Cultural diversity and anti-poverty policy

Michèle Lamont and Mario Luis Small

Introduction

This article examines the relationship between culture and poverty, paying special attention to cultural diversity, economic development and the challenges facing the reduction of poverty in a culturally complex world.[1] Over the last several decades, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and even economists have examined the relationship between culture and poverty in an international context, producing a remarkably diverse, and in recent years, increasingly sophisticated literature (Rao and Walton 2004). Yet the term "culture" has meant different things to different scholars and part of our challenge is to assess those meanings against what we know about poverty and development. We cannot hope in these few pages to cover all this work, address all its complexities or even summarise it faithfully. Instead, we cover a narrow but critical set of issues we find especially important for those attempting to reduce poverty or its consequences in the globalised world in which we live (for more, see Lamont and Small 2008 and Small et al. 2010).

One common and controversial belief about the relationship between culture and poverty posits that the former causes the latter – specifically, that individuals either are or remain poor because of their cultural beliefs and attitudes, and that societies fail to overcome underdevelopment because of their national or collective cultures (Harrison 1985; Harrison and Huntington 2000). For example, some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are thought to remain underdeveloped due to a lack of social cohesion, inclination to justice or interest in engaging their full potential Inspired by Montesquieu, some even single out the climate as a causal factor fostering a weaker work ethic, which slows down economic development. Influenced by modernisation theory, others persist in measuring prospects for the eradication of poverty in terms of cultural proximity to the west. We differ from these perspectives in several respects. Firstly, we do not believe that culture should be thought of as a society's beliefs, norms, values and attitudes. Individuals in given societies differ substantially in these attributes, and both individuals and societies can and do hold contradictory beliefs, norms and

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attitudes. Secondly, to the extent that individuals are motivated by cultural conditions, which are not merely normative but also cognitive, such that how actors view their circumstances can be as important as what they value or believe. Thirdly, behaviour is shaped not merely by cultural conditions but also by political and economic ones, which in turn affects levels of individual and collective development and poverty.

In this article we offer an alternative perspective; one where beliefs, norms and values are understood to be only one of several dimensions of culture. Others include worldviews, frames and scripts of behaviour. Most of these dimensions do not bear a simple causal relationship with poverty. In this vein, we suggest that it is important to study not just the causal impact of culture on poverty but also that of poverty on culture – how the lack of resources affects the way in which people perceive their social circumstances. In our view, a key to the eradication of poverty lies not in encouraging the poor to adopt the beliefs of the mainstream (since the mainstream and poor often do not differ substantially on average and also both hold self-contradictory beliefs) but in better understanding and channelling heterogeneity. We suggest that those working towards the reduction of poverty or alleviation of its effects should address culture more seriously than many have been willing to do in the past. The worldviews of the poor should be captured not by what they are not, but by considering how the living conditions of the poor limit the range of choices available to them, as well as which of the available paths would be most productive for them to take, given their situation.

To frame our discussion, we follow the arguments by Amartya Sen and others that the study of well-being should focus not only on material poverty but also, more generally, on the capabilities people have to acquire the goods (or realise the functions) they have reason to value (Sen 1985, 1999). The benefit of this approach from our perspective is that it moves us away from a rather narrow perspective by which the consequences of culture would centre on its relationship to people's income, employment, or wealth. The idea of capabilities, however, brings up the complicated problem of subjectivity in well-being: capabilities depend on social circumstances and also on what people wish for, which

itself depends on cultural circumstances. We cannot resolve those issues here but we identify those circumstances where some understanding of their import will probably be crucial.

Cultural diversity takes different forms in different settings: for some, it may be associated with racial differences, as in South Africa and the USA; for others, with religious or ethnic differences, as in Nigeria. Much of our empirical work has been based in the USA, though one of us has also conducted work in France. In the first half of this article, we often use the example of the USA to frame some of the issues we find important. In the second, we expand more generally to an international context. To discuss cultural diversity effectively, we must first clarify and differentiate our understanding of culture from that of others. This is the topic to which we now turn.

Cultural consequences of poverty

Perhaps the most appropriate way to rethink the simple causal model described earlier is to think of the opposite relationship; to consider the cultural consequences of experiencing sustained poverty. For years, the most prominent, if controversial, theory in this vein was Oscar Lewis' (1959, 1969) notion of the culture of poverty. Lewis argued that this culture emerged when groups that were socially and economically marginalised from a capitalist society developed patterns of behaviour to deal with their low status. This behaviour, which Lewis observed among families in Mexico and in Puerto Rico, was characterised by low aspirations, political apathy, helplessness, disorganisation, provincialism and the disparagement of so-called middle-class values. Once this culture was in place, Lewis argued, it developed mechanisms that tended to perpetuate it, even if structural conditions changed. This work has been criticised at length, in part for assuming that cultures were internally consistent and also for its lack of empirical support (Lamont and Small 2008; Valentine 1968).

In recent years, scholars have examined this question with greater theoretical clarity and empirical rigour. The cultural consequences of poverty may be categorised into those caused by

individual poverty and those caused by neighbourhood or community poverty. It is important to note that these are not merely two versions of the same effect observed at different levels. Individual poverty, for example, might be experienced in a context of either collective poverty or collective prosperity. The cultural consequences in the former may be different from those in the latter, where relative deprivation is likely to play a role.

Many have examined the long-term consequences for individuals of living in sustained poverty or unemployment. For example, Wilson (1996) argued that sustained unemployment specifically affected daily habits and work orientations. The practices of waking up every morning at a given time, having to attend work or meetings and meet employment responsibilities form part of people's habitus or dispositions towards behaviour, that are themselves conducive to sustained employment. When "work disappears" and individuals do not participate in the formal labour market, people are likely to lose those cultural dispositions. Something similar was observed by Bourdieu (1965) during extended unemployment among Algerians and by Jahoda *et al.* (1971) during an economic depression in Austria.

Much more recent work has focused on the community-level question. The consequences of neighbourhood poverty; specifically, of living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of poor individuals (regardless of whether specific individuals themselves are poor or not) have been a subject of intense scrutiny during the 1960s and 1970s and again in recent years in US scholarship (Goering and Feins 2003; Valentine 1968; Wilson 1987). The earlier literature examined culture at length, but without the theoretical precision of recent works; the recent scholarship exhibits much more sophistication, with the use of survey data, ethnographic data and even field experiments, but unfortunately without much examination of culture. Among the earlier studies the standout is Hannerz's (1969) examination of conditions in a high poverty, predominantly black neighbourhood in an unnamed US city. Hannerz found that the community had developed both mainstream and ghetto-specific forms of behaviour, with individuals adopting one or another as circumstances demanded.

More recently, scholars have found that neighbourhood poverty can have cultural consequences for both individuals and neighbourhoods as a whole. Smith (2007) studied African-American job finders in Michigan and found that living in concentrated neighbourhood poverty reduced trust in social networks such that people were less willing to help others find jobs. On the consequences for neighbourhoods, scholars have reached conclusions consistent with those of Hannerz. Anderson (1999), in a study of black urban neighbourhoods in Philadelphia; Small (2002, 2004), in a study of a Puerto Rican housing complex in Boston, and Harding (2007), using national US survey data on poor and non-poor neighbourhoods have all found that neighbourhood poverty is often associated with cultural diversity – that is, a situation in which multiple beliefs and scripts about appropriate behaviour coexist in one context, such that residents are forced to choose among different patterns of behaviour, all of which are socially acceptable.

The three studies point to different aspects of the question. Anderson advances a distinction between street and decent families in neighbourhoods that alludes to Hannerz's work but, by focusing on differences between types of actors as opposed to types of attitudes, perhaps does not move us as far forward as it could. Small identifies heterogeneity but also provides a model as to how it comes about. He shows that cohorts of residents can exhibit relatively consistent cultural narratives about the neighbourhood itself; for example, on whether it is a good or bad place to live – and that cultural heterogeneity may come about as elders are replaced by newer or younger cohorts. Harding provides comparative data to show that, at least with respect to beliefs and scripts about sexual behaviour and romantic relationships, poor neighbourhoods may be more culturally heterogeneous than non-poor neighbourhoods.

A recent study by Young (2004) provides important insight into the relationship between individual and neighbourhood poverty. Young interviewed African-American men living in poverty and residing in high-poverty neighbourhoods about their understandings of themselves and their aspirations. He found that those who rarely left their neighbourhoods and who were most socially isolated were the most likely to

believe in the tenets of the American Dream, that through hard work and dedication they could improve their own circumstances. Those who spent more time regularly outside their neighbourhoods (for instance, in prison), and who therefore had greater contact with wider society, were more likely to believe that racial discrimination was a serious obstacle to their advancement.

Counter-cultures and the reproduction of poverty

An important issue that follows from examining the cultural consequences of poverty is whether these consequences are themselves self-perpetuating. The paradigmatic model in this vein has, in some sense, been that of Lewis. Lewis did not merely argue that in conditions of poverty people develop the cultural beliefs and attitudes described earlier; he also argued that, once in place, the culture of poverty was self-perpetuating, so that people were unlikely to change their behaviour even if the structural circumstances that led to it changed. This proposition was perhaps the most controversial, and it may have proved to be one of the least supported. For example, in the USA many conservative commentators argued that unemployment rates among blacks were high because of their unwillingness to work or their cultural predisposition against work. However, as labour markets tightened dramatically over the late 1990s the black unemployment rate plummeted, making clear that these formerly unemployed workers were not unwilling to work, they were merely unable to find jobs (US Census Bureau 2001, table 593).

The theoretical assumptions have been criticised as well. Many researchers argued that the development of cultural attitudes and beliefs inconsistent with personal success in capitalist societies were themselves acts of resistance, conscious and not so conscious, against the economic systems of such societies. In one of the most often cited models, John Ogbu (1978; Fordham and Ogbu 1986) argued that the situation of poor ethnic minorities in societies had to be understood in light of their migration to such societies. Some were voluntary minorities, groups that had moved to a society willingly and in search of political freedoms or economic opportunities. Others were involuntary minorities, such as slaves and indigenous people; groups that had become ethnic minorities as a result of conquest or violence. Ogbu argued that ethnic groups in the latter category were likely to perceive themselves as fictive kin (brothers and sisters) and to remain acutely aware of the structural constraints on their advancement (such as the ethnic job ceiling and institutional discrimination). As a result, they were likely to develop an oppositional culture, a set of attitudes and beliefs fundamentally at odds with those of mainstream society, one in which subscribing to mainstream beliefs – such as participating in the formal economy or attaining success through the standard educational pathways – was considered disloyal to the fictive kin group. While groups were internally strengthened through the formation of this collective culture, their members' individual prospects for occupational success were, ironically, weakened. Ogbu tested his model on adolescents in school, where presumably their future aspirations would be easiest to perceive. He found that many black students in the US urban schools he studied complained about students who "acted white" and referred to those who attained good grades as "brainiacs". In this way, cultural conditions helped reproduce poverty.

This model appealed to scholars and policymakers. It provided a way of looking at culture that did not blame victims for their problems and it presented an elegant and comprehensive view of differences in poverty across a range of groups and societies in a way that appeared intuitively correct. However, it was not until the late 1990s that the model was tested explicitly, and the tests found reasons to question it. Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) examined a national group of students for their attitudes about education, homework, educational attainment, the importance of school and the role of education in popularity. They found that black students were either no different from whites or more likely to support mainstream ways of attaining success, in direct contradiction to the thesis (see also Cook and Ludwig 1998).

There are broader concerns with the model, however. Notice that in Ogbu's model culture is

both internally consistent and static – the set of beliefs and attitudes about attainment that involuntary minorities are reputed to have is not inconsistent and, once established, it does not change. Both ideas about culture seem difficult to support. Many, for example, have written of the wide array of beliefs present in urban African American culture, a model in which heterogeneity and opposing views, rather than consistency, seem to reign (Hannerz 1969). In addition, culture changes; an idea given little thought in this context. And yet it is by examining how and where culture changes that the possibility for other forms of change emerges.

Returning to our broader theme, the issues of oppositional culture and cultural resistance point to an additional difficulty: that of conceiving of well-being as depending not just on income but also on people's capabilities. Sen and others have argued that whether people are doing well in light of what they are capable of doing depends not merely on their given society but also on their interests and predilections. For example, most would agree that reducing illiteracy can be conceived as an objective, not subjective goal in practical terms. But when we are consider well-being, we are concerned not that every person has a college education, but that those who wish for one are able to attain it.

Certainly, the evidence does not bear out an overarching conception of oppositional culture in which most members of an involuntary minority reject normal channels of success. Nevertheless, in the context of resistance cultures it is clear that individuals may be culturally at odds with the expectations of desirable goals assumed by mainstream society or international standards. There are few answers based on universals that would apply in all circumstances. Yet a successful approach to poverty should not fail to recognise the existence of cultural beliefs or attitudes born of resistance or rejection of mainstream paths to well-being. In particular, while preserving traditions may often be interpreted as a form of cultural resistance that is counterproductive from the perspective of economic development, it can also sustain strong group identities that act as bases for collective empowerment and valorisation. In turn, cultural erosion that results from industrialisation may weaken traditional solidarities and

networks of mutual support and, in turn, produce new forms of poverty. While the pursuit of economic development may recreate, under new guises, some of the problems that it aims to alleviate, new sites for solidarity may emerge as minority and low-status groups are confronted with new challenges. See for example, Mooney (2009) on the Catholic Church and Haitian immigrant communities in Miami, Montreal and Paris.

Cultural diversity as a tool for self-efficacy

Cultural difference from the mainstream is not always a rejection of mainstream ways, and, in fact, cultural difference can be a tool for success, rather than failure, in contemporary capitalist societies. That cultural diversity can itself become a tool for development, self-efficacy and development has been contested for some time. Banfield expressly argued that cultural traditions in many parts of the world undermined the possibility of political and economic development. What he termed an "amoral familialism", a strong sense of patronage and in-group resource allocation in which merit played little role was a strong obstacle to development. Other scholars have made similar arguments about economic development in Latin America and political development in the Middle East (Harrison 1985; Harrison and Huntington 2000).

These arguments, however, have tended to be unconvincing. The idea that cultural diversity undermines progress because it undermines common values is based on the faulty assumption that political and economic progress of the collective depends primarily on consensus, rather than conflict; on the presence of shared norms, values and beliefs. Certainly, some agreement on core notions such as respect for life, fairness and economic opportunity are important, but they are also hardly points of difference. Many of the most important advances in civil rights, workers rights and economic development in developed nations have come as a result of conflict; of the efforts of society as a whole to deal directly and openly with differences over the right course of history.

Just as embracing differences at a national level can lead to collective progress, embracing diversity among individuals can also be channelled as empowerment tools to improve anti-poverty policy. For example, many pundits have argued that in order for immigrant minorities to do well they must adopt the culture and language of the new societies in which they find themselves. But researchers have shown that retaining cultural distinctiveness can provide important advantages. In an important study of bilingualism among immigrants in the USA, Portes and Schauffler (1994) found that children of immigrants who were bilingual performed better on maths tests and other measures of academic success than those who had learned English but had not retained their language of migrant origin. Others have found that children in school respond positively to culturally relevant materials and to approaches from multiple cultural perspectives, as opposed to one perspective only.

Cultural diversity as a source of exchange, innovation, and creativity

A different way to think of diversity is to think of its impact on innovation and creativity. Some have argued that one may increase the level of self-determination among low-income or low-status minority groups by acknowledging or celebrating their distinctive cultural heritage. While alleviating poverty requires income redistribution and equalising access to rights, institutions and other resources, it may also require interventions that give such groups greater roles in the public sphere while asserting their importance as members of the cultural and political polity. Public celebrations of multiculturalism accomplish this, but promoting self-determination by recognising the existence and cultural distinctiveness of the group is probably even more important (see the example of the recognition of the Mashpee Wampanoag of Massachusetts (Badkhen 2007). These undoubtedly influence the shared capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004 and sustain the development of a stronger sense of collective efficacy.

In development circles recent scholars have argued that we should place greater importance on local knowledge, including the understandings and practices of indigenous and other marginalised groups (Scott 1999, pp.313–335). Forms of government that require the contributions of a wide range of citizens are often granted greater legitimacy and are often more effective and better able to mobilise groups in the pursuit of collective goals. For instance, after the All India Institute for Hygiene and Public Health started using sex workers for peer education in condom use in the Sonagachi district of Kolkata, the rate of HIV incidence was reduced to about 6 per cent in 1999, compared to 50 per cent in other red-light areas (Rao and Walton 2004, p.8). In her study of efforts to reduce HIV-infection in Uganda and Botswana Swidler (2009) found that governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were effective only when they mobilised the systems of meaning and the social solidarities of the local community. In Uganda, prominent clan structures, even if less democratic than local government in Botswana, provided more effective vehicles for reaching local communities than organisations that were operated by national or transnational voluntary organisations. Crucial to success was tapping the social imagery of the moral orders prevailing in diverse local communities and invoking the obligations ordinary people feel to their respective friends and neighbours, as well as socially valued models of behaviour.

Removing stigma as a mechanism of poverty alleviation

How individuals interpret and deal with exclusion and stigma is an important factor in how discrimination affects their mental and physical health and well-being (Lamont 2009). It matters whether members of subordinate groups internalise their lower status and the stigma that comes with it or interpret their situation so as to alter the status hierarchy or power dynamic.

Psychologists have given consideration to the intra-psychological mechanisms with which

members of stigmatised groups cope with perceived stigma, such as privileging in-group comparisons. Equally important are the variegated frameworks through which people define status, including through standards of evaluation that are autonomous from socioeconomic status (Lamont and Bail 2005). Lamont's (2000) interview-based study found that African-American working-class men differentiate blacks from whites by contrasting their "caring selves" with the more domineering self of whites. For their part, North African immigrants in France challenge stereotypes by demonstrating that they are different from and superior to the French on moral grounds. To various degrees workers in both countries locate themselves above the middle class by pointing to the moral failings of this group. They develop alternative criteria of evaluation that allow them to locate themselves in a hierarchy. These cultural templates are widely shared. Cultural resistance can provide strong cultural backbones to withstand the challenges of upward mobility, but it can come about at the cost of considerable stress (James 1994).

More generally, there are other ways for members of stigmatised groups to gain civic membership. One is to attempt to embrace dominant cultural attitudes, beliefs and forms; another is to be bi-cultural or multicultural and to adopt cultural forms relevant to different contexts by "code switching" (Carter 2006; DuBois ([1903] 2005). Strict cultural assimilation, a traditional route, can come about at the expense of loss of identity and of other important cultural assets. Biculturalism has been employed successfully by the upwardly mobile for a long time but the constant code switching can be alienating (Shoshana 2007).

Larger institutional and governmental strategies such as affirmative action laws or regulations also promote the removal of stigma and allow individuals different options in how they choose to define their identities. Their usefulness is often context dependent and debated or contested, as is the case for the adoption of affirmative action policies in Brazilian higher education (Silva 2006), or the debates in 2007 on the collection of racial and ethnic statistics by the *Institut national d'études démographiques* in France, opposed by the Constitutional Council. In the French case the gathering of census data on ethnic and racial minorities is condemned because it can potentially reify and reinforce inequality and differences.

Considering the cultural practices of the middle class and of political and other elites is crucial to understanding destigmatisation strategies and to capturing the broader relationship between culture and poverty. Cultural and social exclusion are features of all systems of inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), and middle-class strategies to pass on privileges to their offspring typically constrain options for less privileged groups – for instance, in the USA, where school budgets are determined by local taxes, the middle class prices the working class out of residential areas with better schools.

The indifference of elites also often has counterproductive effects. In a systematic comparative study of elite perceptions of poverty in Bangladesh, Brazil, Haiti, the Philippines and South Africa, Reis and Moore (2007) demonstrated that while elite interviewees from various sectors of these societies discussed poverty as if it were a problem, they had difficulty identifying very pressing or compelling reasons for concern. There was no very strong sense that to tolerate persisting poverty is to allow some valuable human resources to go to waste. Moreover, the classic threats posed by poverty, such as crime, were generally perceived to be rather weak. There was limited support for any notion of introducing a welfare state providing broad-spectrum support for the mass of the population on a relatively universalistic basis (support was stronger in Brazil than in Bangladesh). The areas of agreement over proactive policies were that more education was the best way to reduce poverty and that poverty reduction was viewed as primarily the responsibility of the state.

Whether strategies for dealing with racial, ethnic or religious stigma can be used successfully to deal with the stigma of poverty is an open question. Low-income groups are by definition deprived of resources. A positive self-concept may not make a real impact on their situation. Nevertheless, recognising how poverty levels are influenced by institutional and economic forces has been shown to sustain the poor in their efforts to improve their situation and gain collective efficacy (see Heller 1999, in the case of Kerala, India).

Institutional and cultural conditions for successful societies

Our arguments imply that the protection of individual rights must include the protection of cultural differences – the protection of group rights. Successful societies recognise individual and group rights and adopt policies that treat diverse groups fairly and that give people from diverse cultures and ethnicities an equal voice in directing their destinies (Kymlicka 1995, 2007). It is also likely that redistributing resources through universal rather than targeted approaches keeps stigma at bay and thereby does not discourage respect for difference. These societies facilitate access to a range of institutions such as schools, hospitals and welfare for a wide range of groups while recognising their distinct needs. They reduce inter-racial conflict by increasing inter-group contacts in many institutions (Warikoo 2010, for schools) and they ensure that groups have equal access to resources. They are societies, in short, that maximise the capabilities of groups and individuals (Hall and Lamont 2009). This last aspect is illustrated by Cornell and Kalt (2000) who show that American Indian reservations that take a nation-building approach (assert sovereignty, think strategically and develop strong governing institutions in accord with local cultures) do better economically. Among First Nations in Canada, communities that embrace traditional values and decision-making practices tend to experience greater economic development (e.g. the Miawpukek of Newfoundland).

Increasing moral concern for poverty in developed countries

Our discussion to this point has identified different elements of the relationship between cultural diversity and anti-poverty policy. In what follows, we conclude by providing a notion for how to increase concern for poverty in a diversifying context. We provide five case studies of successful efforts to integrate cultural diversity into these broader aims.

The growth of transnational populations worldwide is increasing the international awareness of poverty and cultural diversity. When people in the North are actually part of the culture and societies that are rooted in the South, it is much harder to dismiss poverty in the South as a problem of the "other". Nevertheless, high levels of class and racial residential segregation often limit contact between various segments of the population. In this context, cultural institutions are likely to play a central role in diffusing information that does not travel easily through social networks. Religious organisations have traditionally been crucial in raising awareness of poverty, but much more is likely needed, especially as the retrenchment of the welfare state proceeds in advanced industrial societies.

A key to increasing moral concern for poverty is to identify and demonstrate the relationship between poverty and the inequities associated with it. Many social scientists continue to work on finding the connections between the limited capabilities of the poor and the larger structures in which poor and non-poor are embedded. Others are considering how to make policy-makers more aware of their findings (Carden 2008; Weiss 1980). Still others are more concerned with the popularisation of findings through the popular media, impressed by the power of social documentaries that denounce injustice and imperialism (such as the popular films directed by Michael Moore and Al Gore's film on global warming). A combined approach operating simultaneously in different spaces and at different scales and aiming at different audiences is likely to be the most successful.

Others have discussed policy-focused solutions (for example, Rao and Walton 2004). We provide examples of less institutional actions that illustrate best practices:

- The teaching of "fair trade" (Fair Trade Schools n.d.) is spreading rapidly in the British educational system. It successfully sensitises children to the plight of others and to the conditions of exchange that reproduce inequality. Promoting similar training in other industrial societies would be an effective approach, especially in countries such as the USA where children have only vague

notions about living conditions in the economic periphery of the world.

- The Sesame Street Workshop co-produces local versions of Sesame Street in over 30 countries to help promote cultural tolerance and literacy. Through its international co-productions the Workshop aims to produce social change at ground level: "With today's global landscape dominated by such pressing issues as poverty, human rights, AIDS and ethnic genocide, the world's most-watched children's television show can bridge cultures while remaining socially relevant".

- The Global State of Washington initiative is a consortium of more than a thousand Washington State businesses, universities, NGOs and research institutes, along with hundred of civic organisations, that are working together to mobilise citizens to alleviate poverty and enhance rights for all people. They join forces to increase the effectiveness of each organisation and make Washington State an important global centre for sustainable development. Similar initiatives are being put in place in Los Angeles (with the leadership of UCLA).

- Ten Thousand Villages (n.d.) is a non-profit corporation with more than 160 stores in North America to help craft people from the Global South to distribute and sell merchandise that express their unique tradition. It works with artisan groups throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America and ensures that workers receive wages they consider to be fair. Efforts such as these thus provide a way in which historically disadvantaged and marginalised groups can tap into global markets without relinquishing their local, traditional ways of life and while improving their quality of life.

- In Spring 2007 the Transnational Studies Initiative at Harvard sponsored a series of public conversations between immigrant artists and their audiences, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. These events explored the creation and management of the artistic and cultural products of transnational migration, focusing on Latino, South Asian and Chinese immigrants in Massachusetts. Each event featured a conversation between cultural producers and their audiences about how art speaks to the relationship between homeland, identity and belonging. Discussions focused on how different cultural products are received, managed and exhibited and on how artistic encounters contribute to strengthening civic engagement and social change in both sending and receiving countries. A teaching film, *Mixing it up: mapping identities through art*, is now being completed.

Conclusions

Anti-poverty policy has become increasingly concerned with poverty as a result not merely of long-standing ideas about the cultural orientations of the poor but also of the rise of low-skilled immigration from culturally diverse societies into economically advanced societies. Recent history and scholarly research suggest that policy-makers faced with diverse constituencies would gain less from focusing on assimilation than from finding ways of deploying biculturalism and multiculturalism, to the benefit of individuals and society as a whole. In the increasingly globalised world in which we live, societies that resist the impulse to homogenise but instead encourage cultural co-existence are likely to reduce cultural conflict and benefit from the rapid success of ethnic minorities. The successes of Canada in this respect is instructive.

Policy-makers should consider the implications of understanding diversity in many arenas. Religious expression is a form of cultural expression and should be acknowledged as a source of meaning-making among low-income populations. Recent years may have witnessed a resurgence of religious fundamentalism of all kinds and states have sometimes responded by limiting religious expression. This is likely to be counterproductive. Generally, policy-makers should seek pathways for maximising the agency of poorer, culturally different or generally excluded groups (see Rao and Walton 2004). Considerations of diversity should also inform policy-makers in the state staffing of state bureaucracy. The relationships between states and their constituents are likely to become increasingly tense if, in the face of a diversifying population, the various elements of the state apparatus (including services, education

and law enforcement) retain national ethnic or cultural homogeneity. Finally, these considerations should inform the relationship between governments and international NGOs, which should be particularly mindful of adapting their development tools to the local context of action, while taking into consideration the cultural diversity of the targeted group. It is imperative to avoid transposing to new contexts institutional models of policy-making that are unsuitable and misadapted (Evans 2004).

No tool will be more crucial to policy-makers engaged in anti-poverty policy in a diverse world than information. Qualitative and quantitative data collection on various dimensions of cultural diversity is crucial. Ethnographic case studies and cross-national surveys focused not only on standard economic indicators but also on self-understanding and cultural practices are more important today than ever. And to the extent that states do not merely focus on their own countries but also collaborate with others in collective data collection endeavours, our policy-making is likely to be better equipped to deal with an increasingly globalised world.

Acknowledgement

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