

2 Culture, development and global neo-liberalism

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[L]arge related bodies of thought appear, at first like distant riders stirring up modest dust clouds, who, when they arrive, reproach one for his slowness in recognizing their numbers, strength and vitality.

(Glacken 1967: xi)

In every culture there is something that works, and the thing is to find out is what that is. Is it the headman, the religious leader, community pressure, or the police? Find out what it is and use it.

(USAID operative, Cairo, 1995, quoted in Elyachar 2002: 509)

How did it come to pass? The notion – captured perfectly by the USAID trainer offering micro-entrepreneurial counsel to Egyptian NGOs – that *culture* is the indispensable stuff of development. The museum of culture is to be ransacked by the development practitioner (and by implication the development theorist) in search of things that “work.” In the name of development, culture must be instrumentalized – what we might more properly call the “economization of culture.” At stake is yet one more expression of the colonization of the life world by the deadly solicitations of the market. In Elyachar’s example, the headman becomes the enforcement mechanism for Grameen banks Egyptian-style. The pursuit of some cultural form capable of being put to work presumes, however, another aspect of the complicated dialectics of economy and culture. Namely, the idea that economic practices are necessarily culturally “embedded”; the economic is represented (or materialized)

through the symbolic (what we might gloss as the “culturalization of the economy”).¹ Here economic determination is reversed; markets cannot function without culture. The dull discipline of the market requires its own cultural conditions of existence: to operate, in other words, the market requires trust, networks, norms and values, and various institutional prerequisites including law.

How is it, then, that the Berlin Wall separating economy and culture has collapsed – or at the very least, the boundaries between them are ever more blurred and porous? Lash and Urry put it this way: “the economic and the symbolic are ever-more interlaced and interarticulated . . . the economy is increasingly culturally inflected and culture is more and more economically inflected” (1994: 64; compare James, this volume). These inflections are apparently as compelling for the development establishment – the US Agency for International Development and, as we shall see, the World Bank – as they are for the purveyors of contemporary social theory. And who were culture’s “distant riders” (to invoke Clarence Glacken’s magnificent turn of phrase) who battered down the walls and punctured the boundaries, the horsemen whose numbers, strength, and vitality now surprise us? These are the questions I should like to briefly reflect upon in this chapter.

To recognize the centrality of culture in the world of development at this moment – in the realm of ideas and institutions, that is to say as system and practice – is, of course, to pose a paradox of sorts. Let us recall that the Reagan-Thatcher-Kohl neo-liberal agenda was already in high gear by 1985 and the IMF-Wall Street-Treasury complex had succeeded, to a remarkable degree, in not only discrediting the old Keynesian doctrines but in delegitimizing anything that might inhibit the free movement of capital. “Getting the prices right,” global competitiveness, the new realism, shock-therapy, freedom through trade, “there is no alternative”: these were the heady prescriptions screamed by the multilateral circus barkers from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. What they celebrated was not simply the prospect of a “neo-liberal grand slam” (the language is taken from Perry Anderson [2000]), but more profoundly a new kind of universalism – an epistemological counter-revolution – at the very moment that postmodernism claimed master-narratives to be dead. The *laws* of economics, said then Clinton Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers, are “like the laws of engineering”; there is only one set and “they work everywhere.” So why has the rising tide of neo-liberal orthodoxy brought with it

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a flotilla of cultural imperatives? Even within the heart of the World Bank there are now voices for whom development is “getting the social relations right” (Woolcock cited in Harriss 2002: 81). The paradox is that the cold, universal calculus of free-markets – the (universal) instrumental logic of mean and ends (Sayer 1997: 17) – at its moment of triumph has spawned a cultural counter-revolution: a widely held recognition that the market economy is no less a site of culture than the household or the mosque. The “monologic” of the economy can never escape the “dialogic” of culture.

None of this is to suggest that the hard-nosed economists in the structural adjustment division of the World Bank are now fully immersed in Jacques Derrida (but there are certainly program and operations officers who are sufficiently self-reflexive to incorporate the latest ethnographies of development into their arsenal [see Li 2005]). Culturalist thinking, nevertheless, has scaled the walls of the most orthodox of development institutions.² And it has done so against a backdrop of momentous – and intuitively rather inhospitable – change in the policy climate (Duggan 2003). To have proposed in 1945 the sort of conservative revolution we have witnessed over the last two decades – predicated as it is upon appeals to science and reason to endorse the radical application of the laws of the market – would have been the quickest way to the mad house (Giroux 2004). Yet this passive revolution from above – made in the name of a ruthless American hegemony – has rekindled the fire of culture. One only need think of three powerful bastions of development convention: the transnational corporation (TNC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the World Bank.

TNCs and corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Corporate culture → the “ensemble of material practices, social relations, and ways of thinking” (Schoenberger 2002: 378) within a corporation – is as much a part of the business world as it is an academic object of scrutiny. But there is another cultural arena in which the conduct of TNCs has generated an entirely new policy arena: corporate social responsibility (or corporate citizenship) (Kotler and Lee 2004; Hopkins 1999; Smith 2003). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines CSR as: “the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of its workers . . . as well as the local community and society

at large” (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2005). At one level CSR is nothing more than good business sense, endorsing corporate policies that any company should have in place (not lying to employees, not paying bribes, conforming with national labor legislation and so on). But in its most ambitious form CSR attempts to make binding commitments upon companies to ethical investment and to embed corporate activities – as a locus of enormous non-state power – more fully in the architecture of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the UN Codes on Conduct for Law Enforcement and basic principles on the Use of Force and Firearms. Modern CSR was born during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio as an explicit endorsement of voluntary approaches rather than mandatory regulation. What moved CSR forward in the 1990s was a combination of corporate disasters (Shell and the Ogoni, for example [Douglas and Okonta 2001]) and the growing role of the human rights advocacy network. In North America it was the anti-sweatshop movement, the anti-dams movement, and efforts to make the extractive sector more transparent and accountable (the case of “blood diamonds” is a key case) that proved to be the catalysts for the proliferation of corporate codes of conduct. Virtually all major TNCs, for example, now have some code of conduct, and have revamped (on paper at least) their approaches to community development, environmental responsibility, labor relations, and corporate conduct (Watts 2005). Much of this remains voluntary and what one might call “para-legal” (the codes often have limited enforcement). Nevertheless, the rise of CSR has moved hand in hand with new corporate development initiatives operating under its banner. Community development – “sustainable community development” is the current moniker – places corporations in the business of doing development, working with NGOs and development agencies, and hiring rafts of anthropologists and development practitioners. It is not so much that TNCs (or development institutions for that matter) have their own culture but rather a parallel privatization of development through community initiatives that has thrust TNCs into the complex territory between economy and culture (Pralhad and Porter 2003; Sullivan 2003). Corporate practice depends upon – and aspires to build (or deepen) – those sociocultural relations that constitute community. One can, of course, be critical or suspicious of its CSR’s efficacy but nobody

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should mistake the extent to which corporations are in the business of making and breaking culture as a way of making development good for shareholders.

UNDP, democracy and human rights

One of the striking new developments within the world of multilateral developments institutions is the extent to which we have witnessed, over the better part of 20 years, two rather different structures of knowledge for discussing, measuring, and assessing development. One is the World Bank's annual compendium (the *World Development Report*) of statistical data typically organized around a policy theme – the environment, service provision, inequality. The production of these reports is complex and multifaceted, and often contested as the infamous (and public) debate over the 2000 *Attacking Poverty* report revealed. But in general it is clear that the Bank privileges national accounts data and a raft of conventional economic measures (GNP, GDP, and so on). The measures (World Bank Indicators) are typically deployed in normative terms to serve the interests of a particular vision of development in which free markets and economic growth figure centrally. The forms of developmental classification are conventionally around income (low, middle, high, and so on). None of this is to suggest that the measures and concepts are static – the introduction of purchasing power parity is a case in point – or that getting the prices right always crowds out other concerns like governance or environment, but the commitment to the neo-liberal model is surely incontestable. The UNDP *Human Development Report* conversely has emerged as a sort of ideological and conceptual counterweight to the Bank's annual inventory. Its central index is not GDP per capita but the Human Development Index and the Human Poverty Index – both of which depend upon rather different measures beyond income or market-valuated output. Here it is longevity, knowledge, standards of living, and social exclusion that matter. The rankings that are of consequence are the anomalies between expected development achievements based on GDP and actual human development.

If the theoreticians and stenographers of the Bank are the partisans of the neo-liberal counter-revolution, the UNDP, one might say, has been captured by Amartya Sen (1999), the women's movement, and the NGO world. UNDP highlights entitlements, capabilities, and freedoms as its preferred building blocks; its concerns are deepening

global inequality, the relations between human rights and development, the failures of markets, the need to build safety nets (consolidating and deepening entitlements) through empowerment and power mobilization. Nowhere in the Bank compendium is one likely to see – as is the case in the *Human Development Report* – tables depicting who owns the media, or the relations between democracy and equity, whose voice counts at the World Bank and the IMF, corporate influence on policy, and the relations between gender and legal process. The UNDP's ideological vision is in no simple sense Left; it is perhaps Polanyian. The notion that left to its own devices unregulated markets are massively corrosive and their tendency to “disembed” (to commodify all aspects of social life) will always throw up institutions and movements to protect society from its ravages (Polanyi 1945, 1947; Burawoy 2003). My point is that UNDP represents one enormously influential trend whose vision of development – and means for measuring its achievements and failings – are culturally inflected.³ This is true in at least two senses. First, is that development is always culturally constituted (UNDP's admirable commitment to minority rights, gender justice are cases in point). And second, what the twin UNDP-World Bank programs represent are not just different ideas but a struggle between the ways in which the world of development practitioners is shaped by particular systems of knowledge. One can do no better than quote cultural anthropologist James Ferguson from his ethnography of an African development project: “what [development bureaucrats] do and do not do is a product not only of the intense interests of various nations, classes and international agencies, but also of the working out of . . . [a] complex structure of knowledge” (1990: 18). Development as a structure of knowledge is, broadly construed, a cultural question – or perhaps one should say a cultural achievement (or a form of hegemony).

The World Bank and social capital

What began as a meditation on Italian democracy and on the decline of the American bowling club (Putnam, 1993; 2000) now has its own glossy location on the World Bank website. The meteoric rise after 1995 – the “big bang” as Harriss calls it (2002: 75) – of social capital as the “missing link” of development is one of the most striking aspects of contemporary development theory and practice. Two books (Harriss 2002; Fine 2002b) have already appeared

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documenting its institutionalization within the World Bank, and its ability to travel far and wide within conventional development practice. Social capital should be seen as the twin sister of another development discourse (also recent in provenance and now an important part of what is called the “post-Washington Consensus”), namely governance. Both are products of the rise of civil society, especially in the wake of 1989, as a development arena and of the growing recognition that corrupt and unaccountable states could compromise the purported benefits of “emerging markets.” The story of social capital is how a notion with a long history within the academy during the twentieth century (and exhibiting more or less radical iterations), and fed by strong communitarian currents in contemporary philosophy, found a receptive audience within the World Bank, which in turn lent its authority and legitimacy to an idea – “getting the social relations right” – that is now nothing less than a small-scale research industry. For some entrepreneurs within the Bank, social capital was a Trojan horse; it represented an opening, a way of sneaking in a challenge to a fundamentalist commitment to markets as an end in themselves (without a recognition that markets do not automatically give rise to the “right” institutions and getting markets to work better requires something more than price setting). Social capital, on this account, attempts to “socialize” the economists: “The broad and most encompassing view of social capital includes the social and political environment that shapes social structure and enables norms to develop” (<http://www.worldbank.org>).

In the Bank’s lexicon, social capital can “bond,” “bridge,” and “link.” Norms, networks, trust, forms of association . . . this is the raw material of social capital which, it turns out, is key is keeping government honest, to making institutions work, in securing access to markets. Social capital confirms “a growing body of evidence that incorporating the poor into the design and implementation of . . . projects” (World Bank cited in Harriss 2002: 94). In turn, social capital – networks, associations, norms, and values – must be identified, used, invested in, and enabled. There are perfectly good reasons for assuming that the critical tradition within the genealogy of social capital – the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1980) or the research of Peter Evans (1996) to take two examples – has been evacuated or lost as it is has been “domesticated” within the Bank. What is lost sight of is the wider process of democratization within systems of structured inequality and power that determine whether social capital

and community development is anything more than another palliative, another “anti-politics machine” (compare Porter and Lyon, this volume). But social capital turns, nevertheless, on a cultural breaching of the wall that surrounds the economy. Culture again raises its head. Norms, values, associations: we may differ as regards their capacities in the way the Bank envisages their deployment. But their status as culture is unassailable.

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These three brief illustrations are drawn from what we might call the bastions of orthodox development practice. If we turn instead to the enormous ocean of non-profits, social movements, and civic groups operating under the banner of Port Alegre – including the so-called “movement of movements” (Mertes 2003), and the motley transnational community of activists, academics, and public intellectuals that collectively constitute the “post-development” or “alternatives to development” school (Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 2001b) – then the shift away from a crude economism is clearly complete. Two geographers – Dennis Cosgrove and Peter Jackson – penned something like a manifesto for cultural geography in the mid-1980s in which culture was no longer residual, it was the “very medium through which change is experienced, contested and constituted” (1987: 99). From the vantage point of the new millennium, there is nothing here that would surprise any development specialist. Culture, one might say, has become “normalized” within large swaths of development discourse. So how did culture emerge in these ways, how and why did it envelop development and with what consequences?

One must immediately note, of course, that there is an important sense in which development has always – and sometimes self-consciously – been construed in cultural terms. The very notion of ending poverty was a product of the late eighteenth century (Stedman Jones 2004) – the confluence of scientific progress, the Revolution in France, and the promise of the new international economy – and it was debated (and ultimately defeated) in cultural terms. The moment at which such a notion was extended to the non-West in the 1890s as part of a colonial project – what Cowen and Shenton (1997) call “trusteeship” – was wrapped up with the disenchantment associated with capitalist destruction (it emerged, in sum, from the contradictions of modernity. What was on offer then – and again in Truman’s 1949 invocation of “a program of development . . . based

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on democratic fair dealing,” or the postcolonial energies unleashed at the Bandung Conference – was a sort of utopian vision based, as Alexander Gerschenkron once noted, on the need for a “New Deal of the emotions” (cited in Watts 2000). If culture was present, so to say, at development’s inception, it has retained its historical appeal even in the face of the high economism of development theory. Colonial development, after all, was in large measure a cultural project. The British and French in their African colonies governed through culture (“decentralized despotism,” as Mamdani 1996 calls it), they fretted over the “tribal” problem and the social disintegrative effects of urbanization, they rooted improvement in custom and tradition, and sometimes even came to value local peasant knowledge and practice. Even within the “age of modern development” in the wake of World War II, culture was not overrun by the economists and engineers armed with slide rules and talk of savings rates and capital accumulation. Modernization theory in the 1950s was self-consciously cultural. Not simply because its founding text – Rostow’s non-communist manifesto – was an unashamed projection of the West as a global norm, but because its conceptual tool kit latched on to culture as measure of backwardness: how else to explain the “culture of poverty,” the mountains of paper devoted to explicating peasant irrationalities, and the phalanxes of consultants put to the task of inculcating “need achievement” among the natives (see Cooper 2005)? And not least, the first generation of postcolonial nationalists sought to *indigenize* development for their own purposes, tailor-made for local conditions: Nyerere’s *ujamaa* rooted in African traditions, Nehruvian socialism, socialism with “Chinese characteristics,” to say nothing of the cultism of Mbutu or Sun Yat Sen.

What I am calling the “cultural revolution” in development – and what has elsewhere been called the “cultural turn” in the social sciences (Jameson 1998) – marks something more than a sort of latent recognition of symbolism, meaning, and ideas (which is to say culture showed up in development theory as modernity’s other: tradition). One way to grasp this shift is to start with the recognition that development theory and practice turns on discursive – by which I mean systems of meaning and practice – and normative battles over the weighting of states, markets, and civil society in the design of human improvement. The new President of the World Bank (Paul Wolfowitz), Amartya Sen, and the leaders of MST in Brazil represent quite different positions with regard to, say, the centrality of free markets or state regulation in development. If each leg of this

tripod – crudely put polity, economy, and society – constitutes the stuff of development theory and practice, then the power of the cultural revolution is reflected in the extent to which the meanings of each of these three spheres has been “culturalized.”

Culturalization is something more than Sewell’s (1999) observation that in the last three decades or so culture has emerged as an autonomous realm; it is that the economy (to take one example) has been construed in cultural terms (the notion, with which I began, that the economy-culture boundary has been punctured). But the same holds for the state – the rise of cultural politics, of the politics of recognition is a case in point – and associational life. One measure of this culturalization is the fact that each realm has been explored ethnographically (see Mitchell, T. 2000; Hansen and Stepputat 2001) – the methodological hallmark of cultural study; another would be the extent to which (and I shall return to this point) development is seen now as a form of modernity (and often as a catastrophically *failed* modernity). There is no simple way in which polity, economy, and society are rendered in cultural terms. Crang (1997) properly notes that the economy-culture binary has been (re)read as: an economic determination of culture, an economic operation to culture, an economic colonization of culture, an embedding of the economic in the cultural, a representation of the economic through the cultural, or a cultural materialization of the economic. What matters, however, is that the cultural turn has indisputably colored – colonized might be a better term – all the human sciences.

Culture in development

To posit a cultural revolution begs the question of what exactly it is that has colonized development discourse and practice. Definitions are in order but one runs up immediately against a word of formidable complexity. It has been said, with good reason, that nature and culture are perhaps the two most complex words in the English language. They carry, as Raymond Williams (1976), once said, an enormous amount of human history. Taken together the two words are often assumed to be opposites – the material and the ideal, the biological and the semiotic, a realm of law and a world of contingency – but on closer examination their polarities are tangled, difficult, and intractable. As Terry Eagleton puts it, culture inherits the imposing mantle of religious authority but also has “uneasy

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affinities with occupation and invasion” (Eagleton 2000: 2). Culture is obviously not reducible to nature, but their referents are not stable either. They are shifty, tangled, and mixed up; antinomies seem to proliferate. Culture may be nature’s other but there is much traffic, a veritable information highway, between them. Culture is built out of the “ceaseless traffic with nature which we call labor” (Eagleton 2000: 4; see also Bigenho, this volume).

How might we grasp culture’s historical semantics and its relation to contemporary development? Raymond Williams (1976) has charted three major modern senses of the term culture: as *utopian critique*, as a *way of life*, and as *artistic creation*. The first must be situated against the horrors of industrial capitalism, as a sort of anti-capitalist impulse. The word first comes to mean civility and later civilization (understood as progress), but around the turn of the nineteenth century the descriptive and normative aspects of the word, as Eagleton says, “fly apart” (2000: 10). Civilization appears increasingly debased, predatory, and culture appears as a response to “radical and painful change” (Williams 1993: 60). The second shift marks culture as a way of life and is implicitly a critique on the universalism of the Enlightenment. Culture is rendered multiple to encompass, for example, the Romantic anti-colonial desire to reclaim the exotic and the traditional in the face of industrial triumphalism. Cultures are organic and rooted and could furnish, in the hands of Johann Herder or Edmund Burke, a radical critique of Eurocentrism or the notion of industrial capitalism as universal civilization. And third, Williams charts culture as a gradual specialization to the arts whether broadly construed as intellectual pursuits or science, or more narrowly confined to literature and the imaginative arts. Culture figures here, above all else, as refinement, impartiality, and “agreeable manners and an open mind” (Eagleton 2000: 180).

In Williams’ language, culture is a “binding” word which sutures these differing activities and their interpretation, and is also what he calls an “indicative” word appearing in specific forms or lineages of thought (for example, nationalism or racism). These complex and shifting modern meanings cannot be identified, so to speak, in advance; rather they are philosophical and historical texts, always deployed in particular ways, and inextricably bound up with the problems they are being used to discuss.

Here lies culture’s complexity, its perplexing doubleness; it is “both synonymous with the mainstream of western civilization and

antithetical to it” (Young 1995: 53), and “both material reality and lived experience” (Eagleton 2000: 36). Culture’s polysemic qualities are perfectly captured in a new geography handbook (Anderson *et al.* 2003): culture, the authors point out, can be a distribution of things, a way of life, a universe of meaning, a way of doing, and a field of power. The multiple meanings of culture are part of its appeal and durability, and its ability to travel into development. Culture can and does mean differing things to differing constituencies.

So how might we trace the lineages of culture in relation to development, at least since the Cold War, to identify meanings that have particular traction in the age of development? This is an enormously difficult question – compounded by the fact that it is discursive, operating at the level of both ideas and texts (theories, policy statements) and practices (the institutional use of cultural ideas). All that I am able to do here is to sketch some broad ideas. A fundamental starting point has to be the sociology of knowledge, and more precisely a wide ranging “cultural turn” in the human sciences over the last 30 years or so (Bonnell and Hunt 1999; Jameson 1998). There is no simple account of this turn (a phenomenon largely of the academies of the trans-Atlantic). Cultural studies in Britain – associated with Marxist critics (Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall) and social historians (Edward Thompson) in the 1950s – struggled with the limits of Marxist economism and the ways in which the concept of class could be retained through notions of “experience,” “structures of feelings,” and “cultures of class” (Nelson and Grossberg 1988). In the US, the birth of the turn is typically traced to Hayden White’s *Metahistory* and Clifford Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures* both published in 1973; in France to Pierre Bourdieu (*Outline of a Theory of Practice*) and Michel Foucault (*Discipline and Punish*) and their canonical work on cultural capital and governmentality published in the late 1970s. The problems and questions to which culture was put in these differing national settings – and the tool kit developed in response to them – was obviously not of a piece: cultural capital here, thick description there; discourse and habitus in one locale, semiotic texts and poetic acts in another. What one can say, I think, is that what was at stake was first, a questioning of the social (as a category and as a style of explanation), and second, a concern with language and interpretation as the means by which social categories came into being.

William Sewell has captured perfectly the broad outlines of what the cultural turn produced:

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[C]ulture should be understood as a dialectic is of system and practice, as a dimension of social life autonomous from other such dimensions both in its logic and in its spatial configuration, and as a system of symbols possessing a real but thin coherence that is continually put at risk through practice and therefore subject to transformation.

(1999: 52)

The effect was to question the established anthropological sense of culture as consistent, integrated, consensual, coherent, resistant to change, and bounded. Rather as worlds of meanings, cultures were unstable, contradictory, loosely integrated, porous, and contested.

I think that there are two especially significant ways in which this constellation of ideas about culture provided a framework for “culturalizing” politics, economy and society. The first is culture understood as the *meaningful mapping of the world* (worlds of meaning or social imaginaries) and the *positionings of culture bearers within it*. It speaks to identity, meaning, and signification as forms of practice. In the second, culture turns more on difference than identity, that is to say, *the ways in which mappings can produce distinctive social groups and the institutions that are central to their constitution and reproduction* (recognizing that the old sense of cultures as bounded, coherent social units must be abandoned). Inevitably these two broad articulations overlap and intersect in important ways. Both contributed to the idea that the world might no longer be neatly cut up into bounded societies with their own cultures yet retaining a powerful sense in which, as Sewell noted, there are particular consistencies in the ways in which, in particular places and times, worlds of meaning “hang together.” I want to turn to each of these broad meanings – which I shall gloss as social imaginary and community – insofar as they help frame the cultural turn in development.

Culture as [developmental] community

[Community] is not primarily a geographic space, or social space, a sociological space or a space of services, although it may attach itself to any or all such spatialization. It is a moral field binding persons into durable relations. It is a space of *emotional relationships* through which *individual identities* are constructed through bonds to *micro-cultures* of values and meanings . . . in the institution of the community a sector is brought into existence whose vectors and forces can be mobilized, enrolled, deployed in novel programs and techniques

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and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances.

(Rose 1999: 172–6)

Deployed in the English language for at least five hundred years, community has carried a range of senses denoting actual groups (for example, commoners) and connoting specific qualities of social relationship (as in *communitas*). The complexity of community therefore relates to the difficult interaction between two historical tendencies:

[On] the one hand the sense of direct common concerns; on the other the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this . . . Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization . . . it never seems to be used unfavorably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.

(Williams 1973: 76)

Community spoke to membership and identity in which interests, property, and shared meanings were at issue. There were signs, however, from the seventeenth century of a sort of rupture in its usage – which was to become especially important with the advent of capitalist industrialization – in which community was felt to be more *immediate* than society. By the nineteenth century, of course, community was invoked as a way of theorizing modernity itself (and here is, as we shall see, a key connection to the idea of culture as a social imaginary). Community – and its sister concepts of tradition and custom – stood in sharp contrast to the more abstract, instrumental, individuated, and formal properties of state or society in the modern sense. A comparable shift in usage, which has occurred in the twentieth century, was also noted by Williams in which community came to be invoked as a way of discussing a particular sort or style of politics distinct from the formal repertoires of national and local politics. Here the reference is direct action, direct community participation, and organization embracing, typically, a populist notion of working with and for “the people.”

One can recognize immediately how culture as community has a deep presence in development practice (whether capitalist or socialist): Indian cooperatives, native administration, the commune

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(Kitching 1980). In its contemporary iterations, however, it is the empowered and self-governing community that has the deepest resonance. Empowerment represents one major way in which the community has entered, or perhaps re-entered, development discourse but along two rather different trajectories. One emerges from anti-systemic movements. Much of what now passes for grassroots anti-development initiatives, or the new sorts of anti-system or anti-globalization movements, starts from the notion of a radical empowerment from below (Mertes 2002). Another iteration of community as empowerment appears within more conventional development circles: for instance corporate community development, social capital, and community-based resource management (see Watson, this volume). Its source is neo-liberal theory itself. Pre-existing communities must be enabled and enhanced in their institutional capacities in order that they can assume the responsibility for their own *self-improvement* by tapping market power, conducting themselves in a competitive arena, and acting in a calculated manner. Both the community, and the civil society of which it is part, must be subject to the rule of the development expert and rendered through technical knowledge (Mitchell 2002). The vast explosion of NGOs and the civil society boom of the post-1989 period, represents a vast new cultural terrain on which donors and governments now operate in the name of “enabling environments” (Li 2005).

There is another important line of communitarian theory within development that centers on the now vast body of work on nationalism. The idea of “new nations” and development was, of course, central to 1950s modernization theory but it was Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) that marked a brilliant rethinking of the nation around the social imaginary and cultures of community (another point of connection between the two meanings of culture). Nationalism – the imaginary word of horizontal comradeship organized around space – was unleashed by print capitalism (and later the virtual world, what he dubbed fax nationalism). The nation was the cultural community *par excellence*, a particular “style of imagining” out of which postcolonial development was to be fashioned (Apter 2005; Coronil 1999; Goswami 2004). In the postcolonial world the ways in which certain forms of entho-nationalism won out (often violently) and how such political processes were central to nation-building as an institutional

project has had the effect of refiguring what had been until the 1970s a rather anodyne (and Panglossian) view of the creation of the modern nation-state (compare Bigenho, this volume). What was central to this cultural turn turned out to be the shallowness of nationalism in many postcolonial settings, and how particular development regimes failed in their imagining of what Laurent Berlant (1991) called a “national fantasy,” and conjured up in its place a crisis of secular nationalism – that is, a profound sense of the bankruptcy and failure of modernity. In some cases the very idea of state building and national identity imploded – Somalia, Congo Brazzaville, Afghanistan – while in others other styles of development – Islamism is the obvious case – substituted for the catastrophic failure of the a modern nationalist development project. What is distinctive, of course, of the current moment is that an imperial power – the US – has embarked upon a process of forced nation building imposed militarily from without. Messrs Feith, Wolfowitz, and Rumsfeld discovered that their full-spectrum dominance and the export of democracy – Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Adam Smith – ran straight into a ferocious wall of cultural politics (RETORT 2005).

Community, in other words, pays fidelity to its modern political usage and at the same time must be located with respect to modern capitalisms. Community is an expression of modern rule (it is in the business of disciplining the liberal subject) but it is simultaneously, as Joseph (2001) puts it, a “supplement to capital” (it is *in* business). There is no simple genealogy to the modern deployment of community, either in the advanced capitalist states, within development discourse or within the global South. It has come to provide a common currency across the differing expressions of modern justice as Nancy Fraser sees them: the egalitarian *redistributive* sense of justice on the one side (communities of class or social strata) and the politics of *recognition* or recognitive justice on the other (communities of identity and difference) (see Fraser and Honneth 2003). But throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the idea of the community was “a fundamental political institution within European colonial systems” too (Kelly and Kaplan, 2001: 5). Community is an integral part of the construction of the modern. Communities, not just of the modern imagined nation (Anderson 1983) but all manner of local communities, are “political” and “represented” communities to be read against the modern state,

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the nation, and history. Communities demand visibility, legibility, and enumeration as a precondition for claims-making and thereby entry into the modern – and the modern world of development (compare Radcliffe and Laurie, this volume).

It is, of course, a defining feature of modern capitalism that its competitive and ceaseless search for profitability unleashes periodic waves of “creative destruction,” and round upon round of uneven development, through which communities are both destroyed and remade (Hart 2003b). Marshall Berman’s magisterial account of the relations between modernization and modernity starts precisely from the *contradictory* experiences of being modern, its vitality promises “adventure, power, joy growth, and transformation of ourselves and the world” and yet “threaten to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (1980: 23). Over the last two centuries much utopian populist thinking – often but not always draped in nostalgia for a community lost – can only be grasped as a counterweight to the destructive consequences of industrial capitalism and what passes as development. Working-class communities in Delhi, peasant systems of common property management in the Andes, the moral economy of Islamic schools in Nigeria and so on are crushed by the unfettered powers of the market and yet these selfsame conditions of destruction provide a fertile soil in which the endless search for alternatives can take root and flourish.

The construction of collective identities arises out of broader practices of defining and delimiting communities. As a rule . . . these dissolve internal differentiations within any given collectivity in favor of a common external demarcation . . . The spread of such claims is only possible in communities where religious (or traditional) norms and affiliations have become shaky or uncertain. Surrogate constructions then offer magical formulae that suggest hidden ways of belonging, delimiting and persisting . . . Formulaic constructions of collective identity have become a symptomatic signature of the present. They are ubiquitous wherever societies, regardless of their actual differentiation, are transfigured into seamless communities, and assured of continuity by symbolic demarcation and fabrication of meaning.

(Niethammer 2003: 80–3)

In the making and remaking of *communitas*, whatever its local or historical circumstances, the new community must always address questions of representation (how they represent themselves and what forms of political representation they hold to), forms of rule, means

of internal discipline, membership and “purity,” styles of imagination and their relation to accumulation and the economy.

Within the maelstrom of capitalist modernity – and global development – the possibilities for community making are almost endless. At this historical moment we are awash in communities, and the “self-governing community” is one of the defining articulations of neo-liberal rule (Schofield 2002; Osborne and Rose 1998; Rose 1999). Li’s brilliant new work (2005) properly notes that the community resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s in the trans-Atlantic economies is now far wider – from community policing in Birmingham to community partnerships in the Niger Delta – and cannot be grasped outside of the collapse of socialism and the rise of what Keane (2003) calls “turbocapitalism.” Here a new generation of communities arises from the ashes of state withdrawal and speaks the name of civic renewal, associational democracy, and empowerment. Communities are, therefore, bound up with modernity but they are also complicit with modern capitalism itself, and rooted in the operations of the marketplace. It is in this sense that the entry of community into current development discourse must be evaluated.

And yet paradoxically community is an exemplar of what Ernesto Laclau (1996) calls an “empty signifier” – something that no political actor can claim to hold the truth about for very long. For these reasons, three aspects of the developmental community should be clear: first, the fact that community making can fail (often dramatically) by which I mean that a particular world of meaning disintegrates (fails to maintain its social appeal, its ideological function, and its social cohesiveness), and erodes to the point where a base coherence dissolves. The famous Ogoni movement in Nigeria is a case in point. Community can fail to be defined and stabilized (Jensen 2004). Second, that communities typically contain both reactionary (despotic or disciplinary) and emancipatory (liberatory) expressions that are, as it were, in perpetual struggle with one another; communities are not always warm and fuzzy. Development in the name of political Islam is an exemplary case. And third, communities (with their attendant forms of identity, rule, and territorialization) can be produced simultaneously at rather different spatial levels and within different social force-fields, and to this extent may work with, and against one another, in complex ways. People, in short, belong to multiple communities (a women’s credit association, an ethnic movement for resource control, and a transnational green movement), navigating among them in a way that

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works against the communitarian presumption that individuals hold fidelity to only one community.

Community is – or shall we say has become – a powerful (but also dangerous) way in which the cultural turn enters development practice and thinking. There are political and material circumstances in which a round of aggressive and destructive global neo-liberalism – let's call it primitive accumulation (Harvey 2002; RETORT 2005) – has been enormously generative for community-based claims making and for what Edward Said called the endless search for alternatives. I shall return to this later. What I have tried to sketch here is the need to retain a critical cultural sense of community in its deployment in development theory and practice: communities are not always warmly persuasive, they can emerge as forms of modern political discipline, they may be cut across by all manner of strong and violent political currents. They can also be the source of generative politics, struggling against and undermining what Ludden (1992: 252) has named “the development regime as an institutionalized configuration of power.”

Development as a social imaginary

Development in other words is Orientalism transformed into a science for action in the contemporary world . . . Postcolonial settings provide the rationale for the idea of alternative modernities . . . where incommensurable conceptions and ways of life implode into one another . . . into strangely contradictory yet eminently “sensible” hybridity.

(Gupta 1998: 45, 219)

Culture as worlds of meaning: what sort of opportunity did this second lineage of cultural theory linking system and practice offer for development? Its most powerful – and most inclusive – iteration is contained within Gupta's twinned observation: that “Development” is a form of Orientalism – that is to say it rehearses “in a virtually unchanged form the chief premises of the self-representation of modernity” (Gupta 1998: 36) – and that postcolonial states rarely swallow the West's self-representation but fashion a hybrid modernity of their own. One of the standard claims of postcolonial theory – a cultural theory *par excellence* – is that the hybridized postcolonial subjects “continuously interrupt the redemptive narratives of the West” (Gupta 1998: 232). This is a line of thinking

that tends to be both critical of Enlightenment thinking and often apocalyptic in its rejection of the development business (Escobar 1995; Rist 1997). It is at base a cultural theory:

A cultural theory directs one to examine how the “pull of sameness and the forces of making difference” interact in specific ways under the exigencies of history and politics to produce alternative modernities at different national and cultural sites.

(Gaonkar 2001: 46)

One could say, then, that the cultural move was to posit development as a modernist project (and often a failed or incomplete one at that). Development was to be construed as the cultural constitution of the social order (see Povey 1998).

Perhaps the most sophisticated account of this position has been provided by Charles Taylor (2004). Modernity for Taylor is a historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutions, new ways of living and new forms of malaise. Western modernity on this view is a certain kind of social imaginary, that is to say to focus on the ways people imagine their social existence, “how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative expectations and images that underlie these expectations” (Taylor 2004: 23). These may be self-serving and full of repressions but they are at the same time “constitutive of the real” (Taylor 2004: 183). The social imaginary has three modes of narrativity – progress, revolution, and nation – and three important forms of self-understanding, what Taylor calls cultural formations: the economy, the public sphere, and self-rule.

Taylor simultaneously paints the cultural constitution of the modern order – while all the while holding open the project of other modernities – and at the same time perfectly captures the framework within which so much of the critical work on development by the social sciences over the last 15 years has turned. Ludden’s (1992) model of the India development regime, for example, is defined by (i) ruling powers who claim progress as goal, (ii) “people” whose conditions must be improved, (iii) an ideology of science to measure progress, and (iv) self-declared enlightened leaders who deploy state power for development and self-rule. Much of the cultural work has been precisely to prize apart this quarter of “configurations of power.” This meshes perfectly, of course, with critical theorists of

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development like Timothy Mitchell (2002), Tania Li (2005), Sharad Chari (2004), or Anna Tsing (2005).

There has been no single way in which development as worlds of meaning has been explicated (see Watts 2003; Crush 1995; Cooper and Packard 1997). Some have taken the high road of development modernism and the legibility and visibility required by the state (Scott 1998); some have traced the lineages of the notion of the economy (its “invention”) and the discursive construction of economic theory (Mitchell 2002; Gibson-Graham 1996). Perhaps most effective has been the ethnographic exploration of development institutions starting from Ferguson’s (1990) highly generative account of how social problems are converted into technical considerations, thereby creating an anti-politics machine (normalization in Foucault’s language). In his wake has appeared a raft of important studies examining, for example, the “greening” the World Bank and the deconstruction of its “literature” (Goldman 2005; Kumar 2003), forms of green governmentality and economic regulation (Drayton 1996; Agrawal 2005; Roitman 2005), the epistemic communities that help create discursively durable accounts of common development problems (Leach and Fairhead 1996), and the sorts of knowledge (conventional and subjugated) made in the name of development science (Latour 1991; Leach, Scoones, and Wynne 2005). On the other side is a body of work – generally less successful in my view – seeking to shed light on the alternative modernities under construction in Mumbai, Johannesburg (Gaonkar 2001; Simone 2005).

There is no easy way of characterizing this body of work. One part locates itself explicitly on the ground of development policy, using post-structural approaches to tease out the taken for granted assumptions of rural development programs of the operations Departments of the World Bank. Others are more concerned to paint with a larger brush on the canvas of world history. What they have in common I think is the sense in which development’s many worlds of meaning can be construed as an ensemble or assemblage of “institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections,” a social imaginary of “calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of . . . [a] very specific albeit complex form of power which has as its target population . . . its form of knowledge political economy” (Foucault 1991: 102). In this sense culture turns out to be a powerful weapon, not just talking truth to power but of pulling apart the “contingent lash up” (Rose 1999) that is development.

The making of a cultural revolution

We are way ahead of the protestors.

(James Wolfenson, President of the World Bank,
2000, cited in *International Herald Tribune*,
April 19, 2000: 19)

[N]eoliberalism is more than an economic theory. It also constitutes
the conditions for a radically refigured cultural politics.

(Giroux 2004: 107)

My account of the ways in which culture understood as the dialectics of system and practice has reshaped development discourse – has broken through the tough carapace of conventional accounts of the state, the economy, and civil society – has for the most part operated in an historical vacuum. Mapping cultural ideas and their institutional points of entry is one thing, providing an account of the material circumstances in which the cultural turn emerged and the social forces that might go some way toward explaining the rapidity with which culture entered development theory and practice is quite another. The broad historical contours of such an explanation are provided by neo-liberalism. Its realities are plain to see. The world has endured two decades and more of radical reconstruction made in the name of a new/old capitalist orthodoxy – repeated rounds of privatization and deregulation, tight money (for some), free trade (for the defenseless), “adjustment programs,” attacks on welfare and on big (that is, corporate-unfriendly) government. (Ninety-five percent of all regulatory changes during the 1990s, as inventoried by the *UN World Investment Report*, were aimed at liberalizing capital controls. The tripling of bilateral investment treaties in the first half of the same decade was almost wholly aimed at removing “barriers” to foreign investment.)

Suffice to say that the origins of neo-liberalism date to the 1970s, and to the challenges confronting US economic hegemony as a result of a crisis of over-accumulation (Brenner 2002). Faced with growing competition from Western Europe, Japan, and East Asia, the US under Richard Nixon freed-up international financial markets to “liberate the American state from succumbing to its economic weaknesses and . . . strengthen the political power of the American state” (Gowan 1999: 23). The institutional complex that permitted this “gamble” of projecting US financial power outwards was the

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IMF-WTO-Treasury-Wall Street nexus. Right at the heart of neo-liberalism's strategy was an assault on the state-centered development strategies of postcolonial states: markets were to be forced open, capital and financial flows freed up, state properties sold at knockdown prices, and assets devalued and transferred in crises of neo-liberalism's own making. For the Third World, the tyranny of "there is no alternative" ruled supreme; for the post-1989 socialist bloc, it was simply dubbed "Shock Therapy." What proved to be so extraordinary about the neo-liberal counter-revolution was neither its zealotry nor its bourgeois mission to create "a world after its own image," but rather its singular hyper-nationalism: that a single nation imposed its own self-description as a global norm. Its definitive statement, we can now see, was the 2002 National Security Strategy document: its absolutist modality – "full spectrum dominance." At first the neo-liberal offensive was, as Antonio Gramsci might have said, a passive revolution from above: conservative, defensive, and despotic (Silver and Arrighi 2003). Now it is coercive, military, and imperial.

What all of this amounted to was another round in the ceaseless process of primitive accumulation, what Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2002). And the cultural turn in development, I think, must be framed by the Great Arch of modern global neo-liberalism. In this sense much of what I have described in this essay has as its reference point Karl Polanyi, who famously pointed out in *The Origins of Our Time* (1945) that markets cannot create social order, indeed they can colonize and ultimately destroy it. The market destroys the social character of three foundational but "fictitious" commodities (land, labor, and money); its corrosive effects underwrite class-based communities such as Chartism, the co-operative movement, and Owenism, each is a reaction to the destructive process of commodification (see Burawoy 2003). Re-embedding of markets, or the reactions to disembedding, produce forms of association that serve to maintain capitalist accumulation (the civil society counterweight to the anarchy of the market). Naturally, it would be too simple to posit all cultural inflections of development as the product of the giant servomechanism of market-capitalism. Robert Putnam or corporate social responsibility cannot be fully reduced to market re-embedding and the violence of neo-liberalism (though neither can are inexplicable without them), any more than civil society or culture is simply a "reaction" to the unregulated market. To do so would return us the bad old days of

“base and superstructure” which was precisely one of the things that the cultural turn sought to redress.

So neo-liberalism and the horrors of primitive accumulation are indispensable framing devices. So too is the rise of global civil society – and it is at the intersection of these two global vectors that the culture as a “traveling theory” can be productively located. Rampant neo-liberalism – understood as a global constellation of capitalist accumulation under American hegemony rather than simply as the realm of “the economic” – and the “dynamic non-governmental system of interconnected socio-economic institutions” (2003: 9) that Keane calls global civil society, created a global forcing house within which development could be culturalized. Global civil society – Keane notes that there are 50,000 NGOs that operate “at the global level” (2003: 5) – was itself born of a complex confluence of ideas and socio-political transformations, including of course the revival of civil society in the wake of the crashing of the Prague Spring, the socio-political effects of the new virtual technologies, the deep crisis of the postcolonial state (not unrelated of course to the devastating effects of neo-liberal “adjustment”) marked by the moniker “rogue” or “failed,” and the panorama of conflicts emerging in the wake of the end of the Cold War. We may differ, naturally, as regards whether global civil society represents a new global public, or a coherent effort to civilize the global order, or a new cosmocratic form of politics. Global civil society is, as Keane (one of its major boosters and theoreticians) notes, a work in progress. At the very least it foregrounds the prospect of differing ways of democratic living and of rethinking what passes global markets.

To put the matter sharply, the confluence of global neo-liberalism and civil society over-determined the extent to which the dialectics of system and practice forced itself onto the development agenda. Contained within this confluence is a vastly complex set of movements and ideas; let me simply flag five:

- the global human rights movement;
- the global women’s movement;
- indigeneity and the politics of recognition;
- anti-systemic movements and the crisis of the postcolony;
- the Image World of Consumer Capitalism.

Each of these properly requires a full accounting that I cannot provide here. My point is simply to confer their significance as

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force-fields within which worlds of meaning acquired a powerful resonance. How could some matters as patriarchy, ethnic violence, indigenous struggles, the “anti-globalization” movements (whether the revolutionary impulses of the Black Bloc or militant Islam), the volcanic eruption of locally improvised alternatives emerging from the tectonic shifts of postcolonial failure and unmatched imperial powers of consumer capitalism be fully apprehended without the deployment of cultural categories? The extent to which intellectuals, activists, and practitioners of various stripes latched on culture was surely shaped as much by this heady cocktail of cultural politics as by the new theoretical productions emanating from the Left Bank *eco*les, Oxford, or Harvard.

The neo-liberal moment: culture as a form of rule

[T]he recognition of cultural domination as just as important as, and perhaps as a condition of possibility of, political and economic domination is a true “advance” in our thinking.

(Buck-Morss 2003: 103)

[P]ower often makes its presence felt through a variety of modes playing across one another. The erosion of choice, the closure of possibilities, the manipulation of outcomes, the threat of force, the assent of authority or the inviting gestures of a seductive presence . . .

(Allen 2003: 195–6)

I want to end my remarks with some reflections on the relations between the cultural and neo-liberal revolutions in development practice. To do so I want to briefly return to a period when questions of poverty, scarcity, and rule were the compelling political questions of the moment, namely the debate over the Poor Laws in Britain in which Thomas Malthus (1798) figured so centrally. The Malthusian debates the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries represented a debate with “popular radicalism” (McNally 1995). Paine’s *Rights of Man* appeared in 1791 and it is to be recalled that it was enormously popular, selling 200,000 copies within a year. *The Rights of Man* politicized poverty – it accepted the logic of the free market but provided a program for political reform. At the heart of the popular radicalism and its opposition to political economy was a debate within the English ruling class over the paupers and what to do about them.

Malthus' ideas, whatever their class provenance, transcend demography, since his ideas were put to work at a moment of political crisis. The figure of the pauper was constituted as a social problem to be regulated, a discourse central to the shift from an Elizabethan moral economy (a paternalist system of policing to relieve and employ the poor) to a liberal mode of government of poverty fostering a space of individual autonomy and minimal state action. The "discourse of the poor," as Mitchell Dean (1991) calls it, had three new components: the emergence of a strong abolitionist strain toward the poor laws, the insistence on voluntary charity as morally superior to the compulsion inherent in the poor rates, and the substitution of make-work schemes by various contributory methods (life annuities, insurance plans, and mutual assistance). Here was a redefinition of the field of action of the state: a withdrawal of the state responsibility for relief to categories of the propertyless, and the centralization and bureaucratization of the state apparatus of relief. At stake was a liberal mode of government "distinguished by its aim of incorporating self-responsibility and familial duty within the lives of the propertyless . . . by multiplying the institutional and administrative networks which surround poverty" (Dean 1991: 18).

The liberal mode of government, scarcity as an object of regulation and discipline, and Malthus' bioeconomic laws can be productively understood as expression of modern rule, what Foucault (2000) calls the "conduct of conduct," a more or less calculated and rational set of ways of shaping conduct and of securing rule through a multiplicity of authorities and agencies in and outside of the state and at a variety of spatial levels. Foucault was concerned to show how the analytics of government constituted differing expressions of governmentality, which he articulated in terms of the pastoral (classically feudal in character), the disciplinary (the institutions of subjection from the prison to the school), and biopower (the administration of forms of life). Modern governmentality was rendered distinctive by the specific forms in which the population and the economy was administered, and specifically by a deepening of the "governmentalization of the state" (that is to say, how sovereignty comes to be articulated through the populations and the processes that constitute them).

How then do Malthus and liberal government speak to the question of scarcity and modern development? Malthus' achievement was to help construct a discourse of poverty and scarcity which challenged the radical Paine-ites and their theories of rights and to this extent it

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reflected both a voice of the status quo and a fear of the enfranchisement of the popular classes (of social disorder from below). In this way scarcity became central one might say to the conduct of conduct. Scarcity shifted from a pre-modern sense of periods of necessary dearth to a generalized condition of insufficiency. By the mid to late nineteenth century, after Malthus' pessimism lost some of its power, scarcity came to hold what Xenos (1989) calls "the promise of abundance." But this promise required choice, discipline, and above all a rational economic man capable of "economizing": making choices to allocate scarce resources among competing ends. But scarcity had a much broader discursive resonance. It became central to economics, which of course was significant not simply in the rise of neoclassical free market thinking but in the entire arena of economic policy and the very idea of a national economy (Mitchell, T. 2000). Scarcity became one might say a condition of possibility for modern rule. It represents a discursive formation precisely because it operates across many domains in and beyond the state (think of the army of family planning NGOs or famine relief agencies). Scarcity cross cuts and informs *all* of the analytics of modern government. One aspect of the cultural turn has been to shed light on how this logic operates within contemporary development theory and practice.

The relations between rule, scarcity, and poverty can be traced across the entire history of development. An important body of work – driven by the cultural turn – has shown precisely how development operates as a realm of calculation, expertise, enframing (Mitchell 2002; Li 2005). Yet the culture question plays a contradictory role in this process of global neo-liberalism. On the one hand, it has opened up the possibility for a critical assessment of the analytics of government in the developing world in the development institutions of neo-liberal rule. On the other, culture has itself become part of the arsenal of modern neo-liberal development rule. This is quite clear in the way in which community operates in relation to development projects and the debate over governance in the global South. The danger is of course that quite sophisticated senses of culture – social capital, community governance – became the basis for a sort of normalization, for the further fuelling (ironically) of the anti-politics machine. The extent to which culture in this sense is capable of securing hegemony for ruling classes of all sorts is always an open question. What are the limits then to a global neo-liberalism armed with the sophisticated (and self reflexive) deployment of culture?

One might say that this neo-liberalism has in the past few years begun to look rocky; fights within and between global regulatory institutions, resistance to free trade within the global South, and the slide into war. The ruthless underbelly of “globalization” was now exposed. America – partly in response – shifted from consent to coercion, to military neo-liberalism that in a sense compromises a certain vision of self-government. A limit to the neo-liberal project is that in large parts of the world the market-based secular nationalist project has catastrophically failed (the two billion dwellers of the slum world, as Mike Davis [2005] notes). It is out of this crisis of course that militant Islam, to take one example, has grown. The anti-politics machine can create the most explosive sorts of politics. And here is the rub. Some of these oppositional movements – anti anti-politics – assume cultural forms (al Qaeda for example) that are not terribly desirable. They will require what Williams (2005) calls a “generative politics” that must inevitably be cultural but will place civil society in a dominant position by working with and through the state.

Notes

- 1 For useful discussions of the dialectics of culture and economy, see Crang (1997), Sayer (1997), Ray and Sayer (1999), as well as Chapter 1 and James (this volume).
- 2 A brief perusal of Tim Forsyth’s admirable new *Encyclopaedia of International Development* (2005) reveals not only that culture has its own long entry but that development’s “keywords” – its fundamental lexicon – are totally saturated with cultural thinking. Poverty – the eradication of which is the foundation stone of development – is now widely understood to be as much about “social relations” as “economic conditions.” The *Encyclopaedia* properly sees poverty in terms of a panoply of needs, processes of sociocultural exclusion (gender most obviously), human rights, and capabilities.
- 3 The World Bank is not totally immune, of course, to such cultural analysis (this is the heart of the social capital question that I discuss here) but its center of gravity lies elsewhere.