CHAPTER 10. CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT RECONSIDERED

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10. Culture and Development Reconsidered

When he finished his pathbreaking book on culture and development in Italy, Robert Putnam briefed an Italian minister of government. Putnam explained the deep roots of successful democracy and decentralization. The kinds of indigenous institutions and networks that particular districts possessed 150 years before almost perfectly predicted the performance of district governments after decentralization. Putnam went further, showing that some of the differences in "social capital" went back hundreds of years. The minister's first response was not appreciative. "Are you just telling me there's nothing we can do?"[1]

Overcoming cultural determinism may paradoxically involve facing up to cultural differences, even when they are embarrassing. In chapter 8 we encountered Bernard Lédéa Ouédraogo, who founded a new, culturally appropriate model of community development in West Africa. In his old government job, he was disillusioned by the dysfunctional response of local farmers to his high-minded efforts to develop them.

> The rural extension workers would arrive in a village, and the only concern of the officially organized farmers was to take advantage of the donkeys, bullocks, carts, hoes, and other materials we would make available to them … It was normal that in such a situation the farmers had but one concern: prime the State "pump" for all it was worth and cheat the extension workers.

One could deny any problem with the local culture, blaming shortcomings instead on the government (always a promising culprit) or on the culturally inappropriate machinations of the market.

Or instead, one could ask how rural culture might be investigated, involved, and invigorated. This is what Ouédraogo did with his remarkable 6-S organization. As we saw, he built on local cultural strengths and indigenous networks, including age-group organizations and village elders.

> It starts with what people *are* (based on a true appreciation of their African identity), what they *know* (respect for traditional knowledge and values, which implies the considerable effort necessary to become acquainted with them), their *know-how* (rediscovery of traditional techniques, some of which, for example in the field of water and soil conservation, have proven invaluable), and what they *wish to achieve* (which implies meaningful grassroots participation in defining the very objectives of the development process).[2]

Ouédraogo also had a clear-eyed view of their weaknesses, including substandard planning and accounting, a readiness for Big Men to take the financing for themselves, too little agricultural know-how in key domains, and "a cultural syndrome of distrust and lack of confidence." The point is that he and his colleagues built on cultural strengths and networks and took steps, through 6-S, to overcome weaknesses.

Or take another common phenomenon around the world: certain cultural groups lag in conventional measures of academic performance. One response is denial, especially when, lurking in the background, is an academic literature that connects academic performance, general intelligence, and heredity. Instead, easier just to say: "The measures are meaningless and biased against those cultural groups. Don't ever mention 'cultural deficits.'" Another response is to blame teachers and administrators, or books and syllabi. The Pygmalion effect asserts that if teachers believe that students from such-and-such a cultural group will learn less, then teachers

will behave differently and their belief will be self-fulfilling. "The educational system is biased against that group."

Instead, one could investigate what cultural differences are relevant to learning and how they could be taken into account in pedagogy. This is what the KEEP program in Hawai'i did. As we saw in chapter 8, anthropologists studied Hawai'ian children and their families. They noted that when children were singled out at home, it was perceived as a scolding. Perhaps this was the reason why, in the classroom, Hawai'ian children tended to freeze when called upon individually to read or recite. There were educational implications for other cultural behaviors, from group play to noisiness, from learning from stories to benefitting from examples from their indigenous worlds. KEEP changed the pedagogy for Hawai'ian students, and the results were fewer dropouts, more student engagement and satisfaction, and higher achievement test scores.

Tailoring programs and policies to cultures obviously demands knowing about those cultures, in two senses. We need some sort of theoretical framework to lay out the possible interactions between cultures and policies. And we need some sort of data for the specific cultural setting, which would enable the concrete particulars of the interactions to be assessed and addressed.

Both steps are scary. First and foremost come the possibilities of misuse. Of dreaded words like reification, objectification, essentialism, cultural determinism. Of the loathed association between cultural "traits" and genetic ones. Of creating a kind of cultural apartheid. Of being a defeatist trait-taker instead of a revolutionary trait-maker. "You're condemning people from that culture to remain ..."

A second scary thing, at least metaphorically, is the sheer scientific difficulty of modeling the culture by policy interactions and then estimating them in practice. Marcel Mauss expressed

the ultimate in that modeling dream when he talked of capturing a culture's every dimension: no ethnography would be satisfactory, he said, without having included them all. There will always that call for more factors, levels, nuances. As one recent critique of culture and poverty said,

> further theoretical development may be facilitated by a concern for systematically disentangling social psychological processes (often focused on perceptions) from cultural processes that involve intersubjectivity and shared meaning-making (e.g. symbolic boundaries, classification systems, and repertoires), in their interaction and articulation with social and institutional processes. These various levels should be examined in their interaction with access to a range of social, material, and other resources that act as determinants of poverty and inequality ... To consider a part of the equation will by definition result in an inadequate (because incomplete) understanding of crucial causal pathways.[3]

These scholars do not cite a prototype of such work. (And by the way, neither Mauss nor his students ever produced one of his sought-after depictions of *le fait social total*.)

Better, then—conclude many people interested in culture—to leave that scientific agenda aside, indeed to question its premises and authority. Culture isn't a bunch of "factors." It's not a matrix of measures. Yes, there's may be a dynamic, complex system here, but please don't even begin down the path of cultural "variables." As Marc-Éric Gruénais and Fatoumata Ouattara put it, "Anthropology makes fun of models of public health with their boxes and arrows that mix such massive, imprecise, and undefined variables as 'sociocultural environment,' 'ethnic group,' 'socioeconomic status,' 'psycho-social factors,' etc. with risk factors measured down to the millimeter (insulin level, viral load, etc.)."[4]

We must do better. The realities of underdevelopment are harsh and galling. Current strategies are not working well enough or fast enough. We need more analysis of those culture by policy interactions, more experimentation with ways to enable local people to profit from international knowledge (such as it is) and to combine it creatively with their knowledge and know-how.

FROM SOCIAL SCIENCE TO SOIL SCIENCE?

I find a metaphor of Robert Putnam's useful. He refers to local cultural conditions as the *symbolic soil* in which development takes place.[5] Policies and projects may work better or worse, depending in part on these soil conditions; and if we understood the soil conditions better, we might decide to design a different policy or project.

Soil scientists analyze soils, using partial and incomplete measures.[6] They listen carefully to local farmers about their land and farming practices. Beyond describing differences in soil conditions, soil scientists have theories, models, and rules of thumb describing the interactions among types of soils, types of crops, and types of soil treatments. Soil scientists seem like trait-takers when they ask, "In this soil, what crops will grow best, given other factors like climate?" But they also ask questions like trait-makers: "In order to grow such-and-such a desired crop here, what changes can be made to the soil itself, such as irrigation, fertilizer, cross-cropping, shade, and so forth?"

Could anthropologists and other social scientists aspire to become more like soil scientists? We, too, might seek to provide *partial and incomplete* measures of local cultural conditions in order to *help local people* make better decisions. We, too, would listen to locals, recognizing that they know much more about their local conditions and practices than we ever can, that our comparative and theoretical science may at best provide new insights for local people to

consider. As in the case of soil science, one idea is to choose appropriate "crops" to take advantage of given "soils"—in this case, selecting policies and projects to take advantage of local cultural strengths and minimize their weaknesses, given other aspects of the task environment. And as in the case of soil science, social science could also help local people consider how to change those cultural conditions, if they so desired.

Becoming more like soil scientists is at once bold and modest. The boldness comes from taking social science seriously, and trying to apply it. As with soil scientists, the aim should be to help local people make their own decisions with the aid of both local and cross-cultural knowledge.

Modestly, the soil science analogy eschews Mauss's goal of "representing a culture" through social scientific research. The analogy may also reinforce the modest virtues of getting our hands dirty and keeping our feet on the ground.

Guided by the soil science metaphor, we should try to understand what classifications of cultural "soil conditions" might prove useful, for specific issues and perhaps in specific settings. The impossibility of a perfect multivariate, dynamic model for all issues and all cultures need not paralyze us. Soil scientists also rely on experts from other disciplines—horticulturalists, chemists, extension workers, geographers, and so forth. So, too, applied cultural studies should be eclectic, always using whatever intellectual tools might be available to help assess local conditions. The appropriate disciplines may well depend on whether the issue is rural health clinics, credit and savings programs, producers' cooperatives, common-pool resources of various kinds, pedagogies, economic policies, and so forth. Some soil scientists specialize in particular crops or particular soil treatments. So, too, may the study of cultural settings eventually involve

experts in particular kinds of settings and particular types of policy interventions, including cultural change.

Raising the possibility of intentional cultural change is scary—even with the proviso that local people be the ones who decide. Cultural change is more problematic than soil treatment. Nonetheless, the soil science metaphor provides a useful guideline: the scientist's comparative and theoretical perspectives may be able to supplement local knowledge about soil conditions and soil-by-crop interactions, and decisions about change should rely on the locals.

An Example: Common-pool Resources

Consider the work of Elinor Ostrom in Nepal. Local groups there faced challenges that were at once local (and intensely cultural) and generic (and appreciable through a variety of analytical models): the management of common-pool resources (also called common-property resources).

One example of a common-pool resource is a local forest. If a community manages the forest with an eye to the long-term welfare of all, community members will limit how many trees are cut in any period of time. And more of course: the management of a forest includes which trees are cut, how density is managed, what to do about diseases and pests, and other dimensions of forest health. But consider the potential for overcutting. Each individual profits personally (economists say "privately") from cutting down one tree more than their allotment, and the costs to the ecology of the forest, and therefore to the community, from one more harvested tree are small. But if everyone follows the individualistic, private logic of maximization, soon the forest is overcut. It takes a village, as they say—but how to organize the collective management of this common-property good?

Similar questions arose in the management of their local irrigation systems. Nepalis were aware of chronic tensions. They recognized in principle that sharing the water and managing the system would increase their total production. But they also were aware of the personal advantages of not sharing. Especially those farmers located upstream had opportunities to take more water than their allotment, which would mean less water for those downstream and lower overall production.

Imagine the difficult social scientific questions that arise. Estimate the optimal forest size, the optimal distribution of irrigation water: in principle, straightforward but in practice many complexities emerge. Given those estimates, economists and engineers can trot out models of the monitoring and incentives needed for optimal management. But let's focus on the "cultural" and political practicalities of managing a common-property resource. Who is going to determine and then legitimize "optimality" for the local forest or irrigation system? And who is going to implement the monitoring? How and how well? With what incentives and penalties for the enforcers and incentive-givers? With what cultural legitimacy? Determined through what local process? What if corruption and mismanagement occur?

Instead of avoiding these daunting questions as too hard, with too much potential for misuse, Ostrom was bold and humble in addressing them with the Nepalis.

Bold

She was bold in her confidence that learning about the economics of common-pool resources would help the Nepalis improve their own perceptions of the challenges and opportunities. Using knowledge from around the world, she helped farmers understand five kinds of property rights which often form "bundles": access, withdrawal, management,

exclusion, and alienation. She shared her research on seven types of rules used in common-property resources: boundary, position, choice, information, scope, aggregation, and payoff.[7]

Humble

Ostrom was also humble. She appreciated in her heart as well as her head that the Nepalis were sovereign. They were wise in ways and domains that she was not. "She was really a field worker," wrote Prachanda Pradhan. "She strongly believed that we learn from the farmers and we have to give to the farmers what we have learnt; so, she propagated the idea 'from farmer to farmer.'"[8]

She had the anthropologist's humility in the face of diversity. When she revisited Nepal after winning the Nobel prize in economics, she was taken aback by people now asking her for "the" answer. She demurred. "Knowledge is not just about an answer," she told an interviewer, "it is about knowledge itself or about the processes. Sometimes complex processes are interactive and you need to know about the processes are different [sic] before you can judge what is happening."[9] As she emphasized in her Nobel lecture, "the application of empirical studies to the policy world leads one to stress the importance of fitting institutional rules to a specific social-ecological setting. 'One-size-fits-all' policies are not effective."[10]

> Achieving a higher standard of living without losing some of the strong capabilities of self-governance is a major challenge. To do so, however, requires listening to farmers in the first place and gaining information about their needs, their property rights, their ways of governing irrigation, and facilitating their plans for ways of managing improved physical capital … And, if they have managed their own system in the past, they know what kind of property rights and duties have been established in the past that need to be taken into account in any effort to "modernize" a system.[11]

The combination of theoretical knowledge and careful listening led Ostrom to identify local conditions that were most conducive to effective community management:

- users have common interests;
- they place a high value on the resource far into the future;
- users support effective monitoring;
- accurate information is valued and easily communicated; and
- it is feasible to establish binding and enforceable regulations.[12]

Ostrom didn't do all this to *derive a solution*. Instead, she and the farmers worked together (with others) to create culturally attuned designs and learning-based implementation.[13] I want to underscore three things Ostrom and her colleagues could provide for the Nepali farmers.

1. Data

First, data. She could show them, with information that complemented their local knowledge, features of local forest ecology and farming systems that matter for its sustainable management—and she could put those features in a comparative context. These data helped farmers "locate" their challenges compared with other forests and irrigation systems. She and her colleagues screened over 500 case studies from around the world to create a data base of 44 inshore fishing groups and 47 irrigation systems—data that included the actors, their strategies, the condition of the resource, and the rules-in-use. She created "a structured database called the Nepal Irrigation Institutions and Systems (NIIS) Database. We shared the design of this database with a number of colleagues who are deeply familiar with irrigation, and began to code the 135 case studies that we had collected from our trips to Nepal and from the published literature." Later she and her colleagues filled in missing data and added 80 more Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems (FMIS) to the data set.[14]

She could help farmers assess their management systems using quantitative data. For example, regarding irrigation systems, Ostrom and her colleagues assessed three performance measures: (1) their physical condition, (2) the quantity of water available to farmers at the tail end of a system at different seasons of the year, and (3) the agricultural productivity of the systems. After controlling for environmental differences among systems, she and her colleagues showed that irrigation systems governed by the farmers themselves performed significantly better than government-managed systems on all three performance measures. (These findings made a difference not only to the farmers, but to the Nepali government and international development agencies.)

2. Case Studies of Success

Second, she could share with Nepalis specific examples from other countries of local people successfully designing and managing sustainable forest policies and irrigation systems. There were also success stories from Nepal. "Look at what these farmers did and how, and how much better their results became. What do you think about that?"

3. Frameworks and Checklists

Third, she could in creative ways teach them about the economics of common-pool resources. The simplifications and abstraction of an analytical framework can help locals see dimensions that might be hidden. A model can enable them to step back from their locally intense constructions of the problems and opportunities. "You mean this problem isn't just of our particular families in our unique context? Of our culture and history and politics? Or of Nepalis?"

These inputs—data, case studies, and frameworks—were then supplemented with a checklist of design principles (see Table 9.1).[15]

[Begin Table]

Table 9.1

Design Principles for Managing Common-pool Resources

1A. User Boundaries: Clear and locally understood boundaries between legitimate users and nonusers are present.

1B. Resource Boundaries: Clear boundaries that separate a specific common-pool resource from a larger social-ecological system are present.

2A. Congruence with local conditions: Appropriation and provision rules are congruent with local social and environmental conditions.

2B. Appropriation and Provision: Appropriation rules are congruent with provision rules; the distribution of costs is proportional to the distribution of benefits.

3. Collective-Choice Arrangements: Most individuals affected by a resource regime are authorized to participate in making and modifying its rules.

4A. Monitoring Users: Individuals who are accountable to or are the users monitor the appropriation and provision levels of the users.

4B. Monitoring the resource: individuals who are accountable to or are the users monitor the condition of the resource.

5. Graduated Sanctions: Sanctions for rule violations start very low but become stronger if a user repeatedly violates a rule.

6. Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms: Rapid, low-cost, local arenas exist for resolving conflicts among users or with officials.

7. Minimal Recognition of Rights: The rights of local users to make their own rules are recognized by the government.

8. Nested Enterprises: When a common-pool resource is closely connected to a larger social-ecological system, governance activities are organized in multiple nested layers.

[End Table]

And note how humbly she shared this knowledge. Ostrom had confidence in the abilities of Nepalis, thus informed and inspired, to come up with creative and practical ideas. With specifics such as where to start and how. Her "lessons" were not "here's the expert diagnosis, do this." Rather, she may have hoped that farmers would respond this way:

> We're not alone in these challenges. Others have succeeded in meeting them. What they did, and some of the analytical principles we've learned, can help us rethink what we're doing and how we might do better. Data can help us monitor our progress. *We* are the key to doing better—not government, not international agencies, not even Elinor Ostrom.

And then, boldly and humbly, Ostrom worked with farmers groups over time. She helped them install and improve their monitoring systems and incentive structures.

In her Nobel-prize lecture, Ostrom provided a generalization that most anthropologists would immediately recognize and approve: "Thus, it is not the general type of forest governance that is crucial in explaining forest conditions; rather, it is how a particular governance arrangement fits the local ecology, how specific rules are developed and adapted over time, and whether users consider the system to be legitimate and equitable." Notice how much further she went than just acknowledging those contingencies. She helped gather and assemble new data, found and publicized success stories, carefully studied the economic and ecological properties of

common-pool resources, and created checklists and frameworks to distill things in usable form. And what she did and how made a profound difference to farmers in Nepal and, through her publications, around the world.

At the end of her Nobel lecture, Ostrom said there is more to learn:

> We thus face the tough task of further developing our theories to help understand and predict when those involved in a common-pool resource dilemma will be able to self-organize and how various aspects of the broad context they face affect their strategies, the short-term success of their efforts, and the long-term robustness of their initial achievements. We need to develop a better theoretical understanding of human behavior as well as of the impact of the diverse contexts that humans face. (429)

What an invitation to the sorts of knowledge anthropologists, working with others, might provide—and how they might humbly but boldly do so.

RETHINKING "DEVELOPMENT"

Tania Murray Li distinguished three ways for anthropologists to engage with development.

1. Programming: working on interventions to improve social, economic, ecological, or other processes.
2. Critical engagement with programming. Being that person who continues to ask: What are the goals? Do we have the right treatments (policies, programs, projects…)? How are things being implemented, and what are the results?
3. Basic research: in her words, "the attempt to understand the world as it is, in all its diversity, complexity and flux."[16]

Li notes that each role is valuable; each also has its own dangers (even its own hubris). She also observes that, just as people and groups can apportion many identities, so anthropologists (and others) can move across the boundaries of the three roles.

Consider her first heading. Throughout this book, from the Finance Minister Don Fernando to the Burkinabe development expert Bernard Lédéa Ouédraogo, we have contemplated interactions between policy choices and cultural settings. Which, if ignored, could lead to failures. And which, we hoped, if correctly appreciated, could lead to better policies (programs, projects, designs, treatments…), as in the examples of chapter 8.

Now, let's expand our vision and go to Li's second and third categories, critical and basic research. In a fascinating paper, Li and James Ferguson note a worldwide phenomenon: more and more people lack "proper jobs."[17] They propose a kind of global ethnographic effort to get answers to ninety questions, which fall under these five categories: "What is and is not changing about work? What are the uses and meanings of land? How else—besides selling their labour or working the land—do people access livelihood resources? What are the emerging forms of social membership? How do people mobilize politically to make effective demands or to pursue systemic change?" (18-9). Reading through their queries is fascinating, because it reminds one of how little one knows about the answers to particular questions and forces one to ponder the linkages among them.

How to get the answers? And what to do with them if they suddenly appeared? The authors do not elaborate; their point is that we should begin with facts gathered across countries and cultures. But their paper concludes hopefully: "Grids of difference and similarity organized around a common set of questions are, at one level, descriptive devices. But if the questions we have posed are the right ones, they could contribute to a renewed global political-economic

analysis of lives and livelihoods—one more adequate to our times than the one that begins, and too often ends, with the absence or presence of the 'proper job.'" (20)

I agree. Thoroughly listing all the facts we would like to know is a useful discipline at the beginning of any research program. It helps us avoid a common syndrome, where we design our research around the data (or an answer) we already have rather than what (for various reasons) we wish we knew. Discussing with others the list of desired facts makes us aware of blind spots, presuppositions, *evidences invisibles*. And this, in turn, helps us together rethink what the goals and alternatives are and might be.

While looking for patterns, we should also examine the apparent exceptions. Do some countries or cultural groups "do better" than others in transforming jobs, alleviating employment shortcomings, enabling labor mobility, advancing the rights of various kinds of workers?[18] In these examples of "success"—as always, a contestable concept—what policies changed? What politics were involved? What were the roles of government, business, labor organizations, civil society, and political groups? And so forth. In carrying out such case studies of (relative) success, anthropologists have special skills in devising questions and gathering information.

The abiding point here is that we note the possibility of both big think and little think—indeed, of links among Li's three categories of "programming," critique, and basic research. What are the global phenomena of insufficient proper jobs? And how do they manifest themselves, here, there, with these people, with those other people? How does this knowledge help us rethink our goals and our alternatives? And how does stirring this pot of facts and issues help us "to understand the world as it is, in all its diversity, complexity and flux"?

Anthropologists rightly complain that governments in their everyday work sideline big questions of constitutional arrangements, economic rights, cultural change, the patriarchy, and

the like: "they are beyond this project's pay grade." Just as most business decisions take market conditions and legal restrictions as givens, so do "development projects" work within the status quo, even when change is the goal. It's important to note this limitation; might it also be important to go beyond it? Let's not just criticize others for failing to address, for example, "the conditions that position some groups to accumulate while others are impoverished" or for not providing "critical scrutiny of relations of production and appropriation"—let's show them how to do better.[19]

What I have in mind is cultural critique that lays out the deeper issues, reconsiders the goals of projects and business decisions accordingly, imagines different alternative courses of action, analyzes their effectiveness and costs and risks, and considers ways to share this knowledge to help foster a new politics and new channels of action. Invited to do so, encouraged to do so, perhaps anthropologists might undertake bold and humble research with their special knowledge-gathering techniques, which would help us rethink the ends and means of what we do.

What I'm suggesting here is programming with critique and creativity. A process that brings together outside and inside knowledge, in ways that kindle problem-solving and possibly partnerships. Beyond the important task of identifying how cultural features interact with particular projects, we're seeking new ways to think about goals (and risks), new kinds of alternatives, new and perhaps métisse ways to implement, and, as a result, new kinds of politics.

In this vein, let's turn to process. How might we marshal and share cultural (and other forms of) knowledge in ways that catalyze creativity?

CONVENING

The historian JoAnna Poblete studied a promising program for protecting local fisheries in American Sāmoa.[20] As in many poor countries, community fisheries were under pressure, to the point of collapse.[21] According to a 2000 report in American Sāmoa, "Harvested species such as giant clams and parrotfish are overfished, and there is heavy fishing pressure on surgeonfish. Fewer and/or smaller groupers, snappers, and jacks are seen. Most village fishermen and elders believe that numbers of fish and shellfish have also declined." But five years after the start of the Community-Based Fisheries Management Program, an evaluation found that "the biomass status of the American Sāmoa bottomfish complex in 2005 was healthy." (116-7)

What led to this success, Poblete shows, was the ingenious and persistent combining of local knowledge and cultural appropriateness with outside resources and expertise. A key to

> the success of marine programs in American Sāmoa revolves around understanding and incorporating aspects of *fa'a Sāmoa* (the Sāmoan way of life). The inclusion of Sāmoan traditions and beliefs, such as *vā* (social relations) and *vā fealoa'i* (social respect), in the process of creating rules and procedures have enabled the successful implementation of American-style industry, government, and environmental expectations and policies in the region. (136)

As we saw in the 6-S organization in West Africa: "The underlying idea is to analyze a situation by comparing the views of all the members of the community as well as the external actors to identify (jointly) the reasons why existing organizations have seized up, and to support (without any preconceived design) the measures and reforms that the group deems both feasible and desirable."[22]

What I call *convening* brings together these capabilities in a safe space through a pragmatic process. Those convened have different if overlapping objectives, different if overlapping capabilities, and different if overlapping information about the state of the world and about if-then relationships. They are not fully aware of each other's objectives, capabilities, or information; they do not fully understand their strategic interrelations. Convening brings together their strengths and inspires them to address their challenges with new information, examples, and frameworks.

The kinds of convening recommended here provides participants with:

1. Data, especially data that help people "get on the same page" about the contexts and the challenges. Data-rich discussions help build trust, particularly about controversial issues.
2. An example of success on a similar problem in another setting, emphasizing what was done and how.
3. A framework for understanding the policy issues and the role of cultural factors in addressing alternatives. The framework or checklist conveys principles and often provides participants with a new way of conceptualizing the policy problem.
4. An imaginary news story of success five years from now. Participants read the news story aloud, then ponder together what steps might lead from now to then. The imaginary news story stimulates creative problem-solving.

In a convening, the intellectual problem of culture and development is transformed. The challenge is not to apply some complete culture by policy by outcomes model to the local situation; not to carry out a detailed ethnographic study; certainly not to be the outside expert who does the diagnosis and pronounces what should be done. The agenda is instead how to

discover, how to be more creative about, the problems on the ground, the objectives, the alternatives, and the constraints—and to do so together. On this view, policy analysis (including cultural aspects) provides not so much a set of answers that decision makers or citizens should adopt and bureaucrats should implement, but instead data, outside examples, and frameworks that help locals enrich their appreciation of alternatives and their consequences.[23]

DREAM BOLDLY

Might such an approach help overcome the warranted reluctance of many anthropologists to engage with development policies and projects? They worry (with some reason) that standard ways of applying anthropology to development means

- That you have to be part of a "technified," partial "theory of change" that ignores lofty ideals, deep political causes, and on-the-ground realities.
- That you have to "learn about the people," then report on them in ways that serve power structures and limited-budget, limited-imagination endeavors.
- That you have to be complicit with blaming the victims for "failures." The victims can be countries as well as local communities: they are conveniently labeled corrupt, inefficient, ignorant.

Applying cultural knowledge to development activities is felt to be selling out. Sympathize with Tania Murray Li's horror at participating in a discussion of a forestry project in which an Indonesian official blithely suggested assassinating ten mobsters who were illegally logging (all of whom happened to be Chinese-Indonesians, which the official was not).[24] Or with Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan's confronting "traveling projects," which arrive from development agencies with a kind of blueprint (maybe with some tinkering based on a survey and a focus group), and which are unable to see what he, as an anthropologist, perceives: the

steadfast resistance of locals seeking both good ends (equality) and bad ones (corruption), and therefore the to-him-predictable project failures.[25] Or with Marc-Éric Gruénais' conviction that what development agencies (national and international) need simply doesn't fit with what anthropologists can or should provide.[26]

Consider, too, the Swiss anthropologist Annick Tonti's remark that the culture she didn't understand as an anthropologist in a development project wasn't the locals. "I realized that I had no difficulties in communicating with the Bangladeshis, but that I had great difficulties in speaking with the economists, with whom I had to work in that very office. I wasn't really able to communicate with the technicians or engineers, who were involved in our different projects. Perhaps worst of all, I had no idea about development management."[27]

But as we have seen, something different could and should be on offer:

- Applications where a subtle appreciation of cultural texts leads to fewer cultural misunderstandings. Serves as an antidote to poisonous texts in negotiations. Helps unpack different possibilities for "taking indigenous organizations and networks into account."
- Theory-light, nonquantitative, but still scientific ways to adjust to cultural diversity. In the design of stoves and road signs and housing for the poorest. In agroforestry. In tailoring pedagogies to local cultural knowledge and learning styles. In helping Indigenous nations align their governance and policies to their traditions. In collecting data relatively quickly and using checklists in ways that enable rather than brand or condemn.

- Ways to partner with local organizations that respect their autonomy and strengths and also work with them on their weaknesses, which leads to their making better choices, as in the 6-S initiative in West Africa.
- And, in my dream world, using cultural knowledge as part of a new paradigm of policy analysis and evaluation. One that goes beyond "local participation" and never utters "buy-in." One that combines the best of international knowledge and local knowledge, with the goal of catalyzing creativity and problem-solving.

In this chapter, we saw an example of that dream with Elinor Ostrom and the management of common-pool resources in Nepal. She combined (a) quantitative data, case studies, and analytical models and (b) the anthropologist's traditional virtues of working with local people with acumen and respect. The metaphor is soil science, as opposed to social science.[28]

That's my dream for policy analysis as well as for the application of anthropological wisdom. And for other dreamers out there, those who long to eschew "development" for a whole different paradigm. Who would love to help launch a new politics, or several. Or to enable a "pluriverse," with epistemologies from the South, with knowledge born in opposition and cultural mosaics. For you, may I suggest reaffirming and applying several classical methods of anthropology?

1. Help us to countenance diverse ways of life as ways to "decenter" dominant paradigms. In James Ferguson's words, "to see in the non-capitalist social forms that anthropologists have so often studied not only historical data but concrete forms of political inspiration."[29] We may thereby more readily see the shallowness of "development."[30] To understand how it may be, in the trope of Marshall Sahlins, that hunters and gatherers "have affluent economies, their absolute poverty notwithstanding."[31]

2. Combine theoretical explorations with detailed local description. As Clifford Geertz emphasized, "the characteristic intellectual movement" of anthropology can be, should be, "a constant dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view."[32]

3. Carry out more studies of (relative) "success" at the local level, as recommended by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, Mahaman Tahirou Ali Bako, and Abdoutan Harouna:

> The research we have carried out over the last 20 years at the heart of the health and education systems in Niger have led us to encounter various reformatory professionals working on the frontline and providing services to users. These "admirable exceptions" attempt to improve the everyday operation of schools and health centres without resources, publicity or support, and sometimes even against the wishes of their superiors. They invent local solutions. They establish new practical norms or adapt those already in place. They do not adhere rigorously to the wide range of official norms in force. Their "good practice" is not the good practice of the "best students" of the international organizations, instead it involves innovations and improvements that are primarily adapted to the real working contexts and remain invisible to the experts in most cases. In our view, making them visible, documenting these multiple, unobtrusive reforms, is a priority task for anthropological research.[33]

4. Investigate ethnographically radical reformulations of development. For example, for those of us who dream of a new politics based on different bases for sharing other than private property rights and social welfare programs, have a careful look at the so-called Islamic State, at high-fervor Communist experiments, even at Zimbabwe and Venezuela. For those of us who dream of different systems of education other than those based on Western or Sinic academic

merit, review what happened during the Cultural Revolution in China.[34] For those of us who advocate revolutionary efforts to dismantle race and caste, judiciously analyze the outcomes of ethnic policies in the Soviet Union and preferential treatment in India and Malaysia.

5. Critically analyze contemporary cultural anthropology's oppositional texts and dreams. By analogy: classic works of anthropology have been "deconstructed," revealing the rhetorical techniques used to gain authority, the hidden assumptions (often sexist and culturalist despite all their purported liberalism), and the weaknesses of empirical argument.[35] More than three decades ago, James Clifford noted that "the stance of the ethnographer who speaks as an insider on behalf of his or her people is a familiar one; it is a stock role of the ethnographic liberal."[36] How about, today, deconstructing the stock role of the ethnographic radical? Unpack the monolithic renderings of "dominant paradigms" and "governmentality" in contrast to infinitely varied local realities. Speculate about the sources and meanings of being "at once cynical about the 'situation of social action' and utopian about the 'ends of social action'."[37]

WHAT MANIFESTO?

This book is a manifesto for doing better in development by taking culture into account. The word "manifesto" may suggest a slap in the face: its etymology combines the hand (*manus*) and offence (*fendere*). Manifestos are often defined by what they decry, a quality Mary Ann Caws called their "againstness." A manifesto, she says, "is peculiar and angry, quirky, or downright crazed. Always opposed to something, particular or general, it has not only to be striking but to stand up straight."[38] And manifestos can be rude. The Dada Cannibalistic Manifesto (1920) began, "You are all accused. Stand up."[39]

Not my message here (and you may be seated). Nor do I want to hector. Lee Scrivner concluded his "manifesto on manifestos" with a persuasive warning: "After reviewing these most

recent manifestos, one feels that erasure is the best antidote for them. And with such conclusions, I feel that I can only advise such a rule of thumb for manifestos in general; they should never explicitly or implicitly advise others on what they should or shouldn't do, say or believe."[40]

Let's rather focus on inspiration and hope. The Canadian photographer Freeman Patterson begins his art statement this way:

> Every artist is, first of all, a craftperson thoroughly knowledgeable about the materials, tools, and techniques of his or her particular medium and skilled in using many of them.
>
> However, in my view, no amount of technical knowledge and competence is, of itself, sufficient to make a craftperson into an artist. That requires caring—passionate caring about ultimate things.[41]

Or consider the "Metamodernist Manifesto."[42] "We see this manifesto as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism, a moderate fanaticism, oscillating between sincerity and irony, deconstruction and construction, apathy and affect, attempting to attain some sort of transcendent position, *as if* such a thing were within our grasp."[43]

In a similar spirit, this culture and development manifesto is not advising anthropologists to be economists, nor economists to be anthropologists. It is not (at least, not primarily) saying "be interdisciplinary." It is proposing—and I hope illustrating—how we all might become even more engaged, more constructive, bolder, humbler. Technically equipped and passionately caring. And "pragmatically idealistic."

This manifesto shows how we can look at the intersections among cultural settings, local choices, and development outcomes. Yes, as social scientists, and also in the hands-on and

helpful manner of soil scientists. It's not enough simply to aver that "culture matters." At the end of a long review of the literature on culture and development, a distinguished economist declares:

> A first and very important conclusion is that taking culture on board means first of all to take into account the effects of different cultures when designing development policies. One should take cultures as given and see what are the best development policies given the prevailing culture. Particular policies or institutional reforms must be tailored to fit the existing cultural environment. This is how they work best.[44]

Despite a barrage of cross-references for virtually every assertion in the body of his remarkably thorough review, in this "policy conclusion" the author provides no examples of such tailoring. He's not alone. Throughout the book, we've seen many instances of saying that culture matters—and in effect leaving it there. The manifesto says we should do much more: show how to assess differing cultural strengths and then take advantage of them, with the help of theoretical frameworks and real-world examples.

The culture and development manifesto declares the importance of identifying success stories, by combining quantitative methods to find them and qualitative methods to understand their details—and then sharing the stories in ways that people can see *how*, not just *that*, progress occurred. The resulting case studies can remind us of vital though often overlooked dimensions, including cultural settings. They can teach us, as ethnographies also can, about the importance of context, about the yin and yang of similarity and difference. And they can inspire our imaginations: "I never would have thought of doing that" or "I love the way they interpreted this."

A good manifesto expresses hope—in this instance, that convening new combinations of local knowledge and international knowledge by sharing data, examples of surprising success, and checklists can help us reframe what we're trying to do and how.

We can express that hope, because we've seen it work.

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[1] Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work* and personal communication with Robert Putnam.

[2] Pradervand, *Listening to Africa*, 19, 21, 22.

[3] Bell, Fosse, Lamont, and Rosen, "Beyond the Culture of Poverty": 13.

[4] Gruénais and Ouattara, "De L'Anthropologie dans un Projet de Santé Maternelle," 32

[5] For his thoughts on applying such insights to developing countries, see Putnam, "Democracy, Development, and the Civic Community."

[6] For example, United States Department of Agriculture, *Soil Quality Test Kit Guide* (Washington, DC: USDA, 2001). https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_050956.pdf

[7] And these categories had many variations—27 kinds of boundary rules and "112 different choice rules that were usually composed of two parts – an allocation formula specifying where, when, or how resource units could be harvested and a specific basis for the implementation of the formula (such as the amount of land held, historical use patterns, or assignment through lottery)." Elinor Ostrom, "Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems" (December 2009). https://www.nobelprize.org/uploads/2018/06/ostrom_lecture.pdf, 421.

[8] Prachanda Pradhan, "Elinor Ostrom: From Nepal [sic] Perspective" *Hydro Nepal*. Issue No. 11 (July 2012): 69.

[9] Elinor Ostrom, "'Nepal Has a Rich Tradition," interview with "A Correspondent." *Spotlight Nepal*, 4, no. 13 (20 December 2010). https://www.spotlightnepal.com/2010/12/20/nepal-has-a-rich-tradition-nobel-laureate-elinor-ostrom/20 December.

[10] Ostrom, "Beyond Markets and States," 409.

[11] Elinor Ostrom, "How Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems Build Social Capital to Outperform Agency Managed Irrigation Systems that Rely Primarily on Physical Capital," in *Trajectory of Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems*, ed. Prachanda Pradhan, Upendra Gautam, and Naveen Mangal Joshi (Kathmandu: Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems Promotion Trust, 2015), 25. https://fmistnepal.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/trajectory-of-fmis.pdf

[12] Angela R. McLean and Christopher Dye, "The Antimicrobial Commons," in "Tragedy Revisited," *Science* 362, Issue 6420 (December 2018): 1236–1241. DOI: 10.1126/science.aaw0911

[13] Elinor Ostrom, Larry Schroeder, and Susan Wynne, *Institutional Incentives and Sustainable Development: Infrastructure Policies in Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).

[14] Elinor Ostrom, "How Farmer Managed Irrigation Systems Build Social Capital": 23.

[15] Michael Cox, Gwen Arnold, and Sergio Villamayor-Tomás, "A Review of Design Principles for Community-Based Natural Resource Management," *Ecology and Society* 15, no. 4 (2010): 38.

[16] Tania Murray Li, "Anthropological Engagements with Development," *Anthropologie & Développement* 37-38-39 (2014): 227. mis en ligne le 01 décembre 2016. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/anthropodev/495.

[17] James Ferguson and Tania Murray Li, *Beyond the "Proper Job:" Political-economic Analysis after the Century of Labouring Man*, PLAAS Working Paper 51 (Cape Town: University of the Western Cape, April 2018).

[18] Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Cultural Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

[19] Li, *The Will to Improve*, 276–7, 240,

[20] JoAnna Poblete, *Balancing the Tides: Marine Practices in American Sāmoa* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020).

[21] For an exemplary analysis, see California Environmental Associates, *Charting a Course to Sustainable Fisheries* (San Francisco: California Environmental Associates, 2012).

[22] Lecomte, *Project Aid*, 93.

[23] For some examples and more details, see Klitgaard, *Addressing Corruption Together*, and Robert Klitgaard, "Engaging Corruption: New Ideas for the International Monetary Fund." *Policy Design and Practice* 2, no. 3 (July 2019): 229–42.

[24] Li, *The Will to Improve*, 55–6.

[25] Olivier de Sardan, Diara, and Mora, "Travelling Models and the Challenge of Pragmatic Contexts and Practical Norms."

[26] Gruénais, "L'anthropologie Sociale: Est-elle Inapplicable?"

[27] Tonti, "The Model of Swiss Development Cooperation," 54.

[28] Indeed, many exciting, diverse methods are in use, ranging from "problem-driven iterative adaptation" to participatory action research. "Convening" as I see it is distinguished by incorporating policy analysis, case studies, and data. And I'm hoping that cultural anthropology

will enter in different ways, including data, comparative analysis, case studies, and cultural science.

[29] Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish*, 213.

[30] In the midst of her conclusion to *Balancing the Tides*, JoAnna Poblete inserts two rhetorical questions as if in an epiphany: "Despite occupying the lowest economic and social rungs of colonized societies, Pacific Islanders express high levels of personal comfort and fulfillment. What lessons can we all learn from *fa'a Sāmoa* and *vā* that can lead to more community-oriented fulfillment and move us beyond Western-based standards of achievement through individual materialism? How does one's outlook on life change when a balance in all relationships is the highest priority?" (138)

[31] Marshall Sahlins, *Stone-Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972), 3.

[32] Clifford Geertz, "'From the Natives' Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 28, no. 1 (October 1974): 43.

[33] Olivier de Sardan, Ali Bako, and Harouna, "Les Normes Pratiques en Vigueur dans les Secteurs de l'Éducation et la Santé," 131.

[34] Robert Klitgaard, *Elitism and Meritocracy in Developing Countries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), ch. 1.

[35] For example, Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique Fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950 [1934]); *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Marianna

Torgovnic, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), especially ch. 5, 11, and 12.

[36] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 87–8.

[37] Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility*, 152.

[38] Mary Ann Caws, "The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness," in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), xxiii, xix.

[39] Julian Hanna, *The Manifesto Handbook* (Alresford, UK: Zero Books, 2019). Provocation §37.

[40] Lee Scrivner, *How to Write an Avant-Garde Manifesto (A Manifesto)* (London: The London Consortium, April 2006), 23. Maybe I should not share that the quote continues: "So perhaps the best bet would be to steer clear of publishing them or even writing them in the first place. Don't say anything at all..." https://web.archive.org/web/20070615192751/http://www.londonconsortium.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/scrivneripmessay.pdf

[41] http://www.freemanpatterson.com/art_statement.htm

[42] http://www.metamodernism.org

[43] Luke Turner, "Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction," *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, 5 January 2015. https://queenmobs.com/2015/01/metamodernism-brief-introduction/

[44] Gerard Roland, "Culture, Institutions and Development," in *The Handbook of Economic Development and Institutions*, ed. Jean-Marie Baland, François Bourguignon, Jean-Philippe Platteau, and Thierry Verdier, 414–48 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 23 of this preprint https://eml.berkeley.edu/~groland/pubs/Culturesurveyvf.pdf