

# CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT REVISITED

*The summer 1989 issue of The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs explored the role which culture plays in economic and political development. The contributing authors to that special feature included Lawrence Harrison, a career USAID officer in Central America and the Caribbean and currently a visiting scholar at The Center for International Affairs (CFIA) at Harvard University, and Howard Wiarda, a professor of political science at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, a research associate at both CFIA and Harvard's Foreign Policy Research Institute, and an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.*

*Following publication of the summer 1989 issue, both authors requested the opportunity to respond to one another's comments.*

## CULTURE IN DEVELOPMENT: LAWRENCE HARRISON ANSWERS HOWARD WIARDA

In his article, "Defining the Imperative," in the summer 1989 *Fletcher Forum*, Howard Wiarda criticizes my book, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind — The Latin American Case*,<sup>1</sup> on three grounds:

First, although Harrison says in his preface that he recognizes other forces beside culture are important in explaining Latin American underdevelopment, those factors never figure subsequently in his analysis; it is plain from his analysis that culture is *the* most important factor.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Harrison pictures Latin American culture as static and unchanging when, in fact — as in the recent transitions to democracy — that culture is undergoing profound transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Third, it is clear that Harrison is immensely hostile to Latin American culture, wants to abolish it entirely as if Latin America were some *tabula rasa* whose culture slate could be wiped clean, and argues essentially that Latin America cannot develop until it takes on US-like virtues.<sup>4</sup>

Without hesitation, I plead guilty to the first allegation. After working on Latin American development for twenty-odd years, including living thirteen of those years in five Latin American countries, I am convinced that the

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1. University Press of America (UPA) was identified as the publisher of *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* (1985) in Wiarda's article. In fact, the book is published by the Harvard Center for International Affairs through a co-publishing arrangement with UPA in which the latter handles the printing and distribution.
  2. Howard J. Wiarda, "Political Culture and National Development," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1989): 201.
  3. *Ibid.*
  4. *Ibid.*, 202.

*principal* explanation for Latin America's political, economic and social backwardness relative to the developed democracies of the West is the value and attitude system inherited from Spain and Portugal, along with the institutions — including what Wiarda describes as “corporatism” — that both reflect and reinforce that system. (I emphasize *principal* because I neither think nor have written that culture is the *only* factor. Wiarda mentions the caveat that appears in the introduction of *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind*, where I discuss the roles of resource endowment, size, geographic location, climate, government policies, leadership, international economic forces, and sheer luck. That caveat is repeated in the last paragraph of the book.)

The late Venezuelan writer, Carlos Rangel, observed, “As late as 1700, the Spanish American empire still gave the impression of being incomparably richer (which it was!), much more powerful, and more likely to succeed than the British colonies of North America.”<sup>5</sup> Less than 300 years later, Canada and the United States, as well as most Western European countries, Japan and Australia, are fifty or more years ahead of Latin America with respect to political pluralism, social justice and economic dynamism. There is not *that* much difference in natural resource endowment between Latin America and North America, and even if there were, resource-poor countries like Japan and Switzerland would leave weighty questions about a resource explanation. Unless you are prepared to accept dependency theory, which I consider largely mythical and which Wiarda rejects, I think there is no other possible explanation than values and attitudes, and the institutions that reflect and reinforce them.

How else, for example, can you explain the fact that the average Canadian or American has about thirteen years of education, the average Latin American about four? The “distribution” of education follows the same pattern as the distribution of wealth, land, income and opportunity — relative inequality in Latin America, relative equality in North America, reflecting the Latin American elites' failure to concern themselves with the needs and aspirations of the less fortunate. For those who would ascribe the difference in education to national wealth, look at Costa Rica, where, by the way, the elite has an atypical tradition of concern for the masses.

Lest there be any doubt, then, I am not one of the scholars who “would prefer to remain open-minded concerning the question of whether it is the economy that determines the culture . . . or the culture that determines the economy.”<sup>6</sup> While I believe that, in the short run, economics can influence culture — a case in point being the recent Spanish “miracle,” where Franco's decision in the late fifties to abandon autarchy and open up the economy led to the opening of Spain to the values and institutions of the West — I come down squarely on Max Weber's side in the Marx v. Weber, economics v. values, debate.

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5. Carlos Rangel, *The Latin Americans: Their Love-Hate Relationship with the United States* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 21.

6. Wiarda, 198.

The dominant role of culture becomes apparent when the evolution of societies is viewed over a long sweep of time. That approximates the conclusions reached by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Edward Banfield in *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, Gunnar Myrdal in *Asian Drama* and Robert Putnam in his recent research on decentralization in Italy.<sup>7</sup>

I do *not* view culture as static and unchanging. In the last chapter of *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind*, a chapter largely dedicated to ideas on how to promote progressive cultural change, I say:

Culture . . . is transmitted and received, and it changes. Racist theories imply that culture is inborn and static. Those theories are totally inconsistent with the thesis of this book.<sup>8</sup>

I also stress that culture changes in my article, "Cultural Obstacles to Progress in the Third World — and at Home."<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding all our hopes that the recent democratization trend in Latin America will take root, we still have to ask the question, "Why, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, is the viability of democracy still a major issue in Latin America?" I believe that the answer lies in the powerful, five-centuries-old momentum of Iberian culture in this hemisphere, a momentum which operated with strikingly similar political, economic and social consequences in Spain and Portugal until very recently.

I might add that, in a recent article in the *Washington Post*, entitled, "South of the Border: A New Spanish 'Miracle?'" subtitled, "Shedding the Culture of Underdevelopment,"<sup>10</sup> I argued that the Spanish "miracle" may be profoundly influencing movement of Spain's former colonies toward democratic-capitalism and the values and attitudes that nurture it.

To describe my views on Latin American culture as "immensely hostile" and to assert that I want "to abolish it entirely" places the debate on an emotional and simplistic level. Besides, it misses the point. If I am right that traditional Iberian values, attitudes and institutions are the chief obstacles to Latin America's modernization, then those values, attitudes and institutions have to change. As someone who has worked in Latin American development for a quarter of a century, I have few illusions about the ease with which such change can be brought about. My principal motive for writing the book, however, was to focus on the need for cultural change and to suggest some approaches deriving from my experience to promote that change — which is what the last chapter of the book is basically about.

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7. See, for example, Robert D. Putnam, with Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Y. Nanetti, "Institutional Performance and Political Culture: Some Puzzles about the Power of the Past" in *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration* Vol. 1, No. 3 (July 1988): 221-242.

8. Lawrence Harrison, *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Center for International Affairs and Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 167.

9. Lawrence Harrison, "Cultural Obstacles to Progress in the Third World — and at Home," *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1989).

10. *Washington Post*, 27 August 1989, C4.

Wiarda asserts that I argue "that Latin America cannot develop until it takes on US-like virtues." I would modify that assertion as follows: Latin America cannot become an area of stable and progressive democratic-capitalist countries until it substantially shares the values and attitudes common to all advanced democracies: concern with the well-being of those beyond the family in the broader society; fair play, justice, and the responsibility of those with power and wealth to help the weak and the poor; merit as a basis of advancement rather than "family" or connections; the right of dissent and the imperatives of dispersion of power and compromise; the importance of work as a core structure of human life; and the crucial role that education plays both in human and national development.

Ronald Inglehart, in his recent book, *Cultural Change*,<sup>11</sup> documents the fact that the values and attitudes of the Spanish people are now very similar to those of other Western European countries. That was clearly not the case fifty years ago. If it can happen in Spain — and Portugal — it can happen in Latin America, and it indeed may be happening, with the two former colonial powers serving as influential models.

Throughout his article, Wiarda refers to *political culture*. The term was coined, I believe, by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in *The Civic Culture*. While I have the highest respect for that landmark work, above all for the impetus it has given to the study of the impact of culture on political development, I think it is both ironic and unfortunate that political scientists have dominated the study of culture as it affects development. The irony is that the anthropologists, whose universe *is* culture, have shied away, importantly because culture viewed in a development context often implies value judgements, a taboo for those committed to cultural relativism, as are most anthropologists.

What is unfortunate is that, in the hands of scholars from disciplines other than anthropology, culture gets fragmented, and we end up with a term *political culture* which does not exist in the real world. What does exist is an integrated system of values, attitudes and institutions which influences the way individuals and societies act in the political, economic and social dimensions of their existence.

I believe that our understanding of the way culture affects development in all its dimensions will be enhanced substantially when scholars of other disciplines focus on it. This is now happening in economics, principally through Peter Berger's Institute for the Study of Economic Culture at Boston University. Obviously, the participation of anthropologists in an interdisciplinary approach to culture would be a valuable addition.

Wiarda refers to the adverse review of *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* by Daniel H. Levine in the Spring 1987 *Caribbean Review*. Wiarda's comments, Levine's review and a review by a *dependencista* in the *Martha's Vineyard Gazette*

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11. Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Change — The Impact of Economic and Sociopolitical Change on Culture, and the Impact of Culture on Economics, Society and Politics in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

constitute the fundamentally negative reaction to the book. Lest the wrong impression about critical reaction be left, here are some of the positive reactions:<sup>12</sup>

Scholars:

Rutgers' R. J. Alexander in *Choice* ("provides an intelligent reader with much material for contemplation"); Robert D. Crassweller in *Foreign Affairs* ("A significant book, deserving close scrutiny"); Harvard's Jorgé Dominguez ("fascinating and important"); the American Enterprise Institute's Mark Falcoff in *This World* ("[goes] a long way towards setting the [poverty and growth] agenda for the rest of the century"); New York Institute of Technology's Marvin Goldwert in *Transnational Perspective* ("important . . . briskly-written . . . courageous"); the University of Liverpool's David E. Hojman in *International Affairs* ("stimulating, challenging, thought-provoking, sometimes wise, sometimes infuriating . . . do try and read it").

Journalists and writers:

Raymond Bonner, former *New York Times* correspondent ("must reading for anyone . . . trying to fashion a foreign policy for America in the Third World"); *New York Times* correspondent Shirley Christian ("This is a book that tells us, in real cases, why most of the abstract notions about Latin America's development failures are just plain wrong"); *The Atlantic* Washington editor James Fallows ("marvelous . . . admirable"); author and columnist Michael Novak ("stimulate[s] the imagination and suggest[s] many new hypotheses to be explored"); author and journalist Carlos Rangel ("extraordinary"); *Boston Globe* columnist William V. Shannon ("stimulating").

Others:

Former Colorado Governor Richard Lamm ("The immense importance of this book will become increasingly apparent . . . as scholars and policymakers . . . recognize the crucial relationship between culture and progress"); Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap architect Teodoro Moscoso ("courageous . . . must reading for anyone who is as concerned as I am about the future of U.S.-Latin American relationships").

I received another positive reaction to *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* in an unsolicited letter dated September 5, 1985. The full text follows:

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12. The commercial reaction also has been positive: *Underdevelopment is a State of Mind* is in its sixth printing in English hardcover and paperback; three editions have been published in Spanish (Madrid, Mexico City and Buenos Aires) and one in Portuguese (Rio de Janeiro).

I have just gotten around to reading your book. I like it very much. Naturally the reason I like it is that it agrees so strongly with my own viewpoints. I'm enclosing some recent studies which show how close together our perspectives are. Some of these materials may be of interest to you. See especially the Introductions to the two volumes.

The letter was signed "Howard J. Wiarda." Will the real Howard Wiarda please stand up?

Lawrence E. Harrison

### HOWARD WIARDA RESPONDS

I am glad that Lawrence E. Harrison has responded in detail to the comments on his book offered in my article, "Defining the Imperative: Political Culture and National Development," in the Summer 1989 issue of *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*. Mr. Harrison's response goes a long ways toward defining where he stands on the issue of culture and development, explaining what he means, and telling us exactly what his position is.

Nevertheless, a number of critical problems remains:

Harrison woefully overstates his case. Having written extensively and sympathetically on the subject, I should be the last one to criticize an approach from a political-culture perspective; but Harrison's presentation of the argument I find far too simple, historically superficial and inaccurate, and without the qualifications I believe are necessary.

Harrison makes the common mistake of elevating a useful but still partial explanation into a single and all-encompassing one. Again I would be the first to argue that political culture is important, even critical, in explaining development, or the lack thereof; but what is missing from Harrison's account is a subtler analysis of how political culture not only influences but is itself influenced by class structure, political institutions, and changing economic and international relations.

Harrison devotes little attention to how, in fact, Latin America has changed enormously over the decades even within the cultural context that Harrison finds so obnoxious. Rising literacy, a growing middle class, urbanization, the changing international context, among other factors, are all having profound effects in Latin America and stimulating a great deal of development and modernization even within the cultural setting that Harrison feels is objectionable.

Finally, Harrison's approach to cultural change is wrong. Even the most successful developers like Japan do not simply discard their historic cultures; rather, they adapt and accommodate these to new ways and new pressures. So with Latin America: Latin America will not just "wake up" some fine day, as Harrison wishes, jettison its historic culture and institutions, and become overnight an imitation, however pale, of the United States. Rather, the process

is far more cumbersome and complex, involving not the elimination of one historic culture in favor of another but the slow, gradual adjustment and accommodation of a powerful and deeply embedded political culture to new demands and pressures.

It is unfortunate that in an otherwise useful, if still controversial, exposition of his views, Harrison chose at the end to become nasty and personal. I usually try to find complementary things to say about a book that is clearly provocative, even while maintaining private reservations about it; as a former Washington person and experienced government official Harrison clearly understands that discourse takes place on more than one level. But a critical point remains: Harrison should take account of the serious comments raised by readers of his book rather than simply reacting hostilely and defensively to them. For I at least am willing to dialogue seriously, honestly, and sympathetically with Harrison on the question of the relative importance of political culture; but many others are not, and they are about to unload a barrage of negative criticism of his book that will make my reservations about it look positively benign by comparison.

Howard J. Wiarda