Culture and Public Action: An Introduction[1]

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Introduction

Much of the discussion on the role of culture in Development has either seen it as a primordial trap, a mystical haze, or a source of hegemonic power. These have not proved very useful as guides for public action. In recent years, however, Development thinking has arrived at an interesting crossroads. In the academic world, economists are grappling with models of how social and cultural factors shape human behavior, while academic anthropologists, having grappled with these questions for a long time, are seeing the need to move beyond critique towards a more "facilitatory" anthropology (Sillitoe, 1998). Similarly, in the world of policy, culture is increasingly being viewed as a commonplace, malleable fact of life that matters as much as economics or politics to the process of development. But there remains some confusion about *how* it matters. In this introductory essay, we draw on the contributions in this volume to examine some of the positive and normative implications of taking culture on-board in improving how public action alleviates poverty and reduces inequality in the world's less affluent countries. We begin with two case-studies to place our arguments in context, go on to review past work on the subject, in the world of both thought and action, and then distill the contributions in this book towards a conceptual and practical overview of the role of culture in

reproducing or alleviating poverty. We end the chapter with some thoughts on the

normative implications of this – arguing that it suggests a shift from the individually

based principle of "equality of opportunity" to a group-based principle that we call

"equality of agency." We should note that the book is primarily concerned with poverty

and inequality, and some important topics at the intersection of culture and Development

are not addressed in detail. Globalization is one of them, and the relationship between

culture and economic growth is another one. Both, we feel, have been adequately treated

elsewhere[2].

But what is culture? It has been defined in myriad ways (Kluckhohn and Kroeber, 1963)

and we hesitate to privilege one definition over another. Our general view is that culture

is about relationality – the relationships among individuals within groups, among

groups, and between ideas and perspectives. Culture is concerned with identity,

aspiration, symbolic exchange, coordination, and structures and practices that serve

relational ends, such as ethnicity, ritual, heritage, norms, meanings, and beliefs. It is not

a set of primordial phenomena permanently embedded within national or religious or

other groups, but rather a set of contested attributes, constantly in flux, both shaping and

being shaped by social and economic aspects of human interaction.

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[2] Amartya Sen spends some time on both these topics in his chapter, and the concluding chapter also examines some of the implications of globalization for Development policy. Outside the book, Appadurai (1996, 2001), Sassen (1999), Hart (2001), Cowen (2002) and World Bank (2002) are influential contributions to understanding globalization from different points of view.   Lal (1998) provides a sophisticated overview of the relationship between culture and economic growth - particularly on the role of "cosmological beliefs" and individualism in fostering growth oriented cultures.

A focus on culture is necessary to confront the difficult questions of *what* is valued in terms of well-being, *who* does the valuing, and *why* economic and social factors interact with culture to unequally allocate access to a good life. To use Amartya Sen's language, culture is part of the set of capabilities that people have – the constraints, technologies, and framing devices that condition how decisions are made and coordinated across different actors. There is no presumption that these processes are inherently "good", or inherently "bad," for economic and social development. By reproducing inequality and discrimination, they can be exploitative, exclusionary and conflictual – resulting in what Sen has called "relational deprivation" (Sen, 2000). Cultural processes, however, can also be harnessed for positive social and economic transformation, through their influence on aspirations, the coordination of collective action, and the ways in which power and agency work within a society.

In order to concretize the relevance of culture for public action, we turn to two examples: in the first example, a failure to pay attention to a group's culture adversely affected a policy intervention, and in the second, a careful attention to culturally conditioned processes led to a highly successful project.

Two Case-Studies

Famine in the Sudan: how missing the culture dimension diminished aid effectiveness.

The first case, based on the case study by Simon Harragin in this volume, illustrates how a failure to pay attention to local cultures – in particular, to notions of kinship and social

structure - reduced the effectiveness of a response to a famine in Sudan. Blindness to the group's culture caused relief workers to misread the early signs of famine, and to misread as corruption the group's responses to aid.

In early 1998, relief workers began noticing signs of the sudden onset of a catastrophic famine in Southern Sudan. Partly because of a debate over the severity of the famine, Operation Lifeline Sudan, which was formed to tackle such problems in the area, did not organize large infusions of food till August 1998. By that point food deprivation was widespread and famine imminent. A task force concluded that there had been a lack of 'contingency planning' in the relief operation and that Operation Lifeline Sudan had 'underestimated the total number of people in need' (SPLM/SRRA - OLS 1998). Why did such a large, complex and well intentioned effort fail to intervene in a manner that might have pre-empted the famine?

The relief organizations were concerned that the famine was being caused by food hoarding, allegedly by corrupt chiefs and the military, rather than severe lack of food. The concern was highlighted by the observation that food destined for 'the vulnerable' was being taken over by local leaders. Harragin's field investigation found that the leaders were, in fact, appropriating the food to distribute it equally to all members of their kin group and that the targeted "vulnerable" members of the group were willing participants in this. For instance he observed an old lady go to a secret location designated by a local chief and put her ration back into the collective pot to be redistributed amongst everyone, rather than go under a tree and cook and eat her food

alone. Aid workers perceived this as "elite capture," and made attempts to by-pass local leadership structures and target aid directly at the most vulnerable. The fact that vulnerable groups were themselves complicit in these practices only indicated to aid workers the degree to which the weak were subservient to the powerful.

Harragin argues, however, that the perception of the aid workers reflected a lack of knowledge of local cultural systems. In particular, they were unaware that the basis of ownership of economic resources in southern Sudanese society were kinship groups. Key economic resources – such as cattle - are owned by a small group of kin with common grandparents. Even in a famine it is unlikely that a man will approach an unrelated person to ask for food. It is therefore felt to be important that all the separate economic units (the lineages) receive their fair share in a distribution of relief food, prior to choosing the family members with the greatest need for assistance.

The health of the kinship system depends on having resources to circulate. It is with this aim that food was reassembled and redistributed on a kinship basis. Survival of the kinship system was considered almost as important as physical survival. There were, as with any welfare system, individuals without kin who were left unprotected by this traditional distribution mechanism, but it commanded broad support. This equal sharing of meager and declining resources resulted in the food shortages having an even impact on the population. Thus, the most obvious warning sign of a famine – the incidence of severe malnutrition - was ineffective because there were no early isolated cases of malnutrition detected. Aid workers were consequently led to believe that the famine was

not severe. When malnutrition did appear, it came at a point when the famine had reached an advanced stage when severe malnutrition was widespread and catastrophic.

What can be learned from this account? This was a well-intentioned "failure." Relief workers may have been attempting to circumvent traditional redistribution mechanisms because they were judged to be inegalitarian. Many traditional allocation systems do indeed have exclusionary features which must be confronted, but in a famine practical choices have to be made that recognize how individuals and groups actually behave. By not grounding their intervention within local understandings of distributional norms, relief workers also underestimated the impact of food shortages until it was too late. Furthermore, attempting to work around those norms with technocratic targeting approaches proved fruitless and inefficient. A more culturally sensitive intervention would have attempted to investigate local understandings of deprivation and food allocation, understood the cultural logic of why certain decisions were being made by the community, and worked with community members to find a solution.   Instead a more external, one-size-fits-all method was followed where the intervention, initially at least, may have caused more harm than good. The solution to the crisis of 1998 eventually came through sending in more food, and not through better targeting, but even a cursory reading of the anthropological literature on Southern Sudan could have resulted in a more effective response.

How a cultural lens improved development effectiveness: the HIV-AIDS intervention

among sex workers in Sonagachi, Kolkata[3]

The second case comes from Kolkata (Calcutta) -India, which has been the site one of the

most remarkable transformations among sex workers in recent history. Sex work is

arguably even more stigmatized in India than in most parts of the world because of strong

social restrictions on sexual behaviors. Women who become sex workers are considered

to have "fallen" into a life of "shame." Only about 10 per cent enter the profession

voluntarily, most being forced into it either because of poverty, abandonment or violence

by husbands or other family problems (Sleightholme and Sinha, 1996). The sex workers

are almost always part of a brothel under the ownership of a madam or pimp.

Sonagachi is Kolkata's oldest and best established red-light district with over 4,000 sex

workers working in 370 brothels that service about 20,000 clients a day (AIIPHH, 1997).

Because of the intense level of stigma, Sonagachi is a world unto itself and sex workers

have developed their own sub-culture[4]. There are elites -- madams and pimps – often

tied to criminal mafias, and an associated set of actors – tea shop owners, restaurants,

babysitters (usually retired sex workers) – who provide a hinterland of social and

economic support. Stigma induces several strategies to acquire respectability. One of the

most common is a form of marriage where women associate themselves with long-term

clients called *Babus* (who may themselves have "respectable" wives and children living

elsewhere) even though they remain active in the profession. This sex worker sub-culture

is self-contained, shaped by a pervasive sense of exclusion from the mainstream, as well

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[3] See Gooptu (2000) and Jenkins (2000) for more details on the Sonagachi transformation.
[4] See the chapter by Carol Jenkins for further discussion of sexual subcultures, and their role in HIV/AIDS.

as conditioned by the market for sex work – selling a diversity of services to different clients for a range of prices.

Until the 1990s, interventions in Sonagachi tended to reflect the values of the middle class bureaucrats who crafted them. They focused on "rehabilitating" the sex workers, "rescuing" them and taking them to shelters for training in income-generating activities such as tailoring, in an attempt to wean them away from sex work. This usually did not work. The (relatively) high earnings in sex work (Rao et. al, 2003), and the harassment and discrimination faced by former sex workers in the world outside Sonagachi, led most women to return to prostitution.

With the onset of the AIDS crisis public health workers had serious concerns over the potential for sex workers to become vectors for the disease[5]. In this context, the All India Institute for Public Health and Hygiene (AIIPHH), led by Dr. Smarajit Jana, initiated a new intervention in Sonagachi in 1992. They began by treating sex-workers with respect, as individuals went about the "ordinary business of life" practicing a profession that happened to have unique occupational hazards. After spending many months in the community providing basic health services establishing, Dr. Jana and his team established a good relationship based on mutual respect with the sex workers as well the pimps, madams, and clients. In the process the medical team gained a deep understanding of Sonagachi's sub-culture and of the power structures that dominated it.

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[5] An important challenge was that sex workers faced losses of about 60% of their income if they used condoms because their clients had a strong preference for condom-free sex (Rao et. al. 2003)

Gradually by 1993, Dr. Jana, via a process of trial and error and in consultation with the sex workers, developed an innovative strategy to increase AIDS awareness and condom use that emerged from a profound awareness of Sonagachi's cultural logic.   It was extremely simple and yet very effective. Instead of using health extension workers to spread the message, which was the conventional practice in Indian public health interventions, Dr. Jana decided to train a small group of twelve sex workers as peer educators to pass on information to their co-workers. The only thing that distinguished peer educators from other sex workers were green medical coats worn over their sarees when they engaged in public health functions. The green coats also gave the peer-educators a sense of self-worth and a "respectable" identity. But, at the same time, as members of the community they were permitted easy access to brothels and had the credibility associated with being intimately aware of the hazards of the profession.

This process of educating the sex workers and mobilizing them for the HIV-AIDS intervention, along with the increasing media attention brought about by the success of the project led, over a period of two or three years, to a metamorphosis in the sex workers' aspirations. They founded a union to fight for legalization, reduction in police harassment, and other rights. Public events, such as festivals, cultural programs, and health fairs were routinely organized by them which contributed to the process of mobilization and the removal of stigma. The program was also remarkably successful as a health intervention with almost all sex workers using condoms at least some of the time. As a result, HIV incidence in Sonagachi was about 6 per cent in 1999 compared to 50

per cent in other red-light areas (including Mumbai's) that did not pursue such a culturally attuned approach.

The Sonagachi project is, thus, an example of an intervention where a deep understanding of the local sub-culture, and coordination with the community, led to a project design that was extremely effective in meeting its objectives – containing the spread of HIV. It also generated positive externalities by increasing aspirations, reducing stigma, and mobilizing the community in a manner that led to a cultural transformation.

These cases illustrate a number of themes that will be taken up in this chapter and the rest of the book. A culturally-aware approach to public action pays attention to factors that may be common-sense to the intended beneficiaries, but are often exotic, irrelevant, or irrational from the perspective of the policy maker. Ignorance of this contextualized notion of "common sense," which James Scott (1998) calls *metis*, has been endemic among policy makers in government and in development institutions. As Scott masterfully demonstrates, by ignoring *metis*, policy makers impose a structured and formulaic set of interventions on societies that ill serve the purpose of improving well-being. Common sense, understood as part of a cultural system (Geertz,1983), is a way of providing a knowledge base that shapes how people understand themselves and provides stability to human interaction. The example of Sonagachi illustrates that an intervention that pays attention to *metis*, by taking pains to understand the local context, and that is able to foster a shift in collective identity in a direction that builds collective aspirations, can be very successful. The flip side of that, illustrated by the example of famine relief in

the Sudan, is that an intervention that ignores social norms and imposes a view of the world that is external to the target group can be particularly ineffective.

A culturally informed perspective is thus not so much a "prescription", as it is a "lens" – a way of seeing. It sees individuals as driven by a culturally influenced set of motives, incentives, beliefs, and identities that interact with economic incentives to affect outcomes.   It sees the initiator of public action - which could be the government, an NGO or an external donor - as not only a change-agent, but also as part of the unequal relations that inhere within donor-beneficiary relationships. We believe that incorporating this lens into more conventional economic ways of understanding will, in many situations, lead to more effective policy.

Next, we review some of the ways in which anthropologists, economists and other social scientists have conceptualized the link between culture and Development, and briefly sketch the history of how these concepts have been implemented in Development practice.

Reviewing the Context: A Brief Overview of the Conceptual and Practical Foundations of the Role of Culture in Development

Culture in Development thought.
It beyond the scope of this introductory chapter to provide an exhaustive history of the role of culture in Development thinking – Lourdes Arizpe (this volume) provides an

admirable introduction to the role of anthropology in Development from the perspective

of the UN and the World Bank, as do Schech and Haggis (2000) with their more

academic focus[6]. Surveys of thought in Economic Development can, similarly, be found

in Ray (1998) and Basu (1997). What we will instead do is to briefly sketch the work of

a few key thinkers to place the contributions to this book in perspective.

Two extreme views tend to dominate the rhetoric on culture and development. The first

is a hyper-modernist perspective, most recently exemplified in the work of Harrison

(2000), Huntington (2000), and Landes (2000a) that "culture matters" because societies

steeped in traditional cultures are unsuited to market-oriented development and are thus

fundamentally hampered in their pursuit of growth. In this variant of Huntington's

"Clash of Civilizations" (Huntington, 1998) hypothesis, poverty and low rates of growth

are deeply affected by adverse rules and norms that reduce incentives for mobility and

investment. The challenge for development is then to reform culture by inculcating more

growth- and mobility-oriented perspectives, via education or other means of transforming

"toxic cultures[7]". Culture here is the enemy – a voice from the past that inhibits societies

from functioning in the modern world. Max Weber's thesis on the particular suitability

of the Calvinist ethic to capitalism is often evoked, incorrectly, as the distinguished

progenitor of this perspective. In fact, Weber (1958), in his celebrated *Protestant Ethic

and the Spirit of Capitalism* was not outlining a causal relationship between Calvinism

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[6] Despite this long engagement, Klitgaard (1994) suggests four reasons why anthropological notions have not yet become part of the mainstream practice of Development. These are: differences in the cultures of economics and anthropology, the fear that taking culture into account will lead to an oversimplification and misguided use of complex ideas, the sheer difficulty of constructing an analytical apparatus for the subject, and a "misguided notion of policy analysis."

[7] A term employed by Professor David Landes, the distinguished economic historian from Harvard, in his talk at the "Culture Counts" Conference in Florence (Page 30, Landes, 2000b).

and Capitalism, but merely demonstrating that historically there was an "elective affinity[8]" between them. This is a more subtle argument that does not reduce into the practical diagnosis, implicitly advocated by Harison and Huntington and others, that infusing more Calvinist values into non-Western cultures would improve their potential for growth.

At the other extreme are the cultural critics of the discourse of Development. For example, Arturo Escobar (1995) applies techniques of deconstruction, in the tradition of Michel Foucault, to study Development as a cultural system, focusing in particular on how economists shaped the modernization perspectives that have dominated Development since the 1950s. This dominance is taken to be an aspect of neo-colonialism whereby Western ideologies and interests have created a "mechanism of control" that led to the "creation" of the Third World. To Escobar, economists, and through them the IMF and World Bank, are the primary culprits in constructing a Development discourse that reified the distinctions between the North and the South which had emerged from the colonial era. Culture here is seen as a system of control that creates and extends existing "macro" inequalities between rich and poor countries, and "micro" inequalities between westernized and indigenous groups in poorer countries.

We do not wish to characterize what we have labeled "extreme" perspectives as extremist, but rather as extreme bounds along a continuum of views. We do not dismiss the idea that there is a culture of Development associated with dominant mainstream economic views in the development discourse, and that this has had a powerful, and not

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[8] We thank Keith Hart for this providing us with this phrase.

always positive, effect on the world's poorer countries. Nor do we reject the idea that culture and history may affect the manner in which societies adapt to markets. However, we take a more moderate middle ground. In our view, Escobar's Foucauldian take on Development leaves little room for thinking constructively about how to integrate notions of cultural and economic change to design more effective public action, while the "Culture Matters" perspective exemplified by Harrison and Huntington is overly static and simplistic in its diagnosis of the Development problem with culture treated as an exogenous constraint rather than as one of the realms of everyday life.

The middle ground that we seek has a long and distinguished history that can traced as far back as Smith, Marx, and Weber[9] for whom the social, economic and moral realms were inextricably linked in understanding the determinants of human well-being. While disciplinary specialization in the social sciences began in the late 19th century it was, arguably, only in the second half of the 20th century that it reached an acute state. However, even within the polarized disciplinary worlds of the post-War era, there were pioneering efforts to find a space within the intersection of economic and social life. Perhaps the most noteworthy in its attempt to influence public action was Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (Hirschman, 1970) which established the three words in the title as central themes in thinking about how cultural and social factors affected the Development process.

Frustration with the lack inter-disciplinary communication, particularly in thinking about Development policy, led to efforts to facilitate a dialogue across disciplines on

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[9] Who it should be remembered was a professor of political economy

Development topics. At a conceptual level, WIDER sponsored an influential collection

of essays edited by an economist and anthropologist, Stephen Marglin and Fredrique

Apfel Marglin (1990), which examined economic development as a cultural process. At

an empirical level, Bardhan (1989) was a pioneering effort to bring anthropologists and

economists together to conduct a fruitful dialogue on the measurement of economic and

social change in rural India. However, culture, as Kuper (2000) points out, is the "special

subject" of Anthropology[10] and in order to illustrate what we mean by a disciplinary

middle ground we will highlight the efforts of three key cultural anthropologists - Mary

Douglas, Clifford Geertz and Arjun Appadurai - to reach out and actively engage with

economists.

Mary Douglas, with her classic work on rituals and taboo (1966) and the anthropology of

the body (Douglas, 1970), and later on a more general form of cultural analysis known as

Culture Theory, has been among the most influential anthropologists of the post-War

period and has actively collaborated and debated with economists throughout her career.

With Baron Isherwood (1976) she provided a theory of preference formation that was

integrated with economic theories of consumption, and in the process provided a cultural

theory of goods and markets. In her joint work with Aaron Wildalvsky, she developed an

anthropological theory of risk to bring in cultural notions to a subject that had till then

been dominated by statistically grounded individualistic perspectives from economics

and the decision sciences (Douglas and Wildalvsky 1982, Douglas 1992). Clifford

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[10] An extensive literature review is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter, but summaries of the various strands of thought on culture in Anthropology and Sociology can be found in http://www.cultureandpublicaction.org/conference/cc_further_reading.htm.

Geertz, another iconic figure among anthropologists, has also regularly engaged with economists. He is renowned for his seminal contributions to theories of culture and symbolic interaction (Geertz, 1973), but he was also an early proponent of the use of the (then) new economic tools of game theory and information economics to model cultural phenomena – particularly in the context of development (Geertz, 1978).

Among the next generation of anthropologists, Arjun Appadurai has conversed with economists on issues of data collection (Appadurai, 1989) and the moral dimensions of economic change (Appadurai, 1990). He edited a seminal collection of articles by historians and anthropologists which argued that "commodities, like persons, have social lives." (Appadurai, 1986) By emphasizing the transition from social to economic value, his work sheds new light on the relationship between exchange and value. More recently, he has provided a way of extending our understanding of global exchanges, by integrating the nature of economic flows with the flows of ideas, people, technologies, and information (Appadurai, 1996) [11].

From the other side, some economists have also made influential efforts at constructing a bridge across disciplines in thinking about Development. Perhaps the most important is Amartya Sen's reinterpretation of the meaning of Development and of the role of agency within it which has provided much of the intellectual rationale for the movement towards a more holistic vision for Development. For most economists the goal of Development

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[11] Among anthropologists engaged with problems of development – we should also note the work of Stephen Gudeman (1986. 2001) on the social "base" underlying economic life in a poor economy, and Keith Hart's important work on the informal economy (Hart, 1973) as well as his more prescriptive analysis of the potential role of the internet and telecommunications technology in creating a more equal capitalism (Hart, 2000).

has long been the maximization of material well being. Sen interpreted well-being much more broadly in terms of a person's "capabilities"—the potential she or he has to convert entitlements over goods and services into a range of "functionings" -- or all the various things a person may value doing or being[12]. The translation of potential into functionings is a product of active choice by the individual as an agent—"as someone who acts and brings about change" in economic, social and political domains, making use of their capabilities and indeed influencing personal and public action in ways that determine the future formation of capabilities. The extent to which such agency can be effective depends on the broader institutional context, and especially the extent to which the political, governmental and social institutions of a society allow for all agents to have an influence. An emblematic statement of this linkage was Sen's comment that a famine has never occurred in a functioning democracy with a free press.

Work in institutional economics, associated in particular with Douglass North and Avner Greif, integrates the tools of economic, historical and cultural analysis. Institutions - defined as the "rules of a game in a society or, more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction[13]" are, it is argued, the key determinant of economic change[14]. Development policy has tended to focus on formal institutions while paying much less attention to informal institutions[15] which shape what North calls the "informal constraints" that "come from socially transmitted information and are a part of

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[12] This can include satisfying hunger, living with dignity, building social status. See Sen 1985a, 1992, 1999, 2000.

[13] North, 1990 Page 3.

[14] See World Bank (2002a) for an extended treatment of the role of institutions in the market arena, that is very much in the tradition of North.

[15] Development *research* , on the other hand, has increasingly begun to take note of these constraints. For instance see Platteau (2001) who links North's notions of formal and informal constraints to problems of economic development, with an emphasis on property rights and social norms.

the heritage that we call culture[16]." To North, informal constraints form the "governing

structure" "defined by codes of conduct, norms of behavior, and conventions," that shape

our "daily interaction with others, whether within the family, in external social relations,

or in business activities[17]." Greif (1994) translates some of these notions into game-

theoretic models. His most influential work compares "individualist" Genovese traders

with "collectivist" Maghribis in medieval Mediterranean trading networks, and shows

why "individualists" were more likely to develop formal institutional enforcement

mechanisms to manage their activities, while "collectivists" were more likely to develop

informal systems – concluding that individualist cultures are more conducive to the

development of formal property rights.

While Geertz (1976) was perhaps the first to "model" the link between culture and the

transmission of information, a broad literature, pioneered by George Akerlof (1984) and

Joseph Stiglitz, recognizes the centrality of relational problems of coordination and of

information in economic life (Hoff and Stiglitz, 2001). This is especially important since,

from a functionalist perspective, many informal institutions, including cultural practices

and social norms, can be seen as responses to problems of coordination and information

asymmetry.   This has become a central concern of recent work in economics which has

developed and extended problems of information transmission, coordination and social

interaction to examine a variety of subjects. These include social conformity (Bernheim,

1993), poverty-traps (e.g. Durlauf, 2002), segregation (e.g. Benabou, 1993) and fads (e.g.

Bikhchandani et al 1992). Since such topics continue to be the focus of cutting-edge

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[16] North (1990), Page 37.
[17] North (1990), page 36.

research in economics, instead of attempting a review of this burgeoning literature here, we revisit it in the conclusion and in the website associated with this book[18].

Looking at the links between culture and economic behavior, however, also requires an understanding of how preferences are formed – an issue that, until recently, most of economics chose to assume away[19]. Economists have now begun to address preference formation in at least two different ways - as part of an evolutionary process, or as the result of fundamental changes in opportunity costs. Evolutionary models of preference formation are "functional" in the sociological sense attributing the dominance of one set of preferences to fundamental factors that relate to human survivability (e.g. Bergstrom, 2002) In the opportunity cost approach, pioneered by Becker and Stigler (1977), consumers have stable preferences for a fundamental set of goods – related to what Sen would call functionings. These functionings have "production functions" which affect their relative prices. For instance a person may have a fundamental preference for "good food," but since good food is a cultivated taste, the type of food she eats will be affected by the type of "food capital" she acquires. If we have a higher level of food capital for French *haute cuisine* compared to hamburgers, say because our parents were gourmets, we are much more likely to enjoy it. However, if the relative "price" of producing *haute*

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[18] See http://www.cultureandpublicaction.org/conference/cc_further_reading.htm. One particularly interesting set of models have been developed by Chwe (2000, 2001) who analyzes rituals and other forms of collective cultural expression as solutions to coordination problems. In order to generate collective action, an individual within a group must know what others in the group know, they in turn must know what she knows, and she in turn must know that they know that she knows, and so on – what game theorists call common knowledge. This sense of culture as a coordinating system is close to the view of many anthropologists. For example, to Geertz (1973) culture is "an ordered system of meanings and symbols… in terms if which individuals define their world, express their feelings and make their judgments." Douglas and Isherwood (1979) link culture directly to economic life by arguing that "consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape." For them the "essential function of consumption is its capacity to make sense."

[19] Also see Stern (2004) for a discussion on the relationship between preference dynamics and development policy.

cuisine capital falls – say because of food shows on radio and TV, then it becomes easier to enjoy and more people will consume it. Therefore, in the Becker and Stigler model, cultural change is a function of relative prices[20].

Economists are methodological individualists – where the individual is the analytical unit - and interactive relationships with others with others typically result from some form of linked or inter-dependent preferences, information transmission technologies, or strategic interactions. Issues of relationality, however, have been addressed for much longer by anthropologists and sociologists, albeit under different labels and analytical frames. Anthropologists and sociologists, particularly those schooled in the Durkheimian tradition, more commonly start from a perspective in which a person's belief systems, dispositions and behaviors are conditioned and embedded within the group to which they belong. In other words, they adhere to "methodological holism" where the unit of analysis is not an individual but a group. Individuals, like the cyborgs in Star Trek, are so deeply conditioned by their group membership that one cannot really think of autonomous individual actors or identities (e.g. Douglas and Ney 1998). This emphasis on the primacy of social structure has been extended by Social Theorists such as Talcott Parsons and Pierre Bourdieu to allow more room for individual agency, but the relatively greater emphasis on structure still gives social theory, with all its diverse perspectives, an analytical apparatus that is distinct from economics[21].

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[20] Becker (1996), in later work has developed several variants of this idea of preference formation based upon relative prices and applied to a variety of situations – addiction and habit formation among them. Other approaches focus on the inter-generational transmission of preferences an their implications for cultural diversity within societies (Bisin and Verdier, 2001).

[21] There are exceptions such as the late Chicago sociologist James Coleman (1990) who made a case for bringing methodological individualism and rational choice theory to the center of social theory as a

Bourdieu's work has particular relevance to understanding how culture affects poverty and the reproduction of inequality. Much of his core thinking begins with what he calls *habitus* which can be thought of as the set of durable principles -- practices, beliefs, taboos, rules, representations, rituals, symbols, etc.-- that provide a group of individuals with a sense of group identity and a consequent feeling of security and belonging[22]. Bourdieu argues that this varies systematically across groups. To quote David Swartz interpreting Bourdieu[23]: "Habitus tends to shape individual action so that existing opportunity structures are perpetuated. Chances of success or failure are internalized and then transformed into individual aspirations or expectations; these are then in turn externalized in action that tends to reproduce the objective structure of life chances." An economist may find it helpful to think of this internalization of the perceived possibility of success or failure as a *constraining preference* which interacts with exogenous constraints to affect human action.

To illustrate what we mean by *constraining preferences* lets take the example of a taboo - a proscription against certain types of behavior – against marrying a sibling, for example. The incest taboo is a feature of most human societies. Most people would not consider breaking it, not just because of fear of social sanctions, but simply because the taboo is so

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substitute for what an "unfriendly critic" might describe as the "current practice in social theory" which "consists of chanting old mantras and invoking nineteenth-century theorists."

[22] This is our imperfect account of Bourdieu's definition of *habitus* , "a system of durable, transposable dispositions,…. principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990h:53)   For a clear and comprehensive exposition of Bourdieu's body of work see Swartz (2000). Also see Bourdieu (1998) for a readable synopsis of his own world-view.

[23] Swartz (2000) page 103

deeply ingrained within their psyches. Thus the taboo is *simultaneously* an inherent

preference against incest, and a social constraint.[24] While the joint production of

preferences and constraints is particularly clear in the example of taboos, it is in the same

sense that we refer to culturally produced dispositions, beliefs and behaviors in the

habitus as leading to constraining preferences. For instance, preferences derived from the

Hindu caste system may create an acceptance of hierarchy and constrain the motivation

for mobility, but these beliefs are also simultaneously external constraints; individuals

from lower castes who engage in class struggle may face severe social sanctions – we

expand on this point below [25]. Thus, culture not only provides a way to classify *other*

groups, but for members of a group to differentiate *themselves* from others. A

disadvantaged group can view its status within the hierarchy as correct and appropriate.

By positioning a group within the social hierarchy, consequently culture affects their

sense of the possible. For those at the high end of the hierarchy it provides the means to

maintain their high position, while for those at the low end it can limit aspirations, create

discrimination, and block mobility. As Bourdieu argues culture, therefore, is a form of

capital.

Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital represents an extension of the idea of capital to

all forms of culturally derived power.[26] Cultural, social and symbolic resources can be

drawn on by individuals and groups in order to maintain and enhance their position in the

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[24] See Douglas (1966, 1984) for a classic exposition on this theme. The incest taboo is now almost universally applied, but was clearly not the rule among Egyptian Pharaohs or the Inca leaders who were usually the children of brother-sister unions.

[25] The economist Piketty (1995) has an interesting model which formally shows that it is possible for societies with the same objective opportunities to forever maintain different beliefs about those opportunities, precisely because the differences in beliefs lead to differences in actions.

[26] Klamer (this volume) and Throsby (2000) use this term in a slightly different sense more akin to view of capital as an asset unrelated to class structures.

social order. As in the case of physical capital, these are valued resources and often become objects of struggle. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital has three states: it can be *embodied*, as "the ensemble of cultivated dispositions that are internalized by the individual through socialization and that constitute schemes of appreciation and understanding"[27], it can be *objectified* , as books, music, scientific instruments, etc. that require cultural capital for their use, and it can be *institutionalized* in the credentialing systems of educational establishments. Once cultural capital is embodied and institutionalized, it can be accessed by others within the group. It can also be used as a form of domination. Bourdieu calls this use of capital "symbolic violence" where dominant groups have the capacity to "impose the means of comprehending and adapting to the social world by representing economic and political power in disguised, taken-for-granted forms."

Bourdieu distinguishes between the different influences that Social Capital and Cultural capital have on inequality[28]. Social capital emphasizes the social networks available to people to access and mobilize resources, and contributes to inequality because elites are able to access internal and external social networks that are more powerful and wealthy. By contrast, the poor have less influential networks that, while helping them cope with the vicissitudes of life, restrict their chances for mobility.   Different groups within a social system can have different types of social capital, and, because it can be bequeathed, it plays an important role in the reproduction of inequality. It is

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[27] See Bourdieu (1990) and Swartz (2000)

[28] It is important to note that Gudeman, among other anthropologists, prefers to use the word "base" instead of cultural and social "capital" because they "make the base, which consists of incommensurate things, into a commodity or resource endowment that actors bring to the bar of exchange," and this "marketize" it (See Gudeman, 2002 (discussion of Sen and Appadurai in http://www.cultureandpublicaction.org).

contextualized – because it co-mingles with *habitus* and cultural capital. It can be used

for constructive purposes – to facilitate collective action or to improve economic

productivity -- but also for destructive purposes by perpetuating symbolic or actual

violence[29].

Here we should make an immediate clarification. There is a tradition of work on "the

culture of poverty" that attributes the persistence of poverty to the cultural attributes of

poor groups. As discussed in this volume by both Mary Douglas and Lourdes Arizpe, a

poverty diagnosis that "blames the victim" has not proved fruitful, either on empirical or

ethical grounds[30]. Poor people display a remarkable capacity to adjust to extraordinarily

difficult circumstances and it is incorrect to characterize their poverty as deriving from

some unchangeable inherited attribute. However, it is the case that conditions of poverty

and inequality can be a product of cultural processes, and culture, economic conditions

and power can interact to sustain disadvantage. This can be demonstrated by two classic

examples – caste and race.

Let us expand on the idea of the Hindu caste system that we touched on above. The

French anthropologist Louis Dumont (1970), in his seminal work on caste, argued that it

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[29] This approach to social capital is somewhat different from that of Putnam(1993), for whom social capital is seen as a "stock" of social norms and networks, from which people can draw to improve their incomes, which can be "built" to facilitate economic growth and development (Grooteart, 1998). This version of social capital has been criticized for not being sufficiently concerned with issues of class distinction and power (Fine (2001), affected by reverse causality (the link may go from wealth to more group activity just as much as the other way around) (Portes 1998, Durlauf 2001), and for not recognizing that it can be both destructive and constructive (Portes 1998). See Woolcock (1997) for a survey of the term social capital – particularly in its applications to Development, and Woolcock and Narayan (2002) for a discussion of the potential role of social capital in economic development from the World Bank's perspective, Harriss (2001) for a stringent critique of the World Bank's use of the concept, and Bebbington et al (2004) for a defense.
[30] As Arizpe notes, it is probably unfair to attribute such a view, or indeed a reified notion of the role of culture to Oscar Lewis, who coined the "culture of poverty" phrase.

exemplifies *Homo Hierarchicus* – where a belief in the rightness of the caste hierarchy is deeply internalized by both upper *and lower* castes.[31] In Dumont's view, Hindu beliefs, perpetuated by Brahmin upper castes, attribute the station of a person's birth to the stock of his or her rightness of conduct in previous lives – in other words to the person's *karma*. Persons born very low in the caste hierarchy deeply internalize this hierarchy and do little to question it, since they lack an ideology of equality. Any sense of mobility then derives only by behaving according to the conduct ordained for one's particular caste and station, which builds up the stock of good *karma* and increases the chances of having a more satisfactory birth in the next life. This perpetuates the caste hierarchy with little dissent. Constraining preferences, which are a function of the dominant ideology, foster an internalized acceptance of one's low (or high) birth.

The second example comes from the economist Glenn Loury's work on the perpetuation of racial inequalities in the United States. Loury has assessed the range of mechanisms that underlie persistent differences in well-being between blacks and whites. These are reflected in significantly higher rates for blacks in mortality (infant, maternal and young male), poverty, victimization, incarceration and teenage pregnancy. Race is interpreted as a socially constructed phenomenon in which "inheritable body markings ... have come

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[31]Dumont's analysis has been criticized by various scholars for being too textually derived and not allowing for resistance and mobility among lower castes, but it is recognized as being one of the seminal works of Indian sociology. We use it here more as an illustration of our conceptual argument rather than as an empirical characterization of the modern Indian caste system. For a discussion of more recent work on caste that emphasizes "difference" rather than "hierarchy" see Gupta (2000). Dirks (2001) argues that the modern caste system is largely a product of British colonial rule and should not mistaken for an entirely "traditional" form of social organization.

to be invested in a particular society at a given historical moment with social meaning."[32] Persistent racial differences have to be understood in terms of " the tacit presumption of an essentialist cause for racial inequality, ascribing to blacks .. the virtual social identity that they are, in some sense, 'damaged goods' ".[33] This can work in many ways. Racial stereotyping can help explain how rational responses linked to race can lead to self-confirming patterns of behavior, in interactions between members of the same and different groups, whether in work, on the street or at school.[34] This can be reflected in the norms and behaviors within poorer black communities, for example in patterns of behavior that are valued on the "street" that are associated with violence, early sexual initiation and teenage pregnancy. These preferences and behaviors are not a consequence of a preexisting "culture of poverty" of the group, but of the historical processes that produced them.[35] The perpetuation of difference, especially in the developmental disadvantage faced by blacks, has to be explained by stigma that "inclines one to look for insidious habits of thought, selective patterns of social intercourse, biased processes of social cognition, and defective public deliberations when seeking a cure."

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[32] For a recent synthesis see Loury (2002a)—the quote is from p. 20. See also Loury (1999) for an elaboration with respect to social exclusion in relation to economic thought. See also Loury's contribution to the conference on Culture and Public Action (Loury, 2002b).

[33] See Loury (2002a) p 159

[34] See also the work of the social psychologist Steele (1999) on "stereotype threat" among African American students. He presents experimental evidence that poor performance of black students can reflect not ability or training but "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype." Hoff and Pandey (2003) conduct a related experiment with low and high caste children in rural North India. They find that when children are made explicitly aware of their caste status low castes y under-perform high castes in completing mazes. However, when children are put in anonymous groups where caste status is not announced, the performances of high and low castes is not significantly different.

[35] See Anderson (1990 and 1999) for an ethnographic analysis of the workings of interactions between blacks and whites in poor, violent neighborhoods.

As this brief review shows, while economists and social theorists come from different methodological traditions, developments in both fields have begun to emphasize the implications of relational behavior for the distribution of income and power, and for economic action more generally. This offers the possibility for a constructive cross-disciplinary dialogue, away from the old debates on the relative virtues of methodological individualism and holism to a more fundamental interchange about how best to conceptualize the nexus between social structure and individual action in human agency. And how this sheds light on the causes of human deprivation. It is at this level of dialogue that we hope the contributions to this volume can be placed.

The Evolution of Development Practice

We turn next, briefly, to development practice where a number of strands parallel the patterns of thought described above. As Arizpe discusses in her contribution, the UN system has been a central domain for discourse over culture, a discourse that reflects a tension between the universalistic principles of the founders and the practical realities of a club of members with diverse cultures. Attempts to resolve the tension have taken the form of declaring a set of universal rights and principles (some of which are inconsistent with the "cultures" of its members) and, at the same time, declaring the equal claim of every diverse culture to be respected. A similar ambivalence is seen in the allocation of responsibility for culture to one agency—UNESCO—rather than seeing culture as affecting most of the UN's areas of concern. While UNESCO is perhaps best known for its work on cultural heritage, it has also contributed to important syntheses of the role of culture, involving respect for diversity and interactions with markets, that are consistent

with the themes here (UNESCO, 1998). Meanwhile in the Human Development Reports, the UNDP has helped popularize Sen's broadened conception of ends and means in the development process.

Within some development agencies, there has long been a practical recognition that good development practice needs to take account of social factors. For example many European bilaterals—including those from the Nordic countries, the Dutch and the British—have both advocated and supported attention to social and political conditions. This was facilitated by the work of Development anthropologists and sociologists who played an influential role in pressing for more culturally-sensitive and socially-aware form of policy making (Hoben 1982, Cernea 1985). Also important was the focused attention on respecting the cultures of indigenous groups in the design of policy and projects that might affect them —with the development of specific guidelines on approaches to engage and debate with such groups (see Alkire, this volume). By the second half of the 1990s, World Bank practice was illustrative of broader trends in international development, with widespread use of participation in a range of sectors— from water to social funds—rising attention to issues of social capital, increasing use of participatory research within country-based poverty analyses and more recently a scaling up of community based development[36]. Culture as a concept began to make inroads into thinking about policy (see Serageldin and Tabaroff, 1994) and was explicitly developed as a theme by James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank (Wolfensohn 1998).

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[36] This approach has been deeply influenced by views from Participatory Development of which Robert Chambers has been an important proponent (Chambers, 1999). Cooke and Kothari (2001) and Abraham and Platteau (in this volume) are sharply critical of the alacrity with which this approach has been appropriated by development agencies.

Many of these patterns in thought and practice were synthesized in the World Bank's millennial World Development Report (World Bank, 2002) on poverty. This report introduced the concept of "empowerment" as one of the central pillars of poverty-focused development. To a significant extent these conceptions merely caught up with thinking that had been current in the UNDP's Human Development Reports for several years.   As part of the background work for the 2002 World Development report the Bank supervised a broad compilation of participatory research in the Voices of the Poor which signaled a cultural shift in the Bank's practice toward seeking to "listen" rather than to "tell."[37]

There remains, however, a large gap between how culture in the development process has been conceptualized and implemented. Cultural notions, sometimes informed more by concerns that arise in the course of managing a project than by the scholarship on the subject, are now routinely incorporated in practice. Yet, despite the important exceptions noted above, academic anthropologists seem focused on critiquing Development rather than engaging with it constructively. And policy economists, for the most part, either treat culture as emblematic of a tradition-bound constraint on the development process, or ignore it altogether. Summarizing the contributions to this volume, we now turn to some ideas on how to close the gap in, both, thinking and practice.

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[37] See Narayan et al (2001), Narayan et al (2001). Brock and McGee (2002) provide a thoughtful critique.

The Links Between Culture and Human Well-Being: Learning from the Contributions to this Volume[38]

Amartya Sen, in the opening chapter, provides an overview of the role of culture in Development. He extends his work on capability, freedom and agency by moving the discussion from *why* culture matters to *how* it matters both in the ends and means of Development. Culture is a constitutive part of the good life and a factor in the construction of value. It is also an instrumental influence on the behavior of individuals, firms and governments. He shows how the deterministic view of culture's impact on development, as exemplified by Harrison and Huntington, is inconsistent with the historical record. Societies with distinct cultural experiences have shown a capacity to adapt to new demands and opportunities within the development process, including the demands of capitalist development in an integrating world. But this does not imply that culture does not matter or is simply malleable to material conditions. At a point in time culture can have a potent influence on the behaviors of groups, of businesses[39] and of the state, for good and ill.   Culture also affects how countries interact with one another. Interaction and trade between countries and the hybrid cultures that result can significantly improve the quality of life[40]. But when trade occurs within global asymmetries of power then there are two obvious reactions – "submissive supplication"

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[38] The contributions are summarized here in a sequence that reflects the narrative logic of this chapter and are not in the order that they are presented in the book.

[39] The study of "business cultures" is an important part of research and teaching in business administration and management.   Tushman and O'Reilly (1997), for example, argue that cultural norms of behavior are important to understanding the success of highly successful firms such as the US department store of Nordstrom, or the delivery firm of Fedex. These cultures form part of the "fit" between a firm's characteristics and strategic and competitive behaviors.

[40] See Tyler Cowen (2002) for more on this. Looking at the relationship between trade and culture, he makes the case that free trade and globalization do not lead to the destruction of traditional cultures but to a new cultural hybridity that is mutually beneficial - and provides several examples where this has happened.

where the economically powerful culture dominates the less powerful one, or a withdrawal into an imagined authentic identity as a resistance to globalization. Both are less preferable to a process of "free and informed choice, aided by public discussion, critical scrutiny and a participatory political environment." Furthermore it is important to focus on the "institutional demands of cultural democracy" – basic education, free media and free participation via elections and basic civil rights.

Arjo Klamer, in his essay, builds on one of Sen's points that culture is an end in itself – a factor in the construction of value. He focuses on the ability of culture to inspire, express, and symbolize collective memory and identity. While he focuses on cultural products, this has more general application. A cultural lens permits a recognition of this value in a country's heritage -- its monuments, museums, sacred sites, expressive and artistic traditions. They contribute directly to well-being in more than an economic sense. This presents a particular development challenge – how do we assess the inherent value of culture[41]? To what extent should a country invest in taking care of its cultural heritage? The question is particularly difficult for a poor country facing tradeoffs in its ability to provide basic necessities of life such as good health, education and jobs. As Sen argues, sometimes entities with an inherent cultural value may also have an economic value, for example as tourist sites, but there remains a need to assess their cultural value independent of their economic worth. Klamer emphasizes the centrality of interactions between different actors in the development of valuations within social

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[41] See Throsby (2000) for the valuable insights that the field of Cultural Economics brings to this point.

groups. This echoes a broader theme of the book on the role of debate, participation and

deliberation to make choices[42].

 It is important to keep in mind, however, that the valuation of cultural goods may differ

considerably across social classes and the deliberate propagation of culture and heritage

goods that are primarily consumed by the elite may help reproduce inequality by

reinforcing economic hierarchies with cultural distinctions. Thus, if one of the goals of

development is to reduce the incidence of poverty and inequality, access to cultural goods

should be distributed equally to all groups and classes. Similarly a monument or a sacred

site may be politically charged, a symbol of great importance to a sub-culture that seeks

to become dominant and simultaneously a symbol of oppression to another group. On

the other hand, as Sen points out, they can also be potent symbols of tolerance. Thus,

precisely because they have a value beyond the economic, cultural goods can have

externalities that are both good and bad. Policy makers should take care to understand

these externalities well before committing resources to their propagation or preservation.

Mary Douglas, provides a new synthesis of her thinking on Culture Theory to examine

the co-production of preferences and constraints in the perpetuation of poverty, and

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[42] Expressive traditions and heritage are also, of course, means to an end. Sociologists since Durkheim (1912) have argued that collective celebrations and heritage serve an important function by providing a site where communities reify their group identity. Turner (1982), for instance, argues that when a social group celebrates a particular event it "celebrates itself" by "manifesting in symbolic form what it conceives to be its essential life."   Thus, cultural events may serve to build social cohesion by reinforcing ties within a community.   By providing a space where everyone can view everyone else's behavior they also generate common knowledge and help solve the coordination problems inherent in collective action Chwe (1998). In this sense they help build the capacity for collective action. Thus, at the village level, expressive traditions like festivals and other collective rituals can enhance social cohesion and build trust while providing an arena in which families can maintain and enhance their social status (Rao, 2001a and 2001b). For these reasons, "culture as expression" is an important component of "culture as identity" and requires serious attention from policy makers.

Marco Verweij in his appendix to the chapter provides some applications of Culture

Theory to Development topics. Douglas' chapter can be seen as a critique (or an

extension) of some thinking on institutions by economists. She employs a four-fold

"grid-group" classification of sub-cultures ranging in increasing order from weak groups

to strong groups on the X axis, and descending from strong grids (hierarchical structures)

to weak grids on the Y axis.   Therefore a sub-culture on the bottom-left cell with a weak

grid and weak group would be "individualist". A sub-culture on the upper right cell with

strong grid and strong group would be "hierarchical." Douglas argues that her four-fold

classification presents a way out of the methodological individualism/holism debate

because it permits strategy and action to occur within a social structure, and critiques the

individualist-collectivist dichotomy prevalent in the work of economists such as Greif

and North as incomplete. She further argues that most human societies can be sorted

within this grid-group framework, and that the interaction and co-existence of their sub-

cultures forms a useful way to understand the "joint production of meaning" in a society,

because the cells are constantly in a process of contestation, coordination and

collaboration. One possible equilibrium in this process is when "connecting networks"

between the four cells break down – when "trust has been betrayed", "disappointment has

replaced hope" or "when the freedom to choose has been eliminated."   This can lead to a

"culture of apathy" that is "completely incapable of development." Understanding this

culture of apathy is, therefore, key to understanding the link between culture and

development, and inter-cultural dialogue is absolutely essential to foster the development

process.

In refuting Douglas' critique of work in economics, an economist could reasonably say that putting ideas into concise and parsimonious game-theoretic models, as Greif and others do, necessarily requires a compromise towards simplicity. Therefore, Douglas's critique may be a critiquing a modeling strategy rather than a paradigm. As Greif, Chwe (2001) and others have shown game theory, while based on methodological individualism, can still provide powerful explanations of social phenomena, and future work by economists may well come closer to Douglas' multi-dimensional conception of social and cultural life.

In a different take on what we have called "constraining preferences," Timur Kuran, in this volume and elsewhere (Kuran, 1995), argues that the constraint is not internalized values and preferences, but a suppression of voice. The preferences of groups who are less vocal, but perhaps in the majority, could be suppressed because of "preference falsification" where an unwillingness to engage with a more aggressively enforced dominant perspective restricts their ability to express their true beliefs. In order to avoid the sanctions that come from expressing a perspective that could lead to confrontation, groups with less voice simply lie. This suggests the need for a process of discovery of what different groups believe and value, and a recognition of where there are genuine choices to be made. Kuran's example of a more liberal majority in Islamic societies being silenced by the voices of a radical minority is clearly a case of preference falsification. "Man in the street" interviews conducted by journalists in repressive dictatorships where the interviewees express strong support for the regime are another.

When those beliefs are internalized and become part of the value system of all groups, we would call them as constraining preferences.

Carol Jenkins provides another arena where such forms of external, and internalized, discrimination and stigma can affect public policy. She examines the recent history of HIV/AIDS, and action to deal with this epidemic, from the perspective of two cultures that lie at the center of both the spread of the epidemic and the shaping of public action to deal with it: the wide variety of sexual subcultures, and the culture of injecting drug users. This is a powerful example for this volume, not only because of the importance of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but because of its documentation of the nature of subcultures of weak or underrepresented groups and of how these are typically unrecognized or stigmatized by mainstream society. This stigma contributes to the perpetuation of the epidemic. In a vivid demonstration of a broader phenomenon— Jenkins shows how policy interventions are ineffective because dominant actors impose interventions on excluded groups that reflect their biases and stereotypes. Effective approaches, such as those in Sonagachi, would recognize the internal cultural logic of groups at high risk for HIV-AIDS transmission, and engage with affected people directly in a manner that does not require "a slavish adherence to traditional codes."

Note that, while cultural and economic factors can mutually reinforce inequality and power differences and make them resistant to change, this does not mean that cultural and economic structures remain static. Mobility and change exist even in the most rigid societies. Household survey data in developed and developing countries have

established, for instance, that there can be significant movement up and down the income

scale, even while the overall distribution remains stable.[43]   Entire groups may also

demonstrate collective mobility – but the pace of this is typically glacial. For instance, in

the caste system, Srinivas (1966) explores how caste mobility occurs in the form of an

identity dynamic where upwardly mobile lower castes gradually acquire the behaviors,

markings, and other external attributes of upper castes so that, over the long run, they are

indistinguishable from them. The memory of their original lower caste status gradually

fades. But this mobility occurs not by challenging the dominant ideology, but by a

gradual process of identity switching, that results in an ideological transformation. The

newly minted upper caste group often loses all memory of ever being lower caste. Its

preferences now reflect those of upper castes[44].

Moreover, constraining preferences do not necessarily impose a passive acceptance of

fate on poor and subordinate groups – and resistance is itself often a cultural process.

Staying within the caste system, an example of this is in the Virasaiva or Lingayat

movement founded by the poet-saint Basava in the 12th century in Karnataka in Southern

India. Opposition to heredity-based caste discrimination was the explicitly stated

ideology of the movement, and this was expressed in a series of devotional poems or

vacanas which created a space within the Hindu way of life that went beyond caste-based

divisions. A well-known poem by Basava says, "*Oh Look Not to Caste! For who could*

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[43] There is a significant literature in economics on mobility; see Fields (2001) for a discussion, and Bowles and Gintis (2002) for a review.

[44] Hirschman (1970) discusses how this may also happen at the individual level in a process of "evolutionary individualism, in which "..the successful individual who starts out at a low rung of the social ladder, necessarily leaves his own group behind as he rises; he 'passes' into, or is 'accepted' by, the next higher group. He takes his immediate family along, but hardly anyone else. Bloch and Rao (1993, 2002) have models of these ideas.

say, anyway, what he had been in birth's past" (Michael, 1992). Thus, Virasaivasism rejected caste by arguing that God does not differentiate across groups.[45] So long as people at both ends of the hierarchy buy into this ideological argument, group-based divisions can be circumvented without conflict —but this is typically not the case.

Scott (1985), drawing on a study of the beliefs and behaviors of Malaysian peasants, has argued that the lack of overt activism by subordinate groups does not necessarily reflect acceptance of the existing social order. While the poor may view the constraints that they face as inevitable and internalize them, they may also have a strong sense that the status quo is unjust. Scott argues that it is important to distinguish what they view as *just* from what they view as *possible*. This sense of injustice, coupled with a recognition of the inevitability of fate, results in subtle, "everyday" forms of resistance that serve to moderate the authority of dominant groups without completely overturning the system.[46] Moreover, resistance has over the centuries has often turned to revolution – as can be seen in the history of social movements, protests and revolts that have sought to overturn existing social systems. In the Indian context, for instance, in those twentieth century social movements that have confronted caste differentials in favor of more equitable public action, most notably in Kerala (Heller, 2000).

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[45] The Virasaiva movement survives today and Lingayats are an important political force in the state of Karnataka. However, caste based distinctions seem to have crept back into the Lingayats over the last millennium - for instance, while conducting field work in a Lingayat village Rao found that it had a well defined caste hierarchy with Brahmin Lingayats, Potter (*Kumbhara*) Lingayats, Artisan (*Achari*) Lingayats, etc.

[46] Scheper-Hughes (1992) in her work on life in a Brazilian shanty town critiques Scott by arguing that goal of such "weapons of the weak" is not *resistance* but *existence*. She believes that calling it resistance "runs the risk of romanticizing human suffering or trivializing its effects on the human spirit, consciousness, and will."

Arjun Appadurai's contribution to this volume, cognizant of this potential for mobility and resistance, conceptualizes a way out of constraining preferences or "cultures of apathy" - to use Douglas' term. Building on the work of the philosopher Charles Taylor on the "politics of recognition," he coins a phrase - "the terms of recognition" to describe the adverse terms by which the poor negotiate with the "norms that frame their social lives." To correct this imbalance he suggests there is a need to strengthen the capacity of the poor to exercise "voice," treating voice as a cultural capacity – because it is not just a matter of inculcating democratic norms, but of engaging in social, political and economic issues in terms of metaphor, rhetoric, organization and public performance that work best in their cultural worlds. The cultural contexts in which different groups live, form the framework of what he calls the "capacity to aspire", which is not evenly distributed. "The better off you are… the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration[47]." This is partly because the better off are better able to navigate their way towards potentially actualizing their aspirations. Thus, the capacity to aspire is, at its core, a "navigational capacity." "Voice" and the "capacity to aspire" are "reciprocally linked, with each accelerating the nurture of the other." Development then is about empowerment which has an "obvious translation: increase the capacity to aspire, especially of the poor."

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[47] Ray (2003) builds on Appadurai's ideas from an economist's perspective and argues that the "capacity to aspire" is affected by two important factors - the ability of the poor to see enough of rich behaviors in order to aspire to them, and whether achieving a higher level can be obtained with a feasible level of investment. Thus, he argues that "aspirations failures" are more likely in societies with a high level of social polarization – high diversity between the "cognitive neighborhoods" of rich and poor groups, or high levels of inequality where it is impossible for the poor to find the resources to achieve their higher level of aspiration.

For an economist, one way of understanding Appadurai's concepts is to incorporate the Becker-Stigler "opportunity cost" approach to preference change within anthropological understandings that emphasize the collective aspects of preference formation. For someone born into a social group that faces high levels of social exclusion, discrimination and material poverty, social interactions are geared toward survival and interactions within one's own group. The opportunity cost of a culture of aspiration and change may be high. One way out of this is to reduce the opportunity cost of acquiring cultures of aspiration by facilitating collective organization in a manner that expands and reinforces cultural and social capital. "The capacity to aspire" is about how a group (and the individuals within it) succeed in reducing the costs of developing a culture of aspiration by collectively envisioning their future, and their capacity to shape this future, through influencing other groups, the government, and other factors in their physical and social environment

While building the "capacity to aspire" may help break through the constraining preferences of poor groups, it does not address the problem of how different groups interact with one another within a hierarchy. Where groups have little influence, and expressions of voice remain unheard, or evince repression, the incentives for the development and exercise of such capacities are substantially reduced. In other words, the subordinate group faces adverse cultural terms of trade which affects its ability to aspire to a better life, while the dominant group faces favorable cultural terms of trade which gives it the ability to maintain its dominant position. This provides a way to interpret Appadurai's second concept of the "terms of recognition." Where poor or

subordinate groups face adverse terms of recognition from dominant groups or state structures, there is both an inhospitable environment for the development of a "capacity to aspire" and, to the extent that such voice-related capacities develop, their influence is reduced. The potential for increasing *effective* agency is limited.

Accomplishing this in practice sometimes may require an explicit and direct confrontation with sources of power and symbolic violence, because cultural and social inequalities can be very resistant to change. In their contribution, Anita Abraham and Jean-Philippe Platteau provide an example of the difficulties implementing projects that aim to increase the voice of the poor. They focus on the case of participatory local development, where communities are directly given funds to control and manage. From an extensive review of field experience, they argue that effects of such development techniques will be mediated by the cultural context in which they occur. In the cases of "traditional" communities, typical of much of Africa and "indigenous" communities in Latin America and elsewhere, threats to the established ascribed patterns of cultural difference are resisted by community leaders. Elites often capture resources, and use them to further client-patron relationships with poorer groups. In both cases some benefits can pass to poorer groups, but this can be attenuated or transformed by these culturally based processes. Passing resources to local communities presents a particular development challenge, and is likely to have disappointing effects in accelerating development and reaching the poor unless it is designed in a way that takes account of the challenge posed by culturally embedded hierarchies. There are other examples where these hierarchies have been effectively tackled, as highlighted in Appadurai case-study of

Mumbai slums or by the Sonagachi sex-workers example, but they may require more long-term and contextualized approaches than those typically implemented by development agencies.

Shelton Davis' contributes another account of a social movement, the Mayan movement in Guatemala, that attempted to change the terms of recognition of a disadvantaged group in an unequal society. Davis shows how the minority Ladinos established their dominance by imposing various forms of political, economic, and religious control on the indigenous Mayan population. Many Mayans reacted to this domination by reaffirming their ethnicity, choosing to maintain highly traditional, religion-based community cultures, rather than "passing" for Ladinos and attempting to integrate. This reaffirmation of identity then led to various Mayan resistance movements that questioned dominant interpretations of Guatemalan history and society, and by 1990's attracted international attention with the awarding of a Nobel Peace prize to one of their activists - Rigoberta Menchu. This had an important influence on debates surrounding the future of the country, contributing to the Peace Accord of 1996. It is also hopefully laying the foundation for a multi-ethnic, pluri-cultural and multi-lingual nation in Guatemala. However, there has been a strong backlash from ladinos and it is difficult to predict if the Accord will ever be effectively implemented. But there is no longer any way that Guatemala can avoid the issues raised by the Mayan movement and the Peace Accord – and Guatemala's recent development and poverty strategies have been strongly influenced by the principles embodied in the accord. This illustrates the potential effectiveness of using social movements and democratic processes to foster debate in

order to equalize culturally based inequities. It also shows that the process can be long

and difficult.

Thus, changing inequalities in agency almost always involve *interaction*s between

groups, with the state playing a key role, either responding to pressures from below, or

initiating changes in the terms of recognition. This message links the culturally informed

perspectives of this volume to work in political science that emphasizes the need to

conceptualize change in terms of the joint interactions between state and society, in

contrast to either state-centered or society-centered approaches.[48]

The contribution in this volume by Fernando Calderón and Alicia Szumkler further

develops the theme, with a particular focus on the role of political cultures as either

forces for the reproduction or transformation of inequalities. They argue, like Davis, that

most political cultures in Latin America are deeply intertwined with structures of social

and economic inequality, which form part of the mechanism for the perpetuation of

inequities in income and agency. They interpret these as a product of histories of social

and cultural exclusion, that can sometimes be exacerbated by the workings of market

forces, which leads to an argument for achieving more effective poverty reduction

through patterns of cultural change that shift the terms of recognition for different groups

and strengthen the voice of poorer groups through the development of "deliberative

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[48] Jonathan Fox (1992) reviews the theories of state-society interactions in the context of a Mexican case study and argues that effective change occurs in the context of a "sandwich movement", of enlightened state action from above interacting with social mobilization from below.

cultures." This is illustrated with some examples, and we will highlight one – the case of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil.[49]

Participatory budgeting is based on the principle that citizens should be directly involved in the management of public funds, and have a voice in the translation of social demands into budgetary priorities. This is done within a framework of participatory democracy where the target population every year votes on the choice of four policy priorities from a list of eight. Once the priorities are set, there is a round of open discussions, where the policies are debated and delegates chosen for the next round of deliberation. In the next round, the government presents the available budget for the following year and elects councilors to supervise and manage the budget for a one year term. Finally these deliberations are implemented by a Planning Cabinet which allocates the budget. This process of deliberative democracy has resulted in a redistribution of funds to poor areas of the city, sharply improved the quality and reach of public works and services, and reduced corruption. Thus, providing a forum for meaningful participation and debate results in a closer connection between policy makers and beneficiaries which improves the quality of public action – making policy more commonsensical to use Scott's term, while equalizing the terms of engagement.

Monica Das Gupta and her colleagues in their contribution explore another case where state intervention played a decisive role in cultural change. They examine the very different contemporary statuses of women in three countries – China, India and South Korea – which started with very similar kinship and inheritance systems and,

[49] See also Abers (2000) for a case study on political and socio-cultural change in Porto Alegre.

consequently, low levels of women's autonomy and agency. Korea successfully

achieved rapid economic growth while maintaining fundamental aspects of family

organization deeply inimical to gender equity. As a consequence, while women now have

high living standards and participate extensively in the formal labor force, they have

gained relatively little in autonomy — as symbolized by some of the lowest levels of

female legislative representation in the world. By contrast, the Indian State has a

disappointing record on raising living standards, but has been fairly successful in

encouraging gender equity. And the communist Chinese state made substantial strides in

improving women's lives, both through raising living standards as well as through a

synergistic mix of policies aimed at creating gender equity. It is noteworthy, however,

that some of these gains are being eroded in the period following the opening towards

free-market capitalism with the reaffirmation of more traditional patriarchal values.

Thus, despite similar initial conditions that are culturally determined, the nature of the

state intervention can make a substantial difference to the dynamics of agency[50].

We turn finally to the role of international agencies— bilateral development agencies

multilateral development banks, and international non-government organizations. Sabina

Alkire in her contribution to this volume explores the ethical basis for engagement in a

society of an external agent, using the World Bank as a case study.   An understanding of

culture leads to a quite different approach to the relationship between external agents and

domestic partners: from old-style advise-and-invest, to an emphasis on exploration and

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[50] While the state can influence culture, culture can also influence the state. Migdal (2001) argues, for
instance, that culture needs to be brought more centrally into understanding the endurance of the state
despite its gaping failures in addressing problems that affect large numbers of people. He refers to the
unquestioned importance to symbolic rituals to both those who govern and the governed.

discovery of local conditions, support for participatory debate on options, including those from international experience. The World Bank has been moving significantly in this direction in many areas in recent years, but still straddles old and new patterns of thought and engagement. Moreover, all powerful external development agencies have their own strong organizational cultures that have an impact on their deliberations and interactions. Unequal power relationships between donor organizations and their clients can result in policies that reflect the donor's domination of the interaction, with policies that reflect the careless application of current ideological fads rather than negotiations under equal terms of engagement. The role that this plays in development policy needs more attention and understanding from policy makers.

The Equality of Agency: Normative implications of a culturally informed approach to development

The discussion so far has been essentially positive, seeking to show how a cultural lens can inform the interpretation of development processes. Normative judgments have often been implicit, since these processes have been cast in terms of their impact on human well-being. In this final section we focus on the implications of a cultural lens for the normative assessment of well-being, and of policy.

Combining the terminology of Bourdieu and Sen, a group's cultural capital forms part of its capability set. But the implications of the role of culture on capability have not been

fully appreciated [51]. Think of Equality of Opportunity which is probably the most

important guiding principle for public action towards tackling problems of inequality and

discrimination, at least within democratic and market-oriented societies. While equality

of opportunity explicitly recognizes the possibility that group-based attributes may lead

to discrimination, the individual is assumed to be an autonomous actor, if at times tagged

to a group.   In its traditional sense, it has two interpretations according to Roemer

(1998):

- the "level-the-playing-field" view. If two individuals of equal "ability" are
  granted the same access to human and physical capital, their chances of success
  will depend solely on their effort. In this view, the role of policy is to improve
  access to schools, health care, credit, etc.
- the "non-discrimination" interpretation. Individuals competing for the same job
  should be judged solely on those attributes relevant to the job. This view
  acknowledges that individuals may have a social identity, and that
  discrimination can result from the use of demographic characteristics as social
  markers, with the result that an individual of equal or superior qualifications and
  ability to another may be passed over because of his or her race, gender or other
  group-based attribute.

A cultural lens, however, suggests that this is an incomplete way of dealing with the

relational aspects of deprivation. Inequality is not just the result of an individual's

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[51] See Sen (1992) for a broad discussion of these issues. It should be emphasized that he discusses the role of group-based structures such as class, caste or gender as influences on the capabilities of individuals.

affiliation with a group, it is also caused by how members within a group relate to one another, and how the group relates to other groups – unequal "terms of engagement". Furthermore, equality of opportunity implicitly assumes a distinction between preferences and constraints, in arguing that human beings are primarily held back, not by endogenous cultural processes, but by exogenous obstacles. Again, as we have seen above, some groups, because of the symbolic violence of dominant discriminatory ideologies, may have "constraining preferences" that restrict their "capacity to aspire." Similarly, some groups, because of problems of coordination, may lack the capacity for collective action and access to social networks that they would need to move ahead. Individuals are not just limited by obstacles to their individual effort but by *collectively* determined factors that result from ideological, cultural, historical and social factors that are beyond their immediate control.

A cultural lens thus leads us to a different principle -- "equality of agency" – which builds on "equality of opportunity" but takes into account as well the impact of the relationality of individuals, the social and cultural contexts within which they operate, and the impact of these processes on inequality and poverty. "Equality of agency" would propose that that in addition to providing equal access to human and physical capital, people are also entitled to equal access to, using Bourdieu's terms, cultural and social capital. But, since cultural and social capital are inherently relational concepts, these require group-based interventions, along the lines sketched above, that are different from the more individual based interventions that derive from the equality of opportunity perspective.

The normative implication of this discussion can now be pulled together. Greater equality of agency is a desirable, and often a necessary condition, for putting societies on a dynamic path toward greater equality of well-being. This is also likely to have at least neutral, and potentially positive, effects on processes of accumulation. This has two fundamental implications for public action:

- from a focus on individuals to a recognition that relational and group-based phenomenon shape and influence individual aspiration, capabilities, and agency;
- to provide for debate and decision-making when there are several distinct culturally determined perspectives, and in particular, assure that poorer, subordinate groups have voice and opportunities for redress.

To summarize what this book sets out to do – it seeks, via a cross-disciplinary dialogue, an ideological and practical middle ground on how a cultural lens can help improve public action to alleviate human deprivation. As in any cross-disciplinary interchange, there will be different points of view and there are some important disagreements in the perspectives represented here. For instance, Kuran, and Abraham and Platteau, have a methodologically individualist view of the world that leads to prescriptions that focus on the individual – on understanding their "true preferences" in the case of Kuran, and on freeing individuals from the yoke of oppressive elites in the case of Abraham and Platteau. Douglas, on the other hand takes a more Durkheimian view; individuals are fundamentally socially embedded beings and are limited in their ability to influence

broad trends in behavior. She therefore presents a method by which groups can be categorized and characterized in order to understand the nature of social interactions. However, as Appadurai, Sen, and others in this volume show this divide is less acute than it might appear. In recognizing the role of culture as fundamentally dynamic, endogenous, changeable, both forward and backward looking, and affecting both the ends and means of development, we see an acceptance of the social embeddedness of economic action, and of the economic embeddedness of social action. There is also deep agreement that an important implication of all this is that culture affects power relations within a society and is therefore fundamentally linked with the perpetuation of inequality.

This is a fundamental difference from previous points of view on the role of culture in development policy. The modernization perspectives that permeated development thinking in the 50's and 60's focused on using science and technology to break free of traditional cultures, the focus on free markets that was emphasized in the 80's and 90's were relatively innocent of social thought, and the views (that we call hyper-modernization) exemplified by Harison and Huntington were led by a belief that the key to progress was to break "toxic cultures." The authors in this book would not fall into any of these perspectives. The collective view of the articles in this book also provide some answers to the cultural critics of Development by providing some constructive suggestions for moving towards a culturally equitable form of development -- the focus here is less on critique and more on providing a conceptual and practical basis for finding solutions to poverty and inequality.

Thus, the contributors to this volume agree on far more than what they disagree about. To some extent this represents a shift within disciplines – economists have increasingly begun to think about the role of social and cultural interactions in human behavior, and anthropologists and sociologists have increasingly come to recognize the practical light that their disciplinary perspectives can shed on policy and positive change.   It is our firm belief that in order to address the central challenge of designing more effective development policy, economists, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists need to be more cooperatively engaged in an equal dialogue. We view this volume as a step in this direction. In the concluding chapter, we explore some of the implications of this, drawing on the contributions to this volume, for public action and research.

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