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**Cultural Attitudes and Economic Development: arguments for a pluralist  
political economy of development**

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## WHAT IS THE MATTER

Stating in the *Wealth of Nations* that *the desire of bettering our condition is a desire which, though generally calm and dispassionate, comes with us from the womb, and never leaves us till we go to the grave* Adam Smith (1973) sent a powerful message to future studies on economic development which is that, although undoubtedly a social phenomenon, the motivation for development stems from the individual, from the intrinsic nature of the human being, and, therefore, cuts across cultures and inspires us to believe that there is only one way to lead the good life. According to A. Sen (2004) Smith took into account the idea of cultural diversity in his theories but, in spite of the corroborated Smith's knowledge of other cultures, I do not believe that this can change much to the conclusion that Smith's imprint in development theory is universalistic rather than even moderately particularistic.

Neo-classical theory, despite sharing the classical rationale, has, on the contrary, clearly erased the diversity of social behaviours, because otherwise it wouldn't have been able to improve, as it did, through quantitative formalization (Nohra, 1999). This means that neo-classical economics cannot take culture into consideration because individuals are supposed to be all alike. In fact individualism as a methodology has to ignore culture; otherwise it would have to admit the existence of some entity above the individual, with influence upon his decisions. Non-economic factors, therefore, are not decisive and they should not be taken much into account in development studies. Of course nobody believes this, not even neo-classical economists. Nevertheless, they do not traditionally study the economic systems, even third-world economic systems, in the context of the overall social system.

Less orthodox views of economic development, on the contrary, incorporate research on the interaction of economic and non-economic factors, the latter including, amongst others, attitudes towards life, work and authority, patterns of kinship and religion, and cultural traditions. According to M. Todaro, *increasing national production, raising levels of living and promoting widespread employment opportunities are all as much function of the values, incentives, attitudes and beliefs (...) as they are the direct outcome of the manipulation of strategic economic variables such as savings, investment, product and factor prices and foreign exchange rates* (Todaro, 1994, p13). Although a large palette of scholars shares this interest for the interaction of culture and economic development, the leading role given to culture in development processes is undoubtedly associated with modernization theories, according to which economic development should be preceded, or at least accompanied, by cultural change. In G. Myrdal's *Asian Drama* cultural factors are at the heart of the problem because they can constitute obstacles to modernization, namely certain religious beliefs. Breeding pigs is often an ideal supplement to raising crops; therefore, the Muslim aversion to pigs, for example, strongly interferes with the efficiency of peasant farming in Asia (Myrdal, 1968). Modernization theories have been slightly covered by the dust of times, but since the turn of the millennium it seems that we are witnessing a rebirth of the cultural determinism which characterized modernization.

The new wind of the Institutionalist approach with a classical and neoclassical garment has much contributed to this rebirth. Adam Smith himself, again in the *Wealth of Nations*, states that *China seems to have been long stationary, and had probably long*

*ago acquired that full complement of riches which is consistent with the nature of its laws and institutions. But this complement may be much inferior to what, with other laws and institutions, the nature of its soil, climate and situation might admit* (Smith 1973). It is not my intention to speculate on what Smith would be willing to include in these institutions. Free market, class mobility and openness to foreign goods and influences are definitely amongst them, but I do not think that adding what is generally considered as culture to the institutions that have influence on the wealth of nations, could be taken as highly speculative. In this sense we can sustain that the idea that culture can restrain or promote the individual's natural inclination to seek enrichment has a flagrant classical inspiration. This is a step that D. Lal did not hesitate to make considering culture as an informal institution constraining human nature, which is basically self interest, in other words taking culture as an institution limiting the maximization of utility, in the case of consumers, and of profits in the case of producers (Lal, 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to shed some light over this renewed interest on culture and to propose alternative explanations to the connections established between culture and the incapacity to reach development, with the confessed motivation of contributing to send cultural determinism back to the mist and open the way to pluralist modes of development. In order to avoid misunderstandings I should probably state what I understand as being culture and economic development. Suffice to say that what I mean, here, by economic development is voluntarily narrowed to economic growth, although I personally stand for a more wide interpretation of development, and that in relation to culture, amongst its many definitions (see Ruttan 1988) I will adopt the one presented by E. de Kadt, for whom it means the shared knowledge, values, beliefs and attitudes transmitted from generation to generation, which are at the foundation of order and sense, and which allow the members of a community to behave in a convenient and acceptable manner, or at least understandable (De Kadt, 1999, p 149).

## DOES CULTURE MATTER

In one of his most famous writings W.W. Rostow stated that capital formation, taken as being at the source of economic growth and, thus, of development, is not just a question of maximizing profit, it's an attitude (Rostow, 1960). The issue, then, is to discover what the right attitude is. In the beginning of the twentieth century Max Weber's works on the Protestant ethics (Weber, 1958) led several scholars to believe that this could embody that attitude. Honesty, effort, renunciation of pleasure, willingness to save and spirit of enterprise, was the sort of attitude that could explain why development could not have started elsewhere than in those regions of Europe where the Protestant branch of Christianity was dominant. Actually, Weber himself said that he didn't want to demonstrate anything of the kind, meaning that, although these values are an important feature of the industrial revolution, it is slightly hasty to pretend that the Reform ignited economic development, adding that there was evidence that the opposite, economic development having preceded and stimulated the Reform, was true in many parts of Protestant Europe (Hénaff, 2000, p 38). The simplicity of this interaction, despite Weber's doubts, was enough, though, to convince a good set of scholars that the attitudes preached by Protestantism were essential to trigger any sort of development process and that, therefore, any developing community should adopt them.

More recently, D. Landes (2002) (2000), goes beyond the religious, and ethical, factor in development and pretends to show how other cultural features, such as national identity, scientific curiosity and the ability to apply it to economic ends, tolerance or independence from the religious dogma, can give a better explanation of the Western European precocity of development. In fact the essence of Landes' purpose, in his work, is showing why the industrial revolution took place in Western Europe (and later in the United States) and not in so many others parts of the world that, at the time, could be considered, in some regard, at the peak of civilization. An unwary reader might conclude that the most favourable attitude to development is deeply rooted in the western culture and that, therefore, the needed cultural change means the adoption of western culture. Underdevelopment, or delay in development, should, then, be the result of a strong attachment to local traditional values and beliefs, and of a refusal to adopt western culture.

From this verification to the enlightened conclusion that underdevelopment was essentially a state of mind, there was only a very small step that L. Harrison (1985) had already made in the mid eighties. Although all these new cultural determinists are clearly inspired by Weber, they do not seem to be as cautious. For them there is little room for doubts concerning the way of the causality, culture matters because culture determines development. Nevertheless, accepting that culture matters to development shouldn't imply that there has to be only one, or any, kind of causality between them. Some of the attitudes described as favourable to development may in fact be produced by development itself. R. Inglehart and W. Baker (2000) show it very clearly, pointing out not only a vast group of scholars defending each of the positions, but also numerous empirical examples of the two causality hypothesis. It seems, indeed, quite admissible that changes in the ways one produces and in the ways one consumes can lead to changes in the way one perceives its community at large and himself within it, the same happening with the ways in which the others and the world are perceived. On the other hand the fact that some attitudes and beliefs, such as the renunciation to all worldly goods in some Hindu sects, can easily be accepted as an obstacle to development, clearly plays in favour of cultural determinism.

## THE MATTER WITH CULTURE

Although this debate has been responsible for a considerable amount of printed-paper, some appealing, some other rather vain, the purpose of this essay is not to demonstrate who is right and who is wrong. The issue here is pluralism and therefore the question I ask is: Is there a culture best fit to promote development, is that culture western culture and, thus, do other cultures have to be considered as obstacles to development? In order to answer this question I will, firstly, present in which manner some of the cultural features of the third world conflict with development along the lines of the culturalist approach to development. Secondly, I will try to give a different explanation to the source of the conflicts identified above and operate a shift from an alleged intrinsic cultural incompatibility to a historically acquired resistance to an imposed vision of modernity. In order to simplify this essay I will focus on some of the most referred to cultural features that matter in a development process. These are: religion, family and patterns of kinship, and, finally, attitudes towards material advancement and entrepreneurship.

### **Religion**

A chapter on religion should imperatively start by stressing that in social science literature in general low secular influence on thought and behaviour hinders economic development in the sense that one's fate is handled by another entity than oneself and, therefore, would foster resignation and immobility. The question, therefore, has not been to determine how good or bad can religion be for development but to identify values and attitudes specific to each religious belief and compare their ability to promote development along Weberian lines. We have already mentioned the classic conclusions of the Weberian approach of the interaction of cultural factors and economic development which is that Protestant ethics and values, especially when compared to Catholic ones, played a decisive role in the development of capitalism.

In relation to the protestant advantage, M. Hénaff sustains that, in order to understand the differences between the development process in northern and southern Europe, we shouldn't look for it in the Protestantism and Catholicism opposition, as much as we should in the Roman versus Anglo-Saxon traditional law confrontation (to which we could add the Scandinavian and the ancient German law) and the political institutions that result from them (Hénaff, 2000, p 61). In the Roman tradition, human law is conceived as stemming from the order of the world. Principles are highly considered and the role of deduction and speculative abstraction is central in matters of justice and morality. In the Protestant tradition, on the contrary, priority is given to experience, to each case, to the local, to the feasible, to the experiment of all possibilities without an a priori judgement (Hénaff, 2000, p 62).

Regarding political institutions, the Roman tradition establishes the unconditional character of the sovereign's power. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, on the contrary, sovereignty is delegated (Hénaff 2000, p 62-63). In terms of the administration, the principles are the same, in the Roman tradition it is the central administration that decides all, whereas in the Anglo-Saxon tradition matters that can be decided locally need not be taken higher up in the hierarchy of the State. In England, for example, county sheriffs and judges have been elected since the 12<sup>th</sup> century whereas in

France the need is felt to designate the public servants from the centre and, very often, to make sure that they come from a region other than the one to which they were appointed (Hénaff 2000, p 62-63). This procedure is, actually, still largely followed in today's French administration.

The centrality tradition gave French kings the possibility of deciding, more or less by themselves, the nature and the level of taxes; consequently taxation struck essentially the productive population leaving the socially inactive elites free of charges. In England, on the contrary, the monarchy was obliged to negotiate with different social groups. Taxes were now decided in common and the tax burden was more equitably distributed. The fact that the government became more public and accountable also allowed higher levels of taxation than in Continental Europe (Epstein 1995, p 176). According to M. Hénaff (2000, p 63), this resulted in innovation and competitiveness with long-lasting benefits for all. From an institutional point of view this would explain why England was better prepared to launch the industrial revolution than France, in spite of the fact that their economies seemed to be growing at a similar rate during the eighteenth century (Epstein 1995, p 175).

Therefore, the noticeable differences between the southern and the northern European development processes have a political rather than a religious foundation. What seems to be the work of religion could, in fact, be the work of something else. In addition, when European Catholic countries started to show higher growth rates than Protestant ones the explanation was no longer very pertinent and what was considered a Protestant advantage became a Christian and Western advantage. Indeed, in his studies on Asia M. Weber himself would come to the conclusion that Asian values would explain why economic development was much slower there than in Europe (Weber, 1964) (Shixue, 1999) (Sen, 2004). Confucianism, for example, was bad for capitalist development, because, amongst other reasons, in its essence, it despises commerce (Lê Thành Khôi, 1992).

When Japan, whose culture is deeply influenced by Confucianism, started to grow faster than western countries the Confucian obstacle, in turn, lost its validity. From then on several works tried to demonstrate the potential of Confucian values for capitalist development. The emphasis put on education, on loyalty, on family sobriety and work ethic (Han-Yin Chang, 2003) (Jiang Shixue, 1999) (Lê Thành Khôi, 1992) (Morishima, 1982), were, then, at the source of the new Asian economic miracle. After Weber's own conclusions about the unsuitableness of Confucian values for capitalist development, the values that were supposed to have ignited Japanese economic growth were in fact very close to Protestantism, we could almost speak of an Asian version of the Protestant ethics. A new question then arose; why were the other East Asian countries profoundly influenced by Confucianism left aside of this process? Fortunately, the question didn't last for long, as countries like Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, in their turn, started to grow very fast. The only remaining doubts on the ability of Confucian values to promote economic development were related to the incapability of Continental China to join its neighbours on the same path.

In this regard, whereas Confucianism could be seen as a factor of development in Japan, in China, on the contrary, it resulted in conformism, immobility and intellectual isolation (Lê Thành Khôi, 1992, p 159). The Chinese dominant class, the Mandarins, has always been hostile to the development of capitalism because it would

jeopardize their privileges. On the contrary Japanese dominant class was composed of warriors, the Samurais, for whom Confucianism was mainly a form of government and who were eager to beat the West on its own grounds (Lê Thành Khôi, 1992). In conclusion, if Japan and China share the common Confucian cultural fund the differences between their class structures would be responsible for their different economic and social records. Therefore, religious beliefs and its values could not explain as much as class and power the reason why Japan was developing already since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and not China. History and Politics would, thus, be more decisive than culture in this case. Finally, the rapid growth rate observed in China since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to mitigate, once again, the impact of the cultural argument of underdevelopment.

At this stage, if the cultural argument shakes with Confucianism, it certainly will not fall with Hinduism, in regard not only of the extreme poverty noticeable in India but also of the notorious aspects in which any less distracted observer can point out clear obstacles to development. As referred to above, some Hindu sects display an extreme detachment in relation to material wealth which, although recognizing the radicalism of these interpretations of Hinduism, can only but lead us to the conclusion that there must be something in between this faith and economic development. In addition, vegetarianism and the consecration of cows were as much interference on farm efficiency as the aversion for pigs described amongst Muslims by Myrdal. The caste system, in turn, was responsible for social and economic immobility, namely in terms of strict labour specialization. To this we could add the fact that caste system has constituted the perfect ground for rent seeking behaviours and therefore to the waste of public money (Osborne, 2001). Regarding sacred cows and other western clichés, as naked fakirs, much could be said. Concerning the Hindu distaste for wealth the argument is not very solid as *Artha*, the possession of material goods, is one of the recognized goals of human existence in Hinduism (Lê Thành Khôi, 1992, p 161). In relation to the caste system it is not my purpose to proceed to its rehabilitation here, as this system is responsible for vast and unacceptable inequalities, but one should be very careful in associating caste with Hinduism. India's caste system is thought to have arisen through violent inter-communal struggles that relegated the vanquished to undesirable occupations (Kuran, 2004) and can be traced back to the settling of the Ganges Plain (Osborne, 2001). The religious connection one may establish between caste and religion is related to the system's remarkable stability over the time. Hinduism and its belief in reincarnation, certainly contributed to legitimize the discriminatory features of the caste system, pretending they were the just retributions for sins committed in previous lives (Kuran, 2004) (Lal, 1999), but beyond this aspect its religious foundations are quite questionable. In addition, this system appears to have absorbed a great variety of non-Hindus over the centuries (Osborne, 2001).

If development at one time could be considered a Western or Christian phenomenon there is no doubt that the classic and historical confrontation with Islam would surely bring some brighter light to the religious connection of underdevelopment. The poor attention given to education and the well known and still prevailing contempt for interest seem good enough reasons to ascribe the noticeable underdevelopment of the majority of Muslim countries to their religious beliefs. Once again, cultural determinism reveals its difficulties to deal with complexity. No religion has a particular attraction for interest, not even the Protestantism, and its prohibition, in Islam has been clearly overstated. It appears to result from fundamentalist readings of the words of the

prophet and ignorance of the concrete historical facts that, fourteen centuries ago, led to anti-interest religious precepts (Kuran, 2004, p 133). Today, in practice, and after a quarter of a century of Islamic banking experiences, their market share averages around 1% in those Muslim majority countries where both Islamic and non-Islamic types of banks are allowed (Kuran, 2004, p 123). This means that even where a great majority of the population follow strict religious precepts this doesn't seem to interfere dramatically with their economic choices concerning the use of interest. Although there seems to be a slow running away of Islam from economics, seen almost as a perversion (Al-Naquad, 2000), we have to admit that it is a relatively recent and isolated phenomenon and, therefore, to impute it to some kind of Muslim tradition of despike in relation to economic affairs is very exaggerated. One shouldn't forget that the Islamic world is responsible for some of the most important scientific improvements in the history of mankind; in economics for instance, the works of Ibn Khaldun, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, were precociously similar, in some of its conclusions, to Adam Smith's, who wrote in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Baeck, 1994).

As to attitudes towards science and education, facts seem to speak for themselves. In terms of the level of adult literacy, Muslim countries are placed far behind other countries with the same standards of economic well-being, (PNUD, 2004), and the disparity is even more striking if we compare the figures exclusively for women. I agree that when society denies girls an education it is condemning all children to be raised by ignorant mothers (Kuran, 2004, p 132), with negative consequences for society if one wants to raise the average level of education amongst the population. Nevertheless one should be very careful when relations are established between education and economic growth. If praise on education is consensually favourable to economic growth that doesn't forcibly mean that the opposite is also true, in other words, that disregard for education is incompatible with economic growth. Portugal, a southern European Catholic country living under a totalitarian regime saw its literacy rate climb from 60% to 67% of the population between 1960 and 1970 (Barreto, Preto, 1996); two figures that are comparable to the average literacy rate in Arab countries and inferior to the average rate of all developing countries in 2002. It should be added that the performance of women during this period was consistently inferior to men's, and, today, the illiteracy rate amongst them is still twice the one prevailing for men (Comissão Para a Igualdade e os Direitos das Mulheres, 2000). In spite of this very low and unequal level of education Portugal's economic performance didn't seem very much affected, and the GNP grew at an average rate of around 7% per year between 1960 and 1970 (Barreto, Preto, 1996). We have doubts that this growth pattern could have been sustainable in the future, nevertheless during the sixties Portugal was included, in accordance with international standards, in the restricted and promising group of the New Industrialised Countries.

The next question we should ask is if the connection between poor education and Islam can be established only based on the observation of poor literacy rates. Research in three villages of Kerala, in south-western India, show that where the Christian community was the largest more emphasis was given to education and, on the opposite, amidst a Muslim majority, less importance was given to it (Kurien, 1994). This research could strengthen the arguments of those that consider religion to have a strong influence on the rhythm of the development process, but P. Kurien puts forward another explanation. During the British rule of India the Muslim community was the most affected by repression and even today it is still hard to dissociate education,

bureaucracy, and medicine, from the British. Thus, what seemed to be a simple cultural rejection of progressive values is also, and perhaps mainly, the rejection of the symbols of colonial repression. On the other hand, because of the missionaries, the native Christians were accorded special favours by the colonial authorities (Kurien, 1994) and, thus, were able to grasp the advantages of investing in education much quicker. This kind of colonial discriminatory modernization in favour of Christianized populations when in contact with Muslims also seemed to have happened in Sudan (Deng, 1998), strengthening the historical and political argument in detriment of the cultural and religious.

### **Family and Patterns of Kinship**

In general terms, traditional analysis in development economics finds that the extended family, in other words kinship links beyond the nuclear family, is an obstacle to economic development. The main argument claims that it has an inhibiting effect on many of the factors that are taken to stimulate economic development such as mobility, saving, risk taking and even willingness to work for a higher price (Herrick, Kindleberger, 1983, p 102). In other words, extended family is a drag on effort (Lewis, 1955, p 114). Extended family would discourage saving, for example, because kin would have access to funds accumulated and, therefore, any effort to save, with productive investment in mind, would be vain as one would have to take into account unproductive needs resulting from the kin obligations (Moore, 1997, p 300), like financing the studies of brothers, cousins, nephews and nieces, lodge newcomers and finance the multitude of ceremonies that, for example, fill African social life (Etounga-Manguelle, 2000, p 72).

In addition, regression analysis appears to show that family scale is strongly related to corruption (Lipset and Lenz, 2000), communitarian and familistic cultures being more favourable to the development of corruption than those where individualism and self reliance prevail. This could explain the higher levels of corruption in Catholic societies, conventionally seen as mainly familistic and communitarian, when compared to Protestant ones, more individualistic. This interpretation also provides an easily understandable explanation for the African records of corruption. In relation to this last conclusion one should, nevertheless, be more careful with what is to be considered as corruption. Indeed, amidst a society where family ties are very important what is usually considered as corruption on the part of government or other officials could be seen by others as the fulfilment of traditional expectations that gifts should be given to one's family or clan members (Verhelst, Tindale, 2002).

The superiority of individualistic driven societies when compared to more familistic and communitarian societies finds another argument in the capacity of each of them in building formal institutions that supply protection to economic activity, namely commerce and especially long distance commerce. A. Greif (1993) comparing the more individualist Genovese traders with the more collectivist Maghrebi traders in medieval Mediterranean trading networks, shows why individualists were more likely to develop formal institutional enforcement mechanisms to manage their activities whereas collectivists were more likely to develop informal systems. The argument is that informal institutions like extended family, tightly connected to communitarian societies, would be less efficient in providing the security needed to nurture commerce. In East

and Southeast Asia, nevertheless, this did not seem to be an obstacle to the development of even long distance commerce; there the lack of the rule of law was effectively substituted by family ties as well as informal ties that extended beyond the family (Perkins, 2000). As a matter of fact family ties instead of constituting an obstacle to modern corporate economy are taken, even today, as one of the strengths of the East Asian economic model.

Beyond the aspects related with the positive self perception of the sociability of large family ties by its members, extended family can also be understood in terms of economic rationality. It is true that if one considers economic development as the result of individual effort only, family can easily be seen as a tick on one's motivation to progress, but if it is not the case, that is to say, if one doesn't believe in this individualistic vision of development and prefer a more realistic one, according to which, business is strongly embedded in the social relations (see Granovetter, 1992), it is possible to invert the consequences of extended family without, even, having to change one's logic. Thus, instead of simply consuming capital, kin could be a source of additional capital, families also have a central role in the promotion of skills and therefore in the formation of human capital (Bates, 2000, p 131) (CDD-Ghana, 2001, p 28). Employees might work harder because of a sense of obligation to the family; suppliers could provide unusually favourable credit terms to kinsman because they expect them to feel obligated not to let them down. What should be stressed is that individualistic values are not indispensable to economic development, or to capitalist development according to the Weberian model, on the contrary, non individualistic values can also promote development, even capitalist development, and the East Asian communitarianism (Han-Yin Chang, 2003) from Japan to Singapore, is the living proof of that.

Furthermore, in the absence of proper formal institutions extended family provides a system of insurance, or social security, against common setbacks of life, either economic or not, such as crop failure, unemployment, high death rates (Herrick, Kindleberger, 1983, p103) (Lal, 1999) or migrant hazard (Bates, 2000, p 131), it is also an institution for contract enforcement and for reducing transaction costs and finally a financing institution, with a special reference for the system of the tontine, a rotating credit pool that mobilises funds for business start-up, which demonstrates not only the vigour of community initiative but also the importance of the role of women who, in Western Africa, dominate this sector. The existence of some kind of formal safety net that could mitigate bad fortune would, as a matter of fact, probably contribute to a change in the family patterns, more effectively than many kinds of active policy. Pioneers of development studies P. Bauer and B. Yamey stated, as early as in 1957, that *as the economy develops and becomes increasingly removed from the subsistence stage, the concept of the family narrows and the number of people with whom individuals recognise family obligations tends to become smaller* (Bauer, Yamey, 1957, p66-67).

One last remark; in September 2004 at a conference on the Development Concept, at Bordeaux, France, a colleague in the audience sustained that extended family fosters demographic growth and that is one of the major problems of the developing countries, namely in Africa. Indeed, it is not hard to accept that the positive valuation of a large family jeopardizes the efforts of birth control policies. If the size of the family matters a lot then one should normally expect that this would induce high demographic growth. Nevertheless, one can turn the argument upside down. In

extended family it's not the number of children of the nuclear family as much the extension of the family ties that counts and, therefore, the benefits of family should not impose on one to have as many children as one can, although it undoubtedly exerts a certain pressure. In the absence of institutions that provide a safety net the substitution of the extended family by the nuclear one would probably foster demographic growth even more, because one would now depend only on one's children, in the old age for example, and no longer on a myriad of other relatives. I do not believe that a shift in the family patterns is a condition for slowing demographic growth. A rise in schooling – especially concerning women – a growth in family income, a reduction in infant mortality and the creation of some sort of social security system, have more chances of inflecting the demographic trend in developing countries (Todaro, 1994, p 201).

Trying to change the cultural patterns in order to accommodate the family unit to the goal of accumulation, which is to privilege the nuclear family, might, then, be a wrong prescription because, in the absence of a set of improvements in people's lives, as seen above, the result could be the concomitance of poverty and social isolation (Moore, 1997, p 319-320). Thus, the transposition of some modernist ideals, as founding the housing policy on the construction of apartment buildings, clearly presuming a nuclear family, in other words a western European type of family, not only might aggravate the living conditions of the third world population, because it cuts the safety net which contributes to alleviating poverty, but also becomes a threat to cultural pluralism, imposing individualistic behaviour and excluding other forms of interaction of man and the social system.

### **Attitudes Towards Material Advancement and Entrepreneurship**

Recapturing the words of W. W. Rostow (1960) at the beginning of this text, development is supposed to be mainly an attitude. L. Harrison (1985) complies, and for him underdevelopment is a state of mind. The time has come to deepen slightly this matter. According to D. Etounga-Menguelle (2000) (2002) a high degree of fatalism, irrationalism and occult beliefs and a focus on the past and present not on the future, all taken to be part of the Africanity, contribute to a bad general attitude towards material advancement and entrepreneurship. In an earlier work, W.W. Rostow (1952) identified six individual or collective propensities supposed to demonstrate the connection between non-economic variables and economic growth. One of these six was the propensity to seek material advancement. The argument is very plain; if one doesn't really aim for wealth one cannot reach it.

For development economists it has always seemed strange that people would not bother to work for more wages once they had earned enough to pay the tax or that poor farmers would spend their exiguous income on lavish festivals instead of investing in their land (Douglas, 2004). It seemed as if people in developing countries didn't seem interested in greater prosperity, that other goals were better valued. Indeed, in the usual vision of the traditional society it is commonly accepted that, here, economic imperatives are less important than the symbolic ones (Freyssinet, 1966). In traditional societies agriculture, for example, is not just simply an activity with nutritional, or otherwise productive, ends. Men manipulate instruments as much as they perform rites (Dockès, Rosier, 1988). In these rites men relate, not only to nature and the divinities, but also to the ancestors. In the Island of New Britain, Papua-New Guinea, amongst the

Mae Enge people, horticulture does not signify the transformation of the matter, a fight against nature, but an exchange with the ancestors and the gods, and the good or bad results of the harvests depend on whether they have been well honoured or not (Godelier, 1986, p 55). Amongst the Dinka of Sudan, for example, power and wealth must serve moral and social ends or else they do not confer the community's respect on the holder (Deng, 1998, p 114).

Instead of any consideration on the reasons for such behaviour, one should stress that, again, this is especially crucial if one considers self interest the only engine of development. The question of whether development derives from individualism or, on the contrary, results from a collective project, arises once again. Explaining why Singapore has succeeded in development, Han-Yin Chang (2003) states that the communitarian character of economic policy played an important role, and he adds that one of the major aspects of this communitarianism is to *define the interest of the whole nation as of paramount importance and perceive individuals' interest derivable from the well being of the nation* (Han-Yin Chang, 2003, p 91). The ways in which society evolves need not to be singular, there is ample room for plural options as the different experiences of the West and the East have shown.

Anchored in the individual or in the collective, any society can only hope for better times if it holds some kind of perception of the future. There is some kind of consensus that without it, the course of events can hardly be affected, allowing long term fatalism to get installed (Rostow, 1960) and condemning society to immobility and deprivation. In rural traditional culture there is a strong entanglement of the present and the past, the future often being another display of this entanglement; the African for instance, is so anchored in his ancestral culture that he is convinced that the past can only repeat itself (Etounga-Manguelle, 2000). Therefore, one worries little about the future, and concentrates more in revering the ancestors and the old. In Madagascar, for example, one feels obliged to bring the newborn's placenta to the grave of the ancestors in order to respect the tradition (Rakotoarisoa, 2002), as if saying that the future is nothing but an eternal recommencement. Almost all around Africa the land traditionally belongs to the community, although it may be individually exploited; the symbolic justification for this is that it belongs in fact to the ancestors, the chief being some sort of keeper (Ayittey, 1992, p 2). The Dinka, in southern Sudan, extol their ancestors in such a way that no member of this community would ever claim to have done better than his forefathers (Deng, 1998, p 110). Another display of this attraction for the past can be found in the somewhat reification of the pre-colonial Africa, considered by A. Kabou (1991) as a symptom of the African incapacity to access modernity. Although she admits that this is also a subterfuge to overcome the shame of colonization.

So Africans turn to the past rather than to the future, but why? Why should Africans spend their money in their tomb in preference to investing it in commodities or assets? Probably because life is dramatically ephemeral! Indeed, life expectation in sub-Saharan Africa is very low and almost unchanged during the last 35 years, the average for the period of 1970-75 was of 45 years, and for the period 2000-2005 the estimated average was of 46 years (PNUD, 2004). In addition, almost half of its population has no probability of reaching the age of 40 (PNUD, 2002). With these poor health conditions, how can one seriously blame Africans for not thinking too much about the future? It is well accepted that amidst an uncertain universe, agents tend to prefer both the short term and intergenerational investments (Hugon, 2001, 58). In the short term they tend to

pick the options that preserve the greatest amount of possibilities to change the route or simply to back up, therefore, there is a strong preference for liquidity and a choice for monetary and financial assets rather than for productive assets (Hugon, 2001, p 58). Families also favour the extreme long-term options, especially betting on people, either saving for education or plainly investing on demographic growth.

That is why what seems, on a first glance, like irrationality to economists is probably just another form of rationality. The western view of rationality describes it in a way that makes it almost a synonym of economic efficiency; therefore, any act involving *economic* means without concern for the maximization of productive output or the minimization of the former, in other words for the multiplication of an initial asset endowment, is seen as irrational. An act can be considered rational if it combines efficacy, efficiency and consistency. Efficacy literally means that it produces the expected outcome, therefore it needs to take people's goals into account. Efficiency is a quantitative calculation in terms of the effort and time involved in the process of attaining a goal, and, finally, consistency requires that one should make a choice of means that is conducive to the goal, and that, while pursuing an objective, one shouldn't jeopardize another. All of this features the human form of life (Nussbaum, 1995, pp 76-80) and there is no a-priori reason to believe that the major part of the world's population is deprived of these characteristics. What differs from place to place, or from culture to culture, is not so much the degree of rationality, but just the ways in which people conduct their affairs and the purposes considered (Tshikuku, 2001, p 9).

Thus, when one notices that a typical African parcel of land is encumbered by several crops against the grain of technological rationality, or when the farmer minimizes risks instead of maximizing yields, one should take into consideration that under the constraint of a very uncertain environment the rational behaviour is, precisely, to ensure the strongest level of security to the group, and the highest level of protection to the environment (De Kadt, 1999, p 153) (Gu-Konu, 1984, p 490). Therefore, if people's behaviours do not match what traditional microeconomics considers rational, should we conclude that people are wrong?

The alleged irrationality of the economic behaviour in developing countries can also be explained by history and social structure, repelling as above the cultural argument. If an African worker, or any other worker in the third world for this purpose, works less when offered a higher pay, one shouldn't immediately ascribe it to a cultural related irrationality or to a weak work ethic. The mercantilists in seventeenth century Europe also noticed that when the wage went up workers worked less, and dedicated their gleaned leisure to alcohol and prostitutes. They concluded that the only way to keep them interested in production was to pay them poorly, just enough for them and their family to survive. William Petty, for example, laid the blame on the worker's intrinsic low level of morality, whereas the high level of mortality and the almost inexistent social mobility that rendered effort useless and incited the workers to seize the day, could more convincingly explain this behaviour. M. Godelier (1986,) shows why the fact that the ancient Greeks despised work was not as much related to some cultural, or philosophical, option, as to the connection they established with slavery, the main supplier of labour in Greek's economy. This negative relation with work is, therefore, more connected to class differentiation than to some attitude related to a cultural foundation of ancient Greeks' society. Is there any reason to believe the story should be radically different in Africa, or in the rest of the third world?

The hundreds of years of slavery that affected Africa, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, first by the hand of the Arabs, to feed the labour markets of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and by the Europeans onwards, to feed the labour markets of the Americas is not such a distant reality after all. Furthermore, although slavery was prohibited in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, it continued under different shapes, one of them being compulsory, but paid, work. In Latin America one speaks of working like a Negro or like an Indian to refer to strenuous effort (Jiang Sixue, 1999, p 27). How can one ignore the history of almost a thousand years, and the memory of millions of men and women killed by disease, extenuation and murder, at the time of ascribing a certain aversion to work to a sort of culturally embedded laziness of African people? It's not only of dubious taste but perhaps just plainly based on wrong premises. Indeed, if work had meant humiliation and death to the Protestants, in opposition to wealth, would economists be talking, today, of a Protestant work ethic? I believe that poor work ethic in developing countries is much more related to work relations established during colonial occupation and to the historically low reward for hard work (Douglas, 2004, 89) (Porter, 2000, p 23) than to some cultural inheritance.

As a matter of fact, we could find several examples of an African work ethic. In Nigeria, for example, innumerable Yoruba maxims and folk songs praise effort and stigmatize laziness, allowing R. Soetan (2001, pp 8-10), to say that the Yoruba have always extolled the merits of labour industry and thrift amongst citizenry from youth. Markets and trade have always been part of the African everyday life, and amidst enormous difficulties African merchants display a fantastic and imaginative capability to thrive, or simply to survive. The energy shown by the informal economy should silence all those that still believe in a cultural obstacle to entrepreneurship. The problem does not concern entrepreneurship in small-scale enterprise but in larger investments. In this particular field native African participation is quite marginal (Tshikuku, 2001, p 12).

As M. Porter puts it well *the most basic belief undergirding successful economic development is acceptance that prosperity depends on productivity, not on control over the resources* (Porter, 2000, p 21). The question one should ask is why this does not happen in many cases, especially in Africa. Looking at the structure of a major part of African economies one cannot miss the decisive weight of the export of a scarce variety of natural resources, or plantation crops. According to P. Collier and J. W. Gunning (1999, p 9) this kind of structure has shown a tendency to lead to *loot-seeking* activities. The gains to an extractive strategy, an euphemism for loot, are closely related to the size of the ruling elite group (Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, 200, p 1376), thus, when the elite is not abundant, each member can expect a larger piece of the cake and so, the smaller the elite group, and we could add the more unequal the income distribution, the greater the incentives to be extractive. In this case both the economic and the social structure in many African countries, a clear inheritance of colonization in the beginning, and dependent development onwards, would be more responsible for the lack of interest in creating wealth than some kind cultural detachment.

The inexistence of real markets can also partly explain such unwillingness for enterprise (van de Walle, 2000) but we should not stop at the neo-classical interpretation of the absence of real markets in developing countries, namely excessive state intervention and corrupted institutions (van de Walle, 2000) (Collier, Gunning, 1999)

(Hunt, 1989) (Lal, 1985). Markets are considered to be the perfect tool to satisfy the rational allocation of scarce resources, and therefore they can contribute to solve the real problems of citizens, but they can also satisfy and perpetuate ceremonial ends when free markets are driven by the wealthy few (Elliott, Harvey, 2000). Thus, when the requirements for the operation of effective private markets (see Keyfitz, Dorfman, cited in Todaro, 1994, pp 587-588) are not fulfilled, imposing a sham free market can leave people worse-off than they were before and can only contribute to demoralize entrepreneurship. The problem, therefore, is not an inability to generate accumulation as much as a lack of interest in capitalist accumulation. This logic applies when E. Ndione (1992, p 190) says that in Dakar wealth isn't measured by the accumulation of financial capital but through the amount of connections one can mobilize to his, or to his social group's, advantage.

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

In the previous sections we have seen that colonization, scarcity of social and economic institutions and poor health and insecurity, were, partly, responsible for the resilience of such cultural features as, dependence from religious dogma, extended families, and lack of entrepreneurship. Put all together, the reasons for the resilience of these cultural features almost make up a treaty on underdevelopment. One of the reasons that can explain the durability of the caste system in India, for example, is the fact that this system is well adapted to the rent seeking logic that prevails in Indian governance, as it organizes itself quite easily as a pressure group (Osborne, 2001), the same happening with tribes and ethnic groups in other parts of the world. Therefore, culture is not an obstacle to development as much as it is a means of resisting or adapting to underdevelopment.

Underdevelopment shouldn't be seen here as a mere delay or inability in the process of development, but as the result of the implementation, in the last half of the twentieth century, of a particular development model. This model was characterized, amongst other features, by policies almost exclusively driven by the state, a corrupt and authoritarian state, often representing foreign interests, an excessive specialization around the export of natural resources and plantation crops, the exploitation of the rural society by urban oriented policies, historical dependence from colonial powers through occupation at first and unequal trade afterwards, and a financial system that favoured the funding of large projects connected to the elites, and to the quest of external markets for the exporting industry in the developed countries, that left an unbearable debt burden for years to come. This social and political environment conditioned the evolution of the traditional society and the cultural institutions of developing countries proved to be remarkably adapted to this underdevelopment model.

Let me draw, now, some intermediate conclusions that pretend to contradict the deterministic orthodox vision of the interaction of culture and development. One basic problem with cultural deterministic theories is the underlying presupposition that culture is largely immutable allowing the world to be methodically sliced into civilizations and cultures, ignoring the fact that cultures also change and that they are seldom homogenous, although there is a noticeable continuity in values and traditions within societies (PNUD, 2004) The fact that some of the cultural features that we have seen above were notoriously shaped by exogenous interference prove that they are the

result of an evolution, the outcome of history and of the development process (Kaarsholm, 1994, 121), therefore it is quite simplistic to take culture as a brake to change. F. Deng about the apparent Nilotic people conservatism in Sudan, that made them resist to change, sustains that this was fostered by colonial policies which kept the tribes isolated and sought to preserve traditional cultures; on the contrary, in result of today's intensive cross cultural interaction and modern education, Nilotics are demonstrating more adaptability to change than could have been predicted only two decades ago (Deng, 1998, p 115).

There is also a methodological mistake that compromises cultural determinism. It's not because people share important cultural features that one has to conclude that they are overwhelmingly determined by it in every aspect of their lives. If one tries to characterize individuals in terms of personality traits or generalized motives, one usually discovers that individuals within cultures vary much more among themselves than they do from individuals in other cultures (Kaplan, 1954, p 18). It is, therefore, possible for different modal personality systems to be associated with similar social systems, and for similar modal personality systems to be associated with different social systems (Schwedder, 2000, p 164). The example, given above, about the individuals' preference for banks operating with interest in relation to Islamic banks in Muslim countries, shows clearly that one's culture, and in this case one's religion, does not completely determines all behaviours, even less in the economic sphere.

Finally, most of the time culture isn't an obstacle to development as much as an instrument in resisting underdevelopment. Indeed, the core values of African society shared concern for the vulnerable and, therefore, have sustained Africa through decades of crisis (CDD-Ghana, 2001). That is to say that without their cultural institutions people, in a great number of developing countries, would probably be worse-off nowadays. Furthermore, what seems at first glance to be resistance to change may ultimately be just a different strategy to obtain more consistent gains. In Minigo village, in Tarime district, Tanzania, men refused, in 1986, an offer of manually powered grinding mills because, according to the chief, "it would make their wives lazy". In fact what the village was apparently trying to convey was the fact that the time of manual grinding mills had passed and were hoping that if they refused them, the donors would be willing to give them diesel-powered grinding mills, which would not only help the women but also bring revenue to the village (Anacleto, 2002, p 171-172).

If culture is not immutable, if culture is not really the obstacle cultural determinists sustain, why is there such a novel insistence on this matter in recent years? In social sciences an argument easily becomes a speech, and what is supposed to be a neutral observation can perversely slide into a committed vision. Therefore, what is the vision, what is the speech, surfacing the cultural deterministic arguments? Firstly, the idea that the major obstacles to development can be found in a society's culture is meant to signify that the roots of underdevelopment are essentially endogenous. This is to say that the problem resides in the adoption by the individual of beliefs and attitudes that hinder progress, or in other words, that the source of underdevelopment is not political, and not related to the historical dominant modes of value production and income distribution, and to its inherent conflicts. This also means that the source of the problem is not exogenous, or that one shouldn't look for an explanation of underdevelopment within the relations developing countries have established with western developed countries, further, that there is no room for dependence and domination. The major

significance of this argument, finally, is that the victim and the guilty are one and the same person and that the recognition of this fact, along with the indulgence of the developed countries, is the first step towards real development.

On the contrary, the alternative vision proposed in this text reintroduces North-South relations, history and politics. The vision of culture as an obstacle to development is replaced by one where culture in the developing countries is also the outcome of the community's response to an unfavourable political and economical environment and, sometimes even, the result of the manipulation of traditional institutions with the purpose of imposing external domination. This does not mean that culture cannot be a problem and that all wrongs lay abroad. In many cases we clearly perceive a resistance to change in some cultural practices but we should not ascribe it forcibly to an intrinsic resistance to change of a particular culture. We shouldn't ignore that the local elites frequently use culture in order to legitimize the status quo, and, therefore, to preserve their economic privileges and political control.

## HOW CULTURE MATTERS

Modernization theorists believed that cultural change was an important and decisive part of the development process, the new cultural determinists, in their turn, sustain that culture makes almost all the difference. In both cases cultural change clearly means westernization. The alternative cultural approach presented here, on the contrary, firmly believes that economic development does not imply the adoption of an alien culture apparently best fit to promote it. Leaving behind their culture, in order to enjoy the delights of development, is not even a option as many studies have shown that the only countries that have succeeded in development are those that kept intact the spine of their culture, such as the East and South East Asian countries, to which we have referred above (Dockès, Rosier, 1988) (Latouche, 1992) (Lê Thành Khôi, 1992) (Morishima, 1982) (Han-Yin Chang, 2003) (Jiang Shixue, 1999) and, on another level, Botswana, (Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, 2002) (Carroll and Carroll, 1997) (Stedman ed., 1993).

Cultivating its culture as a means of development shouldn't be a synonym of inbreeding, though. I do not believe that it is possible for society in underdeveloped countries to wrap up in its particularities in order to protect culture from external influence. Importing the compass, algebra, paper, tomato, silk, rice, potato, and other exotic crops, European culture changed, but have Europeans ceased to be themselves? The secret of the success in the once called New Industrialised Countries of the Far East, was the combination of openness to the external winds of progress, namely technical progress, and the cultivation of tradition. This is the sense in which culture matters; as societies always search both to change and to last this combination is mutually beneficial because change ensures continuity and tradition works as a technique to incorporate change (Perrot, 1994, p 42).

If external influence worked for Europe and the New Industrialised Countries why shouldn't it work for today's underdeveloped countries? Why shouldn't these countries smoothly accept western technique, either under the shape of machinery or of rationality? According to G. Rist (1994, p 62) the main difference is that Europeans adopted foreign technique on a voluntary and individual basis. They could have, indeed, ignored those discoveries, but they chose to incorporate them, whereas in the third

world modernity was largely imposed, sometimes violently (Amin, 1989, p 160), and could not have been a matter of plain individual choice, as the use of this kind of technique demanded the existence of networks. Talking on a telephone needs the previous connection to a telephone exchange; farming with a tractor needs the existence of petrol stations and repair-shops. In the process of incorporating progress, the way it is presented to you is at least as important as its nature.

I would like to stress that this defence of cultural diversity shouldn't be mistaken with radical relativism or the consecration of difference. We should avoid ignoring what the other has to say but we also have to make sure that there is still something to say to each other. This means, in practical terms, that development studies shouldn't rely exclusively on the use of neither universalistic models nor excessively particularistic case studies and monographs. On the first hand the knowledge produced is useless to understand the complexity of the development processes because of its lack of realism and on the second hand there is a risk of the dissolution of policy oriented knowledge, because any information gathered is threatened by the immediate expiration of its validity. Thus, between the dominant model, that ignores difference, and the particularistic fundamentalism that depoliticises the development process there has to be some kind of path. In order to find and to travel along this path I propose to embrace pluralism.

Global development, seen as the spread of the capitalist economical and ethical system to all parts, is clearly a derivation of a monist approach. Within the mainstream globalization ideology there is, indeed, the belief that there is one best way to reach the good life and that, therefore, there is also one best culture to facilitate the process. I believe, therefore, that a methodological shift from a monist to a pluralist approach is necessary in order to build a new, and more including, development paradigm. We would have, then, as many ways of understanding development as the ways people envision it. It is probably possible to build some sort of vague universal theory of good (Clark, 2002) but it is also enriching to let oneself go across the palette of the possibilities. Be it *umram* (blooming) as with Ibn Khaldun, *swadeshi-sarvodaya* (bettering the social conditions of all) with Gandhi or *bamtaare* (being well together) amongst the Toucouleur people of Senegal and Mauritania (Latouche, 2001).

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**Abstract:**

**Palavras-chave/Keywords:**

**Classificação JEL/JEL Classification:**