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Economics, Culture and Development

Eiman O. Zein-Elabdin



Economics, Culture and Development

This book examines the treatment of culture and development in the discipline of economics, thereby filling a conspicuous gap in current literature. Economics has come a long way to join the 'cultural turn' that has swept the humanities and social sciences in the last half century. This volume identifies some of the issues that major philosophies of economics must address to better grasp the cultural complexity of contemporary economies.

Economics, Culture and Development is an extensive survey of the place of culture and development in four theoretical economic perspectives—Neoclassical, Marxian, Institutionalist, and Feminist. Organized into nine chapters with three appendices and a compendium of over 50 interpretations of culture by economists, this book covers vast grounds from classical political economy to contemporary economic thought. The literatures reviewed include original and new institutionalism, cultural economics, postmodern Marxism, economic feminism, and the current culture and development discourse on subjects such as economic growth in East Asia, businesswomen entrepreneurs in West Africa, and comparative development in different parts of Europe.

Zein-Elabdin carries the project further by borrowing some of the insights from postcolonial theory to call for a more profound rethinking of the place of culture and of currently devalued cultures in economic theory. This book is of great interest to those who study Economics, Economic Development, International Relations, Feminist Economics, and Cultural Studies.

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Preface

This book represents the result of a long-standing interest in, and often puzzlement at, discussions of the concept-phenomenon of ‘culture,’ especially as it relates to the vexing question of ‘development,’ in major economic orthodoxies—Neoclassical, Marxian, and Institutional. These three, in their different varieties, intensities, and deep divisions, constitute a powerful narrative in contemporary social science discourse. The primary aim of this book is to contribute a source for discussions of culture, and culture and development that helps reveal some deep connections between bodies of thought that appear disparate, largely autonomous, or even conflicting, without which, a profound contemplation of ‘culture’ or ‘development’ would not be worthwhile.

In this volume, I do not offer a theory of culture or development, or a comprehensive analysis of economic treatments of these two concerns. Deeper reflection will take another text. My only intention in this volume is to present a tentative account of the presence and absence of culture in Economics, and the ways in which it inhabits the discipline, and to offer some preliminary observations and questions regarding culture and economic development. This volume is intended as a necessary beginning toward a greater understanding of an extremely complex terrain.

Even with this more limited task, the scope of the book is daunting; some might say absurd. For my purpose, this is unavoidable. In Economics, there are books about Development, and books about Economics ‘proper,’ with the two subjects carefully bracketed away from one another. Similarly, there are books about Women or Gender, and other books about Economics ‘proper.’ Here, I cut across all these areas, working against the entrenched division of labor, in order to trace the commonalities that make the specialist discussion of these subjects so inadequate. As in past work, I call this approach *panoramic*.

On previous occasions, I argued against strong disciplinarity—as manifested in strict specialization in the production of academic knowledge—and suggested a ‘counter-disciplinary’ strategy. I remain convinced this is necessary. Nonetheless, in this book, I devote most attention to the discipline of economics, with an eye toward its rootedness in the philosophical (cultural) grounds of European modernity in order to show the implications of the division of labor within Economics itself. A singular focus on this discipline sheds a unique light on and puts certain vital issues in sharp relief. This, I believe, is a necessary step for a counter-disciplinary approach.

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Eiman Osman Zein-Elabdin
Lancaster, Pennsylvania
March 2015

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1 Economics, culture, and development

Culture – Like ‘democracy,’ this is a term which needs to be, not only defined, but illustrated, almost every time we use it.

(T.S. Eliot 1949 [1940]: 197)

Introduction

‘Culture’ is currently enjoying tremendous vogue in Economics across different schools of thought. Many books examine the intersection of culture and economics, particularly in ‘the arts,’ as demonstrated by the publication of the *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture* (Ginsburgh and Throsby 2006). Many others are preoccupied with the relationship between culture and ‘development.’ A symposium on “cultural economics” (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Spring 2006) and an entry on “Culture and Economics” in the *New Palgrave Dictionary* (Fernández 2008) mark the arrival of culture in the general discourse of Economics. Today it is fashionable for economists to invoke Anthropology and to cite Gramsci, Weber, and Durkheim.¹

The factors behind the heightened profile of culture in Economics are many, but all form part of the general current that produced ‘the cultural turn’ in the humanities and social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century. In broad terms, this includes the rise of multiculturalism in European-majority countries, increasing globalization, the disintegration of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and corresponding debates over the role of the state. Alan Peacock and Ilde Rizzo (1994) suggest that, at least in part, economic concern with ‘the culture industry’—arts and other works of creativity—was motivated by the need to maintain state support for the arts in the face of budgetary cuts in the USA and Europe since the 1980s. These various influences have joined with theoretical and methodological exigencies within the discipline of Economics to produce the current interest in culture.²

In this book, I trace the presence and absence of culture in economic literature, particularly in relation to the process of development. What I am trying to identify is culture in its meaning as the broad, but contested, shared everyday sensibilities and practices—including economic ones—of a society or a group, which sanction

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and censor its participants in multiple ways that may not always be fully coherent. Though a shaper of action and knowledge, culture—the concept-phenomenon—is shaped by and changes in accord with individual idiosyncrasies, social gaps, and fissures, and encounters with ‘other’ cultural horizons; I do not see it as a single force that predates and explains all (see Appendix II for a sample of economists’ ideas of culture). As the coming chapters show, many different things are associated with culture—some include practice, others confine it to the generation of meaning. Often, the word merely signifies a difference of some sort. In many discussions of economic development, culture is synonymous with backwardness, and sometimes may appear to be a metaphor for ‘race.’ My interpretation is more encompassing than most (i.e., it includes both the capacity to generate meaning and produce practices that differentiate some groups from others), but does not imply completeness, permanence, or full coherence.

My aim in this project is to outline the extent to which economists have noted the ways in which culture shapes economic action and knowledge, and how they have approached the cultures of those countries discursively marked as ‘under’ or ‘less’ developed. Homi Bhabha (1994) suggests that culture is (more consciously) invoked—as it were—only at the point of confrontation with difference, the moment of encounter with an Other. With this in mind, I look at how economists have experienced, negotiated, and/or endured such encounters. My intent is not to aggregate all economic thought into a ‘Western worldview’ devoid of heterogeneity and muted subjectivities.³ However, the major philosophies of Economics share a specific apprehension of being, knowledge, and history that takes European modernity as intrinsically superior, all knowing, and uniquely historical (Zein-Elabdin 2004).⁴ The twentieth-century discourse of international development has served to universalize this apprehension.

Taking a broad look at the treatment of culture in Economics reveals that the majority of economic thought is rooted in a *dualistic ontology*, that is, an apprehension of ‘reality’ in a binary framework that leaves no conceptual space for in-betweenness and alterity. This is most foundationally manifested in the theoretical separation of ‘culture’ from ‘economy’ as two fundamentally different realms, which ultimately rests on the archaic dualism of ideal/material. In this conception, culture has to do with the mental and symbolic, while economy signifies tangible subsistence, provisioning, resource management, and accumulation. This pervasive dichotomy—and dualistic modes of thought in general—have been the subject of extensive debates, and the basis for much of the philosophical revolt against modernism.⁵ In Economics, this revolt appears most commonly among heterodox thinkers, who have long rejected dichotomies such as object/subject, positive/normative, and fact/value (Dow 1990; Nelson 1992; Waller 1994; Jackson 1999). Feminists, in addition, have challenged the cultural dualisms of public/private, market/household, and market/non-market (Waller and Jennings 1990; Jennings 1993, 1999). Indeed, many colleagues have questioned the separation of culture from economy (Ruttan 1988; Nelson 1993; Kabeer 1991, 1994; Harcourt 1995; Jackson 1996, 2009; Fine 2002). These interventions have been sporadic and, for the most part, have targeted methodological concerns, often detached from substantive content.

In this book, I take all these contributions on board, and go further to argue that, *in general, dualistic ontology forms a common thread in the treatment of culture among major economic philosophies, albeit differently and to various degrees. This pattern is amplified in the field of development with the addition of more dichotomies, and an overwhelming tendency to reductively theorize culture as either an obstacle to or a driving force behind economic growth.* Dualism is often defined by the assumption that “phenomena are separable into two mutually exclusive categories or principles” (Jennings 1999: 142). Here, I do not necessarily associate it with antagonistic pairs, but with all binary, all-or-nothing, analytical perspectives that in effect preclude adequate understanding of *economic hybridity*—economies and socialities that do not comply with and exceed the dualisms. To be sure, some binary distinctions are necessary for analytical purposes. The problem arises when these exist at a deep axiomatic level that obscures their epistemological consequences. To the extent that dualistic philosophy has been critiqued in social science and humanities discourses since the late twentieth century, this book adds little.⁶ My primary concern in this volume is to reveal its pervasiveness and depth in Economics, and its manifestations in approaches to culture.

The aim of this volume is to draw a map of culture in Economics that will hopefully facilitate more systematic, in-depth study of individual contributions. There are many questions and problematics in and about the idea-phenomenon of culture to wrestle with. In this book I only highlight the problem of dualism in economic treatments of it. This first chapter begins with a schematic review of culture’s discursive journey from Anthropology to the field of Cultural Studies, with an eye toward their relationship to Economics. This is a mere sketch that has to gloss over the richness of both fields.⁷ The next section outlines the landscape of culture in the three most established economic traditions—Neoclassical, Marxian, and Veblenian Institutionalism—and the more recent field of Feminist Economics since culture is at the heart of its case against the economics profession. In the fourth section I turn to the treatment of culture in the field of development. The chapter ends with an overview of the book and a note on method.

Although general social science and humanities discourse is vital to any survey of culture, for practicality my survey is limited to economics publications and only the most pertinent literature in other fields. Because of these limitations at least three relevant subjects are not pursued except tangentially: ‘race,’ globalization, and ecological sustainability.⁸ Similarly, I have not included any discussion of development policy and record (growth trends, structural adjustment, inequality, and so on) since my immediate interest is directed at theoretical explorations of culture in development thought rather than the development process itself.

From Anthropology to Cultural Studies

The word ‘culture’ has meant many things, from cultivation of a plant or organism, growth of human intellect and spiritual faculties (distance from ‘nature’), art and other products and occupations of creativity (the ‘culture industry’), to

honoring with worship (cult), and inhabiting a foreign place (colonizing). All these meanings may be encompassed within the familiar phrase “a whole way of life.” It is this versatility, which prompted Raymond Williams to offer his often-cited remark that culture “is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (1983 [1976]: 87). T.S. Eliot (1949 [1940]) had earlier suggested that the word must be defined every time it is uttered, and, long before him, J.G. Herder warned, “nothing is more indeterminate than this word” (Williams 1983 [1976]: 89). This elusiveness of meaning has long shielded culture from the modeling, quantifying impulse that dominates Economics—until recently. In the following paragraphs I take a quick look at the fields of Anthropology and Cultural Studies as they have influenced thinking about culture in Economics.

Anthropology has undergone a seismic transformation from ideas of primitivism, to questioning its own complicity in Europe’s imperial projects.⁹ Still, E. B. Tylor’s founding concept of culture—the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1883 [1871]: 1)—remains a relevant point of departure for current discussions. The scope and crux of meaning he provided have been less of an issue than the theoretical framework within which the concept of culture was to be placed, and the weight assigned to different aspects of it (material, symbolic, regulative, and so on). Tylor’s evolutionist concept was problematized and revised by scores of anthropologists and sociologists—Weber, Boas, Malinowski, Parsons, among many others—with the evolutionary interpretation giving way to a more relativist orientation (see Stocking 1968; Geertz 1973; Friedman 1994; Wilk 1996).¹⁰

By the mid-twentieth century the project of international development had given rise to debates about the content and political implications of anthropological research. As Arturo Escobar (1995) has shown, the debate over Karl Polanyi’s (1957) classification of economies into formal and substantive revealed that Economic Anthropology was either “inside” this project, with formalists advocating for development, or “outside,” with substantivists highlighting its threat to native cultures. The formalist/substantivist debate was never resolved, but many took Clifford Geertz’s (1963: 144) conclusion that “a modern economic system may be compatible with a wider range of non-economic cultural patterns and social structures than has often been thought,” and moved on. Since then, Economic Anthropology has grown into new ethnographic horizons and theoretical perspectives. The most pertinent of these is the “neo-Weberian” direction, which “self-consciously” sees all cultural forms as “ideal types” (Billig 2000: 783) and realizes that the substantive nature of an economy is not unique to ‘primitive’ or ‘non-market’ societies; even “the most urban, complex, capitalist setting” is embedded in culture (*ibid.*: 772).

Throughout this long journey, the relationship between Anthropology and Economics has fluctuated, but most anthropologists took economic theory, Neoclassical or Marxian, at face value. In the opposite direction, Anthropology had a long established presence in the Institutional School (Veblen 1898), and in scattered

discussions of regional economies, especially in Africa (see Zein-Elabdin 1998).¹¹ In general, the most profound and lasting influence of anthropological discourse has been in development economics, where the modernity/tradition dualism served as an explicit basis for the appropriately named “dualistic models” of W.A. Lewis (1954), W.W. Rostow (1971 [1960]), among others, and continues to ground the theoretical divide between ‘developed’ and ‘under(less)developed’ countries.

The interest in culture has brought Anthropology into Economics in an unprecedented manner, as seen in several high profile publications (Geertz 1978; North 1990). In development economics, this trend began with Vernon Ruttan’s article “Cultural Endowments and Economic Development: What Can We Learn from Anthropology?” (1988), in which he argues that this discipline’s focus on culture and “insistence on descriptive realism” (ibid.: 257) provide a rich body of material for economic interpretation. He favors the interpretive approach (Geertz 1973) over cultural materialism (Harris 1979) because, for him, the latter is too full of determinism to shed light on how culture impacts economic change. Ruttan’s article seems to have opened the door for more conversation between the two disciplines. Today there is a higher level of freedom among economists to draw on anthropological insights and even adopt the ethnographic method (e.g., Chamlee-Wright 1997; Wyss 1999).

The almost exclusive identification of culture with Anthropology was broken with the emergence of Cultural Studies in 1950s Britain. In *Culture and Society* (1961), generally considered the field’s fountain of inspiration, Williams argued that the evolution of the idea of culture from several diverse meanings to become mostly associated with the notion of a “whole way of life” had signaled a response to broad economic, political, and aesthetic changes in British life since the eighteenth century. He examined this twofold process of change—in the meaning of culture and in social institutions and practices—as reflected in the work of English Romantics and such major intellectual figures as J.S. Mill and T.S. Eliot. Williams concluded that the time was ripe for a “new general theory of culture” (1961: 12), one that illuminated relationships among disparate elements of society (see also Mulhern 2009).

Cultural Studies, often identified with postcolonial critique (e.g., Said 1979), has since expanded in scope, at times appearing to absorb all contemporary work on culture outside conventional Anthropology. Unlike Anthropology, however, Cultural Studies has no well-defined method or parameters, except that from the beginning it emphasized subjectivity and political consciousness (Hall 1980; During 1993). A recent development has been the emergence of “cultural policy studies,” which converges with the field of Cultural Economics in its interest in the media and arts. Economists who draw upon Cultural Studies are quite diverse, including those preoccupied with the culture industry from a Neoclassical point of view (Ginsburgh and Throsby 2006), those committed to methodological individualism in an Austrian sense (Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright 2000), postmodern Marxists who value subjectivity (Amariglio *et al.* 1988), and those concerned with issues of postcoloniality and cultural hegemony (Charusheela and Zein-Elabdin 2003).

Beside Anthropology and Cultural Studies, explorations of culture in Economics have also been informed by work in several other fields, including Sociology (Granovetter 1985; Schoenberger 1997; Hofstede 2001; Harrison and Berger 2006), Geography (Bell 1976; Harvey 1989), and Political Science (Granato *et al.* 1996), among other examples.¹² Any survey, such as the present one, must pay attention to this diversity of influences and inspiration, which produces different meanings, methods, and perspectives on the ideas of culture adopted in Economics.¹³ This is especially important since in much of the literature, explicit definitions of culture are seldom given, and, even when they are, there is typically very little substantive elaboration on them to illuminate just what authors have in mind.

Culture in Economics

Theoretical explorations of culture (as a concept-phenomenon) and economic action and knowledge have been undertaken at various, overlapping levels, including: (1) the role of culture in the operation—and, therefore, explanation—of economic phenomena; (2) its role in the construction of economic knowledge; (3) the cultural influence of the discipline of economics on society at large; and (4) the internal culture of the economics profession.¹⁴ In this book, I concentrate on the first level, with an eye toward the second; that is, on economic analyses of the ways in which culture enters into the formation of economic phenomena, and on economists' dispositions toward different cultures, which mostly surface in explanations of comparative growth and development. In other words, I am concerned with culture as both the subject of and operator on economic inquiry.

Though an extensive, tangled body of thought, Economics is amenable to grouping into three major paradigmatic spheres: Neoclassical, Marxian, and Veblenian (original) Institutionalism.¹⁵ Determining boundaries can be a matter of debate since each contains several strands and debates, the three schools of thought share philosophical roots and methods, and thought often crosses conventional borders. Nevertheless, the basic three-spheres taxonomy is justified in that each coheres in a distinct theory of value and vision of society. For Neoclassical economics ('the mainstream'), the economic problem consists of a boundless series of individual-induced and centered optimizing choices; Marxian theory prioritizes class relations and processes and material dynamics of power; while Veblenian Institutionalism rejects universalist conceptions in favor of a culturally embedded, evolutionary view of economic processes.¹⁶ All three traditions have drawn some criticism from Feminist economists for different expressions of androcentrism. The details and finer points of each scholarly sphere will unfold in the coming chapters. Below, I outline the landscape of culture in each.

For most of the twentieth century, the concept of culture was largely absent from Neoclassical scholarship. Apart from a few contributions on 'the arts' (Baumol and Bowen 1966), the word culture surfaced mainly within special forums such as the 1970 American Economic Association symposium on "the supply of black American economists." In one panel, Vernon Dixon suggested

that, since economic behavior is learned, the supply of 'black' economists partly depends on the willingness of the profession to admit the possibility of a 'black economics,' that is, "a body of theory that is consistent with or based on the cultural uniqueness of Afro-Americans" (1970: 424), as a complement, rather than a rival, to Neoclassical theory. In opposition, Kenneth Boulding (1970) argued economic thought could not be "culture-bound" because it studies the ancient and pervasive phenomenon of exchange. Yet, he acknowledged a disciplinary bias against group-oriented modes of social organization, which he attributed to the historical and geographical origins of Economics and modern economic growth. Although this observation renders all economic thought culture-bound, Boulding insisted this was only true in the field of development. This type of conversation took place only once in a long while.¹⁷

Today, Neoclassical discussions of culture span three overlapping research programs. The first is the Preferences Approach (PA), reflecting the influence of Gary Becker's work (1976, 1996). In this approach, culture is conceptualized as "differences in beliefs and preferences that vary systematically across groups of individuals separated by space (either geographic or social) or time" (Fernández 2008: 2). Here, culture enters as an argument in individuals' decision functions. The second program is Cultural Economics (CE), which examines the culture industry, relying on standard tools of microeconomic theory (Blaug 2001; Ginsburgh and Throsby 2006), with some authors exploring the more philosophical question of cultural vis-à-vis economic value (McCain 2006).¹⁸ The third research program is contained in the New Institutional Economics (NIE), in which culture is represented as a constraint on individual optimizing agency (North 1990; Drobak and Nye 1997). Many studies across the three research programs aim to model and quantify the economic 'effect' of culture as approximated by variables such as language, religion, or 'trust' (Lazear 1999; Guiso *et al* 2006). Of the three, NIE deals most directly with the question of development (e.g., Tabellini 2005). Yet, despite the impressive volume of research, authors begin and end with the rational choice model intact, and culture suspended within the dualism of preferences/constraints.

In the Marxian school, the place of culture has been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny in the past few decades. Williams (1961: 260) concluded that the 'formula' of base and superstructure, even if taken as mere analogy, has had the effect of diminishing the import of culture in Marxian theory. In the texts of influential twentieth-century interpreters of Marx's economic philosophy (Sweezy 1970 [1942]; Baran 1973 [1957]; Mandel 1975), all cultures outside of modern Europe were analytically treated as an inert mass in the historical path of capitalism. But, eventually, the general current that brought cultural problematics to the forefront of academic discourse, building on the contributions of Gramsci (1985) and Althusser (1970), also led to considerable revisions of Marxian political economy. These are most sharply articulated in the post-modernist project of Rethinking Marxism (Resnick and Wolff 1985, 1987; Amariglio *et al.* 1996; Callari and Ruccio 1996). The hallmark of this intervention is the reinterpretation of class as a process, rather than a group, and accordingly theorizing culture as "processes of the production and circulation

of meaning” (Amariglio *et al.* 1988: 487). As a result, more attention has been directed to previously neglected themes such as subjectivity and consumption (Pietrykowski 1994). All the same, class remains the “guiding thread” of this approach, which has in effect produced a new dichotomy of class/nonclass. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine the extent to which postmodernist revisions have transcended the dualistic framework of classical Marxism.

In contrast to Marxian and Neoclassical philosophies, commitment to the idea of culture forms the philosophical backbone of the original Institutional tradition; it is a “core concept” (Mayhew 1987; Jennings and Waller 1995).¹⁹ The understanding of culture here goes farthest in the direction of Anthropology. This is in full display in W.C. Neale’s description of it as “a primary and therefore undefined rubric for all the rules and folkviews to which its members subscribe” (1990: 335). At the same time, Institutionalists emphasize the idea of instrumental valuation, a tool-oriented, problem-solving tendency thought to be constituent of the human make-up. These two ideas are expressed in the distinction between ceremonial (institutional) and instrumental (technological) aspects of culture—aka the “Veblenian dichotomy” (Waller 1982, 1999). The discourse of international development has exposed the dualism of this conception. Following the work of Clarence Ayres (1962 [1944]), culture lost some of its theoretical significance to instrumental valuation, and a universalist vision driven by emphasis on technological advance took over. The result has been what I call an Institutional estrangement from culture (Zein-Elabdin 2009).

The upshot of all this is that each of the three schools of economic thought conceives culture within a very distinct, but dualistic theoretical framework. This could be summed up in four *paradigmatic dualisms*:

Neoclassicism	Preferences/Constraints
Modernist Marxism	Base structure/Superstructure
Postmodern Marxism	Class/Nonclass
Veblenian Institutionalism	Instrumental/Ceremonial

These binary distinctions frame each paradigm within two poles that define and structure a certain way of apprehending social ‘reality.’ To be sure, the scene in each tradition is more complex than it is depicted here. Nevertheless, two tentative observations may be offered. First, these dualisms should not be seen as mere analytical distinctions. Analytical strategies generally tend to follow ontological convictions, and they engender epistemological consequences. In this case, the consequence is a limited, binary conception of culture, and an inability to grasp economic hybridity; that is, relations and processes found at the intersection and deep fusion of a multiplicity of cultural currents—a salient feature of contemporary societies (Zein-Elabdin 2009). I return to this point in Chapter 9. The need for analytical schema is understandable. The problem arises when these become embedded on a deep, axiomatic level in the discourse that obscures their theoretical and political ramifications.

Second, the ontological roots of these paradigmatic dualisms seem to lie in a more general existential dichotomy of desire/limits: that is, conflict between desire, freedom, and possibilities, on one hand; and limits, boundaries, and finality, on the other. The sharpest illustration of this is the preferences/constraints dichotomy of Neoclassicism, but it can also be located in the Institutional and Marxian traditions though the parallel is not so quickly demonstrable. Thus, throughout economic literature, culture has been conceptualized as a force that either liberates or limits some individual agency or social process, a catalyst for or an obstacle to economic growth and development. In this book, I will not delve deeply into the existential dimension, and instead concentrate on the more immediate manifestations of dualism in economic analyses of culture.

In Feminist Economics the issues are somewhat different. Feminists have contributed tremendously to raising the profile of culture in Economics by pointing out that the dominant models, which offer a narrow interpretation of economy, are grounded in gendered cultural values (Ferber and Nelson 1993; Barker and Kuiper 2003). Most importantly for the issue at hand, Feminists reject the Cartesian dualism of mind/body and all that flows from it (Nelson 1992; Jennings 1993; Barker 1998). Accordingly, several have criticized the theoretical separation between culture and economy (Kabeer 1994; Harcourt 1995). Unfortunately, the emphasis on gender as the central category of analysis has invited a partial treatment of culture reflected most clearly in the approach to development and the question of 'third world women' (Zein-Elabdin 2003; Charusheela and Zein-Elabdin 2003). So far, most of the Feminist Economic critique of dualisms has been confined to those with a transparent gender association (e.g., market/household), overlooking such powerful cultural dualisms as developed/under(less)developed that do have considerable policy implications for many women worldwide (see Chapter 8). It is plausible then to wonder whether the partial treatment of culture has hindered Feminist Economics from having an even bigger impact on the status of culture in the discipline.

In sum, there is now a substantial effort by economists to investigate and account for the role of cultural values, habits, and expression in economic action and knowledge. There are *shallow* as well as *deep* and sophisticated contributions. In this book, I merely broach the outlines of this landscape as an entry point to more critical systematic study.

Culture and development

If "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams 1983 [1976]: 87), development must be one of the other two.²⁰ The general meaning attached to it in the last century is captured in Benjamin Higgins' description: "wide and deep improvements in welfare for the masses of the population" (1977: 100), with welfare being measured against the level of income historically reached in the North Atlantic region, and accompanying social cultural constituents—large-scale mechanization, a market system, urban agglomeration, and a rapid pace of life. Although this is an increasingly contested prototype, it remains the global *desideratum* of most economic discourse and policy. Development economists

were tasked with determining how this prototype could be replicated on a global scale, across different societies and cultures. In other words, development economics is inherently mounted on the theoretical erasure of cultures that might be or seem incompatible with this ‘way of life.’²¹ In this section, I sketch the evolution of this field’s treatment of culture, focusing primarily on Neoclassical discourse, and briefly highlight its rootedness in dualistic ontology.

Since its emergence in post-WWII geopolitics, development economics has presented three stances on culture, which may be described as: *hospitality*, *retreat*, and *return*. The first stance, dominating in the field’s formative years, embodied a conviction that cultural beliefs and habits had significant implications for economic growth (Lewis 1955). Emblematic of this position is B.F. Hoselitz’ (1952) role in launching the Research Center in Economic Development and Cultural Change, and the journal bearing the same name at the University of Chicago. Overall, different camps of economists quarreled over policy details—e.g., balanced growth or big push—but never doubted the desirability of ‘modernization.’ Marxian and Institutionalist authors, though critical of Neoclassical models (e.g., Frank 1966; Myrdal 1968), were equally committed to the agenda of ‘third world development.’ And, although many thought cultural beliefs in low-income countries represented an obstacle to economic growth, most showed great openness to the concept of culture itself as an explanatory variable. The dualism of culture/economy was crystalized in the common reference to ‘non-economic barriers’—attitudes, beliefs, and customs—to development.

By the 1970s, development economics had become more disputed and diverse. Ester Boserup’s book *Woman’s Role in Economic Development* (1989 [1970]), which inspired the now defunct field of women in development (WID), revealed that, across less industrialized world regions, economic growth was accompanied by a widening gap between men and women in income, formal education, land ownership, and use of new technologies. Yet, the cultural dimensions of this finding did not register in the discipline’s mind. As a result, the WID revolution did little to elevate the status of culture in Economics broadly. Instead, by the 1980s, “counter-revolution” authors (most vocally, Lal 1985) were asserting the universal validity of optimizing behavior, thereby foreclosing any potential for consideration of cultural difference. A period of skepticism and critical reflection (Hirschman 1981; Sen 1983; Lewis 1984) ended with the announcement of a New Development Economics (NDE) (Stiglitz 1986).²² Proponents of this view maintain that superior modeling could capture the ‘mechanics of development’ without having to account for cultural variability (Lucas 1988; Krugman 1995). This position represents a *retreat* from culture.

The third stance, surfacing almost simultaneously with NDE, was driven by the search for explanations of rapid economic growth in East Asia, and greater awareness of the global diversity of cultures (Berger and Hsiao 1988; Ruttan 1988). One strand of this culture and development (CAD) literature is policy-driven, generally concerned with “mainstreaming culture in development work” (Wolfensohn *et al.* 2000: 11), and mostly contained in World Bank, UN, and other multidisciplinary discussions such as the human development and capabilities perspective (e.g., Fukuda-Par and Kumar 2003; Sen 1998, 2004). So far, the most concrete