

## **INTERNATIONAL FAMILY CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: THE PAST AND FUTURE FROM THE DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *I examine the international influence of developmental idealism in changing people's beliefs and values, in producing family and demographic change, and in bringing cultural clashes within and between societies. Developmental idealism is a belief and value system stating that societal and familial attributes defined as modern are better than attributes defined as traditional, that modern societies produce modern families, that modern families facilitate the achievement of modern societies, and that freedom and equality are human rights. I discuss the international dissemination of developmental idealism and how it has clashed with local cultures, been resisted, and changed lives and social systems. I discuss the influence of developmental idealism in international human rights treaties, including those focused on children and women, in the modernization programs of such countries as China and Turkey, in campaigns to eliminate polygamy and female veiling, and in efforts to spread gender equality, family planning, low fertility, freedom of spouse choice, older ages at marriage, and the recognition of same-sex relationships. It has also been an influence bringing more personal freedom, with implications for divorce and sexual relations and childbearing outside marriage. I also discuss how developmental idealism produces resistance against it, national and international clashes of culture, and tensions within and between generations. Likely effects of developmental idealism in the future are also considered.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper I examine the influence of developmental idealism on family change. Because we live in a globalised world, I take an international perspective, which requires national and sub-national perspectives. This is an impossibly difficult task, but the advantages of taking an international perspective are well worth the downside associated with falling short. With both historical and international perspectives, it is necessary to describe things in very general terms, and examples and details of specific arguments must be limited.

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Many material and ideational forces have produced current marriage and family patterns, and many forces will shape the future. In this paper I focus on ideational or cultural factors, with an emphasis on developmental idealism, because these factors are important and have not received adequate attention. My focus on the ideational does not suggest that I believe other factors are not important, as I believe that a full understanding of family change requires consideration of a broad range of ideational and material factors and their intersections.

### CULTURAL MODELS

Cultural models help people understand the world and how it operates. They specify what is good and moral, provide motivations for actions, and specify appropriate means to reach desired ends (Geertz 1973; Fricke 1997). These cultural models provide schemas or scripts that give categories for describing the world and specifications for appropriate behavior, relationships, and roles (Johnson-Hanks et al. in press; Thornton et al. 2001). As Johnson-Hanks and colleagues (in press) suggest, these models reside both within the heads of individuals and in the beliefs and values shared within communities. Cultural models are sometimes sufficiently shared that they are taken for granted. In other instances, multiple schemas exist within the same community and even within the same person. These models may be mutually reinforcing or conflicting. These cultural schemas have important implications for decision-making and behavior. They can change dramatically, especially across long periods of time.

For thousands of years the peoples of the world have had their own local cultures that have provided models for understanding the world and how it operates. These local cultures have also provided schemas specifying appropriate behavior and relationships.

A large literature documents a world culture that is in many ways different from the numerous local cultures existing around the world (Krücken and Drori 2009; Meyer et al. 1997; Thomas et al. 1987). This world culture is described as having originated from Christianity but being different from Christianity, even being its own quasi-religion (Meyer et al. 1997; Thomas et al. 1987). It is described as Western and modern, but as spreading throughout the world. This world culture places the autonomous individual at the center of its rational worldview. It emphasizes science, education, progress, development, freedom, equality, justice, consent, and human rights.

This world culture has been a powerful force changing the world. It has generated international increases in school attendance and in homogenizing school curriculums and programs (Baker and Letendre 2005; Chabbott 2003). It

has given science enormous international prestige and funds to support its work (Drori et al. 2003). It has had an important role in the spread of support for human rights (Cole 2005; Meyer, Bromley, and Ramirez 2010; Tsutsui and Wotipka 2004), in the spread of family planning (Barrett and Frank 1999), in expanding women's roles (Berkovitch 1999), in advocating individualism (Bromley, Meyer, and Ramirez 2009), in changing laws regulating sexual expression (Frank, Camp, and Boutcher in press), and in bringing legislation against female circumcision (Boyle 2002).

The world culture literature often emphasizes the influence of world culture on change outside the West. This is a natural emphasis for a worldview originating in Christianity and the West, but, as I have argued elsewhere (Thornton 2001, 2005), such influences have also been powerful in the West.

An important element of world culture is developmental idealism, a set of ideas specifying what constitutes the good life and how to achieve it. Developmental idealism indicates where social change is heading and that freedom and equality are human rights. Developmental idealism has direct implications for marriage and family life, and its international dissemination has been a powerful force for family change. Understanding developmental idealism is essential for understanding both the past and future of marriage and family.

Many mechanisms have spread developmental idealism internationally. Among these are colonialism, Christian missionaries, education, mass media, foreign aid programs, government policies and programs, national and international non-governmental organizations, and international treaties and conventions. As Luke and Watkins (2002) argue, such messages can spread because of the persuasiveness of the ideas and because powerful governments and non-governmental organizations provide financial incentives and legal sanctions for their adoption. My emphasis here is on the persuasiveness of the ideas, but I also mention the influence of money and power.

I do not endorse or reject developmental idealism or any of the local cultures of the world as good or bad, or true or false. I present developmental idealism, its intellectual underpinnings, and its consequences only to understand how it has influenced past marriage and family changes and how it is likely to influence the future. I now turn to a discussion of developmental idealism.

## MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

### *Models for Understanding the World*

The ideas of modernity and development have been important in world culture. They have influenced Western thought from ancient Greece and Rome, through a millennium of Christian theology, the Enlightenment, and in much

social thought and policy of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The modernization model posits a trajectory of development with all societies passing through the same stages (Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1975/1969). The speed of modernization was assumed to vary, resulting in societies at different stages at the same time. Societies believed to be low in development were labeled as backward, undeveloped, traditional, or even barbarous, and societies believed to be developed were labeled as advanced, progressive, or modern.

It was commonly believed that societies of northwest Europe and its overseas migrant populations were the most modern, with other societies distributed at various lower levels (Thornton 2001, 2005). It was also assumed that the past situations of so-called modern societies could be observed within contemporary so-called traditional societies and that currently traditional societies would one day become like the advanced contemporary societies. The world was, thus, portrayed as dynamic, with the West providing a goal or model for modernization.

The family attributes of northwest Europe were often labeled as modern or developed, while many attributes in other places were labeled as traditional, undeveloped, or backward. This occurred despite the fact that there were extensive family variations within northwest Europe and extensive family variations within and across other world regions. It also occurred despite the fact that some places outside northwest Europe had many family attributes seen as characterizing northwest Europe (Szoltysek 2011; Todorova 1997). The family attributes of northwest Europe that came to be seen as modern included: little family solidarity, great individualism, low parental control over adolescent children, marriages arranged by mature couples through courtship, monogamy, gender equality, the absence of veils for women, and small and nuclear (or stem) households. In contrast, the following attributes were labeled as traditional: extensive family solidarity, little individualism, high parental control over adolescent children, marriages arranged at young ages by parents, polygamy, gender inequality, veils for women, and large and extended households. Also, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries northwest Europe experienced trends toward greater control over childbearing and toward lower fertility, and controlled and low fertility was labeled modern, and uncontrolled and high fertility was labeled undeveloped.

Industrial and urban societies with high degrees of education, technology, wealth, and health were called modern or developed while societies with the opposite attributes were labeled traditional or underdeveloped. Scholars of the era also argued that changes from traditional to modern societies would produce modern families and that movement from traditional to modern families would bring modern societies. These perspectives and conclusions have been exceptionally influential for centuries (Thornton 2005).

*Models for Dealing with the World*

The ideas and conclusions from developmental approaches form the basis for developmental idealism (Thornton 2001, 2005). Developmental idealism provides policy makers and lay people new goals and methods. It provides beliefs and values suggesting that modern families, as defined above – including individualism, intergenerational independence, monogamy, marriages at mature ages, courtship as part of the process leading to marriage, gender equality, no veils for women, and planned and low fertility – are good and should be striven for. Developmental idealism also indicates that modern society – including being urbanized, industrialized, highly educated, healthy, and wealthy—is good and should be striven for. It also stresses that modern societies and modern families are causally interconnected in reciprocal relationships that give governments and individuals guidance about the means for achieving societal development and about what family changes to expect as a result of societal development. Also note that the ideas of modernization and development specify that science, secularism, free markets, democracy, and the separation of church and state are modern, good, and causally connected to the other elements of modernity. Also, developmental idealism locates the highest point of development in north-western Europe and its overseas populations, suggesting that these regions can serve as models for those living elsewhere.

Developmental idealism specifies that freedom, equality, and consent are universal rights. This conclusion occurred because numerous scholars in the past believed that at the most undeveloped stages of human life – sometimes called the state of nature – there were no basic societal elements such as laws, governments, and families, and that individuals were free, equal, and had the power to consent or dissent. It was argued that freedom, equality, and consent not only existed in the beginning, but were human rights. It was also believed that, with the advent of society, these rights were abridged and only in the most advanced regions of northwest Europe and its diasporas were these rights later regained.

Developmental idealism not only defines what it sees as modern as good and moral, but frequently views what it defines as traditional and undeveloped as bad, backward, and immoral. Thus, developmental idealism not only strives for the so-called modern and moral, but fights against what it defines as backward and immoral.

Many elements of modernization models have come under heavy criticism in many sectors of academia during recent decades (Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1975/1969; Wallerstein 1991; Chakrabarty 2000). The criticisms indicate that the developmental model is teleological and that its assumptions of uniform and directional change cannot be sustained. Despite these criticisms, many of

the ideas associated with modernity are increasingly recognized as exceptionally powerful forces internationally within both governments and non-governmental organizations (Krücken and Drori 2009; Latham 2000; Meyer et al. 1997). In addition, qualitative studies have identified the existence and influence of modernization ideas, including developmental idealism, among lay people in many international settings (Dahl and Rabo 1992; Ferguson 1999; Osella and Osella 2006; Pigg 1992; Abu-Lughod 1998; Yount et al. 2010). Survey data also document that lay people in many settings have development models and endorse many of the elements of developmental idealism (Binstock and Thornton 2007; Mitchell 2009; Thornton, Binstock, and Ghimire 2008; Thornton et al. in press).

Because the cultural models that have existed for centuries in local populations are often very different from developmental idealism, the introduction of developmental idealism is usually not followed by simple adoption, but is resisted and modified, often producing a clash of cultures. Although the pathways of change and continuity frequently vary across populations, the spread of developmental idealism has had enormous effects on many dimensions of life, including marriage and family, around most of the world. In almost every place, there is resistance, and the resisters have slowed change and succeeded in keeping many aspects of local culture. Nevertheless, almost everywhere there have been changes, with a common outcome being hybridization.

Although the West has for centuries been seen as identical with modernity, the emphasis on modernity and the contrast with other places brought the West an “other” to compare itself to and to move away from. Thus, the West could emphasize as good the elements of its culture that it defined as the most modern and move even more in that direction. Also, the Enlightenment principles of freedom, equality, and consent gained power in the following centuries for changing hierarchical and authoritarian aspects of the West that had existed for centuries (Thornton 2005). As the West changed, the definition of modernity itself changed, and modernity took on diverse and sometimes competing meanings.

I now discuss some ways that developmental idealism has influenced family and marriage. Because many family issues are controversial, I emphasize again that my purpose is not advocacy but analysis and that my intent is not to endorse or condemn any of the elements of developmental idealism or their effects. Instead, my purpose is to evaluate the influence of developmental idealism on past family changes and to analyze its relevance for the future. I also do not believe that developmental idealism is the only force producing family changes.

## INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Important manifestations of developmental idealism and forces for its spread are international agreements or conventions. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century there were more than 100 human rights instruments in force (Simmons 2009, page 37). Almost all were adopted after World War II. They cover many things, ranging from freedom from torture and servitude, to freedom of movement and assembly, and to freedom of religion and thought. Three such conventions are particularly relevant to family and marriage: Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); and the Marriage Convention (MC). All three are aimed at restructuring marriage and family relationships along the lines of developmental idealism.

CEDAW provides for the equality of women and men in all aspects of life. It calls for the empowerment of women in both family and non-family spheres through education, employment, and reproductive rights. Parent-child relations are also modified by changing female education, employment, and reproductive rights. All such movement is in the direction of developmental idealism.

The Convention on the Rights of Children specifies a wide range of rights for children. Boyle, Smith, and Guenther (2007) indicate that the central principles of CRC are individualism and universalism, suggesting that children everywhere have the same universal rights. Boyle et al. (2007, page 273) indicate that these standards are “Western in their orientation” and directed toward the construction of modern individuals. CRC separates the interests of children from their parents, emphasizing children as “autonomous, agentic, and responsible” (Boyle et al. 2007, page 267). Children are given the rights of free expression, thought, religion, and association (Simmons 2009). CRC also protects children from what are seen as harmful cultural practices, with this protection aimed at practices in non-western countries seen as problematic (Boyle et al. 2007).

The Marriage Convention assumes that parents and children have different interests in children’s marriages (Boyle et al. 2007). It specifies that there should be complete freedom of spouse choice. The Convention also specifies that young people should not marry until they reach adulthood and permits states to determine the appropriateness of marriages.

There is disagreement on whether international conventions change government programs and people’s behaviour. Recent studies indicate from both statistical and case study methods that conventions are often effectual (Simmons 2009; Tsutsui and Shin 2008). There are several mechanisms for such conventions having effects. They carry normative significance and international legitimacy for principles, empower people, provide tools to support mobilization, have an education role, raise rights consciousness, and change values.

## SOME PAST EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM

*China*

I now discuss the effects of developmental idealism in several countries, beginning with China. Before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most people in China considered China to be the middle kingdom, or centre of the universe. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China experienced a long period of defeat and humiliation at the hands of the West and Japan and launched its campaign to find and/or create “modern China” (Spence 1999/1990). China sent numerous emissaries to the West to learn the secrets of Western wealth, technology, and power. These emissaries discovered the ideas of developmental idealism, and they and Westerners in China distributed these ideas inside China. Campaigns were launched, with considerable success, to eliminate foot binding as a backward and harmful practice (Lang 1968/1946; Levy 1966). White wedding dresses from the West were introduced and competed successfully with red wedding dresses previously prevalent in China – a remarkable occurrence since white was historically associated with death in China (Lang 1968/1946).

Both the Nationalist and Communist parties adopted many ideas of developmental idealism and worked towards the transformation of the Chinese family. The success of the communist revolution in 1949 brought a new marriage law, implementing many elements of developmental idealism (Cartier 1996/1986; Whyte 1990). Family planning and low fertility were not initially included in the reform package of the Chinese Communist Party, but by the 1970s China had launched its aggressive one-child policy to facilitate development. These programs have helped to reduce substantially arranged marriages, family lineages, concubinage, and the marriages of young children (Davis and Harrell 1993; Greenhalgh 1994). The campaign against the ancestral chain has been so effective that it has been possible in recent decades for Chinese to reach adulthood without knowing about the ancestral chain and its previous centrality in Chinese society. In addition, age at marriage has increased dramatically, and fertility has fallen to the very low level of 1.5 children per woman, on average (Guo and Chen 2007).

*Turkey*

Many elements of the Chinese story exist in Turkey, although there are important differences resulting from Turkey’s own culture and interactions with the West (Kavas 2010; Nauck and Klaus 2008). The Ottoman Empire had been

one of the world's powers, but during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many Ottomans became fascinated with Western wealth, technology, and power. This led to a desire to adopt Western ways, and innovations were made among many of the country's elite.

The Ottoman Empire collapsed after World War I, and a smaller Turkey emerged with a government that adopted many elements of developmental idealism as doctrine and policy. This policy was implemented and enforced over several decades, although with resistance from many quarters. The efforts of Turkey to enter the European Union have provided additional impetus for the adoption of European ways. These programs have been instrumental in the banning of veils from public institutions, increases in gender equality, the decline of parental control over young people, the rise of self-choice marriages, increases in age at marriage, and the decline of fertility to replacement level (Kavas 2010).

#### *Other Countries*

Similar stories can be told for many additional countries. I can mention only a few. Within a relatively short time after the European discovery of America, many native Americans were speaking European languages and were at least nominally Christian, with many family attributes such as young marriage and polygamy restricted. Similarly, the colonization of Africa by Europeans led to many Africans becoming Christian and being influenced by European ideals and norms. Japan also launched its own campaign of modernization. In Nepal, the endorsement of development is widespread, along with the desirability of family change to bring development.

#### *Women and Veils*

The battle to eliminate women's veils has occurred in many places other than Turkey. It was an active – and in many ways successful – program in Central Asia under the Russian Empire and Soviet Union (Northrop 2004). It was also an active program of the Shah's regime in Iran before the 1979 revolution. Elimination of veils and gender segregation was added to the fight against terrorism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a justification for the Western military presence in Afghanistan. Interestingly, the migration of Muslims to Europe has led several European countries that usually take great pride in their emphasis on freedom to take steps to abolish the veil in public places (“Running for cover” 2010; Erlanger 2010). This has been justified both as a security measure and as a way to eliminate backwardness and the repression of women.

Efforts to eliminate veils have met great resistance in many places and are losing traction in some places. The veil became a symbol of resistance against the Shah in Iran, and after the 1979 revolution it became compulsory. Counter reformers in Turkey have argued that the principle of freedom should allow women to wear the veil in public places. Similarly, there have been increases in wearing veils in other predominantly Muslim countries.

### *Family Planning*

A powerful component of world culture is the international family planning movement. For centuries, high fertility and large populations were seen as positive, but during the late 1700s, Western writers began to suggest high ages at marriage and low fertility as explanations for Western socioeconomic accomplishments (Malthus 1798). Although such arguments initially gained little traction, an international family planning program was initiated after WW II to increase age at marriage and the use of birth control and to reduce birth rates (Barrett and Frank 1999; Donaldson 1990; Greenhalgh 1996). Several factors motivated these programs, but a central justification was the belief that they would foster socioeconomic development (Barrett, Kurzman, and Shanahan 2010).

Family planning programs were not accepted and implemented immediately, but in many instances met extensive resistance. Some countries, including China, initially rejected the call for population control. Another example of national rejection was Malawi where family planning was legally banned in the 1960s (Chimbwete, Watkins, and Zulu 2005). The government of Kenya publicly endorsed family planning in the 1960s, but resisted implementing it (Chimbwete et al. 2005). Later, each of these countries – China, Malawi, and Kenya – implemented more vigorous family planning programs.

Despite the initial resistance, almost all so-called “developing countries” adopted such programs by the 1980s, although with varying degrees of enthusiasm and effectiveness (Johnson 1994). In some programs, for example at times in China, India, and Indonesia, the government tried to take control of reproduction from individual couples (Thornton 2005). Government control mechanisms in these places included monitoring women’s reproductive cycles, requiring government permission to have a baby, and forcing abortion and sterilization.

In 1994, the agenda shifted from prioritizing population control to prioritizing gender equity and reproductive health for everyone, including adolescents (Luke and Watkins 2002). Although the full story is more complex, from the viewpoint of this paper, this shift was a change in priorities from one element of developmental idealism, low fertility, to other elements of developmental

idealism, equality and freedom,. Endorsement of this new emphasis in Ghana, Bangladesh, Malawi, Senegal, and Jordan was mixed, with some elements being rejected, at least initially in some places (Luke and Watkins 2002). International financial resources were also important in motivating acceptance of certain programs, although such incentives were not always successful, at least in the short run. Interestingly, by the late 1990s, there was widespread endorsement of the family planning element of the international population agenda in these countries (Luke and Watkins 2002).

The changes in marriage, contraception, and childbearing have been phenomenal. In many countries where women previously married as teenagers or earlier, average ages at marriage have extended into the twenties, even the late twenties. Contraception has become common, and abortion has been legalized in many countries. There have been important fertility declines in most of the world's populations. Many countries have fertility levels at approximately replacement levels of just over two children per woman. In some countries, especially in East Asia and Europe, fertility levels have fallen, at least temporarily, to 1.5 children or below. Overall fertility levels in the US are at or near replacement, but are below replacement in some groups.

Several elements of developmental idealism are important for understanding fertility declines, including high consumption aspirations, the expansion of female employment, and desires for few children. In parts of Europe many people have not only assimilated the belief that two children are better than three, but that zero or one is acceptable and may be preferable to two (Sobotka 2009). Recent surveys in Argentina, China, Egypt, Iran, Nepal, and the US document that low fertility is seen by great majorities to be correlated with development, a product of development, and a factor producing development (Thornton et al. in press).

Fertility at 1.5 children or below will have substantial effects if sustained over long periods. It would reduce populations by one-quarter or more each generation, with large reductions in working age populations. Sustaining population levels would require substantial international migration that would change the ethnic composition of populations. Such low fertility, accompanied by low mortality at older ages, is also producing older populations.

Reproductive freedom has been an important theme across recent decades. Among its earliest successes was the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century fight to eliminate restrictions against contraceptive devices. Increases in the effectiveness, number, and availability of contraceptive supplies have been a major story of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with governments shifting from being active opponents to active proponents. In recent decades abortion shifted from being a violation of norms and laws to being accepted and legal in many places. The legalization of abortion in the US was made possible by the expansion of freedom and the discovery of a new right to privacy. As noted earlier, however, in some places

reproductive freedom was deemed less important than fertility reduction, as the use of contraception and abortion was forced.

### *Marital Timing and Processes*

Efforts to increase age at marriage have extended beyond the international population control movement. For centuries child marriage and arranged marriage have been common in many parts of the world. In South Asia it was considered morally necessary by many for a girl to be married before her first menstruation, and many were so married. Some brides were even chosen before they were born. Such practices have been explicitly targeted for elimination, with mature marriage and self-choice marriage declared to be the rights of children, with vigorous programs to implement them (Boyle et al. 2007). There have been dramatic declines in both child marriage and arranged marriage in many places.

The fight against child and arranged marriage has largely been absent from northwest Europe because initial conditions were different (Brundage 1987; Hajnal 1965; Macfarlane 1986). For many centuries, most marriages in the West were contracted at mature ages by the bride and groom themselves – often with input by the couple’s parents – a pattern that was supported by the Catholic Church. Common law marriages could be contracted merely by a couple living together and presenting themselves to the world as wife and husband. In fact, marriage was historically under such control of the couple – requiring only the consent of the bride and groom – that legitimate marriages could occur in secret without rituals, licenses, witnesses, certificates, clergy, or government officials. With only the couple’s consent required, many disputes of the he said/she said variety arose concerning whether both members of the couple had agreed to the marriage.

This free marriage system was severely criticized during the Protestant Reformation, and a 500-year campaign supported by both Protestants and Catholics was launched to tighten control over marriage (Brundage 1987; Witte 1997). Reforms included requiring licenses, certificates, witnesses, and church or government officials for a marriage to occur. Reforms to prohibit common law marriages were also implemented in many places. These reforms were so effective in some places that many elements of them came to be seen as essential for marriage.

This 500-year effort to control marriage fell apart under the wave of freedom in the West during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after World War II, when the old norms requiring marriage to legitimize sexual relations, cohabitation, and childbearing were eroded (Thornton, Axinn, and Xie 2007). At first, love remained a requirement for sex, but later, for many, consent became the only

requirement for sex. Marriage also was no longer a marker for adulthood or a necessity for independent living. It became just a piece of paper for many, and a valued but unnecessary state that could be achieved at some indefinite future time when the perfect partner, two dream jobs, generous incomes, and a very nice house were achieved (Cherlin 2004). Also, childbearing was no longer required of the married.

Throughout the Western world, this new-found freedom and decreasing centrality of marriage have contributed to substantial postponement of marriage and childbearing within marriage (Thornton et al. 2007). It has also greatly increased sex, cohabitation, and childbearing outside of marriage. Although these trends began in northwest Europe and its overseas populations, they have recently spread to Southern and Eastern Europe and to parts of East Asia and Latin America (Lesthaeghe 2010; Cerrutti and Binstock 2009; Thornton and Philipov 2009).

### *Divorce*

The trend towards easier and more frequent divorce extends back to the Protestant Reformation when the prohibition against it was refuted by the reformers, although they stressed that it should be difficult and infrequent (Phillips 1988). The Enlightenment gave the trend towards easier divorce added impetus, as it emphasized that consent was not only required for the contraction of marriage, but that it could later be withdrawn and the marriage dissolved (Thornton 2005).

Freedom was particularly emphasized during the French Revolution, with its slogan of freedom, equality, and fraternity. Late in the 18<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary France passed an essentially no-fault divorce law, which was revoked in later years (Phillips 1988; Traer 1980). The French Revolution also produced a longer lasting reform requiring equal inheritance (Traer 1980). Following the American Revolution – with its emphasis on freedom and equality – there was a less dramatic but more permanent easing of divorce laws (Cott 2000). Divorce laws in the West became very easy following World War II, and public attitudes toward divorce have become more permissive (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; van de Kaa 1987).

These trends have been accompanied by dramatic increases in the divorce rate and the number of single-parent families. With many divorced people remarrying, there has also been an important rise in the number of blended or reconstituted families. These trends have occurred both in the West and elsewhere.

*Same-Sex Relations*

Particularly important in the past two decades has been the expansion of the rights of people with same-sex orientation, an expansion in the United States associated with the new right of privacy. With the backing of the principles of freedom and equality, sexual acts between two people of the same sex were decriminalized and legitimated in a few decades. Gays and lesbians became more open about their sexual orientations and became more accepted in many places.

Decriminalization of gay and lesbian sexual relations has occurred in other countries as well. One recent example is India where the country's highest court over-turned the prohibitions against sex-sex relations on the grounds that they violated the principles of equality and liberty (Timmons 2009).

So great has been this movement that several European countries, Canada, and several states in the United States have recognized same-sex marriages. Also, a US federal court ruled in 2010 that California's ban against same-sex marriage violated the US constitution's guarantee of equal protection and due process (Dolan and Williams 2010). This decision will likely be appealed and reach the Supreme Court.

*Grassroots Penetration*

Many changes in ideas and behaviour have permeated to the grassroots in many places. An educator in Nepal in 2008 informed me that he taught the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on Rights of Children to students in his classes. The children in his classes were learning new beliefs and values, being empowered by international norms, and gaining tools to challenge the authority of their parents. Many other elements of family and marriage change have penetrated the grassroots, including marriage timing and processes, family planning, veils, and polygamy.

Recent research provides considerable evidence that a large proportion of ordinary people around the world understand the ideas of development and developmental hierarchies, believe that many family attributes such as gender equality, low fertility, high ages at marriage, and intergenerational independence are correlated internationally with development levels, believe that development causes family change, and believe that modern families help bring development. Thus, endorsement of developmental idealism is not just an elite phenomenon, but is evident in the beliefs and values of ordinary people (Binstock and Thornton 2007; Mitchell 2009; Thornton, Binstock, and Ghimire 2008; Thornton et al. in press, 2010a; Yount et al. 2010).

*Changes can be Slow but Extensive*

It can take decades, even centuries, for the principles of developmental idealism to be adopted because they are often in competition with well-entrenched beliefs, values, and social and economic arrangements. Many of the examples mentioned above illustrate this fact, and here I mention the efforts for racial and gender equality in Western societies.

Chattel slavery of African Americans was both legal and widespread in colonial British North America in the 1770s. However, Thomas Jefferson, a slave owner invigorated by the Enlightenment, wrote in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” that include “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/freedom/doi/text.html>). Jefferson later served as the third president of the new United States where slavery was enshrined in a constitution that also provided an aggressive Bill of Rights.

Slavery was still widespread more than eighty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In a Senate campaign debate in 1858, Abraham Lincoln argued that the Declaration of Independence applied to African Americans and that slavery was “a moral, social and political wrong” (cited in Goodwin 2005, page 203). His opponent, Stephen Douglas, declared that the “signers of the Declaration of Independence had no reference to negroes at all when they declared all men to be created equal. They did not mean negro, nor the savage Indians, nor the Fejee Islanders, nor any other barbarous race. They were speaking of white men” (cited in Goodwin 2005, page 204). Two years later Lincoln was elected president, the American Civil War commenced, slavery was abolished, and amendments to the US Constitution provided additional rights.

A century later, African Americans were still far from equal or free. Yet, the same principles of freedom and equality that energized Jefferson and Lincoln energized a new civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Junior dreamed that people would be judged by their character and not by the color of their skin. King was assassinated, but over subsequent decades, additional legislation was passed to protect African American rights, prejudice against Blacks declined, restrictions against interracial marriages were declared unconstitutional, affirmative action programs were adopted, and an African American was elected president in 2008. This does not mean that total racial freedom and equality existed in America in 2008, but the contrast with America in 1776 is sharp.

Gender provides another example of the long time frame often associated with change. In 1690 John Locke (1988/1690), a British philosopher, wrote that

women and men came together in marriage as equals, a normative rather than descriptive statement for British society in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A few years later Mary Astell (1690/1730, page 107) asked the simple question, “if *all Men are born Free*, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?”, a challenge that has been heard around the world. Enlightenment writers declared that the status of women was an indicator of development levels in a society, and declarations were passed concerning the rights of women, for example in France in 1791 and the United States in 1848 (Thornton 2005).

It was not until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that women received the right to vote in certain American jurisdictions, but this did not occur in the whole of the US and in most other Western countries until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rights and status of women have generally increased over the past decades. Community identity separate from their husbands, substantial participation in the labour force, educational attainments that often equal and sometimes exceed those of men, and the acceptance of legal equality are some of the many changes in Western societies during the past century. In addition, egalitarian attitudes towards the place of women have expanded dramatically, equal rights for women are enshrined in international treaties, and gender equality is being globalised as an element of world culture. Recent studies document worldwide increases in women’s status and egalitarian gender values (Dorius and Firebaugh 2010; Dorius and Alwin 2009). This does not mean that equality has been achieved, but the changes in that direction have been substantial.

Similar points have been made for Egypt (Abu-Lughod 1998; Yount and Rashad 2008). Egyptians have had tremendous contact over the years with the ideas legitimating female education, women’s employment, nuclear families, and companionate marriage. Ideas about what constitutes proper family life have been transformed. Abu-Lughod (1998, page 261) suggests that “access to any sort of real ‘tradition’ has been made impossible by the historical cultural encounter with the West”. Many aspects of developmental idealism are opposed vigorously in Egypt, but this opposition occurs within the context of a changed cultural reality.

## CLASHES OF CULTURE

The spread of developmental idealism has led to many clashes of culture because developmental idealism brings new values and beliefs that often contradict other beliefs and values. These clashes of culture occur at many levels: within countries; between countries; and within individuals and families. In addition, because developmental idealism contains several different elements, clashes occur within developmental idealism itself. I now discuss these types of culture clashes, beginning with clashes within countries.

*Within Country Culture Clashes*

In many ways the cultural clashes in the United States, which Hunter (1991) refers to as “cultural wars”, are a direct outcome of the spread of developmental idealism. As I mentioned earlier, the world’s people have for centuries had their own cultural models and schemas that have defined their sense of right and wrong. Western Europe and the United States are not exceptions, and culture and laws in these regions have historically opposed contraception, abortion, divorce, same-sex relations, premarital sex, and cohabitation and childbearing outside marriage. The increased acceptance and practice of these behaviors have elicited strong opposition and conflict.

Many clashes of culture in the US can be traced to these issues. The importance of abortion, divorce, same-sex relations, and premarital sex, cohabitation, and childbearing for culture clashes and American politics is demonstrated by research showing that voting patterns are strongly related to the geographical distribution of family behaviours. Geographical distributions of votes in recent US presidential elections and in state-wide initiatives followed closely the geographical distribution of various family attributes (Lesthaeghe and Neidert 2006, 2009). The blue-state red-state distinction in elections is closely related to the extent to which the behaviours supported by developmental idealism are evident in particular jurisdictions.

*International Culture Clashes*

Clashes of culture extend around the world and are often associated with desires for an alternative modernity that is different from the West – a modernity seen as suitable or moral. Many see certain personal and family patterns in the West as immoral and corrupt, with these viewpoints probably enhanced by the exaggerated displays often produced in the Western media that are available internationally. In the Middle East, for example, many people view modern personal and family attributes as largely compatible with their values, but they see Western personal and family life as largely incompatible with their values and view them, and local people who adopt them, as immoral (Yount et al. 2010).

The views of people in the Middle East about the immorality of American personal and family life are related to their views of American morality in general. In recent surveys in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, respondents were asked to rate several countries on morality, and the US was rated the lowest and France the second lowest. In a youth survey in Egypt, the average rating of American

morality on a scale from one to ten only reached 2.1, whereas the average morality ratings for Egypt and Saudi Arabia were respectively 6.5 and 7.2 (Thornton et al. 2010b).

Such international clashes of culture can become intense when people outside the West perceive that the West is imposing its immoral standards on them. This has taken many forms over the centuries as developmental idealism has conflicted with local cultural models. A recent example occurred in Malawi. Two gay men formed an unofficial marriage and were then arrested and sentenced to hard labour. This provoked considerable international outrage, strong communications from international bodies, a visit from the UN Secretary General, and threats to cut off foreign aid. The Malawi government reluctantly reacted to this international pressure by pardoning the two men (Bearak 2010).

The clashes between developmental idealism and local cultures take another form when the beliefs and values of developmental idealism are arrayed against non-Western norms and behaviours that are defined by developmental idealism as being especially backward. There are several examples of values and behaviour that have been labeled and condemned as barbarous, with strong action taken to eliminate them. Polygamy, or one man having multiple wives at the same time, is one example of strenuous fights against so-called barbarism over many years and places (Thornton 2005, 2011). For millennia, polygamy had been considered a legitimate form of marriage in many countries, sometimes viewed as the preferred form of marriage. Yet, for centuries, monogamous Westerners have passed laws and launched campaigns to eliminate the practice in numerous settings around the world, including several in Africa (Phillips 1953).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the US Congress declared polygamy to be illegal and over several decades passed increasingly harsh laws to eliminate the practice within a small religious group (Thornton 2005). These laws were challenged on the basis that they violated religious freedom, but in several decisions, the Supreme Court declared that the principle of freedom did not extend to two women being married to the same man. The primary rationale for these decisions rested on the declaration that polygamy was a barbaric practice contrary to civilized ideals. Such laws have been reaffirmed by the US Supreme Court in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Other local cultural beliefs and practices are being fought around the world. Sometimes these are identified as “harmful cultural practices”. Efforts to eliminate such harmful practices reach into the lives of individuals worldwide. For example, a newspaper advertisement sponsored by UNICEF in Malawi declares: “Stop Harmful Cultural Practices: Every child has a right to good health” (<http://developmentalidealism.org/imagery/malawi.html>). This UNICEF newspaper ad did not specify what it meant by harmful cultural practices, but it is

unlikely that it was aimed at Western cultural practices with negative health outcomes, such as smoking, consumption of junk food, the amount and content of television viewing, or the lack of exercise.

One particular cultural practice that UNICEF is desirous to end is female circumcision, also known as female genital cutting. This practice is widespread in some regions of the world and is currently targeted for elimination. Official statements condemning it, laws outlawing it, and campaigns against it have been implemented in several African countries (Boyle 2002; Yount 2004).

The strong cultural differences within and between societies raises the issue of alternative modernities. Cultural models supporting technology, wealth, health, education, airplanes, computers, and cell phones are relatively widespread internationally, but cultural models about personal and family lives can be very conflicting. These strong differences have led some to advocate alternative modernities and alternative pathways of progress. It has also led to variations in the pathways of change that some individuals and countries have taken.

#### *Clashes of Cultures within Individuals and within Families*

Clashes of culture can also occur within families and within individuals. Individuals can accept both the values and beliefs of their own local culture and the values and beliefs of developmental idealism, and the respective beliefs and values can clash. In many cases, especially when developmental idealism is first encountered, there is probably an easy rejection of it in favor of the long-standing local values and beliefs. As the ideas of developmental idealism become more familiar and understandable, and perhaps as they are accompanied by external incentives and/or sanctions, they start to compete with local values and beliefs within the minds of individuals. Over time, the within individual clashes can become intense.

There are many ways for within-individual culture clashes to be resolved. There can be outright rejection of developmental idealism or the local culture. Another possibility is a hybridization of values and beliefs, with the acceptance and practice of elements from both the local culture and developmental idealism. This hybridization may occur with the integration of disparate ideas into a coherent package, or the elements may fit together awkwardly. The ability to pick and choose, however, may be restricted by the fact that “modernity” and “traditionality” are sometimes seen as “packages” with an all-or-nothing character, with “modernity” in one dimension implying “modernity” in another. People may also adopt developmental idealism superficially and take different stances concerning it in different contexts.

Within family clashes of culture can be especially contentious. As different members of the same family differentially adopt or reject the elements of de-

velopmental idealism, there can be considerable family tension and conflict. Such clashes are often intergenerational, as young people adopt new ideas that are contrary to those of their parents. Such clashes can also occur among siblings, as they differentially accept or reject developmental idealism.

### *Clashes within Developmental Idealism*

The existence of many different values and beliefs within developmental idealism creates numerous opportunities for clashes within developmental idealism itself. There are many ways in which such clashes may occur, but I focus here primarily on clashes between the idea of freedom and the idea that behaviours labeled as backwardness or barbarism should be eliminated. Although freedom may be considered a human right, other values can take precedence. If a particular cultural attribute, usually non-Western, is judged as barbaric from the perspective of developmental idealism, there are often efforts to limit people's freedom to practice it. In short, in some cases people do not have the freedom to practice things labeled by developmental idealism as barbarism.

One such clash occurs in the case of sexual freedom and the practice of polygamy. In many places in the Western world today, freedom allows individuals to have sex with as many different or same sex consenting partners as they desire. Although adultery, a married person having sex with someone other than her/his spouse, is often considered unacceptable, there are no legal sanctions against it in many places today. However, if two women are simultaneously married to the same man, the threesome can be both socially ostracized and criminally sanctioned in some jurisdictions in both Canada and the United States. In fact, a man who has sexual relationships with two women who each say they are married to him is condemned by a larger percentage of Americans than almost any other behaviour (Thornton 2011). The clash between the acceptance of sexual freedom and the condemnation of polygamy is seldom acknowledged.

The Province of British Columbia in Canada is one jurisdiction that both currently criminalizes polygamy and recognizes a potential conflict between the anti-polygamy laws and the principles of freedom and equality. A British Columbia court is currently (May 2011) seeking to determine whether the perceived evils of polygamy trump freedom and equality, and, whatever the decision, it is expected to be appealed all the way to the Canadian Supreme Court. Polygamists in Canada and the United States have also mobilized to advocate for the decriminalization of their form of marriage, with sexual freedom being an important component of their arguments.

Another clash concerns women's dress. Many Westerners today permit almost any dress, except if it covers a woman's face. There is intense political

and legislative debate in several countries in Europe about the freedom for women to wear veils. It will be interesting to see how this clash is resolved in Europe and other settings.

Another clash of cultures within developmental idealism is female circumcision. This practice has been common in certain parts of the world for many centuries, presumably because it was valued in these settings. Powerful international forces have labeled this practice evil and have launched vigorous campaigns to remove freedom to practice it. To my knowledge there is currently no campaign to eliminate male circumcision, which is a form of male genital cutting.

My final example concerns the freedom of parents in rearing their children. Although parents have many such freedoms, their freedom is also limited in many places if they decide their children do not need education or if they decide who their children marry, especially if they make those decisions for very young children.

Of course, clashes between the principles of freedom and protecting what is seen as the public good do not occur only within developmental idealism but occur in many other areas of life. For example, the freedom to shout "fire" in a crowded movie theatre when there is no fire, the freedom to drive while under the influence of alcohol, and the freedom to print counterfeit money are all severely restricted. There are many considerations that enter into such decisions that do not directly involve developmental idealism. It is also not clear how such clashes are ameliorated. My purpose is not to make a judgment in any of these cases, but to illustrate the clashes that can occur among the elements of developmental idealism.

#### FUTURE EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM

As we shift focus from the past to the future, we leave the advantages of hindsight and accept the difficulties of looking forward. I examine the future of family change and conflict within the lens of the developmental idealism perspective. The question is: How does the understanding of developmental idealism and its past influence provide insights into the future?

##### *Continuing Influence and Tension*

My firmest prediction is that developmental idealism will be a powerful future force in (nearly) every part of the world. Developmental idealism has been an extremely strong force in the past and there are no signs that it is weakening.

In fact, with the increasing globalization of the world, the power of developmental idealism may be increasing.

This suggests that many elements of developmental idealism will play out in the future in many ways that are similar to how they occurred in the past. Many practices defined by many in the West as harmful, backward, and barbaric – for example, female genital cutting, polygamy, and women wearing veils – are still evident in many places and will likely continue to be the targets of campaigns to eliminate them. In many places, fertility is still above replacement levels, people marry at young ages, parents arrange the marriages of their children, same sex orientation is repressed, same-sex marriage is not legally recognized, contraceptives fail, gender inequality is widespread, and there is opposition to abortion. Developmental idealism will be used to oppose each of these attributes well into the future.

It is likely that these trends will continue to generate considerable cultural clashes. As noted above, developmental idealism is being advocated among people who have long had their own beliefs and values. Many of these local cultural models continue to clash with developmental idealism, and these clashes are not likely to disappear soon. It is easy to predict long-term continuation of these cultural clashes within countries, between countries, within individuals and families, and within developmental idealism itself.

#### *Pathways of Future Change*

The part of the future just discussed seems easy to predict. What are more difficult to ascertain are the particular decisions and pathways of future change and continuity. I will speculate on such directions, but because my crystal ball is cloudy, I will primarily ask questions to consider as we think about the future.

I begin by asking what will happen if same-sex marriage is considered by the US Supreme Court, as it likely will. Will the Court declare that states have the right to restrict marriage to heterosexual couples? If the Court decides that states do not have this right, will there be a constitutional amendment? And, what will the American people support and not support? Similarly, will same-sex relations be decriminalized in Malawi and other parts of the world? And, if so, will same-sex couples in Malawi and elsewhere eventually be able to contract legal marriages? Such questions can be raised on many other issues in numerous places.

*Possible Limitations on Developmental Idealism*

I mentioned earlier the clashes between various elements of developmental idealism and discussed some ways that certain freedoms are restricted. It may also be useful to contemplate the possibility of other limits on freedom, equality, individualism, and the necessity of consent. One area where this seems relevant today concerns the rearing of children. At what point do children have the right to determine their own educational programs and activities? What are the rights of parents in this? In many Western societies age at marriage is increasing and age at sexual initiation is declining. Are there any minimum legitimate limits on ages for sexual intercourse that parallel the specifications in many places of a minimum age for contracting marriage? Will children of any age have the right to have sexual relations with any other child, as long as the two are willing and able?

I mentioned earlier that in some places fertility rates are substantially below what is needed for population replenishment. Is there any limit on how low fertility can or will go? Will a new equilibrium – or new equilibriums in different places – be found in age at marriage and the number of people ever marrying? Or will age at marriage and the number who never marry continue to increase? Are there any real limitations on the number of marital dissolutions that occur and will society reach some kind of equilibrium in this regard? Are there limitations on the extent to which human beings, social animals for sure, can operate as individuals rather than as members of social units?

*Challenges to Western Exports*

I earlier raised the issue of the exportation and, in some cases, imposition of Western values and practices in many parts of the world. Such exportation and imposition is often accomplished by the identification of the values and practices originating in the West as universal and modern. This exportation and importation is also benefited by the designation of the West as an advanced role model for societies seen as less developed.

This exportation of Western cultural models as universal and modern is frequently effective, but it is also sometimes recognized and criticized (“Some say they don’t want them” 2010; Clayton and Banda 2010). Such cultural models are sometimes recognized as simply foreign and inappropriate for a given society (Chimbwete et al. 2005). This seems to be true in many places, as people wonder about alternative models of modernity considered to be more suitable. They ask, is Sweden an appropriate model for the US, and are the US and Sweden appropriate models for Hungary, Egypt, and Kenya? Will asking such questions increase in the future, with non-Westerners increasingly asking where

Westerners got the right to be models of the good and to tell them what is moral and immoral in their own societies? If this occurs, how much will it detract from the power of developmental idealism as an international force? Will the exportation and importation of Western cultural models under the labels of universal, modern, and progressive values continue into the indefinite future?

Another dimension of this is the disdain by many of Western cultural patterns. As I discussed earlier, some Western cultural practices are seen as immoral by many people in the Middle East and elsewhere. In addition, Western countries are not always on the side of developmental idealism. They can take opposite positions when they see them to be in their own national interests. Support of repressive governments when they are supportive of Western economic or political interests is one example of this.

## CONCLUSION

I close with the observation that there is considerable evidence consistent with the conclusion that developmental idealism and its integration into world culture have been important forces for family and marriage change in the West and elsewhere. Establishing causation is always difficult, especially since cultural models and changes in those models are infrequently measured, but there are many reasons to believe there are causal effects. Developmental idealism is not the only force for change as there are many other ideational and material forces, and its spread has been the locus of much resistance, tension, and conflict. But, over long time frames, its influence has been enormous, although local cultural schemas also guide the change and often persist, although often in modified form. This understanding of developmental idealism and its spread provides a framework for understanding family change, resistance to family change, and many cultural tensions within and between societies.

Developmental idealism also provides a useful framework for thinking about the future. There are many reasons to expect that many aspects of the future will be like the past. The principles of developmental idealism will continue to be advocated, exported, and imported. They will also continue to be resisted. Cultural clashes within and between countries, within individuals and their families, and within developmental idealism itself will continue. There will continue to be contradictions, and there may be limitations on how far developmental idealism can be implemented.

The past has been full of surprises. Any Rip van Winkle who was to awaken from a long sleep would be surprised – and probably shocked – by the many changes. The coming centuries will probably be as full of surprises as the last two centuries. The developmental idealism framework and this paper do not provide much assistance in specifying what pathways are the best for what

people, but they do provide an overview of some of the issues that will enter into the international flow of change and continuity in marriage and family relations. They also provide a framework for understanding the terrain of the journey. The framework also provides impetus for further research concerning the beliefs of policy makers and ordinary people about developmental idealism, the factors producing the associated values and beliefs, the consequences for family and marriage change, and the implications of these issues for international relations.

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