CULTURE MATTERS

How Values Shape
Human Progress

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Culture, Childhood, and Progress in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Every economic system consists of a world of social beings living out cultural careers, who bring their goals, motives, capacities, and cultural models of the world to economic life. Cultures around the world imagine and try to guide children into wonderful and varied cultural careers in hopes of producing the kinds of social beings they value. Cultural careers start before we are born and are foreshadowed in childhood pathways. Are the cultural careers of children in the less developed world significantly hindering economic market activity or new forms of civil society, and if so, should parenting and child life become a focus for change efforts intended to encourage economic progress?

My comments focus on sub-Saharan Africa—the "except-for" continent (Roe 1999)—that part of the world seemingly least economically favored and farthest from the ideal of a pluralist polity. In my view, there is nothing fundamental in the parenting and child care practices in Africa today that would prevent economic development under some version of a market model or a local version of a more pluralist society. Many values and practices in African family life and child care are at least compatible with economic de-

velopment and political pluralism. These include the shared, socially distributed caretaking of children; the high value placed on combining schooling and shared family work for children; the evidence that parents want their children to show a *mix* of individual cleverness and compliance to elders; and the advantages of social networks that can mediate between rural and urban settings.

Furthermore, parents actively debate how to raise children and try out new practices and family arrangements. Hence, there are children and families *potentially ready* for a variety of economic and political activities. The task is to put such activities and institutions in place rather than fundamentally change the values and practices of African parents and families. There will be children and young adults there to engage in those activities once they are in place.

Finally, the conception of culture and values as rather inflexible traits that are inculcated early and become part of a national cultural "character" is mostly wrong. Cultural beliefs and practices are tools for adaptation, not simply fixed patterns that determine institutions. Culture is a mix of shared values and beliefs, activities organized in daily routines of life, and interactional experiences that have emotional meaning. Cultures often raise children in ways that cause them problems when they become adults that then have to be solved anew. Western children are taught to be all they can be and to expect reasons for everything. They are offered choices and are expected to negotiate rules. As adults, they may struggle to compromise and work well in social groups at work, and to realize that no one can perfectly realize every childhood dream.

African children learn to be interdependent, to share resources, and to live within family and community authority systems with at best covert questioning of them. As adults, they may struggle to break away from those very beliefs to be autonomous, curious, searching for new alliances. Beliefs, values, activities, and experience are never perfectly integrated during childhood and across developmental stages.

Children acquire cultural knowledge through mostly nonverbal channels of participation and modeling—verbal tuition and language are important but are not the dominant mode by any means. These channels for acquiring culture do not necessarily give consistent information, and in times of change, these levels of cultural experience and modes of acquisition can be quite inconsistent. What all children learn about their culture and what parents try to inculcate is always experienced ambivalently, is filled with mixed messages, and is often resisted. Cultures may have a clear central tendency and normative pattern, but they are hardly monolithic and uniform.

PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA

There certainly are conditions in the political economy of nation-states and the international economy that inhibit economic growth in Africa. Africa is the place where all the plagues of the economically poor nations are exponentially compounded (Landes 1998, 499; UNICEF 1992; Weisner 1994). Development and change are presumably occurring in much of the world, "except-Africa" (Roe 1999). Fertility rates have declined and development proceeds at least somewhat in most places, presumably except for Africa (although the fertility transition is actually under way in many places [Bradley 1997; Robinson 1992]). Economic growth exemplars can be found in most every continent, except for Africa (but some exist). Roe characterizes the "except-Africa" trope as part of a "narrative" that itself leads to negativity about development. He suggests a variety of positive "counternarratives" of development that focus on variety, surprise, unpredictability, and the complexity of circumstances on the ground.

But concerns over "narrativity" hardly capture the deeply felt and serious economic and social problems Africans face. Daniel Etounga-Manguelle outlines the problems facing African communities in this volume, and I share many of his concerns. He personally experiences the conditions that inhibit the desires for change and progress for millions in Africa. Etounga-Manguelle sees cultural features as the cause of these negative African institutions: "Culture is the mother and . . . institutions are the children. More efficient and just African institutions depend on modifications to our culture."

In Africa, as anywhere, culture can be oppressive and destructive. Although I agree that many experience the cultural patterns Etounga-Manguelle describes as harmful, and tens of millions of Africans hope they will change, I think that he is wrong to argue that culture *precedes* resource-based, institutional, and politico-economic factors. Rather, these factors are loosely coupled within a complex.

Africa is *not* the except-for case as far as parenting and child development beliefs and practices are concerned, and child care practices can hardly be blamed as among the *primary* conditions blocking economic and social progress. We should begin instead with the region's ecological constraints, and with the regional, national, and international institutions restricting and channeling the potential capacities of African children and youth, instead of proposing to change ways children are being raised and the values and goals parents have for their children.

My argument is not blindly optimistic in the face of the obvious poverty and problems plaguing so much of sub-Saharan Africa, nor does it absolve

culture from a role in understanding the past and shaping the future progress of African communities. The absence of conditions in which families and communities can organize a sustainable daily life for themselves is the single most important factor inhibiting children and families from raising their economic level and is a fundamental concern of anthropological studies (Weisner 1997a). Tens of millions of children and parents in Africa and elsewhere around the world do not have the most basic conditions of health, security, and stability; nor do they have opportunities for acquiring literacy and other skills that would put them in a *position* to engage in a wider civic polity or make much economic progress. With Etounga-Manguelle, I deeply believe that African children deserve these basic material and social goods and the opportunity to find activities and institutions in their societies they can engage in to promote those goals.

Those who argue that African cultural values and practices are the reasons why these basic material and social goods are not available propose changing African cultural values. But the evidence from studies of families and children suggest that such change has been under way for at least two generations and that there is ample variety and heterogeneity within African communities to provide individuals who are ready for change. Provide *basic* support for children and then let them and their parents adapt to change, including turning to new child rearing values and practices.

Some would argue, however, that the evident variations in values and practices within cultures, although interesting, are irrelevant to the larger argument about relationships between culture and economic progress because so many sub-Saharan African states show slow or declining economic development and slow or no evidence of the emergence of democratic society. Ecological, cultural, and historical circumstances certainly play some role in these comparative differences, but the connections are at best only loosely coupled. Understanding local cultural change and variability is essential for understanding what is really going on among families and children within African societies. How else can we know what to do—how and whether and at what level and in which community to intervene? Only studies of real contemporary cultural circumstances can address that issue. This is a research program that, it seems to me, should be given the highest priority.

CHILD REARING, PARENTAL GOALS, AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS IN THE DEVELOPED WORLD

There is an association between certain core parental beliefs and child care practices, and economic progress in the developed world. Those beliefs and

practices have not necessarily caused economic progress but are often associated with them in the West. A "pedagogical" developmental model (LeVine et al. 1994) emphasizes stimulation and responsiveness in the service of boldness, exploration, verbal skills, and literacy. It is characterized by a concern with individual child stimulation and active engagement of the child with others, exploratory behavior, active recognition of cognitive and verbal signs of intelligence, verbal communication, and question-response exchanges.

Individualism, autonomy, self-reliance, and self-expression are also encouraged in children. Parents look for signs of precocity in children and openly boast or glow in the admiration of others who remark on such precocity. There might be a steady drumbeat of praise and encouragement: "Good job!" "Way to go!" "Nice try!" "Be all you can be!" "You're so smart/athletic/ beautiful." Parents interpret typical developmental milestones as signs of intelligence or unusual abilities. For instance, babies everywhere in the world begin to display a social smile at around three months of age. Many African parents interpret it as a sign of physical health. Western parents interpret this as an early sign of intellectual understanding and intelligence.

Along with these parental goals of energetic precocity, however, Western parents may worry over whether the child has sufficient and secure basic trust within a stable social network, attachment security, and enough "self-esteem." There is variation across North America and Europe in such beliefs, and commitment to this ideal-typical set of practices is not uniform (Harkness and Super 1996). However, this model is recognized as among the acceptable, desirable ways to raise children and is not questioned or challenged. There is quite high consensus about its desirability and normality.

African parents of course have equivalent hopes and goals for achievement and success for their children. But rather than individual verbal praise, parents are more likely to emphasize integration into a wider family group and show acceptance through providing opportunities for such integration, through giving food and other material possessions, and through physical affection and contact with their younger children. Parents encourage children to learn through observation and cooperation with others instead of providing active, adult-child verbal stimulation, and they encourage interdependence skills rather than individualistic autonomy. Robert Serpell (1993) has called this a socially distributed model for socialization of children.

Many African parents and children today actually have a much more mixed model of parenting, incorporating pedagogical, autonomy-centered, and sociocentric developmental goals. In addition, individual variation in children (in temperament and other constitutional capacities) and in families inevitably leads to heterogeneity in these patterns, ensuring that there are

children growing up all the time who are in concord as well as in conflict with traits similar to those of the pedagogical/autonomy models.

I do not mean to gloss the obviously wide diversity of cultures and families across the African continent, but these are useful summary patterns for illustrative purposes. These patterns certainly fit, at least in part, child life in many regions of Africa as a central tendency with substantial variations and local differences around those tendencies. I share Etounga-Manguelle's view that there is of course very significant diversity across Africa, but also "a foundation of shared values, attitudes, and institutions that bind the nations south of the Sahara together, and in many respects those to the north as well."[1] Diversity across Africa around this central cultural pattern strengthens my argument that there are children and families throughout Africa ready to engage in new forms of market activity and civic life.

THERE IS SOME CONTINUITY IN ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consisted of dynamic and expansionist political economies. Eastern African cultures steadily expanded into new territories, had active trading networks into Arabia and the Middle East (as well as regionally within Africa), and intermarried with neighboring groups. It took savvy and ambition to be socially and economically successful under the very difficult circumstances of that era, just as it still does in the contemporary era.

The economic problems that faced parents and children in African communities then are still present now. Allen Johnson and Timothy Earle summarize these as the four universal politico-economic problems of production risks, warfare and raiding (security), inefficient resource use, and resource deficiencies (1987). Such problems remain omnipresent. Communities face the task of finding other solutions in a world of global markets, regionalization, dramatically increased access to information, and increasing inequality. The task is how to find a better fit between solutions useful in the past that still characterize parenting and child care and new solutions requiring new child care practices and parental goals, rather than the de novo creation of awareness of such problems. This search for new solutions seems to be happening in parenting and family life today.

Furthermore, communities need a variety of talents in children, not just narrow economic skills as contemporary Western market economies may define them. When we think about the fit between the need for economic progress, parental goals for children, and child socialization, it is not only entrepreneurial talent, competence in literacy and numeracy, or basic health that matter. Dealing with security, risk, and inefficiency problems requires in-

dividuals with varying talents and socialization experiences in a community, not only those with a single-minded preparation for economic innovation or wide social networks with an exclusively cosmopolitan outlook.

MARKET PRICING IS A UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL RELATIONS AND MENTAL LIFE

A market economic calculus may well be among a small number of universal principles available in all societies and learned and used by all children to some degree (Fiske 1991, 1992). Alan Fiske sets out four such universal principles of social relations: communal sharing (solidarity, unity in a group), authority ranking (status, inequality, hierarchy in social relations), equality matching (egalitarian, peer relations among separate coequals), and market pricing (exchange relationships determined by pricing or utility). These elementary relational structures are likely universal properties of the mind as well as of social organization.

If the four forms are universal properties of both mind and society, all humans from childhood are prepared to appraise and relate to others using one or combinations of these four. Market calculus may not be as salient in mind and society as those interested in economic progress might want, but it seems that social beings everywhere learn how to balance among these four kinds of social relationships. Here again, the problem for those interested in economic development is not to create a sense of market thinking and social relations de novo in children and their parents but rather to develop and extend what is already available.

CULTURAL VALUES DO NOT DEFINE CULTURES OR THE POTENTIALS FOR CHANGE

Cultural values do not define or constitute a culture, although they are often thought to be the key cultural barrier to economic progress. Clyde Kluckhohn, a founder of the anthropological study of values, described values in abstract terms as "conceptions of the desirable"—shared ideas about what is good (D'Andrade 1995, 3). Kluckhohn actually opposed culture to "life" and to adaptation, and he did not consider values systems as determinative (Edmonson 1973; see also Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961, 21).

Life [Kluckhohn] regarded as essentially disorderly and chaotic. Culture involved order imposed on life, and for the human species, was necessary for life to continue. . . . It was clear enough to him that not all individuals are made healthy and happy by their cultures, that in the long run not all societies are in-

sured growth or survival by their cultures, and that successful societies do not indefinitely preserve their cultures intact but must change them. (Fischer and Vogt 1973, 8)

Barth (1993) argues that we should not reify values by concentrating on their institutional expression but should focus on their uses in socialization. However, values *do* affect behavior when they inhere in institutions; cultural values are therefore powerful and should be taken seriously at institutional and social action levels. But they are adaptive tools, subject to negotiation and change; they do not determine or constitute culture.

Values matter in how they guide social action. They do so by accounting for the world as it is constructed—making *sense* of it and why we should even act in it at all in a meaningful way; by providing a guide to *attentional appraisal processes* (e.g., what should we be attending to?); by providing socially sanctioned rationales for actions that are *justified* to oneself and others by invoking shared values; and by providing a form of *social identification* and labeling—the belief that I am a person with spiritual values, for instance, as compared to others who do not share those values (D'Andrade 1991).

Values serve different functions for different people. Respect for authority and one's elders might help children know who to attend to but would not help explain the nature of the contemporary changing world or serve as a primary social identification. Women may use values concerning respect for authority to know what they have to attend to, but they may not share with male authority the justifications and social identifications that such values imply.

A UNIVERSAL STANDARD FOR ASSESSING CULTURES WITH REGARD TO CHILDHOOD: WELL-BEING AND BASIC SUPPORT LEAD TO THE POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL LIFE

Cultures should be judged on their ability to provide well-being, basic support, and sustainable daily lives for children and families. I do not have a relativist stance with regard to these features of child life. We can certainly give our advice and ally ourselves with those in a society who share our visions of meaningful goals and cultural practices. But we should leave it to the internal mechanisms of change and debate within communities as to how, with what specific content, and toward what cultural goals these three conditions should be achieved.

Well-being for children is the ability to engage in the activities deemed desirable by their community, and the positive psychological experiences produced thereby. Resilience and the potential for change depend on such

engagement by children and their families. Market economic activity or participation in shared civil society depends on such cultural well-being more than on the provision of particular values or beliefs (Weisner 1997b), although the content of beliefs of course matters as well.

Children and parents also require *basic support*. Support systems for children have certain features recognizable around the world. These include affection, physical comfort, shared solving of problems, provision of food and other resources, protection against harm and violence, and a coherent moral and cultural understanding of who can and should provide support, and the appropriate ways to do so (Weisner 1994).

Cultures provide basic support in different ways and mean different things by it. What is important to assess across cultures is whether children have culturally coherent, reasonably predictable support. Tens of millions of children and parents in Africa and elsewhere do not have this basic level of support.

Well-being and basic support combine to provide a sustainable daily routine of life for children. Sustainable routines of family life have some stability and predictability, have meaning and value with respect to parents' and children's goals, can minimize or balance inevitable conflicts and disagreements within a family and community, and have an adequate fit to the available resources of the family. If parents and children can create sustainable routines, the cultural basis for change, new competencies, and innovation is present. Without this, no intervention is likely to succeed (Weisner 1997a).

CHANGING PARENTING AND CHILDHOOD SOCIALIZATION IN EAST AFRICA

African family and child care practices differ in emphasis from Western, middle-class parental goals and child care, yet they are not incompatible with versions of market economic activity and change in political life. More importantly, they can promote well-being and sustainable family life through socially distributed parenting and child care, flexible and changing moral debates about family resources and authority, an emphasis on childhood traits combining independence with respect, and expanding family social networks associated with increased modernity and less stress.

Socially Distributed Parenting and Care of Children

Socially distributed support in shared management family systems can be found in many places around the world (Weisner 1997a). Some of the characteristics of this culture complex include the following:

- Child caretaking often occurs as a part of indirect chains of support in which one child assists another, who assists a third. Support is often indirect and delayed, not necessarily organized around exclusive relationships between child and parent.
- Children look to other children for assistance and support as much or more than to adults.
- Girls are much more likely to do caretaking and domestic tasks than boys. Boys clearly provide support, caretaking, and nurturance to other children as well, although more infrequently as they reach late middle childhood.
- Mothers provide support and nurturance for children as much by ensuring that *others* will consistently participate in doing so as by doing so directly themselves; fostering and other forms of sharing children are common.
- Care often occurs in the context of other domestic work done by children.
- Aggression, teasing, and dominance accompany nurturance and support and come from the same people; dominance of these kinds increases with age.
- Food and material goods are a powerful cultural concern and are used to threaten, control, soothe, and nurture.
- Verbal exchange and elaborated question-framed discourse rarely accompany support and nurturance for children; verbal negotiations regarding rights and privileges between children and dominant caretakers are infrequent.
- Social and intellectual competence in children is judged in part by a child's competence in managing domestic tasks, demonstrating appropriate social behavior, doing child care, and nurturing and supporting others—as well as through signs of school achievement.
- Children are socialized within this system through apprenticeship learning of their family roles and responsibilities.

This pattern of African life promotes deference to older siblings and adults, training in sociability and nurturance toward others, jealousy and anger toward these same community members, competitive striving, and some distrust of those outside of one's home community.

Socially distributed support is part of a culture complex—a set of loosely coupled ecological circumstances, beliefs, and practices that interrelate and contribute to each other. It is almost always the case that persistent, stubborn, and hard-to-change features of a culture are that way in part because they are embedded in a culture complex that is an emotionally learned, high-

consensus, tacit, cultural model of the world. The shared support culture is loosely coupled with features like high fertility; concerns over child health and mortality; expanded, extended, or joint household family patterns; a high maternal workload; and multiple affect and attachment patterns of diffused emotional and social behavior. Analyzing the entire, contextualized culture complex is essential. Change is unlikely to occur by simply pointing to one or another part of a culture complex and expecting it to take place in that particular feature.

Socially distributed caretaking certainly might inhibit individualism and autonomy in children, through diffusing affective ties and contributing to a more "sociocentric" sense of personhood and self that might limit autonomy. Early child labor contributions to the family estate can conflict with schooling, time for play, and social development. Control of children's work effort might conflict with their autonomy and explorations of new kinds of work and learning.

Although these characteristics are related, the connections are loose and situational, and they vary across families and individual children. For example, children participating in shared caretaking do a bit better in school. Competence in school abilities does not decline due to either boys' or girls' participation in socially distributed caretaking. Child fostering is another practice in which effects are positive or mixed. Fostering reinforces the female social hierarchy as children move from lower- to higher-status households. Effects on the child depend in part on whether the foster mother requested the child (such children seem to do well) or whether a child was forced by circumstances into a move (Castle 1995).

There Is a Varied and Complex Moral Discourse About Parenting and Children

Cultural change is far more difficult when cultural values and practices are so deeply held and tacitly accepted that minds and discourses are closed. But African debate seems quite open. Carolyn Edwards has presented an interesting version of open debate over the value of shared support in her story of "Daniel and the School Fees" (Edwards 1997, 50–51). Her informants mix notions of basic "reasonableness" and flexibility in family decisions with values of "respect."

In this moral dilemma, Daniel completes his secondary school education because his brother helps pay his school fees. Daniel then gets a wage job in Nairobi while his wife and children live in the rural community. Eight years later, Daniel's son is ready to start school and needs fees. Daniel's parents come to him and say that the brother who paid for Daniel's school has had

an accident and the brother's child (who is the same age as Daniel's child) now needs school fees, and Daniel should pay them. But Daniel has only enough money to pay for one child. His wife says that he should pay for their own son first. What do you think Daniel and others should do? Why?

Edwards presented this dilemma to "moral leaders" in two Kenya rural communities—individuals recognized as responsible, honest, and available for wise advice. About half were non-schooled and half had some secondary school. She also interviewed secondary school students. Her sample comes from two communities in Kenya: Abaluyia and Kipsigis. She found that

> all the men—young and old, married and unmarried—shared a common vocabulary for talking about the underlying issues and moral conflicts raised by the dilemmas. The core values of respect, harmony, interdependence, and unity were not only alive and well, they were stressed over and over as the central virtues of family living. . . . The ideal of seeking "reasonableness" in one's thinking and behavior seemed more prominent among the [Abaluyia] men, whereas maintaining "respectful" relations . . . seemed to preoccupy the Kipsigis elders and students. (Edwards 1997, 82)

There were clear differences in moral reasoning due to generation, cultural community, and religious and cultural background. For example, the better-educated secondary school students were less likely to use authority criteria in evaluating the moral stories. Those from the Abaluyia, a community that had more education and was influenced by Quaker/Protestant missions, more often mentioned reasonableness.

Although arguments regarding what to do about the school fees differed, there was a shared basic moral and values vocabulary sufficient to have a meaningful debate. This common framework meant that arguments pro and con were grasped by everyone. There was flexibility in debates, multiple available scripts for understanding, and an openness to change in people's use of values justifications to account for different decisions by Daniel or others. Similar kinds of debates occur about economic strategies or the distribution of family resources to children (Super and Harkness 1997).

Such moral debates regarding child rearing are going on in Kenyan communities every day. The ambiguities and ambivalence in choosing the "best" strategies about what is "right" can be heard in the moral debates about such matters. Cultural beliefs and moral ideals regarding how to organize family life and child rearing are not based on rigid values.

Parental Goals for Children's Behavior

Traits parents desire for their children are also changing. Beatrice Whiting identified eight character traits that mothers prefer their children to have based on community interviews with Kikuyu mothers in Central Kenya. Four—confidence, inquisitiveness, cleverness, and bravery—were selected as character traits that were considered good for success in school by Kikuyu mothers and by students (and perhaps in market economic life and political participation as well). Four others—good-heartedness, respectfulness, obedience, and generosity—were chosen as examples of characteristics that stressed harmonious interaction in a hierarchical, patrilineal, mixed rural and peri-urban community.

Both clusters of traits are considered at least somewhat desirable. The dimension contrasts the relative advantages for schooling only, not their overall cultural desirability. Furthermore, these traits are desired for both boys and girls. These parents try to train children for a mix of traits. Since there is already expectable temperamental and other variation within sibling groups, and since there is variation in modernity across households, there are many children relatively more likely to display one or the other cluster of attributes, as well as many who are quite balanced in both.

Parents were asked which of these traits they could actually train in their children and which were more likely to be innate and inborn. Parents understood that both nature and nurture matter in development, as do parents around the world. Generally, children's traits that are visible in everyday cultural practices—those that are learned through "guided participation" or various forms of apprenticeship and informal learning—are more likely to be thought amenable to direct parental influence.

Most parents thought that curiosity, good work habits, industriousness, obedience, and respect for adults could all be trained. The reason? Children could learn these traits by being put to work in the household or sent to others for work. Kikuyu parents said that they definitely could allow children to ask questions and learn the answers through tuition at home or in schools. They could encourage curiosity through practices they could establish in their own daily routines. But being clever or brave, generous or good-hearted—these traits are inborn, a part of core personality (Whiting 1996, 22–25).

Whiting also developed a composite index of modernity, which included parents' education, mother's knowledge of Kiswahili and/or English, radio ownership, Christian church membership, and other items. Parents with these characteristics were more likely to value traits in their children such as confidence, inquisitiveness, cleverness, and bravery; they were relatively less

likely to value being generous, obedient, and respectful. But again, most parents want both clusters of traits in their children.

Modernity Is Associated with Increased Social Connectedness and Affiliation with New Groups

Finally, more modern attitudes are found among families with ties to both rural and urban communities, rather than to only one or the other. Since 1970, I have followed families from western Kenya who tried to colonize both the cities and other rural areas to achieve economic and social gain (Weisner 1997a). Compared to families living mostly in Nairobi, families that had relatives in multiple locations and moved back and forth between those settings along with their children had lower levels of reported psycho-physiological stress and similar levels of overall modernity in their attitudes. The children in cities had higher levels of child-child and parent-child conflict and aggression, and lower levels of sociability and nurturance compared to rural-resident children or rural-urban commuting children. Parental strategies for deploying their children and other kin for survival and security varied. Families and children with socially distributed networks across generations and places were doing as well or better than their counterparts trying to make it in only one location.

CONCLUSION

Let parents and children around the world decide how to innovate and experiment with their cultural practices. If those with the means to do so can provide activities and new institutional contexts encouraging market accumulation or pluralism in political life, the evidence suggests that we will find many families and children there to engage in those activities. If such new institutions and community activities are planned and prepared with local cultural understanding in mind (Klitgaard 1994), they can and will find their place. If market economic activities and new and more positive forms of civic political life become available, there will be children and parents in contemporary African communities sufficiently well fitted to engage in those new activities.

Of course, like all cultural ways of life, socially distributed socialization has costs as well as benefits for individuals and for economic development. This is the case, for example, for the continuing gender segregation that restricts the cultural careers of boys and girls and the institutionalized jealousy and fears of neighbors and other cultural groups outside one's own. Although parents often say that boys and girls are equally likely to have this

mix of traits (and greater formal education and economic success increases the likelihood that parents say this), the cultural careers of boys and girls keeps gender segregation highly salient, although increasingly fragmented and changing in the direction of increased equality. Local beliefs certainly can make equitable distribution of wealth and interventions on behalf of children and families difficult and complex (Howard and Millard 1997).

Millions of African parents and children are prepared for change, are increasingly cosmopolitan or at least aware of alternatives, and creatively do change their family life and child care practices. Yet many resist change at the same time. Parents and communities are, of course, ambivalent. They have "the impulse to defend the predictability of life . . . a fundamental and universal principle of human psychology" (Marris 1975, 3). Parenting and child care are changing and adapting, but there clearly are powerful, emotionally felt cultural models that make such change both possible yet difficult.

Given the cultural importance, personal intimacy, and ambivalence that attach to parenting and child rearing, why focus on changing the values and practices of children's cultural careers that families both defend and are struggling to change? Indeed, I have to wonder why those interested in achieving economic development and new forms of civic life displace our attention by focusing on the details of how parents should raise their children.

Families could be helped so much more easily through the provision of the means to establish basic and universally desired social supports and thereby the wherewithal to achieve meaningful daily routines of family life. There is little basis for prescribing interventions and new-values orientations that require specific changes in parental goals or child care practices within the family system, given the evidence that change is already widely occurring and that there is inherent individual variability built in to the child development process. But there certainly is reason to provide a foundation that establishes *any* culture's ability to provide well-being for children: the basic social supports of security, stability, health, and resources that permit families to achieve for their children a sustainable daily routine in their community that meets their goals. That is progress.

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