



# *Maitreyee*

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## **Editors' letter**

The Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development published by Unesco in 1995 stated that the very understanding of 'development' is infused by culture:

It is culture that defines how people relate to nature and their physical environment, to the earth and to the cosmos, and through which we express our attitudes to and beliefs in other forms of life. It is in this sense that all forms of development, including human development, ultimately are determined by cultural factors. Indeed, from this point of view it is meaningless to talk of the 'relation between culture and development' as if they were two separate concepts, since development and the economy are part of, or an aspect of, a people's culture. Culture then is not a means to material progress: it is the end and aim of 'development' seen as the flourishing of human existence in all its forms and as a whole. (p. 24)

What constitutes 'development', or even what counts as 'human development', can thus never be disentangled from culture. This issue of *Maitreyee* explores the relationship between culture and human development.<sup>1</sup>

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr starts by examining the interconnections between people's cultures and human freedoms, and argues that multicultural policies are key to human development. Jan Nederveen Pieterse discusses some of the problems of taking cultural freedom as a central concern of development. The authors of the 2004 Human Development Report on Cultural Liberty offer their counter-response to his critique. Wim Hiemstra concludes the 'Insight' section by exploring the concept of 'endogenous development' and describing examples of culturally embedded development initiatives.

'In the Practice' section reports two examples of (failure of) cultural embeddedness of development policy. Francesca Panzeroni addresses the limits of so-called 'culturally appropriate' measures of health provision among the Australian Aborigines. Agnes Apusigah writes on the practice of female bondage (trokosi) in Ghana.

As usual, if you have any comments, or would like to make a contribution to forthcoming issues of *Maitreyee*, do not hesitate to contact me.

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<sup>1</sup> For a pedagogical overview of the literature on cultural and human development, see Sarah White's chapter on Culture in the 'human development textbook'.

## *Insights*

### **Cultural freedom and human development today<sup>1</sup>**

**Sakiko Fukuda-Parr**  
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A dangerous fear is spreading around the world – a fear of cultures that seem threatening, for one reason or another. This fear has generated questions about the role of culture in human progress that have increasingly come to dominate public debates. For example: Is Islam an obstacle to democracy? Does the power of traditional cultures explain stagnation in Africa? Will the conflicts between Shiite and Sunni communities lead to civil war in Iraq?

At the same time, much recent literature in the social sciences has approached culture in purely instrumental terms – as if culture were merely a means to some other end (modernization, for example), rather than an end in itself and one of the chief *goals* of human development.

I argue that the ability to choose an attachment to one or more cultures is an intrinsic value, to be protected and promoted as a basic human freedom. Individuals acting alone cannot achieve this goal: only public policies can ensure that distinct cultures and cultural identities coexist within the borders of any given state. As economic globalization advances, states must also devise policies that expand rather than reduce cultural diversity

All people want to live in dignity, without suffering discrimination or ridicule from the larger society, and without being restricted from following their own chosen way of life. These freedoms are entrenched in universal human rights, and states have an obligation to protect and promote them.

Exercising such cultural freedom, that is, the freedom to choose a cultural identity of one's own,<sup>2</sup> entails being able to choose *multiple* identities. It also entails being able to participate in shaping the culture of the group with which one identifies—to scrutinize and reinterpret its values, habits, and norms of behavior, and to introduce new modes of expression into it.

Despite the wish of all people to choose a cultural identity freely and to live in dignity, suppression of cultural freedom is widespread around the world. Cultural exclusion takes two forms. One is participation exclusion, which prevents people who belong to specific cultural groups from participating in social, economic, or political opportunities, such as in schools, jobs, or elected office. The other is living-mode exclusion, which denies recognition and accommodation of a lifestyle or of a chosen cultural identity. Examples include religious oppression and the insistence that immigrants or indigenous people speak the language of the state in schools or courts. Such exclusions are deeply rooted in history. Through the centuries, on every continent, conquerors and settlers, despots and democratically elected governments, have tried to impose their language, religion, and way of life on the people under their rule in an effort to build loyalty through a common and single cultural identity.

Cultural exclusion can take the form of brutal repression or institutionalized suppression. But more frequently it comes from a simple but pervasive lack of respect for the culture and

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<sup>1</sup> This is a shortened version of an essay published in June 2004 in *Daedalus*. It draws from the *Human Development Report 2004: Expanding Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World* for which Sakiko Fukuda-Parr was the lead author.

<sup>2</sup> Amartya Sen, 'Cultural Freedoms and Human Development', Background Paper to the 2004 Human Development Report, available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev>.

heritage of a people. This lack of respect is reflected in state policies that disregard excluded groups in national calendars that do not observe their religious holidays, in schoolbooks that leave out the achievements of their leaders, and in support for the arts that ignores their artistic heritage.

Living-mode exclusion often overlaps with participation exclusion through discrimination and disadvantage in employment, housing, schooling, and political representation. From indigenous groups in Latin America to blacks in South Africa to the Roma in Central Europe, minority groups and oppressed majorities are often the poorest, have the lowest health and educational outcomes, are treated the worst by the legal systems, and so on. Many groups, especially large minorities such as the Kurds in Turkey and the indigenous people of Guatemala, are excluded from political participation and economic opportunities because the state does not recognize their language in schools, law courts, and other official arenas; this of course has often led to intense fighting. Sometimes, however, living-mode and participation exclusion do not overlap. For instance, some economically dominant minorities such as the Chinese in Southeast Asia have been pressured to take on local names and restrict their use of their native language.

While cultural exclusion is nothing new, what is new today is the rise of identity politics and the growing assertiveness of groups in claiming cultural recognition. From indigenous people in Latin America to religious minorities in South Asia to ethnic minorities in the Balkans and Africa to immigrants in Western Europe, people are mobilizing anew around old grievances along ethnic and religious lines. The spread of democracy has enlarged the political space for such action, and global networks have strengthened these movements. Indigenous people protest investments in mining and logging that undermine their livelihoods; local communities fear the loss of their national cultures with the unprecedented increase in immigration; and immigrants, in turn, want to keep much stronger ties with their countries of origin and as they reject involuntary assimilation. Whatever the context, states today face an urgent challenge to respond to these claims. If handled badly, these struggles over identity can turn violent.

Repressing identities is not the solution, for it violates the rights of people. States need to find ways of forging national unity amid cultural diversity. While guaranteeing individual, civil, and political rights and equitable access to economic and social opportunities is essential to cultural freedom, that is, the freedom to make choices about one's cultural affiliations, they are not sufficient to address cultural exclusion. Equity for individuals who choose to identify with minority groups or oppressed majorities requires policies that acknowledge difference.

While multicultural policies have been endorsed by a growing number of thinkers,<sup>3</sup> they have been less warmly received by most political leaders. While few today would support the brutal repression of minority cultures, the conventional wisdom among political leaders has long been that allowing diversity to flourish weakens the state, leads to conflict, and retards development. Many countries, which even have prided themselves on their democratic principles, have ignored demands for cultural recognition. In the United States, bilingual schooling has been discouraged, and the celebration of African American heritage was only introduced in response to the civil rights movements of the 1960s. Meanwhile, Western European countries have hesitated to promote the rights of minorities.

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of multiculturalism, see, among others, Benhabib (1996, 2002), Gutmann (1994), Kymlicka (1996), Taylor (1994).

In order to persuade political leaders that cultural rights are worth acknowledging, it will help to dispel four widely held myths about the incompatibility of cultural freedoms and democratic development:

- *Myth 1:* People's ethnic identities compete with their attachment to the state, so there is a trade-off between recognizing diversity and unifying the state. *Counter argument:* Individuals can and do have multiple identities that are complementary—ethnicity, language, religion, and race as well as citizenship. Nor is identity a zero-sum game; each individual can identify with many different groups simultaneously.
- *Myth 2:* *Ethnic groups are prone to violent conflict with each other in clashes of values, so there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and sustaining peace.* *Counter argument:* *There is little empirical evidence that cultural differences and clashes over values are themselves the cause of violent conflict. It is dangerous to suppress cultural differences or to allow economic and political inequalities to deepen between these groups because they can be easily mobilized to contest these inequities.*
- *Myth 3:* Cultural liberty requires defending traditional practices, so there could be a trade-off between recognizing cultural diversity and other human development priorities such as progress in development, democracy, and human rights. *Counter argument:* Cultural liberty is about expanding individual choices, not about preserving values and practices with blind allegiance to tradition. Culture, tradition, and authenticity are not the same as cultural liberty. They are not acceptable reasons for allowing practices that violate human rights and deny equality of opportunity.
- *Myth 4:* Ethnically diverse countries are less able to develop, so there is a trade-off between respecting diversity and promoting socio-economic development. *Counter argument:* There is no evidence of a clear relationship, good or bad, between cultural diversity and socio-economic development. Just as there are multiethnic countries that have stagnated, there are others that have been spectacularly successful, such as Malaysia and Mauritius.

In short, policies recognizing cultural identities and encouraging diversity to flourish do not result in fragmentation, conflict, weak development, or authoritarian rule. Such policies are both viable and necessary, for it is often the suppression of culturally identified groups that leads to tensions.

The advance of cultural liberty must be a central aspect of human development. This requires going beyond expanding social, political, and economic opportunities, since doing so does not guarantee cultural freedoms for all people. At the same time, cultural liberties must not be promoted at the expense of social, political, and economic rights. In other words, multicultural policies that are designed to address cultural exclusions must also be consistent with economic, social, civil, and political rights.

Fair multicultural policies need to involve the institutionalized recognition of ethnic, religious, or linguistic identities, for cultural exclusion is often rooted in institutionalized obstacles to equal participation which do not disappear in the presence of democracy and social equity alone – for example, as long as the language of instruction is not one's mother tongue, or the state does not recognize a day of religious celebration as a holiday, or children are taught history that belittles the achievements of their heritage, exclusion will continue. In multiethnic democracies, this would mean some form of recognition in the constitution and in the design of institutional arrangements that ensures political representation. Attention also needs to be given to legal pluralism so that people can have access to justice according to the norms and values of their culture. Language pluralism is particularly important, requiring not

only the state recognition of a multitude of mother tongues, but also the teaching of the official language to all citizens.

Yet multicultural policies often raise questions, especially when they seem to conflict with policies that promote democracy and equitable socioeconomic development. Examples abound: legal pluralism that observes customary law that denies inheritance rights to women; schooling for indigenous children conducted exclusively in their native language, denying them the opportunity to learn the official languages of the state; banning imports of foreign books, films, and music in order to preserve the local culture under the pressure of globalization.

In my view, a form of multiculturalism intended to promote the full range of human rights must be centrally focused on promoting cultural freedom, not the defense of tradition, and must be combined with equitable policies. How to design such policies in the larger context of human development is a challenge. Multicultural democracies such as India and Switzerland have been grappling with such policy dilemmas for decades. Norway developed policies for cultural recognition of the Sami indigenous people, but is now struggling with accommodation of immigrants. European countries are struggling to develop immigrant integration policies that recognize multiple cultural identities, multiple loyalties, and multiple citizenships.

Successes in these countries show that multicultural policies embedded in a human development approach are possible and do work. There are no solutions that fit all situations, but apparent tensions between cultural recognition and deepening democracy, between economic growth and social equity can be worked out. For example, indigenous people may protest mining investment in their territories and want to opt out of the global economy; multinational investors and indigenous communities can devise projects that involve benefit sharing and avoid disrupting cultural tradition.

In a world where nine hundred million people belong to groups that experience cultural exclusion, developing multicultural policies is an enormous challenge. But it is a challenge worth meeting, if states are to continue to promote development as a process of progressively expanding human capabilities.

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## Development and Cultural Liberty<sup>1</sup>

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In view of the political spillover of ethnic and religious movements—as in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and several Muslim countries—the policy relevance of the cultural dimensions of development is increasingly prominent. So it plays large in the 2004 Human Development Report devoted to culture. As its title indicates, *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, the report deals not merely with cultural diversity but with cultural liberty, which, it argues, is its novel contribution to the debate. Liberty or freedom is the report's Leitmotiv: 'If what is ultimately important is cultural liberty, then the valuing of cultural diversity must take a contingent and conditional form. Much will depend on how that diversity is brought about and sustained' (16). In often paraphrased wording it adopts 'a freedom-based defence of cultural diversity' (23). From this premise follows a critique of cultural conservatism:

Being born in a particular cultural milieu is not an exercise of freedom—quite the contrary. It becomes aligned to cultural liberty only if the person chooses to continue to live within the terms of that culture, and does so having had the opportunity of considering other alternatives. The central issue in cultural liberty is the capability of people to live as they would choose, with adequate opportunity to consider other options (16-17).

The report reiterates that 'tradition should not be confused with freedom of choice' and cautions that 'defending tradition can hold back human development' (88). On the same premise the report criticizes identity politics and quotes Anthony Appiah on the 'imperialism of identity': 'it is crucial always to remember that we are not simply black or white or yellow or brown, gay or straight or bisexual ... but we are also brothers and sisters; parents and children... let us not let our racial identities subject us to new tyrannies' (18). The report, rightly in my view, draws attention instead to multiple identities, but it carries this too far:

People must be free to choose how to define themselves and must be afforded the same rights and opportunities that their neighbours enjoy. This Report asserts that a main hope for harmony lies in promoting our multiple identities. ... the recognition of multiple and complementary identities—with individuals identifying themselves as citizens of a state as well as members of ethnic, religious and other cultural groups—is the cornerstone of cultural liberty (42, 73).

The report becomes unreal when it argues that identity is a matter of individual choice and it is up to individuals to decide which of their identities matter most, which may be theoretically true but ignores that most people live their lives as part of communities. Besides, dominant discourses and structures of power often reinforce and perpetuate particular identities.

A chapter on 'Confronting Movements for Cultural Domination' discusses coercive movements that oppose cultural liberty in the name of cultural superiority on ethnic or religious basis. It discusses restrictive measures against them (such as institutional barriers against coercive political parties, legislation and judicial intervention) but rightly argues that the most effective way to marginalize extremism is to strengthen democratic processes; which

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<sup>1</sup> This article first appeared in an expanded version in *Development and Change*, 2005, 36(6): 1267-73. It has been revised and included chapter 5 ('The cultural turn in development: Questions of Power') of the second edition of *Development Theory: Deconstructions/Reconstructions* (London: Sage and TCS books) to be published in 2010 (first edition in 2001).

includes concerns such as paying attention to school curricula. The closing chapter focuses on three policy challenges: indigenous peoples and extractive industries; trade in cultural goods; and migration. Its contributions are generally what one would expect in a brief twenty page treatment and further reiterate the cultural liberty approach: ‘globalization can expand cultural freedoms only if all people develop multiple and complementary identities as citizens of the world as well as citizens of a state and members of a cultural group’ (89).

The report follows the World Commission on Culture and Development Report, *Our Creative Diversity* published by UNESCO in 1996, but it bears little relation to the culture and development literature. Earlier work examined the cultural assumptions of development thinking and cooperation, from Eurocentrism to racial bias. This literature is reflexive and self-critical and its major concern is to make development efforts more effective and participatory by taking into account social diversity and local culture (Schech and Haggis 2000). Gone in this report is the reflexive and self-critical character, gone is the critique of Orientalism; instead criticism squarely targets cultural conservatism and extremism—the opponents of cultural liberty.

About development the report is brief: ‘there is no clear relationship between culture and development’. ‘Work ethic, thrift, honesty and openness to strangers can play a role in economic growth... But there is no grand cultural theory of development here’, as econometric evidence shows (38, 39). The report rejects cultural determinism to explain economic development—from Weber’s Protestant ethic (at times Catholic countries were growing faster than Protestant countries) to claims made in Harrison and Huntington’s work *Culture Matters* (2000). It rightly rejects the cliché of western liberty and Oriental despotism: ‘The history of the world does not suggest anything like a division between a long-run history of Western toleration and that of non-Western despotism... the very idea of democracy, in the form of participatory public reasoning, has appeared in different civilizations at different periods in world history’ (21).

The report notes the difficulties of measuring cultural liberty and developing a cultural liberty index because of limited data and conceptual and methodological problems. It attempts to operationalize cultural liberty by measuring its opposites in two forms of exclusion: living mode exclusion (‘when the state or social custom denigrates or suppresses a group’s culture, including its language, religion or traditional customs or lifestyles’) and participation exclusion (‘social, economic and political exclusion along ethnic, linguistic or religious lines’).

The report rejects as myths that cultural diversity inevitably leads to clashes over values and that cultural diversity is an obstacle to development. Fair enough; but would it not be appropriate in a Human Development Report on cultural diversity to take a further step and at least explore that cultural diversity may be *conducive* to development? Yet the *economics* of cultural diversity barely come up. The strongest claim is ‘As this Report argues from beginning to end, attempts to suppress and assimilate diverse cultural groups are not only morally wrong—they are often ineffective, heightening tensions’ (44). Two pillars that remain are moral considerations and preventing or managing conflict. Precisely where one would have expected a reflection on correlations between multiculturalism and development it is entirely absent, bar a passing mention of the economic benefits of migration.

There would be several routes toward a political economy of multiculturalism and development. Keith Griffin, a member of the World Commission on Culture and Development, makes a strong case that cultural diversity, past and present, is conducive to development particularly with a view to the innovative contributions of migrants (Griffin 2000). Another option is to link up with the learning approach in development economics, including ‘learning what one is

good at producing' as well as 'learning to learn' (Rodrik and Hausman 2003) and under which conditions combining diverse cultural databases and institutional practices enhances investment decisions and economic performance. This also involves taking up questions of intercultural social capital (Nederveen Pieterse 2007). Cultural economy approaches hold that economics is not merely a social and political but also a cultural phenomenon (Amin and Thrift 2004), which points to a political economy of multiculturalism. This human development report, however, is long on norms and policy prescriptions and short on economics.

According to the report, 'human development aims at expanding an individual's choices' (93), which is odd because one would think that development is above all a social, not an individual project; though it is consistent with the analytical roots of the human development approach in liberalism (Nederveen Pieterse, 2010, chapter 8). Like most development studies the report is short on history and on theory. It makes selective references to the massive literature on ethnicity, ethnic conflict, religion and multiculturalism. The argument for cultural liberty is an odd duck in the massive literature on religion, ethnicity and ethnic conflict and novel in this debate. It does fit Amartya Sen's argument of *Development as Freedom* and its functionalist application of a rights-based liberalism. To this report Sen contributed a background paper on 'Cultural Freedom and Human Development'. As a broadsheet against exclusion the report doesn't discuss the exclusions and shortcomings of liberalism itself, which are well on record, for instance in the history of colonialism (Mehta 1997; Metcalf 1998) and in relation to multiculturalism (see Parekh 2000, 2008).

The core problem of liberal multiculturalism is that it provides a solution for which there is no problem and a remedy for which there is no ailment; a world of optional multiple identities in which individuals can choose their identity is a world that doesn't need multicultural policies (Nederveen Pieterse 2007). The central paradox of this report is that it wants all-round cultural inclusion—but not cultural conservatism; it wants multicultural democracy—but not cultural conservatism. But who can define and decree what is conservative? In effect, this takes the politics out of culture and identity. Campaigns against extremism usually target the extremism of 'others' and are oblivious to one's own extremism.

The report reads as a compendium of liberal multiculturalism policies—straightforward, plain speaking, but mostly obvious and difficult to implement. The report acknowledges the problems that arise from integrating multicultural policies into human development strategies and from its liberal policy recommendations. Thus while education in one's mother tongue is no doubt a value, it notes that there are practical and economic impediments to doing so. Yet these reservations don't feedback to the recommendations: 'In the big picture the arguments for these policies are clear. But for policy-makers the contradictions, trade-offs and clashes with other aspects of human development can monopolize their attention' (45). These fundamental problems are discussed in throwaway lines on 'a history of power relations' that leave matters open and to which there is no follow up. Thus, for all its plain speaking clarity this is actually a confused and confusing document. At times its pronouncements seem to address a parallel universe: 'The central issue in cultural liberty is the capability of people to live as they would choose, with adequate opportunity to consider other options. The normative weight of freedom can hardly be invoked when no choice—real or potential—is actually considered' (17).

In sum, this report presents problems. First, when it claims that 'defending tradition can hold back human development' it restates the old-fashioned modernization vs. tradition approach. Second, when it poses cultural liberty as the framework for culture and development, it views developing countries' cultures through the lens of western values. Third, by offering freedom as the answer to every problem it places the cart before the horse. Policies informed by norms

rather than by the difficult trade-offs of actual development policy belong to the world of ideology.

The report brings us into an arena of freedom and its opponents. In approach and language it reads like an American take on culture and matches an American policy agenda. If one would want to align development cooperation with, say, the war on terrorism, this would be the way to go. One would first declare the aim of development to be freedom; second, one would aim to defend and spread a ‘culture of freedom’ and oppose any form of cultural conservatism. To demonstrate even handedness one would also roundly criticize extremism in the west such as extreme rightwing parties and Christian fundamentalism. Third, one would weave this into development cooperation and conditionality. Thus the promotion of cultural liberty and the struggle against extremism would become strands of good governance.

Turning to culture and development generally, a key point made in this chapter is the significance of cultural difference within developing countries. A trend in many culture and development discussions is to focus on north-south relations and northern cultural bias, as in classic discussions of Eurocentrism and Orientalism. But, of course, ethnic stratification and cultural ‘divisions of labour’ within developing societies is at least as important, if not more for it may involve institutionalized racism on the part of elites and bureaucracies (Jonsson 1999; Nederveen Pieterse 2007). Culture is charged with power at every turn.

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### **Response to Nederveen Pieterse by 2004 HDR authors Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Arunabha Ghosh**

In his review of the Human Development Report 2004, Jan Nederveen Pieterse finds problematic that the main concerns of mainstream debates about culture and development, such as north-south relations and northern cultural bias, and the role of cultural diversity in economic development do not form the core of the analysis. These gaps are not omissions; the main purpose was to clarify culture as an aspect of human development and capabilities expansion and to consider policy options that would promote cultural liberty as the prevailing approaches are problematic because they do not take account of individual choice. These include the instrumental approach that sees culture as a facilitator or obstacle to economic growth; the cultural diversity approach that sees diversity as an end in itself; and the communitarian approach that sees the conservation of cultures and identities as an end. All of

these approaches pose serious contradictions with human development and capabilities priorities. The instrumental approach does not recognize culture as an important aspect of human life, and could be used to justify development that would destroy language, history, and so on. The cultural diversity approach would not recognize that individuals might wish to be free with respect to their way of life and identity with respect to such matters as religious affiliation. The communitarian approach could be used to justify development that would entrench traditional practices that restrict freedoms such as oppression of women. The central claim of the Report rests on two points argued in chapter 1 authored by Amartya Sen: first that choice in areas of culture is an important capability; and second that individuals have multiple – not single – identities. On this basis, the Report elaborates on appropriate development policies that see cultural liberty as an end, not a means, to development. Expansion of cultural liberty needs to be a fourth pillar of the human development policy approach in addition to equitable growth, expansion of social opportunities, and democratic governance.

In particular:

1. Nederveen Pieterse is wrong to suggest that human development is ‘above all a social, not an individual project’. It is indeed about expanding the choices and opportunities for individuals to lead lives that they value.
2. He is also wrong to interpret the report as suggesting that a world of ‘optional multiple identities’ actually exists. The report argues that for individuals to exercise their freedom, the choice must exist, not that it occurs in practice always. If that were so, then of course there would be no problem and we would not have written the report in the first place. In reality, it is true that many individuals and groups are constrained in exercising their identities or in opting for different identities and the report documents how such constraints adversely impact human development.
3. Nederveen Pieterse asks ‘who can define...what is conservative?’ and alleges that the report suggests Western donors would do that. This is a misrepresentation of the report’s argument. Even on the headscarf debate, the report discusses democratic processes, pointing out that among French Muslim women, opinion was split. Nowhere does the report suggest that a donor agency would go in and decree cultural freedoms in return for conditional lending.
4. He criticises the report for acknowledging that policies promoting cultural liberty would face other trade-offs. Now, which approach would be more genuine? A report that hammers away at policy prescriptions or one that outlines preferred policy options but recognises that different countries might choose different approaches even in the pursuit of seeking to promote cultural liberties?
5. The ‘parallel universe’ that the report is meant to inhabit is the same universe that many oppressed people would also prefer. If some people can choose the lives and identities and luxuries they want, why cannot others?
6. The report is not a restatement of the modernisation versus tradition debate. That approach would have recommended literally bulldozing through the lands of indigenous people, not the much more complex and messy approach to designing co-beneficial modes of development in indigenous peoples’ lands. To take another example, a ‘modernising’ approach would only accommodate the teaching of a few international (colonial) languages, whereas the Report draws attention to the need to adopt multilingual education policies, which have helped children in many countries perform better in schools and also learn languages that would be of use in the global marketplace.

7. The biggest misreading of the report is that it views the world through the lens of Western values. At best, this criticism reflects ignorance of liberal and democratic traditions that have existed in other parts of the world. At worst, it gives fodder to those who like to think of the world as divided between liberal and illiberal civilisations. Just because Nederveen Pieterse does not want to personally impose his liberal Western values on others does not make the worldview of cultural relativism any less blinkered.

In sum, Nederveen Pieterse is right to point out that the report is more about norms and less about economics. But this is deliberate. But he is wrong to say the offers no policy options. We took a decision to go beyond some of the spurious ‘culture impacts development’ literature to think about what social, economic and political framework would promote human development and the expansion of individual capabilities.

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## **Endogenous development as interface**

**Wim Hiemstra**

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In the film ‘The Age of Stupid’, on devastating effects of climate change, we see a man in the year 2055, looking at old footage from 2008 and asking: why didn’t we stop climate change when we had the chance? Where do we find inspiration to respond to the challenges? In the current context of failing neoliberal development policies, the need to reduce carbon emissions and to ensure food sovereignty for a growing population, where are alternative pathways emerging? The COMPAS network was established 13 years ago to explore how endogenous development approaches, based on people’s culture and worldviews, and intercultural dialogue can contribute to equitable and sustainable development. During an evaluation in 2009, the relevance of alternative approaches such as endogenous development within current development debates were deemed high. In the course of 13 years of action research, the COMPAS partners have designed, applied and tested a variety of methods for enhancing endogenous development, particularly methods for learning from and with local people, for testing and improving indigenous practices, for networking and training. When addressing ways of learning in endogenous development, it became clear that different ways of knowing co-exist. Different cultures have different ways of knowing and learning. In the Andes, the spiral notion of time is not separated from space (territory). The first ordering principle is ‘relationship’: everything is related and this leads to a reciprocal relationship between people, animals, plants, rocks, water, wind, sun, moon, and stars. The relations are re-lived in rituals and festivals (Rist et al 1999). In African worldviews, the world is made up of ancestors, the living and the yet unborn. Nature is sacred and there is a hierarchy between divine beings, spiritual beings, ancestors, living human beings and nature. Nature provides habitat for human as well as spiritual entities (Millar 2006). In the Vedic tradition of India, reality is a continuum of matter, mind and consciousness. ‘Akasha’ refers to the unifying energy inherent in nature and in every living creature (Shankar 1999). In the Western scientific worldview, the world is conceived of as consisting of separate and autonomous entities, such as people and nature. In the post-modern Western worldview, the world is seen as a more holistic entity where uncertainty, diversity, chaos and self-regulation are seen as ordering principles (Haverkort and Reijntjes 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about COMPAS, see [www.compasnet.org](http://www.compasnet.org)

Endogenous development is defined as development from within, based mainly though not exclusively on locally available resources, values, institutions and knowledge. By revitalising ancestral and local ways of knowing and learning, and addressing their current relevance, endogenous development aims to empower local communities to take control of their own development process. External resources that best fit the local conditions are selected by the communities. It is a participatory approach which takes the material, social and spiritual wellbeing of peoples and their interactions into account. As spirituality is included, it allows for an intercultural dialogue between different paradigms, between indigenous and rural people and their worldviews on the one hand, and the worldviews related to (western-based) development proposals on the other hand. The network consists of partnerships of Community-Based Organisations representing indigenous and/or rural people, NGOs and universities in 18 countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia. In 2002, a University Consortium for Endogenous Development was added to the COMPAS network to assist field-based organisations to document and systematise their approaches.

In order to further operationalise the approach of endogenous development, a focus on wellbeing monitoring was agreed upon in 2007 in the COMPAS network. 'Wellbeing' is a relatively new concept in development discourses, but is also central in the 'economics of happiness' as in Gross National Happiness approaches in Bhutan. White (2009) defines wellbeing as being comprised of three key dimensions: material, relational and subjective. The 'material' comprises assets, welfare and standards of living. The 'relational' dimension deals with social relations. The 'subjective' relates to perceptions of wellbeing and cultural values, ideologies and beliefs. COMPAS defines wellbeing as 'real life', where material, social and spiritual wellbeing coincide. The niche of COMPAS partner organisations is to show how endogenous development approaches deal with wellbeing in concrete field programmes. How can outsiders such as 'development workers' - learn to - deal with the different dimensions of wellbeing (material, social and spiritual) as expressed in the worldviews of the people they work with?<sup>2</sup>

In Sri Lanka, three COMPAS partner NGOs implement and coordinate their activities from an endogenous development perspective, dealing with traditional organic farming, ethnoveterinary practices and traditional architecture. Until recently, farmers practised agriculture based on subsidised modern crop varieties, fertilisers and pesticides. Negative effects of modern agriculture become clear: water pollution, changing consumption patterns and related health problems such as kidney disease and diabetes. The farmers know that these practices go against their worldview and the five precepts of Buddhism: refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicants. With external support from COMPAS partner NGOs, they are now gradually moving back to traditional varieties and organic farming practices. Within Sri Lanka, many scientists and policy makers currently question the agricultural policy of the government. Endogenous development is proposed as a relevant alternative as it mediates between 'development' and 'indigenusness'.

In Ghana, COMPAS partner organisation CIKOD (Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development) has been working since 2001 to develop methodologies to strengthen traditional institutions: male (chiefs) and female (queens) traditional leaders, elders, clan heads, earth priests, institutions for mobilisation, control or economic development. CIKOD's experience in revalorising local culture and on restoring indigenous forms of natural resource management also has strong potential to address the crisis facing

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<sup>2</sup> Experiences of COMPAS partners in seven countries, where sacred natural sites are of importance for community wellbeing and for global biocultural teachings in nature conservation, are described in a contribution to the forthcoming IUCN book *Precious Earth*.

peasant agriculture. In 2008, record numbers of Africa's poor experienced hunger. The 'Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa' (AGRA) has been proposed to solve poverty by shifting African agriculture to a system dependent on expensive, harmful chemicals, monocultures of hybrid seeds, and ultimately genetically modified organisms. From the COMPAS perspective, there has to be room within AGRA to explore alternative approaches based on food sovereignty<sup>3</sup> and agroecology on a large scale. Peasant farm leaders argue that 'Agroecology is not just a collection of practices. Agroecology is a way of life.' To survive, it needs to be embedded in a cultural and organizational reality. The ambition of COMPAS partners in Africa is to support a wider movement that strengthens farmer organizations, enabling them to promote an innovative agroecology, mobilize grassroots support for "countervailing" resistance to the neoliberal approach to agriculture, and advocate for policies and practices that create an enabling environment for endogenous and culturally sensitive development. Endogenous development also encourages its practitioners to address negative aspects of a culture, with a view to reforming them and promoting positive aspects for sustainable development. One example on female bondage is described elsewhere in this bulletin. Endogenous development in this case means a process of reflection with the whole community on the negative and positive aspects, and facilitating a search for alternatives.

The government of Bolivia approved a new constitution in 2009 that aims to empower the country's indigenous majority. COMPAS partner AGRUCO (Agroecología Universidad Cochabamba) contributed to the constitutional process by proposing agroecological alternatives and indicating how revitalised indigenous knowledge can be used as an asset. AGRUCO has developed a methodology for intra- and intercultural dialogue. Intra-cultural dialogue is exchange of experiences, ideas and values within a particular culture with the aim of mutual learning and strengthening cultural identity. Inter-cultural dialogue refers to a similar exchange between people from different cultural backgrounds with the aim of re-evaluating knowledge and wisdom of people (Delgado and Mariscal, 2006). Endogenous development emerges as an interface between the indigenous and the modern way of life

A broad range of alternatives is emerging from indigenous and/or civil society movements across the globe, which can inspire us all. There is a great need to bring ordinary people's needs to the centre instead of market needs. COMPAS is working on one of those alternatives and, by living its mission and core values, respects spirituality as an essential component of wellbeing. The basis for COMPAS remains to empower local communities to take control over their own lives. The challenge is to demonstrate impact beyond isolated success stories and to appeal to policy makers. COMPAS is currently working on tools for interfacing, including capacity building, qualitative monitoring through most significant change stories to complement quantitative monitoring, wellbeing assessments and policy dialogues to deal with the challenges ahead. 'Our response to climate change will define our generation, in the same way that ending apartheid, overturning slavery or landing on the moon defined earlier generations', said 'Age of Stupid' film director Franny Armstrong. Time will tell whether our responses have been successful.

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<sup>3</sup> Food Sovereignty was first defined in 1996 by the international peasant federation La Vía Campesina (The Peasant Way) as 'people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems'. It is a much deeper concept than food security because it proposes not just guaranteed access to food, but democratic control over the food system—from production and processing, to distribution, marketing, and consumption.

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## ***In the Practice***

### **Limits of culturally appropriate measures in Australia's indigenous health policies**

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The concept of culture permeates the development discourse in many and diverse ways. In particular, the use of a 'language of culture' seems to resonate as a dominant mantra across the diversified spectrum of development initiatives. Terms like 'cultural awareness', 'cultural appropriateness', 'cultural safety' are often used to legitimize mainstream development policy strategies against contexts of startling cultural diversity. I argue that the use of a 'cultural language' in development policy frameworks often conceals the replication of a cultural divide which lies at the foundation of development policy failures. The case study of Australia's indigenous health policy frameworks exemplifies how the use of concepts such as 'cultural appropriateness' or 'cultural safety' can indeed perpetuate the same cultural divide that intends to overcome.

Australia, ranked among the wealthiest countries in the world, has been listed within the first countries enjoying the highest human development index over the last years. In a country where people enjoy the second highest life-expectancy among OECD countries, and one the highest standards of living and well-being, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to suffer health conditions comparable to some of the poorest countries in the world. To illustrate, the life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is estimated to be 59.4 years for males and 64.8 for females, compared with 76.6 years for males in the total population and 82 years of females in the total population. A significant gap of approximately 17 years for both males and females exists between the indigenous and non-indigenous population of Australia. This is only a glimpse of the devastatingly poor health conditions of indigenous Australians, conditions which show the severe health inequality between the indigenous and non-indigenous population of one of the most developed country in the world.

Numerous questions continue to arise as to the causes of the widespread indigenous ill-health and the adequacy of Australian governmental institutions' responses to tackle the indigenous health crisis. Central in the debate is the tremendous incidence that social determinants have on people's health status (WHO 2003). Socio-economic factors such as education, income, employment and occupation, housing, legal exclusion, together with several risk factors,

impact significantly on the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Altman 2003; Gray 2004).

Without ignoring the significance that socio-economic factors have on the ill-health status of indigenous Australians, it is important to consider the unexpected ramifications deriving from the adoption of the language and concept of 'cultural appropriateness' in Australia's health policy frameworks and service delivery. I argue that the concept of 'cultural appropriateness' in the delivery of health care services to Aboriginal communities and individuals is inadequate to fully address their 'cultural needs' or cultural diversity. The reason lies in the fact that the application of the concept of 'culturally appropriateness' to mainstream health care services delivered to indigenous Australians tends to sanction a one-way medical conceptual framework and medical response to illnesses. In other words, it ignores the cultural complexities of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health interface.

This line of argumentation can be better grasped if we consider the issue of 'compliance/non compliance' in the context of Aboriginal health. This issue is in fact illustrative of the predominance of the western medicine paradigm. The treatment failure as a result of 'poor compliance', has significantly weighed down Aboriginal Australian health care (McConnel 2003; Hamrosi et al 2006). Evidence shows that compliance, that is, adherence to western medical advice and services, is a key cause of the continuing dreadful state of health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The failure to use prescribed medication is reported to be a reality of daily life, a problem leading to continued or worsening Indigenous health outcomes (Lucas 1997).

Alternatively, it is suggested that indigenous non-compliance is not the problem but rather a measure of the real issue: the dissonance between two different belief systems, those of Aboriginal patients and western medicine (McConnel 2003; Maher 1999: 235). 'Strong compliance', or healthy behaviour, occurs when there is a strong cultural affinity between patients and western medical advice and treatments, in particular, when the scientific concepts of cause and effect, as well as statistical relationships such as predictability, are shared. 'Poor compliance', or unhealthy behaviour, occurs when there is not a common understanding of those fundamental concepts underlying the western medical system. Difficulties arise when perceptions about the causes of ill-health are different, when health practitioners offer an account of reality which is different from patients' understanding and experience: the greater the dissonance between the western medical explanatory model and patients' belief systems, the higher the impact on compliance (Maher 1999: 235).

The introduction of 'culturally appropriate measures' as a device to improve the accessibility of the mainstream health delivery system, can be considered as a means to increase compliance among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The point I would like to make is that those measures operate only at one specific level of the 'health interface' in which a lot of Aboriginal people live on a daily basis. To clarify, we can consider 'compliance' as a rate or a fraction with a numerator and denominator. In the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, the numerator indicates adherence to medical advice, whereas the denominator is the medical advice given according to the western medical system. It follows that progress towards compliance can be achieved either by manipulating the numerator or the denominator (McConnel 2003).

Efforts to improve compliance have focused on the numerator, that is increasing indigenous peoples' adherence, by encouraging patients to take responsibility for their health, increasing personal and community autonomy, and changing 'institutional attitudes and behaviour' to ensure 'cultural safety' through more 'culturally appropriate' measures aiming at

accommodating Indigenous Australians' 'cultural needs' (Humphery and Weeramanthri 2001).

In all these 'culturally appropriate measures' the fundamental assumption is that the denominator, that is the western medical system, remains unchanged and unchallenged. In this way, western medicine is conceived of as a neutral construct, free from any 'cultural traits'. In contrast, I argue that cultural awareness should be applied not only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but also to the western system of medicine. Western medicine is deemed to have a culture, a set of attitudes, actions and a belief system. The most significant feature is that western medical culture is science-based: scientific and evidence-based knowledge underpins the whole conceptual fabric of western medicine. Accordingly, a scientific view of health, illness and disease not only informs the whole cognitive apparatus of the medical system, but also affects health professionals' practices, attitudes, and advice given to patients. It is precisely the distance between Indigenous Australians' health belief system and western medicine's belief system, the root cause of the problematic issues in the cross-cultural health service delivery setting (Maher 1999; McConnel 2003).

It is suggested that the immobility of the denominator indicates the foundational flaw of Australia's policy framework to address Aboriginal Australians health status: the recognition and maintenance of the western medicine paradigm as the only system of medical knowledge accepted and applied in the delivery of health care. It is evident that the adoption of 'culturally appropriate measures' based on this model perpetuates an intrinsic dynamic of difference which replicates, instead of overcoming a significant cultural divide between the indigenous patients and the non-indigenous medical system and personnel.

The articulation of real 'cultural sensitive' health policies for indigenous Australians should imply a broader and deeper understanding of cultural awareness operating at the 'health interface'. In the case of compliance this would translate into the manipulation of the denominator through the elevation of Aboriginal traditional medicine to the same level as western mainstream medicine. In other words, 'cultural awareness', 'cultural safety' and 'cultural appropriateness' in Australia's indigenous health policy frameworks and strategies should work both ways. As the traditional healers of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, Andy Tjilari and Rupert Peter, declare 'we want to work together to improve the health and well-being of Anangu'.

The integration of Aboriginal traditional medicine into Australia's health policy frameworks would have far-reaching significance and implications. First of all, it would not be exceptional from a worldwide perspective (Ryser 2006). Rather, it would harmonize Australian health policy with the growing international interest and recognition of traditional medicine and complementary/alternative medicine (WHO 2000, 2001, 2002; WHO-PAHO 2000). More importantly, its acknowledgement would involve the acceptance of the cultural paradigm underlying the whole indigenous knowledge and belief system. In other words, it would represent a valuable alternative option not only to improve 'compliance', but to fulfil the internationally recognised indigenous peoples' right to health for Aboriginal Australians. As article 24 of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights states, 'Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medical plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services'.

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## **Addressing the Controversial Practice of Female Bondage in Ghana<sup>1</sup>**

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Traditional values and beliefs are a unifying factor in local communities regardless of people's religious affiliations. Yet some of these may favour some members of a community and disfavour others. They may promote some interests while undermining others. One of COMPAS' tasks is to examine cultural values (such as solidarity, hospitality, integrity) in order to understand how they have evolved over time. The role of the Endogenous Development intervener should therefore be to bring awareness around the issues of who benefits and who loses in maintaining or abandoning a particular cultural resource. The key word is self-awareness: the Endogenous Development intervener uses the empathic engagement and critical dialogue tools to increase people's awareness about their own resources, and the potentials and dangers of these with regard to the possibility of bringing peace, harmony and prosperity to the community as a whole.

### **Gender lenses**

A next step is 'to wear gender lenses to engage with values': why is a particular practice promoted? Who gains from it? What are the gender implications? And does this practice limit or enhance the liberties of either sex? Trokosi, popularly referred to as female bondage, a cultural practice in parts of southern Ghana, served as an example during the workshop.<sup>2</sup> It is practised as a form of atonement for the sins of an offending family. When a family offends

<sup>1</sup> This is an article published in the magazine *Endogenous Development*, issue 4, June 2009. The magazine is sponsored by the Compas programme in the Netherlands. For more information, see <http://www.compasnet.org>.

<sup>2</sup> This was an Endogenous Development and Gender Equity workshop held by the African COMPAS partners in Uganda in November 2008.

the gods, they are required to commit a young maiden to their service. This entails her removal from her family to a shrine, where she receives her education, training and health care outside the formal system. The maiden renders various services including cleaning, cooking and farming as well as attending to priests, devotees and visitors. She may also become the sexual partner of the priest. For some time now, anti-forced labour activists, anti-slavery campaigners and human rights activists as well as child and women's rights activists have targeted the practice for its human rights breeches. The forced removal of children from their families, denial of formal education and health care, use of labour and sexual exploitation of young women have been highlighted as controversial. These forms of activism come from external sources including UN agencies, NGOs and women's rights organisations. Priests and devotees have also initiated counter-activism, defending their cultural rights.

### **Cosmovision and gender**

In the Uganda workshop, COMPAS partners were challenged to critically examine their principles and practices by imagining how to deal with this controversial custom in their own field localities using gender lenses. The participants were encouraged to 'infuse' gender analysis in their operational tools and techniques. They reflected on and analysed cultural practices to bring out the cosmovision aspects. The exercise was carried out by considering the three dimensions of the 'interacting worldviews':

- *Material*: The young woman provides labour and sexual gratification to the chief priest, and produces children. Her material needs are met. Other aspects of the exchange, such as the position of children born within the contract are controversial issues that should be addressed.

- *Social*: The social significance is seen in the atonement, as a result of which the family (re)gains acceptance within the community and freedom to associate with dignity. But what happens to the girl when she is removed from her family? What types of association can she maintain and on what terms? There are losses and gains to the family and the girl in the form of socialisation, security and status. How might critical dialogue informed by gender analysis address these questions?

- *Spiritual*: A sense of security and gratification is born from meeting spiritual obligations, as the family and even the community achieves psychological peace of mind through cleansing and appeasing the ancestors. The committed woman represents the family in the shrine, interceding on their behalf while growing in her spirituality. Yet, the loss of a family member to the shrine is a disconnection that upsets the balance of the family. How might the operational tools help to enrich spirituality by effectively addressing the tensions? The other side of the coin is the priests' and devotees' appreciation of the practice; what are their motivations, modifications and compromises? Although this was not explored during the workshop, it was agreed that a similar analysis could lead to a better understanding of why a cultural practice persists; who benefits and how; the extent to which it is understood as positive or negative by the people who maintain the practice and those who condemn it; and the appropriate interventions to make.

### **Bern Guri of COMPAS partner CIKOD from Ghana comments:**

One criticism of the endogenous development approach is that it tends to lead to a position of cultural relativism. However, it is not a question of condoning all practices simply because they are part of a culture. Facilitating a process of reflection, in which the negative aspects are acknowledged and the positive aspects are supported, can enable a community to make informed choices. In the case of trokosi, human rights activists in Ghana have adopted the sympathetic approach where they have clearly taken the side of rushing to the 'rescue of the enslaved girls' without engaging the community in meaningful dialogue. The result is that trokosi has been officially outlawed in Ghana but it still persists. On the other hand, if the

gender analysis presented in this article were carried out with the whole community, with the aim of heightening the community's awareness of the negative and positive aspects, and offering alternatives, the community would probably be motivated to initiate their own process to modify or change or even adopt other practices that would be more acceptable to the community and the wider society.