it should be based on logical thinking not based on our wishes and individual objectives.

### **3. Ethnocentrism**

Due to difficulties to gather enough information about the concept of cultural absolutism, as it is not widely used, it is safe to say that it Is a philosophical theory that adopts similar principles that ethnocentrism adopts. the principle that ones own culture is superior to other cultures, the idea of judging other cultures based on the normalities in our own culture is regarded as the equivalent of cultural absolutism.

## **Marxist criticism**

### **1. Marxism**

Marxism is a political and social and economical theory that is directed towards understanding the effect of the creation of different social classes on the progress of the society as a whole, in terms of social justice and productivity and the procedure of the distribution of wealth between the hard-working class and the elite owners of business, named after him, Karl Marx is considered as the Father of Marxism, he prefixed its elements in the joint book that he produced in pairs with Friedrich Engels "*The Communist Manifesto*" or as it was first named "*The Manifesto of The Communist Party*". the book was published in 1848, based on Karl Marx's claim that the productivity of a certain society and its political perspectives and economical status is directly formed based on the social structure and the economic system in

which the economical gains is dispersed, which is an element that decides the kind of relationship between the social groups and the state of agitation that it might exploit which is also referred to as the concept of *class struggle*.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. The concept of class struggle**

coined by Karl Marx and Engels in “*the communist manifesto*”, the concept refers to the fact that in society, a struggle exists between the bourgeoisie class and the working class, this struggle happens when the business owners benefit from the proletariat need for work and offer them jobs that earn a limited wage without them having any say in the price of the product they made or the right to demand a raise in wage, which inquires workers to unite and gain more authority over the decision concerned with the business, Marx glamorized the experience of the french commune in his book the civil war in France (1871) and encouraged workers in all the world countries to bring about a revolution that liberates them from the oppression imposed upon them by the business owners, the revolution that would be called the proletarian revolution which is the quest of all Marxists.

## **The relationship between Marxism and Relativism**

### **1. Marxism in relation to relativism**

“It is not the consciousness of man that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (karl marx 1859: 04)

There has been debate about whether or not Karl Marx had a relativist stand, in the prior statement Karl Marx suggests that the social existence of mankind is what shapes their consciousness, hinting that the cultural and social perspective is the primary element that decides the intellectual position man take, this statement is an improvement ( although not intended to) of the individual relativism theory because of the fact that it dismisses the idea of universal moral truth and it promotes the idea that a social experience that one has shaped his beliefs and reflection on the world. In other words, the statement suggests there is no belief that we are arguably born and directed naturally to follow, it is the role of our experience to create the belief itself.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/CIP.CHAP5.HTM> (last accessed on 12-05-2021)

religion in Karl Marx ideas is a tool for the bourgeoisie to keep the poor class under control with the moral codes that religions consist of, those codes help to discourage their will to regain the resources from those that abuse them and gives them patience in the form of promises of a better life in the afterlife times when justice will be served and those that oppressed them will be held accountable for their actions.

Scholar Michael Rosen conducted A research at the University of Harvard, with the attempt to investigate the Marxist critique of morality in order to answer the question whether or not the Marxist theory has a moral dimension, based on studying Karl Marx's various comments earlier on the nature of morality the researcher suggests that Karl Marx embraces Hegel's idea about the Kantian morality, which claims that the duty is what determines the ethical action but the objection of Hegel that Marx also agrees on is that it does not determine the content, meaning that it does not clarify the duty and how we can decide what is our duty.

According to Marx the abstractness of morality lays in the abstractness of ethical life in society, Karl Marx objects on the human rights that are institutionalized, as mentioned earlier his idea that the elite possess political power is the motive behind his objection, Karl Marx sees the right of man as a method leading to more isolation in the society between individuals that belong to different social classes, therefore we conclude that marxism has many similarities with relativism, both theories hold similar beliefs on the leading elements that determine the intellectual shape of the individual which are social and cultural factors, and the uselessness of institutionalized morality in creating a united society that is based on equality and diversity.

## **2. Marxism in relation to absolutism**

Social change and the struggle of the working class was always Karl Marx's major focus, in a well-conducted study, Muhammad Ateeq and Farah Iqbal Iqbal try to examine the absolutism of Karl Marx, according to their research When it comes to the development of the social structure, Marx presents four production modes in mankind history that shaped the society in each historical context based on the production model that was followed :



The Asiatic being the first one, according to Marx was the primitive mode of production, when property ownership was split among the tribe and the work available is limited to agriculture and craft, and natural elements of age and sex are what determines the amount of work with no existence of productive power authority until the rise of family and its unity.

The second period is the ancient mode and in this historical context, the phenomenon of slavery and forced labor emerged, and as production arises with it arises trades which creates the wealthy merchants and formulates the first form of class divisions.

The third stage is the feudal stage, during this era the land ownership is in the hands of the landlord, he provides the farmers and workers with a place to live and production means in return for labor and rent money for the production means, the merchants gained more capital in this era and some of them would turn that money to industries and in the researcher words wage-labor properly begins, which marks the beginning of capitalism,

The fourth stage is the modern capitalist mode of production. the investment of capital earned by merchants and the minority of wealthy landlords increased and furthers the gap between the laborers and the wealthy owners, which creates class conflicts and the quest of a classless society rises.

In Karl popper's critique of Marx's absolutism, he criticized Marx for emphasizing that there are historical laws that govern us in an absolute manner, also the way Marx sees society as a whole is a trend of absolutism as he completely disregards the individuals.

Depending on the prior research Marx saw an absolute solution in a society lays in a proletariat revolution that bases on socialism, disregarding capitalism, which he considered harmful and brutal, thus Marx political theory consists of an absolute belief in the form of the importance of socialism, and as we have seen in the prior ( marxism in relation to absolutism ) article, Marx did not believe in the existence of universal morality, he believed that morals are the result of the cultural context and social circumstances, thus he does not see individuals but he rather sees society as a whole group rather than focus on the individual. It is safe to conclude the relationship

between absolutism and marxism lays in the total belief of Marxists in their own version of social and political solutions.

### **3. Marxist literary criticism**

Marxist Criticism is an approach in which the social class and economical background of the author is viewed as an essential element in the formation of the text, based on the belief that the economical circumstances of the author are what determine his ideology, thus the MLC views the author as the result of his social background, and views the economical background of the author as the base for his social status in order to perform a socio-economical analysis of the text, literary criticism concerns with styles and language and relating in-text samples to the social and economical background of the author.

The work of Karl Marx and Engels set the cornerstone for Marxist analysis, yet it did not gain major employment until after the bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the foundation of the Russian soviet federative socialist republic, during this time artists were directed by the system into creating art that is influenced by the political views of the party and took part of the bolshevik propaganda artists like painter Vladimir Tatlin and Lyubov Popova performed street arts that expressed the bolshevik ideas and concepts, the social movement, and the sense of liberation promoted the Marxist literary theory, when literary and art, in general, became primarily concerned with tackling social class issues and the pursuit of social justice, various forms of literary emerged during this era.

effect of the revolution on the orientation of literary could be seen in the emerging of dystopia, a genre of fictional literary contrary to utopia, dystopian literary is based on a fictional community that is harmful, unappealing and contrary to the perfect utopian community, where the government sedates the social groups with a false sense of renewal and change while brutalizing and abusing the lower classes, this genre was introduced by Russian author, Zamyatin in his novel *We* 1924 from aboard, due to the dictation of all forms of art that was produced from inside Russia and the idea that arts should be dedicated only to promoting the desirable philosophy of the ruling Bolshevik party, the novel was not published in Russia because of its unfavorable dogma.

In order to further our understanding of the marxism approach, we will utilize terry eaghton's definition "marxist criticism is not merely a sociology of literature, concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully, and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history". (terry eaghton 2001: 03).

The prior definition means that the MLC does not only focus the critic of the literary text based on its social background, but it also relates the use of a certain terms that were varial in a certain era and relates them to it.

## **Conclusion**

To briefly put it, the relativism theory in order to find harmony and avoid conflicts amongst people promotes the idea that universal truth is not existent and judging others will only cause discrimination and it does relate to Marxist theory in terms of moral approach, at the same time the absolutism theory emphasizes its own view on the best way to preserve order and avoid the chaos which is through holding similar universal values in order to be capable of judging everyone equally and trust one leader to lead the nation to avoid instability and it relates to the theory of Marxism in the way both theories followers see no other solution but the one they believe in, and it is safe to conclude that Marxism Literary Criticism is the best method to examine the social and political theories in order to evaluate their origins and efficiency in changing the society.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **THE PROJECTION OF RELATIVISM AND ABSOLUTISM IN THE FIRE NEXT TIME**

## Introduction

The following chapter will be devoted to performing a Marxist analysis of the James Baldwin 1963 non-fiction book *The Fire Next Time*, the analysis method is highly coherent with the subject of this study. The relativists and absolutists both similarly see that the development of a nation is related to the political and social approach that they offer, in order to evaluate the function of the relativism and absolutism theory, to be able to understand which theory is more practical and effective, we will use selected passages and examine the social-economical background of those ideas that the passage presents us with and relate them to the former doctrines, we will explore the forms of absolutism and relativism in the historical context of the book. Our reference book is composed of two contents, the first one is *my dungeon shook, a letter to my nephew on the one-hundredth anniversary of the emancipation*, that appeared originally in the progressive madison, Wisconsin. the second one is *down at the cross: Letter from a region in my mind*. an article that was originally published in the new yorker 1962.

### 1. Relativism in *The Fire Next Time*

An overview of the fire next time will give us an impression of the authors relativistic approach to the events and conflicts surrounding him, he does not identify with any group that he mentions in his book yet he takes a neutral stand and tries somehow to let us conclude the similarities between those groups that might differ in their view but that is the basic reason that makes them similar and we can see that this is a reasonable claim according to the following quote “for here you were, Big James, named for me—you were a big boy, I was not—here you were: to be loved. To be loved baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, We were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived”(1963:18) the author here is talking to his

nephew trying to show him the value that is most important which is to be loved and strengthened with love even if the world seems not to share the same love in a general sense of relativism, the strengthened refers here to prospering and finding a place in the world which is a reference to the American community as a whole with all its ethnic diversities and social classes that makes it difficult for people to love one another and creates a conflict of a survivalist nature where nobody cares about the life of another and the concept of sharing is not to be found.

## **2. Individual relativism in *The Fire Next Time***

The African American social struggle is deeper than the discrimination that they experience in American society, it is the hatred implemented in their community towards one another and that keeps them shattered and divided, the root of this mentality goes back to centuries before the book is published when the black men were still enslaved and back then, slaves were distinguished based on the kind of labour they perform into two kinds, a house slave and a field slave, house slaves are those slaves that worked in the master house, they would often get better treatment and are offered second-hand clothes from the master's family, the field slaves were those that worked in agriculture and were usually the ones that get most abused by the master because their social circumstances make them vulnerable to revolutionary thought, a field slave would not be provided with clothes until he would reach an age of 16 sometimes, and a field slave would be often promoted to a house slave when he becomes old and incapable of doing hard labour as a form of retirement, which makes the social classification of the hard-working man inferior to that of the man in a closer position to the authority which is the master in the slave community, and the house slave would often provide information about the field slave to the master in case of an escape planning, for example.

Deviding the African American in an era in which they most needed their unity, partnered in the African American culture to the extent that members of the African American that pursue success and a life of comfort are viewed by some other groups of the community like outlaws and degenerates as the modern slaves, that seek the white man approval and believe in the system that enslaved their ancestors while

others take pride in seeking an honest living and see those outlaws in a similar manner.

the author demonstrates some call for an individual relativism view in the following passage “just before and then during the second world war, many of my friends fled into the service, all to be changed there, and rarely for the better, many to be ruined, and many to die. Others fled to other states and cities—that is, to other ghettos. Some went on wine or whisky or the needle, and are still on it. And others, like me, fled into the church” (1963: 31). The use of a sorrowful term such as fled more than once expresses the authors view upon the life choices that were available in his society as if they were all similar in terms of difficulty and lack of effectiveness, each group took a risk in order to find hope and behaved on perceived uncertainty of the social and economical income of their action, regardless of the morality or immorality of the choice of one group in the eye of the other group, they all shared the same origin and experienced the same inferiority that led them to their various paths and played the role that was produced and forced upon them based on their circumstances, for example, the social struggles that the soldiers experienced as African Americans still continued once they came back home, groups that turned to drugs only contributed to their own destruction and the author religious beliefs only managed to relief the burden of hopelessness, this similarity in the outcome of the African American individual choices implies that the social struggle was not only affecting certain individuals but the culture as a whole, the author refers to the degenerates groups in the following quotation and his realization that they are all similar “it had not before occurred to me that I could become one of them, but now I realized that we had been produced by the same circumstances” (1963: 28).

The similar circumstances the author refers to are the poverty created by the lack of economical dependence of the society, racism and police brutality, the isolation and the systematic racial segregation and Frazier's cities of destruction that were populated by African Americans and the author refers to them in a prior text, finding means to fight this systematic oppression is what should concern the African American culture and the individual approach should be expected to differ and what seems like a solution to someone to fight back is not necessarily approved by another individual, and the essence of individual relativism is to accept that everyone is



entitled to his own experience and version of reality, thus the moral truth is not something that should be the same to every individual and that itself should not cause conflicts to arise within the same society.

### 3. Cultural relativism in *The Fire Next Time*

The danger of believing what someone might believe about you is that it will be a tool to limit your progress as it will make one decide what is best for him not according to his assumptions and capacities but according to beliefs others want him to have about himself, and in capitalist society it is not the concern of those in a position better than you to offer you help but it is their concern to keep gaining naturally at the expense of the lower classes.

throughout the book the author used the term innocent people in a sarcastic manner, he used it to refer to the white people of america and their culture role in the ill treatment the african americans receive the author used a charles dickens line "i hear the chorus of the innocents screaming, ' no ! this is not true ! how bitter you are'" (1963: 17) in order to provide a similar example from a different historical context to showcase the role of the innocent people in exploiting the class struggle, addressing his nephew, the author referred to his father's suffering that was caused by him believing the opinion of white people about him in the following passage "well, he is dead, he never saw you, and he had a terrible life; he was defeated long before he died because, at the bottom of his heart, he really believed what white people said about him." (1963: 15) prior to that he refers to the nephew voice tone that he finds similar to the grandfather's tone, he suggests that both of them did not want others to think they are soft.

the most effective method of stereotyping is when you make someone feel entitled to that stereotype that you promote of him, in a negative manner, of course, a negative stereotype, u play on the element of pride, and certain individuals associate embracing it with their pride as it is allegedly part of their culture. the author refers to the fact that the African American man has been put in the ghetto and deliberately constructed his life in order to make him feel inferior.

the author suggests that the nephew should understand and accept the white culture not define it as he explains in the following text "The really terrible thing, old

buddy, is that you must accept them. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love. These innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it” (1963: 20).

Many criticize cultural relativism as a tolerance policy that creates chaos, but it is rather a perspective that is brutally fair, a human that is born and lives for an average of 80 years, what are the chances that he can change a culture that is constructed through centuries, we are born into our cultures and we embrace them in order to stick by the norms, the author used here the term trapped to show that even the superiority of the white race does not liberate them from the false beliefs they have been lectured, in the same manner, the beliefs that the African American people were lectured about how who they should be are not true.

The author refers to the fact that the whites are not aware of the social circumstances that his community experiences and I quote “I know your countrymen do not agree with me about this, and I hear them saying, "You exaggerate." They do not know Harlem, and I do. So do you” (1963: 19) it is the role of cultural relativism to tackle this ignorance about the social facture effect on a certain culture, the ignorance that leads to a clouded vision and a false belief of superiority which is in fact just a result of an economical and social advantage. Throughout the book, the author tells of his experience with various different cultures. The problem lays in the fact that every culture fails to dissociate its culture from the obsession with the truth. Intellectual Flexibility is an obvious characteristic of the author, he underwent many changes and encountered various people with the same altitude every time.

The author tells about a dinner at the house of the Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam played an effective role in the African American community according to the author “Elijah Muhammad has been able to do what generations of welfare workers and committees and resolutions and reports and housing projects and playgrounds have failed to do: to heal and redeem drunkards and junkies, to convert peopl~ who have come out of prison and to keep them out” (1963: 60). However, the undeniable of the movement achievement does not stop the author from criticizing some of the things he noticed at the dining table, like the way Elijah

referred to the white liberals the author appeared on tv as the white devils, the author, later on, refers to the fact that following this dinner he went on to have some drinks with white friends of his as if he is intentionally switching from one extreme to another, and he uses sad expressions when he describes Elijah's face and tells of the fact that the former witnessed his father killing when he just six years old as if he is somehow trying to justify his beliefs about the whites in a similar manner that he justified the hatred whites might have for the African Americans because of the false lecturing they have received through many centuries.

Cultural relativism lays in this ability to understand the similarity between two extremes and expose it, if we limit our perception to our own experience we will most likely exclude the majority of thoughts and views in the world, but if we learn to relate to different cultures that will open our eyes on a whole different perspective and the author is the embodiment of the relativism theory in this context as he interacts with all these different groups of people and doesn't seem to prefer a certain group, he takes pride in his culture yet reasonably without a false sense of superiority and the following passage shows that he warns people of colour of this mistake "That sinners have always, for American Negroes, been white is a truth we needn't labour, and every American Negro, therefore, risks having the gates of paranoia close on him." (1963:70). He saw the preaching of such superstitious beliefs as a temporary relief for a cruel reality that is unreasonable and he uses a derogatory term as negro in reference to the ignorance that lays behind such a belief. he criticized the white culture perception of the African American men yet he understands it on a deeper level and encourages his nephew to embrace the same approach and accept the world around him as it is.

On a theological level, the author reflects on his first years of preaching when he joined a predominantly Jewish high school, the exposure to a different culture that affected his previous view on jews that according to his church teaching was beyond any hope of salvation he describes the effect of this exposure on him in the following passage. "I knew that these people were Jews-God knows I was told it often enough-but I thought of them only as white. Jews, as such, until I got to high school, were all incarcerated in the OT and their names were Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel, and

Job, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It was bewildering to find them so many miles and centuries out of Egypt, and 'so far from the fiery furnace.'" ( 1963: 47).

The exposure to a different religious perspective provoked questions in the author's mind about his own belief, one that he was not ready to ask himself, one of them was the work on the congregation, the use of religious sentiment to persuade people to give money to the church caused the writer to feel doubts, knowing that the money gathered was not exclusively spent as the church workers whom he worked with would claim on god's work. the question is what are the odds would the author suspect his beliefs if he hadn't encountered those Jewish boys? and for the average person, the chances for such an encounter are not many.

the use of religion to separate the average person within a culture from the average person within a different culture is remarkable and this was experienced by our author when he invited his Jewish friend to his house, his father being a Christian asked him about the faith of his friend, his answer and his father's reaction are in the following passage "but I said coldly, "No. He's Jewish." My father slammed me across the face with his great palm, and at that moment everything flooded back-all the hatred and all the fear, and the depth of a merciless resolve to kill my father rather than allow my father to kill me." ( 1963: 74) the reaction of his father only went on to shake his faith further, and cause conflict between him and his own culture, the role of religion if we at this situation is very limited and rather than seen it as a structure of belief that does not differ, according to this case, the perspective of someone that interacts with different groups of people towards strangers differs, not to the extent that he ignores but furthermore his beliefs are adapted to his mental shape, meanin that the author being the son refused to consider his friend doomed and his eyes opened to the possibility that he might be more christian than his father, the father does not have the same perspective and each of them believed in his opinion, which shows that fators like personality and mentality are not shaped according to our beliefs in all cases but sometimes our mentality goes beyond our culture's influence which evantually results in more tolerance and a wider perspective on the world, this goes to show that the cultural relativism does not only dissolve conflicts between cultures, but it exposes that individuals among a culture might use their hatred for

another culture as a tool of pressure relief, and fear of difference might lead to a chaotic situation that could be avoided with acceptance.

Socialism has always been criticized for reasons like, it is directed towards the destruction of the wealthy population out of envy and hatred that the poor feel because they don't accept the way life is, we will examine the following passage and try to conclude the validity of such claims, the author said: "I remember, anyway, church suppers and outings, and, later, after I left the church, rent and waistline parties where rage and sorrow sat in the darkness and did not stir, and we ate and drank and talked and laughed and danced and forgot all about the man." (1963: 51-52). The author here refers to parties that were prepared in order to collect rent, family members and neighbours of the person that organized the party would join together and have fun and provide a small charity fund to help him pay his rent, this sort of economical machination is one that the oppressed class use in order to overcome the material needs and strengthen their bonds, the author use of cheerful expressions shows that the lower classes do not act according to the economical system even in a capitalist country as it does not serve their primary needs, the "forget about the man" statement goes to show that the social struggle is not out of feelings of jealousy as some might claim but it about the justice that people need to live a normal healthy life, however, if these needs are met through such schemes as the rent party the oppressed would not think about the number of wealth others enjoy, waistline parties are parties in which a guest pays a fee according to the size of his waist, an indirect reference to the theory of equal pay.

equal pay means that someone that works certain hours should be paid equally to someone that works the same amount of hours if the production value is the same, thus if some is going to be eating more than someone else he ought to pay a larger amount of money, the author somehow presented in the prior statement an alternative economical policy that the lower class follow in order to create social justice whether it is church suppers or parties, the difference of nature of the gathering does not surpass the same struggle which is a class struggle.

#### 4. Absolutism in the fire next time

In the light of the previous part, it is plausible that the fire next time takes sophists to stand, the way the authors represents the various characters that he interacts within the stories he tells, show that he favors uncertainty and does not intend to judge, we will explore forms of absolutism in the book and in what light the book represent them, we will be looking for symbols of absolutist orientation.

##### a) Absolute monarchy

James Baldwin originates in Harlem, the new york neighborhood that witnessed the birth of the new negro movement, the movement that the author praised in his book while keeping a distance somehow, the movement aim is to gain economical independence and motivate the African American community to take pride in their culture and identity, and reintroduce the black man to his heritage and his part in the American society based on the movement's rejection of laws of racial segregation.

During a visit to Chicago, James Baldwin receives an invitation from the nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, the author tells about his viewpoint on the former in the following passage “I do not know what I had expected to see. I had read some of his speeches and had heard fragments of others on the radio and on television, so I associated him with ferocity.” (1963: 72) The author however realizes that the man that he pictured in his mind is different from the one he saw when Elijah entered the room, and here the author refers to something very important, which is the reaction of Elijah's entourage when he entered the room, he refers to them as his disciples, the use of this term hints that Elijah's entourage had complete faith in him and his leadership, they smiled and showed total excitement to see him.

the main character in a system of absolute monarchy is the complete submission to the leader, the point I'm about to prove is that organizations even those that are allegedly pro-revolution and pursue the liberation of the society in which they originate might hold similar features to those of the absolute monarchy, the following passage shows the submission to the leader that the author highlighted from his visit to Elijah's house, “Whenever Elijah spoke, a kind of chorus arose from the table, saying "Yes, that's right". This began to set my teeth on edge.” (1963:74) Is it

plausible that the yes men mentality is exhibited by the entourage, but the problem lays in the fact that any future objections would make the leader sense some sort of sudden change and questions the loyalty of those that surround him.

among those around the table sat a young man the author describes him as very sober, the term sober here is used in a sarcastic manner to refer to the sharpness of the young lad even during dinner which is a calm social event that is supposed to be relaxing and he further describes him as bitter. the major weakness in absolutist thinking is that it deprives the person of understanding a different perspective from his, and cloud his vision to the point that his experience becomes the only source of definition for what reality is,

Elijah's background contains a horrific experience according to the author "This is why the most dangerous creation of any society is that man who has nothing to lose You do not need ten such men-one will do. And Elijah, I And Elijah, I should imagine, has 84 had nothing to lose since the day he saw his father's blood rush out-rush down, and splash, so the legend has it, down through the leaves of a tree, on him."(1963:84-85).

Elijah's political theory was that the new negroes should be separated and form their own nation and return to their original religion of Islam, he believed that America owed the African American race seven states and that the liberation of the race would not be achieved without economic independence and that is theoretically correct, but in practical terms the negro economy is apart from the American economy as a whole, meaning that the separation would result in reducing the African American spending power, if we reflect on the original absolute monarchy of Louis xiv, we will see that the same concept is being applied here when Louis xiv oppressed the protestants, many of them fled to other countries and the production of the french nation reduced which then resulted in more depth.

There is a strong relationship between power and ownership that urges the leaders of the Muslim nation to highlight that the freedom of the negro could not be achieved without gaining land, in a capitalist nation the power that influences the decision making comes from the wealthy elites or the bourgeois, and with the racial segregation and the oppression of the African American race, one could easily

conclude that the lower class primarily consists of the oppressed race and the author mentions it in the following passage “Negroes were brought here in chains long before the Irish ever thought of leaving Ireland; what manner of consolation is it to be told that emigrants arriving here-voluntarily-long after you did have risen far above you?.”(1963:69). this cycle will limit any form of social revolution sense the lower class is not of the same ethnicity as the elite, the role of the separation if it is to be achieved will be to divide the bond between the elite and the government.

The absolutism of us government lays in the manner the system treats the African American man, the democracy of America is only limited to the theory, meaning that people have the right to express different opinions but not to act upon them, the African American is the typical victim of police brutality in America.

The violations that the american police performed towards the african american community have affected the author and he tells of his experience, “The humiliation did not apply merely to working days or workers; I was thirteen and was crossing Fifth Avenue on my way to the Forty-second Street library, and the cop in the middle of the street muttered as I passed him, "Why don't you niggers stay uptown where you belong ?.” (1963:31). the author mentions that this harassment applied to all groups of African American, the cops targeted them systematically, as if uptown was the only part in which they were supposed to interact, this will eventually cause them to gain limited knowledge, thus a limited role in the society, which eventually keeps the cycle going and the poor unfavorable race will still be oppressed. this is how the absolute monarchy in the 16TH is familiarized. which makes one question how a form of absolutism seems to appear in the policy of a country that is democratic?.

the proletariat in the 16th century did not have access to knowledge, with the emerge of the enlightenment movement, individual awareness grew, and the enlightenment new ideas influenced various social revolutions in the world like the french revolution, however, if we look at the post-revolution era, many counter-revolutions emerged, this liberation, however, did not change the limitation of the lower social classes role, the year 1791 witnessed the first-ever french elections, however the right to vote was only preserved for tax payers, and the candidates though they were independent all of them were in league with the three political



branches that originated from the new legislative assembly. Thus, the bourgeoisie political influence remained, the change of the regime manipulated the public into thinking that it is a real change happening however the system still follow one ideology with similar policies to those of absolute monarchy, as if the sense of liberation was the lower class's only gain, they gained the basic human rights to live without torture and live a life free because that's how bad it was. but the socio-economical situation, the social conflict would be exploited and the system would live up to the publics new level of awareness but with limited sensible change. In America there are two dominant parties democratic and republican, these parties both are similar in terms of following the same long term goals, the policy of America for example towards china's economical expansion is the same, the support of Israel has not changed during various terms in which the president was the republican's candidate or the Democratic candidate. The absolutism of the 16th century cannot possibly succeed in the modern world, however its ideas that can be traced back even to ancient civilizations from different cultures we can see that it is found in each government, a nation's ruling is based on the national ideology, it is hard to define who decides the ideology of a nation, culture is a huge fracture, yet history also has its effect on the ideologies of the nation, and an absolute policy is highly related to power to the extent that even the relativism theory has its own extremists that they formulated some sort of absolute relativism.

### **b) Cultural absolutism**

The cultural entourage is the first element that introduces a person to the world, it is the matter that raises his awareness of his existence and to many, it gives one a sense of his ego, and his role in the world, the glorification of that culture's beliefs and ancestry is what exploits the comparison between cultures, and each group would favor their ways of life and judge based on the effect of their methods on them under their own circumstances, disregarding the other perspective. We will try to shed light on various forms of cultural absolutism, examine how those that hold the same absolutistic ideas and originate from different cultures are similar in many ways, even in their arguments. The first symbol we will use is the white Christian belief about the people of color, how they see them through allegedly a heavenly statement, the second symbol will be the belief of the nation of Islam about the white Christian and

also allegedly according to the heavenly statement, we will try to see how both use religion in a silly manner to promote their own agenda.

The following passage represents the white Christian belief about the black people through the experience of the author. “according to many Christians, I was a descendant of Ham, who had been cursed, and that I was therefore predestined to be a slave. This had nothing to do with anything I was, or contained, or could become; my fate had been sealed forever, from the beginning of time. And it seemed, indeed, when one looked out over Christendom, that this was what Christendom effectively believed. It was certainly the way it behaved. I remembered the Italian priests and 46 bishops blessing Italian boys who were on their way to Ethiopia.” (1963:46-47).

the use of religious belief in order to manipulate the African American community goes back to the age of slavery, in order to keep the slaves and assure that they will be useful and energetic in a degrading reality of life, they were thought that god is white, thus the white man is the inheritor of god on earth, and the black man should fulfill his destiny and accept the reality of slavery in order to be saved, this kind of manipulation of religious texts is wide and it affected every culture, the lower class often relate their exhausting circumstances to the will of God, in the same manner, the wealthy might feel blessed.

you cannot scientifically prove that wealth is a blessing, it could be a test but once again you can't scientifically prove that too. the author refers to the use of religion in exploiting conflict and blessing the governments decisions concerning war to the point that bishops bless men that are going to kill and sure the Ethiopian religious authorities did the same, but the righteousness of the action depends on the perspective that you hold, an absolute perspective would be that one of them is right. however it is obvious that it motivates the warriors and that is the basic reason religious authorities manipulate people, whoever objects to the word of god is objecting to the rule of the government that acts under the guidance of the bible.

The second symbol is the counter to the first one, the nation of Islam doctrine had a similar perspective on white people to that white people had on people of color, Muslim speakers would often give speeches in Harlem as it is the place of birth of the new negro movement, the author witnessed a speech of the nation of Islam, he

mentions it in the following passage. "Power was the subject of the speeches I heard. We were offered, as Nation of Islam doctrine, historical and divine proof that all white people are cursed, and are devils, and are about to be brought down. This has been revealed by Allah Himself to His prophet, the Honourable Elijah Muhammad."(1963:59) the former ideology is one that is very similar to the Christian that we have mentioned previously, it is based on god favoring a certain race which is in this case the black race, in this passage God is referred to as Allah which means that this is a Muslim belief, the use of the term prophecy shows the delusion of this idea since the prophecy according to Islam ended with prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, however in order to gain the public's interest the speakers would go beyond their own belief in order to glamorize the leader of the Nation of Islam, the religious message that the nation of Islam promote is exclusive to the black race and it considers the white race doomed.

In a different passage, the author expresses this statement by the leader of the Nation of Islam "The so-called American Negro is the only reason Allah has permitted the United States to endure so long; the white man's time was up in 1913, but it is the will of Allah that this lost black nation, the black men of this country, be redeemed from their white masters and returned to the true faith, which is Islam."(1963:75) the leader of the Nation of Islam disregards the scientific advancement and military power of the united states and suggests that the only reason America survived is that god's wish that the African American people are liberated and links this liberation to the doom of the white man, the idea that the prosperity of one race should come at the expense of another race is a call of unnecessary hatred between different cultures, where the development in a certain race which is in fact a development of all mankind seems like a threat to another nation. the previous two symbols hold similar religious beliefs even if they might seem like two extremes, and that is the thing about extremes is that they are both unreasonable, the absolute exclusion of a different culture's beliefs and the attempt to unite everyone under one religion is an absolutistic concept that succeeds in separating nations and could eventually lead to civil wars.

A culture that holds absolutistic orientation tries to bind negative habits with a certain different culture and the author refers to when the leader of the nation of Islam

advised him to give up ‘the white man’s alcohol’, this is not valid historically as evidence shows that drinking existed in early Egyptian civilization and in china around 7.000 bc, so it is not correct to relate the habit of drinking to the white culture, another way to aggrandize a race at the expense of another, is to dismiss all scientific research about the origins of mankind and claim based on your own beliefs that a certain race did experience the same evolution as the rest, and that it always was at a high level of awareness and advancement compared to other races and the author refers to this belief in the NOI ideas in the following passage, “Black men ruled the earth and the black man was perfect. This is the truth concerning the era that white men now refer to as prehistoric. They want black men to believe that they, like white men, once lived in caves and swung from trees and ate their meat raw and did not have the power of speech. But this is not true. Black men were never in such a condition”(1963.75-76). this is a similar concept of the white Christendom belief about the origin of black men, the descendants of ham that were destined to be enslaved and mastered by the white man, the social circumstances of black people, the very fact that the black people were enslaved till a one-hundred back from the date of the publishment of this book, made them develop some sort of need to recognize their origins and the experience they had with the white race did not make it very hard for them to accept such ideas, the white need to degrade the African American man and the threat they see in the rising of a black man, made the African American man feel a need of such belief in order to keep his pride, this will eventually lead to more self-degradation.

### Conclusion

Eventually, we conclude from this chapter that the holding of absolute beliefs, will cloud our vision from seeing further than our own reality, our personal experience and events that we have witnessed, in a society in which there are two different ethnic groups living together, it is not possible to develop as a nation if not some sort of relativistic mentality is adopted, our author proves this as his experience with the various groups he met, did not effect his vision and he did not seem to jump to conclusions and just judge based on his own belief, he rather understands and accepts the nature of those that are different from him, and bare in mind that the negative belief in a certain culture that develops through hundereds of years can effectively control an individual that lives an average of 70 years. . The outcome of the american systemic racism against the african american community and the white propaganda that promotes the white culture as the ultimate right way of living, has failed to reproduce the african american culture in a more american shape, it is american the way it is because it existed in america. in the book we have learnt that the minority in america is primarily of black ethnicity, this very fact is what makes the african american prone to feel isolated from america, thus until the economical situation of the african american man is changed his opression will ever last. The absolutism may seem as an effective way to unite the people but could lead them into thinking that their own individual beliefs are absolute, meaning that they see the world from a perspective that is absolute, but act not in accordance to the nation's policies but to their own beliefs creating more cults.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

Throughout our study, we have been able to gain an efficient understanding of the absolutism, and relativism theories. These two doctrines have been in existence since ancient Greek times but under different names but with similar principles. In addition, many forms that exist for each concept have been explored. Which confirms the fulfillment of the doctrines more and the expansion of their dimensions.

This research represents examples of different empires and governments that adopted similar principles to those of absolute monarchy and France in which it started. If we look at the way absolute monarchy ended in french, it is clearly to see that acts of rebellion have a major role in its demolition. The target aim here is not to suggest that relativism adoption will assure a certain government that will last forever, because that is not true. Yet, the intent is to reveal that the limitation of the society's freedom and the exclusion of cultural differences will come at the expense of creativity. Regrettably, it will do no more than causing conflict to arise at the end and anarchy that could have been avoided with a smooth change of rule.

However, the systemic racism in the USA goes to show that even in a democratic nation there still could be an absolute mentality that we see in western imperialism today. Various examples has been extracted from *The Fire Next Time* (1963) that are absolutely non-identical in their beliefs and backgrounds. The Nation of Islam, the Christian church in which the author James Baldwin was baptized. Both of them represents the same total confidence in their ways. They exclude each other and go as far as using god and religion in order to justify their hatred for others.

The sake of this study is not in no shape or form to attack religion, but it is important to expose how people manipulate their faith in order to make it coherent with their own beliefs, various religious groups, that belong to the same religion do not believe in the same things. In this vein the question raises; what makes those certain groups that promote hatred find acceptance and followers? Simply because it suits their own beliefs about the world around them. The role that character plays in deciding what we choose to identify is an important reason that makes one prefer the relativistic approach because nothing is perfect. Ergo, assured to be effective. However, the upright position in this study is to promote acceptance not because a

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

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certain thing is right thus we should accept it. Yet ue to its existance. We cannot as well just deny it.

The various experiences that James Baldwin tells us about in comparison to his pacific character, tell us furthermore about the importance of relativism in fighting against crime, hatred and dictation. if it possible to say that the author choose to follow those racketeers on the avenue or stay in church, he would perhaps miss on discovering so much about the world.

The danger of absolutism lays in the way it isolates the individual from the group, and the group from another, creating in a similar but less interactive world. Ultimately, it is safe to say that the absolutism theory is not an assurance of a nations unity. In case of the existence of various racial groups, it is dangerous to promote one's culture. Further, the role of the goverment should be to assure the freedom to be who you are as long as you do not menace the others. Besides, it is noticed how being a pacifist affected the author who finally found his passion in writing. If relativism means accepting harm because we don't know what really is right or wrong, he is more likely to be still on the avenue, or tells himself something similar when he found out that the money they gathered in the church was being abused by the people he worked with.

The continuous development of France after Louis xiv shows that absolutism is not a successful ruling method, and humans are progressive. Thusly they are in constant change that we might overlook but we can see after generations once we examine the past.



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## ملخص الدراسة

الغاية من هذه الدراسة هي توفير دراسة معمقة لنظريتين متعاكستين تماما، أولهما هي الحكم المطلق او الحكم الواحد و التي يقصد بها ان تكون السلطة في يد حاكم واحد و في شكلها الثقافي يقصد بها الحكم على ثقافة أخرى من خلال المتعارف عليه في ثقافتنا بدون مراعاة أي اختلافات في الخلفية. النظرية الثانية و هي النسبية و على خلاف الأولى فهي يقال بها ان الثقافات لا بد ان تقبل كما هي مراعاة لاختلاف الخلفية و الظروف التي يعيشها أصحاب تلك الثقافة لان حسب أصحاب هذا المذهب الصواب و الخطا لا يمكن تحديدها لعدم توفر قانون كوني يحدد ذلك, اذن ما قد يبدو خاطئا لشخص ما من ثقافة معينة من الطبيعي ان يبدو صائبا لشخص من ثقافة أخرى و كلاهما سيكون على صواب. هدفنا هنا هو تحليل أي النظريتين اكثر فعالية في انشاء مجتمع متجانس و منتج و متساوي و ذلك من خلال تحليل نص ادبي و استخراج مظاهر تجسد كلا من النظريتين في مجتمع معين مكون من خلفيات عرقية مختلفة للتوصل للنتيجة النهائية.