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CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS*

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay I argue that two distinct, but not unrelated, features of culture are relevant to comparative politics. First, culture is a system of meaning that people use to manage their daily worlds, large and small; second, culture is the basis of social and political identity that affects how people line up and how they act on a wide range of matters. Culture is a framework for organizing the world, for locating the self and others in it, for making sense of the actions and interpreting motives of others, for grounding an analysis of interests, for linking collective identities to political action, and for motivating people and groups toward some actions and away from others. At the same time, two caveats are in order: One is that to be useful culture cannot be defined so broadly as to include all behaviors, beliefs, institutions – in short, any domain of life – although it is appropriate to consider the cultural dimensions of specific domains; two, the effects of culture on collective action and political life are generally indirect, and to fully appreciate the role of culture in political life, it is necessary to inquire how the impact of culture interacts with interests and institutions.

It should not be surprising that cultural analyses in comparative politics take many forms, for unlike rational choice theory, cultural approaches are less clear about exactly what domains of politics to examine, and there is even less of a con-

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sensus concerning the methods and tools to employ.¹ Lichbach (this volume) distinguishes between subjective and intersubjective views of culture; the subjective emphasizes how individuals internalize individual values and attitudes that become the object of study, while the intersubjective focuses on the shared meanings and identities that constitute the symbolic, expressive, and interpretive part of social life. I argue here for the merits of a postmodern intersubjective understanding of culture (with attention to subjective elements). This strong view of culture is completely compatible with the belief that comparison is central to the social science enterprise (while not denying its complexities), although this is not the position some radical interpretivists hold. In making this argument here, an important task is to situate important or exemplary works in the field in terms of crucial questions that cultural approaches to politics address. However, this essay is not a review article, and there are many additional studies that would be included if reviewing the field were my goal.

This essay offers an opportunity to emphasize (even advocate) what an intersubjective cultural approach can contribute to comparative politics. In contrast to rational choice approaches, which are well entrenched in the discipline, and institutional approaches, which have dominated the field in one form or another since its inception, cultural contributions to political analysis are relatively rare and far less developed. Few graduate students take culture very seriously, and if one peruses the annual list of dissertations in comparative politics over several years, it is difficult to place cultural analyses in the trinity of comparative politics, as the editors of this volume have done.

It is not hard to identify the reasons why studies that give culture a central role are rare in comparative politics. Most basically, culture is not a concept with which most political scientists are comfortable. For many, culture complicates issues of evidence, transforming hopes of rigorous analysis into “just so” accounts that fail to meet widely held notions of scientific explanation. Culture violates canons of methodological individualism while raising serious unit of analysis problems for which there are no easy answers. Culture to many, neo-Marxists and non-Marxists alike, seems like an epiphenomenon offering a discourse for political mobilization and demand-making while masking more serious differences dividing groups and individuals. Finally, employing the concept of culture puts political scientists into a series of controversies over which proponents of cultural analysis in anthropology themselves are deeply divided.² Each of these objections is more or less addressed in this essay, and while I do not argue that they are unimportant, I do not view them as sufficiently damaging to warrant throwing the baby out with the bath water.

¹It is possible to identify differences within culturalist approaches to politics in terms of methods, levels of analysis, substantive questions, and willingness to compare and generalize across cases. In this essay, other than distinguishing between what I call weak and strong cultural understandings, I emphasize what I view as the useful core of the approach much more than differences within it.

²Among the issues that divide anthropologists are relativism, the importance of searching for generalizations, the possibility of comparison, and the role of psychological mechanisms in cultural explanations.

Cultural analysis of politics takes seriously the postmodern critique of behavioral political analyses and seeks to offer contextually rich intersubjective accounts of politics that emphasize how political actors understand social and political action (Merelman 1991). In cultural analyses, for example, interests are contextually and intersubjectively defined, and the strategies used to pursue them are understood to be context-dependent. Central to cultural analysis is the concept of interpretation. The interpretations of particular political significance are built from the accounts – stories if one prefers – of groups and individuals striving to make sense of their social and political worlds, and I use the term to refer both to the shared intersubjective meanings of actors³ and to the explicit efforts of social science observers to understand these meanings and to present them to others (Taylor, 1985). Shared interpretations of actors – worldviews – are important in any cultural analysis as they offer an important methodological tool, along with an examination of rituals and symbols, for examining both systems of meaning and the structure and intensity of political identity.

This essay has four parts. The first discusses five contributions that the concept of culture defined as a system of meaning and identity makes to comparative political analysis: culture frames the context in which politics occurs; culture links individual and collective identities; culture defines the boundaries between groups and organizes actions within and between them; culture provides a framework for interpreting the actions and motives of others; and culture provides resources for political organization and motivation. The second part examines five central themes (some might say approaches) in cultural analyses of politics: culture and personality studies; the civic culture tradition; culture and political process (an approach that originated in anthropology); political ritual; and culture and political violence. Third, I identify five critiques of cultural studies of politics: unit of analysis issues; the problem of within-culture variation; the difficulty of distinguishing culture from social or political organization; the static nature of culture and explaining political change; and the need to identify underlying mechanisms that suggest “how culture works.” The fourth section examines the role of interpretation in cultural analysis as an effort to link the contextually rich political details found in particular political settings (be they small communities or countries) to general domains of political life such as authority, community, and conflict. I discuss the concept of psychocultural interpretations and their methodological relevance in the comparative study of culture and politics for understanding processes such as ethnic and national identity construction. I conclude that culture is too often ignored as a domain of political life and that cultural analyses can enrich the way we conceptualize areas such as political economy, social movements, and political institutions in a number of useful ways, often complementing the insights derived from interest and institutional approaches.

³Taylor uses the term “common reference world” (1985:38) to refer to what members of a culture share.

CULTURE AND CULTURAL ANALYSES OF POLITICS

CULTURE

Culture, a central concept in anthropology, has been defined in a wide variety of ways that variously emphasize culture as social organization, core values, specific beliefs, social action, or a way of life (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). Most contemporary analyses, however, begin, as I do here, with Geertz's definition of culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (1973b: 89)⁴ This view emphasizes culture as public, shared meanings; behaviors, institutions, and social structure are understood not as culture itself but as culturally constituted phenomena (Spiro 1984). Culture from this perspective is a worldview that explains why and how individuals and groups behave as they do, and includes both cognitive and affective beliefs about social reality and assumptions about when, where, and how people in one's culture and those in other cultures are likely to act in particular ways (see also Berger 1995).⁵ For purposes of political analysis, I want to emphasize that shared understandings occur among people who also have a common (and almost invariably named) identity which signals distinctions between the group and outsiders. Culture, in short, marks “a distinctive way of life” characterized in the subjective we-feelings of cultural group members (and outsiders) and is expressed through specific behaviors (customs and rituals) – both sacred and profane – which mark the daily, yearly, and life cycle rhythms of its members and reveal how people view past, present, and future events and understand choices they face (Berger 1995). Cultural metaphors have both cognitive meaning, which describes group experience, and high affective salience, which emphasizes the unique intragroup bonds – almost like a secret code – that set one group's experience apart from that of others.

It should be pointed out that in a shared meaning and identity system the fact that different individuals and groups understand each other does not imply agreement that widely held meanings are necessarily acceptable to all. Rather, meaning and identity, control over symbols and rituals, and the ability to impose one interpretation rather than another on a situation are frequently bitterly contested (Scott 1985). In this same vein, Laitin (1988) contends that culture highlights points of concern to be debated (1988: 589) and not just areas of agreement. Sharing a culture does not mean that people are necessarily in agreement on specifics, only that they possess a similar understanding of how the world works.

⁴D'Andrade (1984: 88) points out that the radical shift from the view of culture as behavior that could be understood within a stimulus-response framework to culture as systems of meaning is found in a number of fields. For a more complete discussion of culture as meanings and symbols see the excellent discussions in Schweder and LeVine (1984).

⁵I use worldview to include affective elements, whereas often the concept of social schema only emphasizes cognitive elements. Anthony Wallace's concept of maze-way is a parallel to worldview (1970).

Placing the concept of culture at the center of analysis affects the questions asked about political life (Brysk 1995; Merelman 1991: 45). For example, an interest in distinctive worldviews and identity leads to questions about how differences in worldviews might explain such phenomena as the emergence of certain leaders and reactions to them, the organization of political decision making, social movement mobilization, or perception of external threats. At the same time, an interest in culture and cultural difference discourages inquiry into the role of rational self-interest in political choice making, for such questions presume that interest maximization is more or less invariant across cultures and does not need a theory of cultural variation to explain what is viewed as constant (Wildavsky 1987).

My goal is to suggest how cultural analysis enhances our understanding of politics, not to comprehensively review the field, which defined broadly, could include every study that includes a cultural variable in a regression equation on the one hand to the most hermeneutically informed textual analysis on the other. Here I emphasize work that gives a central role to the concept of culture as a system of meaning and identity, and in the next few pages I suggest core questions in comparative political analysis that profit from attention to the concept of culture. Underlying my presentation is the belief that most political scientists have not thought a great deal about culture; that many consider it an epiphenomenon to be explained away rather than to be incorporated into theories and explanations; and that many who do invoke culture define it so thinly that they do not develop analyses of cultural dynamics that are terribly insightful.⁶

Culture Frames the Context in Which Politics Occurs

Culture orders political priorities (Laitin 1986: 11), meaning it defines the symbolic and material objects people consider valuable and worth fighting over, the contexts in which such disputes occur, the rules (both formal and informal) by which politics takes place and who participates in it. In doing so, culture defines interests and how they are to be pursued. For example, anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon (1967) invokes the cultural importance of the value of fierceness (*waiteri* complex) to explain the prevalence of high warfare among Yanomamo communities; political scientist Edward Banfield (1958) explains the absence of political participation and civic society in southern Italy in terms of a cultural pattern he calls amoral familism; and political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) explain differences in political attitudes and patterns of participation among the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico in terms of differences between participant, subject, and parochial political cultures. To understand the cultural framing of politics, consider how culture influences beliefs about, and the organization of, community, authority, and conflict (Ross 1988).

⁶Laitin (1986; 1988) describes "the two faces of culture," referring to culture as a system of meaning on the one hand and culture as a resource for instrumental action on the other. While I find the distinction useful and his analysis very consistent with my own, this twofold distinction is too brief for my purposes here.

Cultural understandings are at the core of the definition of political communities since people in a community share, in Geertz's (1973b) words, "schematic images of the social order," common meanings which Taylor says are the basis of community (1985: 39). Communities are distinct, but also nested, entities. People are invariably part of more than one community and develop multiple loyalties whose interrelationship can take a variety of forms. Authority in any political community is culturally constituted and consists of regularized procedures that members of a community consider more or less legitimate — meaning that they have been arrived at by a procedure they consider fair, although the issue may continue to be highly contested — for distributing tangible and symbolic goods. The establishment of legitimate authority is a historical process for a community (Arendt 1958) and a psychological one for individuals, linking people through a sense of common fate captured in the historical accounts people in a community share. The establishment and maintenance of political authority is often explained in cognitive and cost-benefit terms and threats of coercion but also involves ritual activity, including religious action, which connects people's everyday experience and anxiety to those of the collectivity (Edelman 1964; Kertzer 1988; Shils and Young 1953; Turner 1957, 1968). Conflict occurs in virtually all communities, and all cultures have norms about what is reasonable to fight about and how conflicts are to be managed. Cultures shape conflict, defining what is appropriate social action, how the motives of others should be understood, and what is worth fighting about (Ross 1993a). Thus, at the same time, culture constitutes the social order and is a tool for domination, and conflict over the nature and make-up of the political community and authority within it are regular features of political life.

Culture Links Individual and Collective Identities

Culture offers an account of political behavior that makes particular actions more or less likely and connects the fate of individuals and the group. The crucial connection at work is that of identification, which renders certain actions reasonable and removes alternatives that on other grounds might be equally plausible. Individual and collective action, this view suggests, are motivated, in part, by the sense of common fate people in a culture share and involve two distinct elements: the strong reinforcement between individual and collective identity that renders culturally sanctioned behavior rewarding and the sense that outsiders will treat oneself and other members of one's group in similar ways.

Identification dynamics involve the construction of internal images of the external world out of the developmental and historical experiences group members share. Many objects of identification are associated with primary sensations such as smell, taste, and sound that acquire intense affective meaning and only later acquire a cognitive component. People sharing cultural attachments have common experiences that facilitate the developmental task of incorporating group identity into one's own sense of self. Anderson (1991) writes of imagined communities, which can link the person and collective identities.

The process of within-group identity formation overemphasizes what it is that group members actually share. It gives greater emotional weight to the common elements, reinforcing them with an ideology of linked fate. It overvalues the uniformity within groups, emphasizing both affectively and cognitively the common elements individuals share, and exaggerating differences with outsiders (Turner 1988). Deviations from the norm are selectively ignored or negatively reinforced as incompatible with group solidarity and its myth of shared historical experiences.

It should be stressed that culture is only one basis for linking individual to social identity. It can be a particularly powerful one, however, in situations of threat and uncertainty because cultural attachments are connected to very primary feelings about identity. While much of our language, in western thought generally and psychoanalysis in particular, emphasizes an inherent conflict between the group and the individual, an emphasis on identity draws attention to ways in which social attachments are an integral way of strengthening individual identity (Turner 1988).

Culture Defines Group Boundaries and Organizes Actions Within and Between Them

As culture defines identity groups, it also specifies expectations concerning patterns of association within and between groups. Consider such basic questions as who lives with whom, who spends time together, to whom one is most attached emotionally, who controls scarce resources, how property is transferred between generations, and how work is organized. The world's cultures provide very different answers to each of these questions, but most important the evidence shows that how any group answers any of these questions has significance for how people act and expect others to behave (Levinson and Malone, 1981; Naroll 1970).

Cultural definitions of social groups – whether they are defined by kinship, age, gender, or common interests – entail clear expectations about how people are to act, even when these definitions are continually contested (Greif 1994; Scott 1985). How such social categories and groups are defined and the rules that regulate their behavior vary cross-culturally. Cultural norms regarding intergroup relations (here we can consider relations between groups in the same culture such as age or ritual groups, or groups from different cultures) can be highly elaborate. Cultures differ in how and when they restrict (and how they enforce such restrictions on) relations, but few are silent on these questions.

People don't often think about the social origin of groups with which they identify, for most groups are seen as natural, often biological in character, when in fact they are cultural and political constructions whose "reasonableness" needs to be regularly reasserted and taught to succeeding generations (Anderson 1991). Weber, for example, shows how the nineteenth-century French state, through the institutionalization of a national education system, investment in transportation, and universal male military service, created a sense of national identity out of a

myriad of regional loyalties (1976).⁷ All cultures, of course, provide specific, but not always explicit, socialization regarding in-group and out-group distinctions. Cultural learning involves messages about groups' motives, their behavior, and how one is to act toward members of each category.

Cross-culturally, the rigidity of social distinctions is highly variable, and variation in the permeability of boundaries means that functioning categories are both contextual and changing over time. This is clearly seen in the literature on "situational ethnicity," which shows how distinctions among groups can depend upon what other groups are in a social environment and what the particular political stakes are in a conflict. In East Africa, for example, speakers of *Kiluhya*, whose homeland is in western Kenya, gradually developed a political and social identity as Luhya people through contact with other ethnic communities in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kampala, and other urban centers since 1900. Earlier, however, their identity was primarily as Marigoli, Busia, or Samia, more localized Baluhya subgroups.

Culture Provides a Framework for Interpreting the Actions and Motives of Others

Actions, like words, are highly ambiguous, and making sense of them requires a shared cultural framework to assure that the message that is sent is similar, if not identical with, that which is received. Few behaviors are so universal that they require little or no interpretation. The work on the cross-cultural (and even cross-species) interpretability of specific facial gestures (Ekman, Friesen, and Ellsworth 1972; Masters and Sullivan 1989), while fascinating, is also testimony to how few domains of human action are coherent outside of a shared cultural framework. Because most political and social action is complex, a capacity to decode only facial and other obvious physical gestures doesn't get one very far in understanding political life. It also provides little assistance in placing action in a broader context – one that includes motives, which offer an account of what someone has done but, in addition, says why they acted as they did.

Motives are central to cultural analysis because they offer a mechanism to link individual action to a broader social setting (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992). This contrasts with Geertz's focus on "inspecting events" and making sense of actors' interpretations of them but his rejection of the idea that we should examine mental structures (1973a: 10-12). D'Andrade's (1992) cultural analysis of motives develops the notion of a schema (not unlike what I am calling worldviews), "a conceptual structure which makes possible the identification of objects and events" (1992: 28). Schemas, he argues, are culturally acquired and produce "motivational strivings." He emphasizes the importance of understanding the context-dependent nature of schemas as interpretive devices and the need to spell out

⁷Certainly the comparative analysis of state-building has long recognized the role of cultural practices and political control over them, as well as the role of political leaders who become cultural icons, linking previously disparate groups in a single state and in the process defining newer, broader identities.

how they are acquired. Both D'Andrade and Strauss argue that we need to see cultures as "both the public actions, objects and symbols that make shared learning possible ... and the private psychological states of knowledge and feeling without which these public things are meaningless and could not be recreated" (Strauss 1992: 6).⁸

In many ways motives in cultural analysis are much like interests in rational choice theory. In statements such as "They were motivated by fear of their ancestors and so they sacrificed half of their livestock" or "The blips had an interest in weakening the military capability of their enemy," both motives and interests offer a "reasonable" account of why individuals or groups behave in a certain way. Yet there are also significant differences in the use of motives and interests as explanatory mechanisms that are central to the difference between cultural and rational choice explanations. Most basically, while interests are assumed to be more or less transparent (some would say given) and universal, motives are knowable only through empirical analysis of particular cultural contexts.⁹ As a result, while turning to interests suggests that more or less any human group would behave the same way in a certain situation, an emphasis on motives focuses on explaining variation in behavior across groups. Wildavsky (1987) argues that rational choice theorists make a serious error in taking interests as given. In fact, he says, an empirically based cultural analysis reveals systematic variation in interests across cultures.

In an analysis of intracultural behavior, the difference between motives and interests is not always consequential, for in fact when interests are shared they can operate like motives, offering a readily available account of why people behave as they do. However, when we consider cross-cultural encounters, the difference between interests and motives can be more significant. Consider the statement above that a group of people motivated by fear of their ancestors and therefore sacrificed half their domestic animals. To people in another culture in which such fears are unknown, they are not plausible motives for action, and such behavior is not comprehensible. Trying to transform such an explanation into an interest statement ("They had an interest in not making the ancestors angry") still begs the question of why the group understands the world in terms of "fear of the ancestors." Only an analysis that seeks to explain why this motive is important in one culture but not another is adequate here.

Interest accounts of political action are imperialistic, dominating other explanations and insisting in what is often a tautological fashion that whatever action occurs can be understood in terms of individual (or group) interest maxi-

⁸This sort of rich understanding of culture is not one that it is possible to develop exclusively from survey data. Although such data can make a significant contribution to what I have called subjective cultural analysis, the data by themselves are insufficient for building an intersubjective cultural account.

⁹There have been efforts to identify a fixed number of human motives such as Murray's (1938) and McClelland's (1961) work on three particular motives – achievement, affiliation, and power. It is important to recognize that in both of these cases – especially McClelland's – the relative importance of any single motive varied both cross-culturally and across individuals.

mization. The power of interest explanations lies in their hypothesized connections between thought and action; their weakness, however, is that they begin with actor's action and then identify interests that are consistent with the pursuit of such action. All too infrequently is there an effort made to see if actors themselves make the same connections. More interesting from a cultural perspective is the almost complete absence of concern with the nature of specific interests in interest theories.¹⁰ To the extent that groups and individuals are seen as having invariant interests, such as the maximization of wealth or political power, this question is somewhat uninteresting. However, to the degree to which important interests vary from culture to culture, the matter of what constitutes crucial political interests for groups or individuals is worthy of serious empirical study. Cultural explanations, as a result, do not deny the relevance of interests but see them as contextually defined and one motive among many. Even though it views interests as cultural constructions rather than objectively identifiable universals, cultural theory can complement rational choice and other interest theories. Its different emphasis does not necessarily lead to competing propositions that put the two theories in conflict with each other; rather, cultural theory's concern with the construction of interests addresses an issue about which interest theories have little to say.

In cross-cultural encounters people most often make sense of other groups' behavior, i.e., attribute motives to them, by drawing on their own cultural worldview. However, it is worth pointing out that cultural worldviews provide two contrasting strategies for encounters with outsiders. One is to apply the rules of one's own culture because they are, after all, what is best known (and often all that is known), believing that outsiders will respond as insiders do. The second is to search for different rules, assuming that outsiders share few motives with people in one's own culture, hence will respond in "heathen" ways and are likely to take advantage of any weakness shown to them – for they will not follow what are viewed as "civilized norms." The first strategy is that of generalization, whereas the second is one of differentiation.¹¹

Few people ever subject shared cultural frameworks to self-conscious analysis, since most people deeply internalize cultural assumptions and hence rarely articulate them consciously or view them as problematic. Yet even in times of stress

¹⁰However, see Levi (this volume) and her recognition of early rational choice theory's lack of interest in this question and current attention to it, including an interest in the role of culture as a source of interests (e.g., Greif 1994).

¹¹An important question is the extent to which any culture characteristically exhibits generalizing or differentiating behaviors in encounters with outsiders, at least in certain domains. In a cross-cultural study of internal and external conflict and violence, I found that in some cultures the levels of internal and external conflict are quite similar (generalizers) while in others they are highly differentiated. The differences between the two groups of societies are quite clear: Differentiating societies are characterized by many ties that link diverse groups in the society and that clearly mark them off from outsiders, while generalizing societies are those without strong mechanisms of internal integration. Probably a key reason why insiders and outsiders are treated somewhat the same is because whether one is an insider or outsider vis-à-vis a group is defined contextually and not in absolute terms (Ross 1993a: Chapter 7).

there is a widespread (if not universal) ethnocentric tendency to suggest that "there is something wrong" with a person who fails to offer or misreads an obvious cultural signal and to take such behavior as evidence that something is "wrong" with that person or of the inferiority of the other group. For the most part, culturally shared worldviews are protected, and people will go to great lengths to resist changes that challenge their core elements.

Culture Provides Resources for Political Organization and Mobilization

Culture offers significant resources that leaders and groups use as instruments of organization and mobilization (Brysk 1995; Edelman 1964; Kertzer 1988; Laitin 1986). For example, Tilly has developed the concept of repertoires of collective action referring to "a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choices. Repertoires are learned cultural creations" (1995: 26; also see Tilly 1986; Traugott 1995; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly this volume). Anthropologist Abner Cohen (1969; 1974; 1981) spells out more generally the political uses of culture, emphasizing the importance of cultural organizations (formal or informal groups organized around specific cultural practices such as a religious or age group) as a political tool in situations where "normal politics" is not possible for one reason or another; in fact, the theory is much more widely relevant. In Cohen's analysis of Hausa traders in Ibadan (Nigeria) and Creoles in Freetown (Sierra Leone), the two were small minorities, so that using electoral strategies to pursue their economic and political goals would have likely resulted in massive defeats. Instead, the two groups organized around cultural issues -- a religious revival focused on the Tijaniyyi brotherhood in the case of the Hausa, and Freemasonry for the Creoles. In each case these cultural responses to changing political situations provided intense within-group interaction and social exchange that prevented the loss of control over long-distance trade in the case of the Hausa and protected the Creoles' domination of the state's administrative elite.

Frequently groups use cultural organizations (not always consciously, as Cohen points out) to achieve goals that cannot be pursued directly. Cohen identifies six political problems addressed by cultural organizations that bolster group solidarity and effective mobilization (Cohen 1969: 201-10). (1) Such organizations help define a group's distinctiveness, meaning its membership and sphere of operation within the context of the contemporaneous political setting, through myths of origin and claims to superiority; descent and endogamy; moral exclusiveness; endo-culture; spatial proximity; and homogenization (201-4). (2) Cultural organizations meet the political need for intense internal communications among the group's constituent parts (205). (3) Cultural organizations offer mechanisms for decision making involving some formulation of general problems confronting the group and taking decisions about them (206). (4) They provide authority for implementing decisions and for speaking, where appropriate, on behalf of the group (207). (5)

Cultural organizations can provide a political ideology often rooted in the language of kinship and ritual, which gives legitimacy to power and converts it into authority (208-10). (6) Finally, cultural organizations meet the need for discipline, through ceremonials and rituals that connect the ideology to current problems of the community (210-11).¹²

In discussing religion, the prototypical cultural basis for political organization, Cohen points out that:

Religion provides an ideal 'blueprint' for the development of an informal political organization. It mobilizes many of the most powerful emotions which are associated with the basic problems of human existence and gives legitimacy and stability to political arrangements by representing these as parts of the system of the universe. It makes it possible to mobilize the power of symbols and the power inherent in the ritual relationship between various ritual positions within the organization of the cult. It makes it possible to use the arrangements for financing and administering places of worship and associated places for welfare, education, and social activities of various sorts, to use these in developing the organization and administration of political functions. Religion also provides frequent and regular meetings in congregations, where in the course of ritual activities, a great deal of informal interaction takes place, information is communicated, and general problems are formulated and discussed. The system of myths and symbols which religion provides is capable of being continuously interpreted and reinterpreted in order to accommodate it to changing economic, political and other social circumstances. (210)

Although Cohen's analysis is about the coping strategies of small cultural minorities, it is clearly relevant to understanding how leaders of large ethnic groups (often, but not always, majorities) have come to, and held onto, political power. African politics since the 1960s provides many examples of mobilization around cultural symbols and fears, and so do European settings such as Northern Ireland, France with a strong antiimmigrant, antiforeigner party, and Germany with its numerous outbreaks of antiforeigner violence. It is, however, in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union where we perhaps have the most to learn about the political manipulation of cultural symbols and rituals and their sometimes disastrous consequences. Here we must ask why the appeals to Serbian, Armenian, or Hungarian identity are all so powerful. However, as Campbell (1983) has suggested, any such answer that relies on mechanisms of individual benefit only makes sense if we can also account for the strength of individual attachments to groups such as those defined in cultural terms.

¹²Cohen's analysis is quite compatible with the one resource mobilization theorists offer in their discussion of social movements, especially in their willingness to consider cultural as well as material resources (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly this volume).

CULTURAL ANALYSES OF POLITICS

Although one could make a cogent argument that cultural analyses are among the oldest works of political analysis, here I discuss a selected number of more recent studies that illustrate key concepts and methods associated with a cultural approach in comparative politics. My focus here is on approaches that give a central role to the concept of culture, not ones in which one or two cultural variables appear but are neither theoretically significant nor well developed. I discuss five different (but not necessarily mutually exclusive) approaches that are important because of their widespread influence within comparative politics and/or because of their potential to provide important insights. Under each I discuss a few important studies that illustrate the approach, without suggesting they are the only, or best, examples of it.

Culture, Personality, and Politics

The merging of the theoretical perspectives of psychoanalysis and cultural anthropology in the 1940s and early 1950s provided a framework linking macro- and micro-level phenomena to explain cross-cultural differences in behavior. A popularized branch of this work, national character studies, combined Ruth Benedict's (1934) view that cultures were highly patterned with psychoanalysis' stress on the importance of infant and child socialization to offer profiles (some would say caricatures) of large countries, such as Japan, Russia, and the United States, to explain, among other things, their political institutions and political styles (Benedict 1946; Gorer and Rickman 1946; Mead 1942). Emphasizing (often with weak data) the link between socialization (defined in terms of a country's modal patterns), personality (often not directly measured), and political behavior, these studies offered sweeping generalizations about American individualism, Japanese militarism, and Russian totalitarian rule. Within a few years, a wide range of critiques emerged emphasizing problems in these works, including assumptions of within-country homogeneity, lack of evidence linking key elements in the theory, and its inability either to account for political change or to speak to the zigs and zags in political life in the countries under study. Clearly, transferring culture and personality theory and methods from small-scale preindustrial societies to the largest modern, industrial nations was not successful on either theoretical or methodological grounds.¹³

However, two political scientists, Lucien Pye (1962) and Edward Banfield (1958), found sufficient merit in the approach that they borrowed from it in two widely read, influential studies, while trying to address some of the most tren-

¹³Much of the critique of national character research was also relevant to studies in small-scale societies typically studied by anthropologists. For example, Wallace (1970:152-54) argued that while culture and personality theories would predict that a large proportion of the people in a small society would exhibit a similar personality profile, when he administered standardized tests to a community of Tuscarora Indians only 37% fit the modal pattern. Also see Inkeles and Levinson (1968) and LeVine (1973).

chant critiques of national character research. Pye, in an ambitious study of Burma in the 1950s, sought to explain the country's search for national identity. Keenly aware of the criticism that the personalities of political elites might be significantly different from those of the mass public and the need to study personality directly, Pye produced data on the crucial psychological variables through in-depth psychoanalytic interviews with Burmese elites. Emphasizing identity issues in an Eriksonian framework, Pye developed the link between the problems of individual identity among the elites he interviewed and Burmese nation-building. Development, he concluded, was not just about economic policies and institution-building but was intimately linked to the worldviews and psychological capacities of a country's elites.

Banfield developed a far less psychoanalytic framework to examine the absence of collective social or political action among peasants in a town in southern Italy where on self-interest grounds an outsider might expect to find it. His answer was that amoral familism, the rule that one can only trust and cooperate with the members of one's immediate family, is taught from an early age and supported in a variety of domains of daily life. Wider cooperation fails to gain a toe-hold because no one can imagine that cooperation will be reciprocated or sustained. Consequently, the culture of amoral familism is a powerful configuration (as Ruth Benedict might have used the term) and difficult to overcome despite the likely benefits from doing so.

The Civic Culture Tradition

Without a doubt, when most political scientists think about cultural analysis of politics, Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963) quickly comes to mind. Utilizing data collected from large national samples in five countries – the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico – the authors sought to explain different levels of support for, and participation in, democratic political practices. Almond and Verba identify three distinctive political cultures – the participant, subject, and parochial – which differ in the attitudes citizens express toward the political system, trust in political authorities, beliefs concerning the efficacy of individual and collective political actions, and levels of political involvement. Thus, individual subjective attitudes and behaviors are the basis for assigning individuals to patterns, and the distribution of a country's individuals determines where the country is categorized in Almond and Verba's scheme. As a result, Almond and Verba's indicators of political culture cohere far more loosely than the constituent parts of culture do for Benedict, Geertz, and most anthropologists (Merelman 1991: 52; see also Almond 1980).¹⁴

Although the civic culture data are more or less consistent with the authors' theory, there are large questions that remain from a study using individual level

¹⁴An additional criticism of the civic culture tradition is the impoverished, generally implicit, unilinear view of the world's political cultures on a single continuum with the United States at the high end, rather than a multidimensional, more complex image of cultural difference.

survey data to discuss national political patterns, such as how to explain the sometimes large numbers of people who do not fit a country's dominant pattern, the role of political institutions, the weak conception of culture that emerges from their individualistic approach, and the relationship between political and other domains of culture (Verba 1980). The relatively low correlations among attitudes, the very small number of respondents who fit ideal-typical patterns, and the subjective, but not intersubjective nature of survey data mean that survey evidence alone is insufficient to describe the existence and significance of cultural meaning systems. In contrast, Merelman's (1991) comparative study of political culture in the United States, Canada, and Britain is based on a richer view of culture as a system of meaning and includes intersubjective cultural data derived from television programs, corporate publications, textbooks, and magazine ads along with survey data.¹⁵

Nonetheless, survey research in literally dozens of countries has produced hundreds of studies in the civic culture tradition, including another large-scale study in which Verba and his colleagues examined political participation in seven countries (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978). Perhaps, however, Inglehart (1977; 1988) is the political scientist who has most faithfully carried out work in the civic culture tradition, emphasizing culture in interpreting cross-national survey data using the yearly Euro-Barometer surveys. For example, he has explained in cultural terms the strong political and life-style differences between individuals who emphasize what he calls materialist and postmaterialist values, i.e., emphasis on order and the economy versus participation and free speech. Arguing that political scientists often develop explanations that give short shrift to cultural factors, Inglehart links the strength of a syndrome of attitudes he calls civic culture – personal life satisfaction, political satisfaction, interpersonal trust, and support for the existing social order – to democratic stability and economic development (1988).

Finally, although it does not rely on survey data as exclusively as Almond and Verba or Inglehart, Putnam's work on the political differences in the civic cultures in northern and southern Italy is also squarely in this tradition (1993). To the survey evidence he presents, Putnam also adds data on governmental performance, aggregate economic and political participation data, and interviews with political elites. Using these different data, Putnam argues that democracy and democratic innovations are most effective where there is a strong tradition of civic participation. When he examines alternative explanations for the relative success of Italian regionalization in 1976, he argues that those regions in which civic participation has flourished for perhaps the past 800 years are most likely to be those in which effective regional governments developed, whereas in regions without such cultural traditions (such as the one Banfield studied), the governments are less effective.¹⁶

¹⁵In another interesting example using a cultural indicator of collective political orientations, Regan (1994) relates sales of war toys and popularity of war movies to U. S. militarization.

¹⁶There has been extensive discussion of Putnam's (1993) work and its relevance beyond Italy, which is not my focus here. For two critical views of his theory pertinent to my discussion of culture, see Laitin (1995b) and Tarrow (1996).

Culture and Political Process: The Extended Case

Although political anthropology has existed as a field for decades, only a few political scientists have found its theoretical insights or methods of great interest (Barkun 1968; Bates 1983; Easton 1959; Friedrich with Horwitz 1968; Laitin 1986; Masters 1964). Much of this is probably due to the field's emphasis on documenting variations in political structure in human communities. Among these works one finds Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940), who provide detailed descriptions of eight African states and stateless societies in which kinship forms the basis of political organization and who argue strongly that politics does not require a state with a monopoly over the means of legitimate force, as Weberians have argued. Others illustrate the complex ways in which different societies deal with leadership succession, political decision making, and conflict management (Goody 1966; Kuper and Richards 1971; Pospisil 1971). Cross-cultural studies in this tradition examine patterns among political variables and relations between them and social, economic, and ecological factors (Murdock 1949; Ross 1986, 1988). From the point of view of cultural approaches to comparative politics, most structural studies in political anthropology, while documenting differences among societies, do not pay much explicit attention to culture per se.

In contrast to structural studies, works that put political process at their core have greater theoretical and methodological relevance for comparative politics. Initially developed by Max Gluckman and his followers in field research in southern Africa (and later known as the Manchester School), these studies focused on explaining how and why particular political outcomes occur, providing rich details about political conflict in which culture's role is at center stage (Gluckman 1942; Mitchell 1956; Epstein 1958; Turner 1957; 1968; Cohen 1969; 1974). These studies, which particularly influenced Africanists, offered a deeply contextualized account of particular events or problems to develop broad middle-range theory that is especially useful in comparative political analysis.¹⁷ For example, in one study, Victor Turner (1957) analyzed how the Ndembu of Zambia cope with the strong conflicting structural demands between their norms of political succession and postmarital residence. He argued that strong cross-cutting ties in their society provide the basis for the extensive use of ritual, which emphasizes what members share and integrates a group that often finds itself bitterly divided on other grounds. Abner Cohen, whose work was discussed in detail above, argues that culture provides a strategic, although not necessarily conscious, basis for political mobilization of groups whose positions cannot be defended through more conventional political means. An examination of ethnic mobilization in the last decade in Eastern Europe (and elsewhere) shows the power of his analysis, which few political scientists have examined, and offers a theoretical context for explaining the behavior of political leaders whose ability to survive in multicultural contexts is uncertain.

¹⁷Gluckman, for example, wrote about the importance of studying what he called "trouble cases" in his work on African law, but it is clear that he saw this as a much more general methodological strategy as well.

The extended cases of interest here are those that use culture to explain why and how a political conflict takes the course it does. For example, Scott (1985) analyzes the responses to irrigation and the institutionalization of double cropping in Sedaka, a village in Malaysia, in terms of how the richer and poorer rice farmers understand the demands of traditional norms and obligations in light of new opportunities and challenges. His study includes several detailed cases, one concerning the village gate and another involving a politically motivated village improvement scheme, that are especially effective at showing how the competing interests are manifest within a culturally homogeneous village. Scott demonstrates that it is only because the villagers' shared understandings are so great that small actions that an outsider might easily miss can contribute to the continuing battle over access to resources.

Political Ritual and Identity

Before Murray Edelman published *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (1964), few political scientists gave much serious thought to issues of political symbolism and ritual. Since then, comparativists ignore it at their peril. Edelman's core argument was simple but important. Politics, he said, is a passing parade of symbols to which we react on two levels: the cognitive, which involves the information any symbol communicates; and the affective, which consists of powerful feelings political symbols can invoke. The ability of leaders to provide symbolic reassurance to the masses allows organized groups to take the lion's share of material benefits for themselves. Edelman and the many people he influenced more indirectly have made the study of political symbolism and ritual central to analyses of political institutions and dynamics. For our point of view here, this work is crucial because it shows how cultural frameworks render political symbols and rituals significant in a wide range of settings and to a wide number of political dynamics (Brysk 1995).

Whereas earlier analyses, for example, emphasized elections as citizen choice making, a more cultural analysis would also pay attention to how political parties and candidates, in their quest for power, use culturally shared metaphors and culturally rooted fears in their appeals to citizens. Policy positions or candidate choices, we now understand, are not just about the issue preferences of individuals; we also must ask how such orientations are or are not consonant with shared cultural understandings and identities. The invocation of symbols and use of rituals do not just indicate points of consensus; they are also efforts to overcome contradictions in situations of disjunction (Kurtz 1991: 149).

This richer understanding of politics' cultural roots has produced an interest in how political rituals create (rather than just reflect) meanings and shape actions (Gusfield 1966). There is attention to high-visibility political rituals such as the torchlight marches in East Germany in the waning days of the old regime in 1989, and how participation in these events provided the courage for citizen participation under a regime that earlier made such action

unthinkable. More generally, political transitions, such as the changes in Eastern Europe or in South Africa between 1990 and 1994, can only be explained effectively when we make sense of the interaction between substantive change and ritual action.

An even stronger position is that political rituals are particularly critical to constructing political reality for most people (Edelman 1988; Kertzer 1988: 77-101) and that the power to control ritual is important.

Indeed, ritual is an important means of influencing people's ideas about political events, political policies, political systems, and political leaders. Through ritual, people develop their ideas about what are appropriate political institutions, what are appropriate qualities in political leaders, and how well the world around them measures up against these standards. (Kertzer 1988: 79)

In short, rituals are important instruments of control and from a Gramscian point of view are central mechanisms for obtaining and maintaining power. Detailed analyses of meaning-construction rituals would examine social movements as well as the mass media, which increasingly for citizens of mass democracies provide not only access to core knowledge but also the framework for making sense of it (Dayan and Katz 1992).

Political rituals offer meaning in ambiguous, uncertain situations and are crucial to the dynamics of identity construction and maintenance, particularly in periods of change. In bringing certain people together, culturally rooted rituals simultaneously exclude others. Powerful political rituals are those that utilize culturally rooted metaphors and meanings to offer a vision of reality; often this involves pitting one group against another by raising fears and threats to the point that people are all too ready to undertake strong action in the name of the group.

Culture and Political Conflict

In many analyses culture plays a central role in explaining the level and form of political conflict and violence. Culture in these analyses provides a system of meaning to make sense of the actions and motives of opponents and a mechanism for building and maintaining identity. Within-group worldviews are reinforced as groups increase in-group solidarity and out-group hostility increases. Not all cultural mobilization in conflict situations leads to violence, however, and one important comparative question concerns when this turn to violence occurs and when it does not.

For example, Laitin (1995a) offers a controlled comparison emphasizing culturally constituted differences in social organization to explain the high use of political violence in the Basque protest in Spain and its relative absence in nearby Catalonia. He identifies as a significant difference between these subcultures the relative importance of autonomous male groups with strong norms of honor in the small towns in the Basque region and their relative absence in Catalonia.

When these small, local male groups engage in protest that produces some limited and mainly symbolic successes, violence becomes self-sustaining.¹⁸ As a result, the differences in the use of violence between the regions are not a function of objective differences or relative deprivation within them but of the cultural organization of each community, which affects the likelihood that the ethnic revivals in each community will turn to violence.

Ross (1993a) provides a more general cross-cultural analysis to explain differences in levels and targets of conflict and violence. He finds that psychocultural variables – low warmth and affection in child rearing, harsh socialization, and male gender identity conflict – were excellent predictors of a society's overall level of violence, while social structural factors, such as the strength of cross-cutting ties or the presence of exclusive male groups, determined whether targets were within the same society, in another society, or both. He goes on to argue that cultural worldviews determine how groups see outsiders and the motives attributed to them. In addition, the culture of conflict is a crucial determinant not just of a group's level of conflict but also of how conflict is managed when it occurs (Ross 1993b).

Raymond Cohen (1990; 1991) demonstrates how culture provides a framework through which political leaders understand the actions and words of others in his examination of how cultural assumptions complicate the task of diplomatic negotiations. First through an analysis of Egyptian-Israeli negotiations over time (1990), and then through an examination of how cultural miscommunication has affected U.S. negotiations with Mexico, Egypt, China, India, and Japan, Cohen (1991) suggests that differences in time frames and in the importance of context, language, and individualistic versus collectivist ethos all are important in either inhibiting or facilitating negotiated efforts to deal with international issues. Focusing only on "substance," he contends, leads to serious missed opportunities and failures where successes might have emerged.

Finally, culture is central in the ethnic and identity disputes that have seemingly proliferated in recent years. In intransigent conflicts between groups with very different systems of meaning and distinct identities, cultural factors easily become the focal point of many conflicts when they are central to the parties' definition of the dispute (Ross 1997). In such situations, each group readily sees itself as a threatened minority whose very existence is precarious (Horowitz 1985). Frequently, in conflicts such as the one in Northern Ireland, differences are framed so that central elements of one culture are seen as powerful threats to the other; in these cases one can only imagine a resolution that addresses these culturally rooted fears head-on (Mulvihill, Ross, and Schermer 1995).

¹⁸In many ways his argument is similar to fraternal interest group theory in anthropology, which says that in the absence of centralized authority, coresident related males are likely to defend what they see as their core interests through organized violence (Paige and Paige 1981; Ross 1993a).

CRITIQUE OF CULTURAL ANALYSES OF POLITICS

Cultural studies of politics have been subject to a number of important criticisms about which proponents cannot remain silent. Perhaps the most significant problems arise over methodological issues such as the vagueness of culture as a unit of analysis or the issue of within- versus between-cultural variation. Others are concerned with the vagueness of the concept of culture and the difficulty in distinguishing culture from related concepts such as social organization, political behavior, and values. Some are worried that, since culture suggests relatively fixed, unchanging patterns of behavior, it is not terribly useful in accounting for changes in behavior and beliefs, a key feature of most contemporary political systems. Finally, there is concern that cultural analyses are not sufficiently explicit concerning the mechanisms linking culture and political action. Each of these criticisms is worth some brief comments. However, it should be clear that my view is that none of these problems is fatal and that in the cultural approach to comparative politics, like those rooted in interests or institutions, the best way to address the conceptual and methodological problems is through a multi-method search for convergence rather than abandonment of the theory.

Unit of Analysis Issues

Defining the unit of analysis precisely – be it voters, states, wars, or international organizations – is one of the first lessons of most methods seminars in political science. "What is a culture?" some political scientists ask, meaning "How do I know one when I see one?" since culture is not a unit of social or political organization with readily identifiable boundaries. Furthermore, the imprecision of common language use makes it very unclear what are a culture's key properties. As a result we hear references to western culture, French culture, Breton culture, rural Breton culture, etc. Where does the parsing stop? Conceptually the best answer is that the appropriate level of analysis depends on what one wants to explain. However, this is not always an easy-to-use methodological guide in empirical research.

Huntington offers a similar answer when he describes a range of what he calls cultural entities starting with villages and moving to regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, and civilizations. Each has distinct cultural features that distinguish it from similar units in other cultural entities. The key for him is that the civilization is "the highest grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species" (1993: 24). Following Horowitz (1985), he says that the level of cultural identity that is the most salient at any moment depends upon where someone is and what they are doing with whom.

The unit of analysis problem is about what constitutes the core of a culture and also how to identify its edges (Barth 1969). Where does one culture stop and another begin? Since cultures, unlike states or political parties, are not formal units of organization, treating them as independent units of political analysis can

be troubling indeed. While this may seem like a devastating critique to some, it is just as true that neither states nor voters are as independent as our political and methodological theories lead us to believe. For purposes of most analyses we emphasize the independence of all these units. What is probably more useful is to be more sophisticated about interaction effects and the influence of one unit upon another.¹⁹

Probably the best answer to these methodological problems is to begin with the recognition that cultural identity is layered and situationally defined.²⁰ People hold multiple identities, some identities partially overlap, and the group boundaries can shift across issues. Despite the methodological problems this can present, we cannot ignore culture if we think it is important, and we should make decisions about units of analysis based on what we are trying to explain rather than on abstract criteria intended to identify a set of cultural units akin to a list of all UN member states.²¹ In addition, there are a number of other procedures we can use to define cultural units in particular pieces of research. For example, we can use operational criteria such as asking people how they identify themselves and others and use social consensus about particular cultural groups and their boundaries. The point is that the task for research is to identify relevant groupings in whatever situation is under study. The fact that people can have multiple identities or that identities can change over time does not invalidate such analysis, it just makes the research more complicated. Good longitudinal data on socially defined cultural identities might be of real importance, for example, in understanding the breakdown of Yugoslavia and its recent civil war.

Political culture research in the Almond and Verba tradition ought to solve the problem by defining culture as the aggregate of individual orientations. Almond and Powell, for example, define political culture as "the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among members of a political system" (1966: 23). Reducing culture to the sum of individual attitudes is hardly

¹⁹Galton's Problem refers to the fact that in cross-cultural (and cross-national) samples, assumptions about the independence of units are often inappropriate and that substantive correlations among culture traits can reflect diffusion and borrowing rather than functional association. The most useful response is not to ignore this problem but to build diffusion hypotheses into models to test the relative power of each pattern (Ross and Homer 1976).

²⁰Another answer comes from Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky (1990), who argue that culture is seen in distinct ways of life, which they define in terms of Mary Douglas's grid-group analysis. Group refers to the extent to which an individual is incorporated into bounded units, whereas grid refers to the degree to which a person's behaviors are circumscribed by externally imposed restrictions. Different individuals or states can, in their view, exhibit different degrees of each of the five combinations they identify over time. However, viable social units, they argue, are not characterized by the presence of only one culturally defined way of life. While I find much of their analysis of the interaction between values and social structure quite useful, it is less evident to me that making the way of life the unit of analysis provides a guideline easy for researchers to use, since they say multiple orientations can exist in the same culture or subculture and that individuals may have different orientations across time and situations.

²¹This does not mean that such a list of societies that represent the world's cultures, such as one of the samples developed in cross-cultural research, is not useful in many research situations.

adequate, however, ignoring both the context in which particular attitudes are held and the shared understandings that organize clusters of intersubjective orientations (Merelman 1991). Culture, as a result, is no longer a system of meanings and identity; rather, it is simply a frequency distribution on a set of single attitude items – a kind of machine with totally interchangeable parts. While studying individuals is one way that we can understand culture, as both Taylor (1985: 37) and Geertz (1973a) argue, culture is not the property of single individuals, for it is rooted in social practice and shared understandings, and survey data alone cannot build a rich understanding of political culture. This explains why survey data alone are inherently limited as a tool for studying political culture; they must be used in conjunction with other data to provide a coherent portrait of any single culture or comparisons between cultures.

Within-Culture Variation Can Be Substantial

It often seems easy to say what members of formal groups have in common. But what exactly do people of a given culture share? My answer is shared meanings and a common identity. Operationally, this can be ambiguous, however, for we know that people who themselves identify with a culture (or any organized group) may also differ in terms of values, lifestyles, political dispositions, religious belief and practice, and ideas about common interests. In addition, Strauss cautions that while there may be some variation in schemas (what I have been calling worldviews) across individuals in the same culture, even those with very similar schemas may not internalize exactly the same things, and that the ambiguity of metaphor produces variation in responses (Strauss 1992: 10-11). However, this is not necessarily any more a problem in dealing with culture than with other units (or even intra-individual variation in behavior or attitudes over time). LeVine argues that emphasizing culture as common understandings of the symbols and representations they communicate does not mean there is necessarily a problem with within-cultural variation in thought, feeling, and behavior (1984: 68).

A second answer is that often what is more crucial politically than agreement on content is that people share a common identity, although this still leaves open the question of different degrees of identification and differences in the actions people are willing to undertake in the name of that identity. Shared identities mean that people see themselves as similar to some people and different from others and are open to potential mobilization on the basis of these differences. What an emphasis on identity stresses, once again, is that the relevant critical aspects of cultural similarity and difference are defined in specific political contexts. It is also the case that often what people believe they share may be at odds with reality because perceptions of cultural homogeneity overemphasize what is actually shared, minimizing within-group while stressing between-group differences. In this dynamic, in-group conformity pressures will lead people both to selectively perceive greater within-group homogeneity on critical characteristics than actually exists and to generate greater actual homogeneity and group conformity in situations where perceived threats to the culture are great.

Distinguishing Culture from Other Concepts

Some uses of the concept of culture, such as much of the early work on national character, defined culture so broadly as to include society, personality, values, and institutions. In fact, nothing was excluded.²² The very broad use of the concept of culture is also seen among social scientists emphasizing culture as a source of the social integration of a society. This perspective, probably clearest in functional theory in British social anthropology, would use culture to refer both to distinct elements of social organization and to the "fit" between different parts of a cultural system and the integration of the whole. The problem here is not the concept of culture but the way it is used. As noted above, the current anthropological focus is on culture as meaning systems distinct from social structure and behavior. D'Andrade makes this particularly clear in his description of culture "as consisting of learned systems of meaning, communicated by means of natural language and other symbol systems, having representational, directive, and affective function, and capable of creating cultural entities and particular senses of reality. Through these systems of meaning, groups of people adapt to their environment and structure interpersonal activities" (1984: 116). I find Spiro's (1984) clear distinction between culture as a system of meaning, and what he calls "culturally constituted elements," referring to social structure, behaviors, beliefs, rituals, etc., particularly helpful here.

Spiro's (1984) distinction between culture and culturally constituted elements allows us to distinguish between cultural meanings and identity on the one hand and structure, behaviors, and individual beliefs on the other. Structure, from this perspective, is reflective of (and to some extent derived from) culture, but it is independently measurable, and an important empirical question concerns the conditions under which the correspondence between culture and various culturally constituted elements is high and when it is not. We also can examine hypotheses about change and examine how culture, structure, and other phenomena do and do not shift in patterned ways. Last, the distinction makes it feasible to compare societies in which the correspondence between culture and social structure are high and those in which they are low to test hypotheses about the impact of consistency on such things as citizen satisfaction with government, political involvement, and political stability.

Culture and Change

Cultures are commonly viewed as slow-changing entities. How, then, can the concept of culture help comparativists deal with issues of political change, especially relatively rapid developments such as the end of military rule in many Latin American states during the 1980s or the breakup of the Soviet empire?

²²Pye says that national character analyses tended to treat "personality and culture as opposite sides of the same coin. Culture for them was the generalized personality of a people, in the sense that the modal personality of a people was their culture, and thus culture and personality were essentially identical factors shaping behavior" (1991: 494).

Three points are worth making. First, cultural analyses are no better than any other partial theories, such as interest or institutional ones, available in comparative politics. There are some phenomena for which each is most powerful, and some aspects of change are not best explained in cultural terms. Second, and interestingly, while it is not clear that cultural theories would have explained the fall of the Soviet empire very well (many other comparative political theories share this feature), a political cultural analysis is probably a good deal better at accounting for the ebb and flow of politics in the region since 1989 than many of its rivals (Fleron 1996). Particularly in unstructured, changing settings, cultural interpretations and assumptions about the motivation of others can be especially important in accounting for political processes in which there are few or no institutionalized procedures to guide action. Third, few contemporary views see culture as a static, unchanging phenomenon marked by fixed beliefs and unalterable practices (Eckstein 1988). Rather, emphasis on the interactive, constructed nature of culture suggests a capacity to modify beliefs and behaviors, and for important shifts in the salience of particular cultural understandings and their connections to other cultural elements (Goode and Schneider 1994; Merelman 1991).

Culture can play a significant role in political change despite the fact that culture itself does not change rapidly, if, and when political demands are articulated through culturally meaningful accounts, which sharpen goal articulation and mobilize supporters. Defining culturally legitimate possible alternatives both builds support and can challenge a regime. Brysk argues that this is particularly powerful when it involves reframing elements of identity in a way that mobilizes supporters, produces agenda change, and challenges the legitimacy and authority of existing policies and institutions (1995: 580-2).

The Mechanisms Underlying Cultural Explanations

Asking "how culture works" raises two different questions: (1) How does the organization of any particular culture produce the specific effects attributed to it? and (2) why are appeals to cultural identity so powerful that people are willing to take high risks in their name? The first is about the organization of culture and the second about its mobilizing power.

Theories that give culture a central explanatory role must specify how the effects attributed to culture come about. It is not good enough to simply say, "They did it because they're Germans." While this statement implies that non-Germans (such as the Japanese or French) would have behaved differently, adding a clause to this effect doesn't really enhance the explanation a great deal. Only when one starts to say why Germans are likely to behave in a certain way that is different from how Americans behave (in what is presumed to be an equivalent situation) do we begin to have an adequate explanation that pays attention to the content of culture and also says something about how it is learned and reinforced

(Andrade, 1992; Strauss, 1992D).²³ Indeed this was a central concern of early political culture research, although few were very impressed with the adequacy of explanations it provided. Learning and reinforcement involve institutional contexts in which a person (child or adult) practices, and then masters, key behaviors, infusing them with emotional significance.²⁴

Social experiences within institutions such as schools, religious organizations, kin groups, and later in work and leisure settings all provide cultural messages about values and expectations that are selectively reinforced. It certainly is the case that the messages from different domains are not always fully consistent. Sometimes there is a difference in emphasis; at other times there is an outright contradiction, e.g., peer groups and families don't necessarily give adolescents the same messages. However, what are most important from a cultural perspective are the beliefs, customs, rituals, behaviors, expectations, and motives that are internalized by individuals and widely shared among people in a culture even though they may also, at the same time, be highly contested. For example, Scott's (1985) study of a small rice-growing village in Malaysia shows how people can share meanings while at the same time compete over how specific elements are to be weighted and in what situations specific cultural elements are most relevant. Culture is about what is held in common and regularly reinforced; there is a reward for "getting it right" and a cost – which most people are willing to pay at times – for not doing so. Finally, it should be noted that cultural learning is not necessarily very conscious, occurring when individuals in institutional roles pass on culturally sanctioned beliefs and behaviors to others. Through these experiences culture prepares people to make sense of – to interpret – the world and act "effectively" in it.

The power of culture – the ability to mobilize action in its name – requires explanation, for it is not always the case that people can or will exhibit solidarity around cultural identity just because a leader (or anyone else) asserts that there is an external threat. Cultural mobilization builds on fears and perceived threats that are consistent with internalized worldviews and regularly reinforced through high in-group interaction and emotional solidarity. Such worldviews are expressed in daily experiences as well as significant ceremonial and ritual events that effectively restate and renew support for a group's core values and the need for solidarity in the face of external foes (Kertzer 1988). In potentially threatening situations, the ability of a group to organize collective ac-

²³The point here is similar to Przeworski and Teune's (1970), that comparative political analysts should strive to replace proper names with variable names. While some interpretivists only want to consider the uniqueness of each culture and context, others are comfortable making comparisons while recognizing the potential problems inherent in any comparison and the generalizations derived from it.

²⁴Beatrice Whiting (1980) discusses the importance cross-culturally of the placement of individuals in particular contexts, e.g., girls take care of younger siblings more than boys and boys are more likely to take care of animals in all the cultures for which she has data. Her data also show that cultures vary in the settings they "make available" to individuals, and she distinguishes between behaviors seen as "mundane" and those domains that are "projective" and infused with great emotional significance.

tion, which can range from unified voting to political demonstrations and violent action, is tied to the plausibility of a specific worldview – although the view itself does not produce direct effects. Rather, these must be mediated through institutions (Laitin 1986; 1995a). The resonance between the definition of a situation and group-based action is often not explicit, as Abner Cohen's (1969) analysis points out. Nonetheless it is effective when group members act in unified ways in the face of perceived threats. Closer examination of the dynamics of psychocultural interpretation in the next section suggests additional specific mechanisms at work.

THE CENTRALITY OF INTERPRETATION IN CULTURAL ANALYSES OF POLITICS

At the core of contemporary intersubjective approaches to culture and politics is the concept of interpretation. Culture in the Geertzian, postmodern view is a system of meaning and identity that accounts for why and how people in any particular setting act as they do, in contrast to the idea of culture as a set of norms or behaviors that directly shape action. This culture-as-meaning-and-identity perspective gives a central role to interpretation, the making of meaning from the ambiguous and fragmented elements of daily life (Darnton 1985; Taylor 1985). While there is widespread agreement that a subjective, meaning-centered conception of culture is richer than more mechanistic or material views, there is also fundamental disagreement concerning the goals of cultural explanations of politics. More humanistically oriented political (and other social) scientists emphasize the role of particular contextual and historical forces that shape meaning for actors. Their concern is with the uniqueness of each context as actors understand it, and they have little interest in accounting for patterns of similarity and difference across settings. This emphasis on the uniqueness of each cultural context and its particular meaning for actors readily leads to the conclusion that any search for generalization is pointless, for the only generalizations that might be offered are uninteresting. At the same time, this radical interpretivist view denies the value of any comparison at all and is not the one I develop here (Edgerton 1992: 23-45).²⁵

²⁵In anthropology where this debate has been particularly heated, two issues – evaluation of different cultures (cultural relativism) and comparison of cultures – are often fused. The relativism debate concerns the appropriateness of evaluating cultures other than one's own, while the comparison question turns on the issue of whether it is possible to compare cultures and develop meaningful generalizations. Edgerton describes the anti-comparison position as "asserting far more than the self-evident point that people in different societies live in somewhat different worlds of meaning. They are claiming that each of these worlds is truly unique – incommensurable and largely incomprehensible – and that the people who inhabit them have different cognitive abilities ... [and] various postmodern relativists and interpretivists postulate fundamental differences from one culture to the next in cognitive processes involving logic, causal inferences, and information processing" (Edgerton 1992:28).

In contrast, more social scientifically oriented investigators, while accepting the intersubjective and subjective character of culture, seek to identify the mechanisms that link culture and action, and to identify regularities in cultural behavior across settings. One approach found in psychological anthropology draws on both psychoanalytic and cognitive theories to explain how culture affects behavior (e.g., D'Andrade 1992; Spiro 1987). It emphasizes, for example, how individuals absorb, process, and modify cultural knowledge (information, affect, images) to develop images of the world, and how these images affect collective and individual action.

Here I discuss the conceptual and methodological importance of interpretations, arguing that they are key tools for understanding culture and politics. The rich accounts found in the images of the world's people point to key concerns, assumptions about how social and political relations are organized, and views about the possibilities for political action. These images of the world are obtainable, in part, through public and private accounts. However, simply presenting the transcripts of individuals' stories is insufficient for a number of reasons, including the important one that texts do not speak for themselves and without an intermediary they often make no sense to an outsider (Scott 1985: 138-41). Rather, the comparativist needs to frame accounts in both a cultural and comparative context and highlight the crucial elements (Kohli et al. 1995: 44-5).²⁶ Laitin (1988) says that connecting culture and action requires detailed local, ethnographic knowledge and experience. Without a rich contextual understanding, it is too difficult to derive much significance from the detailed, highly contextualized interpretations of the world that hardly ever speak for themselves.²⁷

The interpretations of interest here are accounts of the world that people within a culture widely share (or at least easily understand).²⁸ Elsewhere I use the term psychocultural interpretations to describe how shared interpretations are acquired through individual-level psychological (and social-psychological) mechanisms that are widespread in a culture (Ross 1993a; 1995).²⁹ Psychocultural interpretations are the basis on which people in a culture understand the world and link specific worldviews to political action, offering rich data for comparative political analyses.

²⁶Here the subjectivity of different social scientists and varying theoretical interests will certainly produce variation in the accounts that are rendered. Often this will reflect differences in emphasis. This is not necessarily a sign of the method's failure but of its complexity; as with other methods, efforts to obtain inter-subjective reliability among observers are important.

²⁷This is the same claim that many students of the U. S. Congress have made over the years.

²⁸Taylor proposes an interesting test of the utility of an interpretation when he writes, "We make sense of action when there is a coherence between the actions of the agent and the meaning of his situation for him" (1985: 24).

²⁹The term psychocultural brings together the psychological processes central to the construction of these interpretations and cultural dynamics, emphasizing that these orientations are not just personal but, rather, are nurtured and socially reinforced, linking individuals in a collective process, amplifying what is shared, and emphasizing differences among groups (Mack, 1983).

Psychocultural interpretations offer plausible accounts of the world, emphasizing the motives of different actors and reinforcing those features that distinguish one's own group from others. When supported by one's social world, these plausible accounts offer psychic and social protection from the ambiguities and uncertainties of existence, reinforcing social and political bonds within groups. The power of psychocultural interpretations lies in their shared social character, not those idiosyncratic features that distinguish one person's account from another's. As Taylor writes, "They are not subjective meanings, the property of one or some individuals, but rather inter-subjective meanings which are constitutive of the social matrix in which individuals find themselves and act" (1985: 36).

At the core of psychocultural interpretations are internalized, shared orientations rooted in the earliest social relationships that help people in a culture make sense of the inherently ambiguous, highly charged events that characterize their lives (Ross 1995). Psychocultural interpretations draw attention not just to what people do to each other but also to what one group of people think or feel that another group of people are doing, trying to do, or wanting to do. In a context of suspicion and uncertainty, not only actions but also presumptions about the intentions and meanings behind the actions (or inactions) play an important role. This is crucial, for in few political situations do external events provide clear explanations for what is occurring; to develop these, individuals turn to internal frameworks which then shape subsequent behavior.

While participants in any dispute can often tell someone "just what the conflict is about," this precision is often illusory, and political scientists often see this as evidence of flawed decision making and/or faulty information processing. However, it is more useful to view these "errors" as important data about the social dynamics. In many situations, different parties don't always agree about what a conflict is about, when it started, or who is involved, for they operate from (but are not aware of) alternative frames of references that shape their actions. Many disputes, whether they are between families in a community or nations in the world, involve parties with a long history, which, of course, includes long lists of accumulated grievances that can be trotted out and appended to newer ones as political conditions shift (Scott 1985). In many situations, complex conflicts are about a range of issues that are not of equal interest to all parties. For example, Hager (1995) offers a particularly clear case in her examination of conflict in West Berlin over energy policy, which she examines in terms of both the public policy considerations and the democratization issues concerning the legitimization of citizen roles in decision making on technologically complex matters. Decision makers saw the issues as technical ones needing conflict management, while citizen groups emphasized the legitimization of citizen participation in decision making.

The same factors that push actors to make sense of a situation also lead to cognitive and perceptual distortion, because the desire for certainty is often greater than the capacity for accuracy. Not only are disputants likely to make systematic errors in the "facts" underlying interpretations, but the homogeneous nature of most social settings and cultural amplifiers reinforces these self-serving

mistakes. What is most crucial, however, about interpretations of politics is the compelling, coherent account they offer to the parties in linking discrete events to general understandings. Central to such interpretations is the attribution of motives to parties. Once identified, the existence of such motives seemingly makes it easy to "predict" another's future actions, and through one's own behavior to turn such predictions into self-fulfilling prophecies. In this sense, it is appropriate to suggest that rather than thinking about particular objective events that cause conflicts to escalate, we ought to be thinking about the *interpretations* of such events that are associated with escalation and those that are not.³⁰

Psychocultural interpretations are found in the stories parties recount about past experiences, present difficulties, and future aspirations. These accounts are valuable for revealing how participants think about and characterize their political worlds. In fact, as we listen to them it is important to consider the extent to which stories from different groups or factions differ without necessarily directly contradicting each other, as each selects key events in its effort to gain supporters and to make sense of its actual experience (Scott 1985).³¹

This can be seen vividly in stories about long-standing ethnic conflicts that contain the culturally rooted aspirations, challenges, and deepest fears of communities. Volkan (1988) uses the term "chosen trauma" to refer to a specific experience that comes to symbolize a group's deepest threats and fears through feelings of helplessness and victimization (1991: 13). Volkan and his collaborators provide many examples of such events including the Turkish slaughter of Armenians, the Nazi holocaust, the experience of slavery and segregation for African Americans, and the Serbian defeat at Kosovo by the Turks in 1389.³² If a group feels too humiliated, angry or helpless to mourn the losses suffered in the trauma, Volkan suggests that it then incorporates the emotional meaning of the traumatic event into its identity and passes on the emotional and symbolic meaning from generation to generation.³³ In escalating intergroup conflicts, the key metaphors, such as the chosen trauma, serve both as a rallying point and as a way to make sense of events that evoke deep fears and threats to existence (Horowitz

³⁰While there is no room to develop the point here, it is important to understand that in contemporary society, the media become politically significant as creators and interpreters of events (Dayan and Katz 1992: 83).

³¹For example in Northern Ireland, Protestant Unionists find great meaning in the story of William of Orange and the Battle of the Boyne in 1689, while Catholic accounts really say little about King Billy or the battle. In contrast, Catholic Nationalists emphasize the meaning of the 1916 Easter Uprising, which for Protestants is far less significant than their sacred pact committing themselves to resist Irish self-rule four years earlier. Even when an event enters into the stories of both sides, such as the Hunger Strikes of Nationalist prisoners in 1980–81, the metaphors and meanings associated with them can be so different that it is hard to realize one is hearing about the same events in two different ways.

³²See the special issue of *Mind and Human Interaction* (1992) devoted to the question of ethnic and nationalistic traumas, and Volkan (1996) for a discussion of the meaning of Kosovo for Serbs.

³³The flip side is the *chosen glory* in which a group perceives triumph over the enemy; this is seen clearly in the Northern Irish Protestant celebration of the Battle of the Boyne in 1689 every July 12 (Cecil 1993).

1985; Kelman 1978; 1987). Only when the deep-seated threats these stories represent are addressed, he suggests, is a community able to begin to formulate a more peaceful future with its enemies.

Psychocultural interpretations reflect but also strengthen the boundary between in-groups and out-groups. The process of telling and listening to – validating³⁴ if you will – stories of past traumas and glories strengthens the link between individual and group identity and emphasizes how threats to the group are also threats to individual group members. In long-term intransigent conflict, strong threats to identity are an essential part of the conflict dynamic, and any efforts to defuse such a situation must take seriously the stories that participants recount, and the perceived threats to identity. The point, after all, is not whether participants' accounts are true or false from some objective point of view but that they are meaningful to the parties involved.

Interpretations play a central role in the construction of ethnic and national identities (Anderson 1991; Brubaker 1996; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Smith 1986; Tambiah 1986). The examination of interpretations over time is a tool for understanding the contested nature of history and for discerning how one account comes to be accepted as "what really happened" while other plausible stories of the past are rejected. Interpretations of the past are found in how people talk and write about it but are also found in the public rituals and myths built around key events in the national (or ethnic) past. The rituals and myths are significant because of the meanings and metaphors surrounding a group's history that they communicate and reinforce, and because of the political mobilizing potential they have in the hands of political entrepreneurs.

Interpretations As a Methodological Tool

At the core of cultural analyses of politics are people's accounts of their daily worlds. Comparative researchers of all persuasions easily recognize many of the forms in which such accounts appear, such as formal written materials, historical documents, public discourse, government records, law cases, systematic observations, and survey data. In addition, the rich accounts often needed in cultural analysis can only be obtained through ethnographic field research (Laitin 1988; Ross and Ross 1974); in-depth interviews and life histories; structured interviews; extended case analysis of trouble cases; popular culture (Merelman 1991); and public and semipublic myths and rituals. Certainly the process analysis Migdal, Tarrow, and Zuckerman all advocate in their chapters (this volume) is central to cultural analysis with its emphasis on interpretations.

The central goal of the culture as a meaning and identity perspective is to understand from the point of view of actors in a particular context why certain

³⁴What is validated is the meaning of a story to participants on each side. This does not necessarily mean the acceptance of such accounts as accurate. The notion of empathy is useful here. It suggests an acceptance of the account as meaningful to the recounter without necessarily implying agreement on the part of the listener.

actions are undertaken and others are not. What this entails is developing a plausible account – and in the process examining rival accounts of action and showing why they are not as good. There can be a huge gap, however, between the elements in the stories actors offer and how a comparativist understands political action, just as there is a great difference between the content of a patient's dreams and the psychoanalyst's interpretation of how the elements fit together and the dreams' overall significance. Bridging the two requires calling on cultural understandings and building interpretations that both make sense to cultural insiders and can be appreciated by outsiders.³⁵

With a few rare exceptions, the most successful work linking culture and politics will not rely on only one source of data or a single tool for data analysis. Our most interesting theories are complex and highly contingent and cannot be simply accepted or rejected on the basis of one crucial piece of evidence, as is the case in some natural sciences. Instead, we need to obtain areas of convergence between independent data collected using a wide range of methods in order to have confidence in a set of findings, as Campbell and Fiske (1959) advocated. Exclusive reliance on one type of data to study the interplay of culture and politics, as is found in some survey researchers such as Inglehart (1988), inevitably produces a thin, almost content-free sense of culture and points to few dynamics of how culture produces the political effects it does. Instead, a more useful approach is one such as Scott's (1985) or Laitin's (1986; 1995a) in which a range of evidence is marshaled to explain a phenomenon that is not self-evident: the presence of everyday, but not overt, resistance among third-world peasants; the absence of bitter conflict between Christians and Moslems in western Nigeria; or why in Spain, the Basque revival has been violent while under very similar circumstances, the Catalan one was not. Another successful instance of bringing together a range of data is Merelman's (1991) comparison of liberal democratic cultures in the United States, Britain, and Canada, which analyzes television programs, corporate publications, textbooks, and magazine ads along with survey data.

CONCLUSION

Culture is a worldview offering a shared account of action and its meaning and providing people with social and political identities; it is manifested in a way of life transmitted (with changes and modifications) over time, and embodied in a community's institutions, values, and behavioral regularities. Politics, I have argued, occurs in a cultural context that links individual and collective identities,

³⁵Carol Hager (personal communication) suggests that critical theory provides a set of guidelines for the empirical study of interpretations in political research with its attention to communication processes and concerns with the problems of mediating between a researcher's own interpretations and those of the people being studied.

defines the boundaries between groups and organized actions within and between them, provides a framework for interpreting the actions and motives of others, and provides resources for political organization and mobilization. Cultural accounts of politics emphasize how, through shared intersubjective meanings, actors understand and act in their daily worlds. Beginning with context-dependent accounts – worldviews – cultural analysis constructs plausible interpretations of political life that both seem reasonable to local actors and make sense to outsiders.³⁶

I have argued for a "strong" view of culture and against the notion that it can be more simply approached in terms of specific values that people in a community hold. In fact, the significance of the presence or absence of consensus on any single item is often unclear without an analysis of the context. Culture as a system of meaning is not at all incompatible with strong disagreement on particular attitudes (Laitin 1988), and it is often those points of disagreement that are of real political significance and shed light on "tough" problems facing a society. For example, the bitter divisions in some European countries over questions such as the treatment of immigrants or further European political or economic integration are powerful points of tension involving complicated, alternative cultural constructions of what it means to be French or German or British. As a result, a cultural analysis might utilize survey data to document the nature of divisions in a country on these questions, but it would go a good deal further, trying to make sense of why and how they are important to people, the connections between these issues and political and personal identity, and the significance of bitterly contested political meanings and actions within a common cultural framework.

In principle, cultural analysis can enhance our understanding of politics in a number of domains. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (this volume) describe important cultural contributions in the field of contentious politics and offer a model of how structural, interest, and cultural perspectives can complement each other in explaining significant political phenomena. Seeing social movements as both carriers and makers of meaning, they suggest, enriches older, more developed structural and resource mobilization perspectives. Cultural analyses emphasize framing of action and increase our understanding of the definition of political opportunities and the repertoires of action that are found in different settings. A focus on narrative structuring and symbolic politics expands our capacity to explain collective action in terms of changing preferences, changing identities, and changing responses to resources (Brysk 1995: 567)

³⁶The issue of how local actors react to an interpretation has several components. One is the extent to which they or the social scientist have provided it. If it is the latter, to what extent do they see it as plausible? Another issue is how local actors react to a social scientist's interpretation. For example, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1982: v-xi), writing about the severe personal and social dysfunctionality associated with the very high rates of schizophrenia in rural Ireland, reports how upset villagers were with her book describing this pattern. Interestingly, they didn't say she was wrong; rather, they chastised her for making public what were regarded locally as private matters.

Attention to culture would certainly address one of the most widely cited weaknesses of rational choice theory, its inattention to context-specific interests and cross-cultural differences in how interests are conceptualized and articulated. More broadly, political economy might be an area that would benefit from more explicit attention to cultural questions, as Hall (this volume) suggests. For example, political economists have long documented differences in equality of resource distribution across countries, noting places like Scandinavia and Sri Lanka where inequalities are relatively low. While there is a certain amount of lip service paid to "cultural differences" in these cases, a more profound analysis would inquire into cultural conceptions of social justice, linked fate, and perhaps the relationship between the individual and the collectivity. Similarly, there are probably strong cultural factors involved in explaining cross-national differences in the locus of decision making and control over the economy. Where economic theory would emphasize efficiency, it may be that culture is much more salient in determining not only how a country resolves such an issue but also how it implements economic and political programs.

Political institutions are another obvious candidate for more culturally oriented research, although such studies are certainly not totally absent. Many students of American legislatures, for example, have found culture particularly helpful in explaining their internal operation (Matthews 1962; Muir 1982). The "folkways" of the U. S. Senate that Matthews identifies to explain its functioning in the 1950s are both specific norms affecting any individual senator's behavior and also a system that cannot simply be understood in terms of its individual elements or the degree to which any senator thinks a particular norm is appropriate. Similarly, as Crozier (1964) demonstrated so effectively, culture can shape the behavior of both public and private bureaucracies, and a cultural model sharply contrasts with explanations derived from a more universal, rational-actor, bureaucratic routinization model.

Finally, conflict is cultural behavior, since culture shapes what people fight about, how they fight, with whom they fight, and how the conflict ends (Avruch 1991; Ross 1993b). Both group goals and group actions are linked to cultural notions of appropriate behavior in the development and pursuit of goals. As a result, culturally shared rules can guide behavior even in the absence of strong institutions to enforce them. Conflict involves both the pursuit of culturally defined competing interests and the parties' divergent interpretations and threats to identity. These interpretations offer alternative metaphors about what is at stake in a conflict and the intensity of the dispute. Only when we examine the cultural meanings from the point of view of the participants can we make sense of why any conflict took the particular course it did.

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