

Subalternity and Entrepreneurship*

Tales of marginalized but enterprising characters, oppressive settings and haunting plots

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Abstract

Entrepreneurs are cultural creatures and culture affects how they conceive their opportunities, how they determine and pursue their interests. Understanding entrepreneurship in any particular context, thus, requires us to pay attention to prevailing cultural beliefs as well as the formal and informal institutions which affect economic behavior. This paper adopts the important but seldom used approach of focusing upon the tales of entrepreneurship prevalent in a given culture. We argue that to get a sense of the economic culture in a particular context, it is crucial to focus on a culture's success and failure stories tell about how to get ahead. Arguably, this approach is particularly important if our goal is to understand entrepreneurship amongst subaltern / marginalized groups. Using fiction from the former Soviet-bloc, where a one dimensional form of entrepreneurship flourished even within the command economy; and literature from Anglophone-Africa and the British Caribbean, where black entrepreneurship had to contend with brutal colonial rule and post-colonial corruption - this paper highlights how entrepreneurs were influenced by culture in these contexts and explores the origins of these cultural factors.

Keywords: Africa, Russia, Colonialism, Corruption, Culture, Entrepreneurship

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Introduction

There exists a wealth of conceptual literature examining the relationship between culture (shared values and beliefs) and enterprise. Since Weber's (1930) discussion of how the spirit of modern capitalism in the West led to economic prosperity, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and entrepreneurship scholars have focused on how culture impacts economic activity (see, Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright 2001; Chamlee-Wright 1993 and 1997; Granovetter 2004; Gudeman 1986; Harrison and Huntington 2000; Berger 1991; Bird-David 1992a and 1992b; and Boettke and Storr 2002). Much of the empirical work within the entrepreneurship literature has concentrated on how differences in national cultures affect either rates of entrepreneurship or the characteristics of entrepreneurs in that context. It does not concern itself with voices from the margins.

Following Hofstede (1980), entrepreneurship scholars have argued that cultures that are more individualistic, more comfortable with uncertainty, more masculine and have low power-distance are likely to have higher levels of entrepreneurship. Thus collectivist, risk adverse, feminine, and high power-distance cultures are likely to have lower levels of entrepreneurship. As Hayton *et al* (2002: 34) argue Hofstede's taxonomy of cultural values and their effects on entrepreneurship has inspired much of the behavioral research that exists on the relationship between national culture and enterprise. Using either Hofstede's results or other surveys that try to measure national or regional culture, studies like Shane's (1992 and 1993) and Davidson's (1995) have discussed culture's impact on national rates of innovation and firm-formation rates, respectively. These studies corroborate Hofstede's contention that a certain set of national and regional cultural characteristics is related to the national and regional levels of entrepreneurship (Hayton *et al* 2002: 35).

The other major strand of empirical work regarding culture and entrepreneurship has relied on surveys of entrepreneurs in various cultures focusing on how entrepreneurs differ across countries or regions (Hayton, *et al* 2002: 37). Shreinberg and MacMillan (1988) and Shane *et al* (1991) discuss how the motives of entrepreneurs differ across cultures. McGrath *et al* (1992) and Mueller and Thomas (2000), on the other hand, focus on the similarities between entrepreneurs across contexts. Similarly, Morrison (1999: 68) concluded that the ideal-typical entrepreneur, regardless of culture, 'is intelligent and analytical; is an effective risk manager and networker;

possesses a strong set of moral, social and business ethics, exhibits a basic trader's instinct; and is dedicated to life-long learning in its many forms.' Entrepreneurs regardless of context appear to have higher masculinity, individualism scores and lower uncertainty avoidance scores than non-entrepreneurs in their respective countries.

Regional and country-specific studies have, however, taught us a great deal about the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship in certain contexts. Entrepreneurs in the former Soviet-bloc and Britain's black colonies, for instance, have relatively high levels of distrust and low levels of perceived internal locus of control. Using fiction from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and literature from Anglophone-Africa and the West Indies this paper considers the position of the subaltern in relation to entrepreneurship in these contexts. Our aim is to *get at* the cultural frames which guide subaltern entrepreneurs and to explain the origins of some of the cultural attitudes and factors that impact entrepreneurship in these regions. A narrative based approach, we contend, is particularly suited for recovering subaltern voices and understanding the tales of marginalized peoples.

Section II, describes the methodology employed in this paper and outlines the case for using literature to understand the relationship between culture and enterprise, especially in marginalized contexts. This follows Nummela and Welch's (2006) charge that in order to better understand international entrepreneurship, 'there is a need to broaden our viewpoint, look outside our own research traditions, and offer fresh perspectives.' Though perhaps relatively new to entrepreneurship studies, the approach is not a novel one. Storr (2004) applied this method to a single context using literature and folklore from the Bahamas to discuss the models of entrepreneurship that competed for cultural dominance. Moreover, the use of literature and other cultural productions to make sense of economic life is not without precedent within the field of economics. Similarly, *reading* cultural works like novels to better understand a given culture is common in cultural studies and anthropology.

Section III, focuses on the kinds of cultural practices that became common under the Soviet-style systems that prevailed in twentieth century Central and Eastern Europe. Next, *Section IV* discusses how colonialism and neo-colonialism 'distorted' entrepreneurial lenses in Anglophone-Africa and the British West Indies. *Section V* offers concluding remarks.

Method

This paper argues for an alternate approach to the study of the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship than is typically found in the entrepreneurship literature. We contend that an important but little pursued method for getting closer to the culture of entrepreneurship in a particular context is to focus on the tales of entrepreneurship that prevail in that context. To get a sense of the economic culture in a particular place, we argue, it is important to focus on the stories that exist about success and failure and the myths that people believe about how to get ahead. Why focus on stories? First, efforts to score cultural traits must necessarily reduce cultures, which are inherently rich, dynamic and complex, to collections of measurable characteristics (e.g. indices of individualism and masculinity). The color, the verve, the flavor of the different varieties of entrepreneurship that exists gets lost in this move to come up with quantitative measures of culture (see Storr 2006). Secondly, culture not only affects levels of entrepreneurial activity but also the kinds of activities perceived as entrepreneurial. As Rhen and Taalas (2004) discuss, what counts as entrepreneurship is not easy to determine and varies across (and is contested within) different cultures. Thirdly, and most important for our purposes here, these studies have tended to ignore marginalized voices. Entrepreneurship, however, is the engine of economic development (Harper 2003) so understanding the challenges facing subaltern entrepreneurs is critical to understanding the prospects of the world's poorest.

Spivak ([1988] 1995) famously articulated that the subaltern cannot speak. By this, she doesn't mean that they are mute, that they are unable to tell us their stories, that they cannot complain about their conditions, or that they cannot protest. They can and do cry out when they are wronged. Rather, she meant that no one listens to their cries, their tales, their complaints or their protestations. According to Spivak, the subaltern are the perpetual, voiceless and unrecoverable 'Other' in the hegemonic discourse that is taking place in the centre and that continues to (negatively) impact subaltern lives in the periphery. The subaltern, simply, does not have a seat at the boardroom tables where discussions take place, like those over development strategies, which have a tremendous impact on subaltern lives (Escobar 1995).

Our task, Spivak insists, is not to protect to the subaltern nor should we attempt to speak on their behalf. Spivak views this as a dubious project since it perpetuates rather than helps end subalternity. Instead, we must create spaces from which the subaltern can speak for themselves and be heard. Spivak writes, 'who the hell wants to protect subalternity? - Only extremely reactionary, dubious anthropologicist museumizers. No activist wants to keep the subaltern in the space of difference . . . You don't give the

subaltern voice. You work for the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity.'

Yet how do we work against subalternity? How do we recover and recognize subaltern voices? How do we as entrepreneurship scholars ensure that we're listening to the subaltern? Embracing qualitative approaches to our empirical work, especially ethnographic methods can ensure that we open ourselves up to marginalized voices. As Geertz (1983: 57) explains, (correctly done) ethnography can

...produce an interpretation of the way a people lives which is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by the witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer.

Economic anthropologists (and some economists) have profitably employed these methods teaching us much about how economic practices differ across cultures. Bird-David (1992b), for instance, has argued that different communities organize their economic lives on the basis of different 'primary metaphors' which color how people think about their opportunities, their situations and their relationships. Bird-David discovered that the metaphor of 'forest as parent' informs economic life amongst the Nayaka. This metaphor, which deprecates land ownership as everyone is considered a child of the forest with rights to its bounty, differs significantly from the metaphor which underpins economic life throughout the West, where private property is key.

Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright (2001: 22) similarly argue that we get at culture 'by way of intimate, detailed, qualitative research, immersed in the complex context of one particular situation'. We get at culture by *reading* cultural texts. To get a sense of a people's worldviews and values, watch the movies and television shows that they watch, read the books and poems that they read and write, listen to their folktales, examine the photographs they take and the art (paintings, sketches, and sculptures) they produce. For Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright (*ibid.*, 53) 'If you want to get a sense of whether a community is apt to grow wealthier, we are suggesting you find out what stories they tell, what myths they believe, what heroes they admire, what metaphors they use.' Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright focused on how the culture industries in the U.S. portrayed businessmen. Although there were cases where wealthy business characters used their fortunes for good, Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright (*ibid.*, 87) found that most businessmen were portrayed as morally bankrupt. The U.S. cultural industry, they argue, both reflects and transmits American attitudes toward successful businesses and businessmen.

A people's literature, similarly, teaches us much about their lives, beliefs and values. As novelist Toni Morrison (1993: 372) observed, 'narrative remains the best ways to learn anything' and, as Preston (1995: 943) remarked, 'the imaginative reach of personal narrative and other forms of more literary writing allows us important access into the lives of particular people in particular places.' Economists have long recognised the value of literature as a pedagogical tool and as a source of data for their research efforts. As Watts (2002: 378) discovered, 'there are a surprising number of economists who have used literary sources.' Economic historians, Watts (*ibid.*) notes, have cited passages from authors like Swift and Defoe, game theorists have analyzed characters and situations from works of fiction, and economists have also analyzed economic arguments and ideas that have appeared in fictional passages (*ibid.*). Watts (*ibid.*) highlighted several ways that economists of a 'literary bent' use literature; as a way of '(a) describing human behavior and motivations more eloquently, powerfully, or humorously than economists typically do, and thereby make economists' writing more interesting and effective; [and] (b) using literary descriptions as basic evidence of individual behavior or of economic conditions and institutions in a particular time and place.'

Using literary descriptions as basic evidence of economic conditions and institutions can be profitably employed in trying to understand the circumstances of marginalized populations. Members of the subaltern can and do speak through their imaginative productions. As Schiff (1979: 73) writes, 'ethnic voices, when they speak of oppression, state their theme with authority.' Literature can bring the tales of the subaltern to life not only by providing eloquent accounts of subaltern lives but, when written by members of these groups, they can give us tremendous insight into the life-ways and mental models of the subaltern. 'The Novel' as Lamming (1983, xxxvii) writes, 'had had a peculiar function in the Caribbean. The writer's preoccupation has been mainly with the poor; and fiction has served as a way of restoring these lives – this world of men and women from down below – to a proper order of attention; to make their reality the supreme concern of the total society.' The 'Novel' has undoubtedly played a similarly restorative function amongst other marginalized peoples. Novelists like Gogol and Havel in Central and Eastern Europe and Ngugi, Armah and Achebe in Africa, have spoken quite eloquently about subaltern lives from a subaltern perspective and have done much to teach us about politics, economics and culture in those contexts. Indeed, as Preston (1995: 949) writes, 'literary writing has far more potential than generic, rigorous analytical prose to reach into the deep and often unsavory ... forces that divide or join people.' Critical to understanding the economic lives of marginalized peoples, our chief concern here, literature from the margins can show how culture has impacted entrepreneurship in

these communities. Consequently, our discussion of the relationship between culture and economy in the former communist and colonized countries will rely on this literature.

This paper deploys the literary descriptions of the subaltern in several contexts in order to illuminate the cultural circumstances of subaltern entrepreneurs and to speak to the origins of those circumstances. This approach offers a way to overcome the challenge of incorporating marginalized voices into the discourse about entrepreneurship. Although there are obviously great differences between these regions, the former Soviet bloc and Britain's black colonies were selected because of (a) the undeniable presence of subaltern peoples and (b) the wealth of literary descriptions of the subaltern in those contexts. These criteria would obviously apply to other regions as well but we attempted to balance the tradeoff between breadth and depth in hopes of showing the value of a narrative based approach in multiple settings but realizing that looking at even two regions would mean that we would have to at times paint with broad strokes, broader than we would prefer. Additionally, the body of literature of a people can be overwhelmingly vast, touch on a variety of themes and is often impossible to master. This was certainly true of the literatures that we engage below. Here again we attempted to strike a balance between depth over breadth because our aim is primarily illustrative. A number of the novels from these regions engage subjects that are simply irrelevant for our purposes here and so they are not touched on in this study. The novels and stories that we do focus on below were selected because they offer rich fodder to consider the relationship between subalternity and entrepreneurship in the selected regions. Decisions about which themes to focus on and which to ignore in the presentation below were guided, where possible, by the entrepreneurship studies that look at culture in the selected regions. The novels selected offer rich illustrations of some of the cultural challenges facing subaltern entrepreneurs and they offer clues to the source of some of the cultural attitudes that color entrepreneurship in these regions. As such, the examples presented below both illustrate points that were made elsewhere in entrepreneurship studies and offer narratives that present the cultural circumstances of subaltern entrepreneurs in a way that is impossible without employing a narrative based approach, as we do here.

Culture and entrepreneurship in Russia and the former Soviet-Bloc

Entrepreneurship studies have stressed the importance of personal networks for entrepreneurs in pre- and post-Soviet Central and Eastern Europe. As Batjargal (2006: 309) has described, for instance, 'Personalizing any relationship is a key cultural feature of the Russians for many centuries.' The inability

of the Soviet economy to consistently deliver the goods necessary for survival meant that Russians had 'to mobilize resources from informal sources such as family and friends' (ibid.). Blat, the value of your connections or, more specifically, the amount of pull that an individual has with suppliers, government clerks, or any other actor who trades in relational capital, all important before the collapse of communism, remains an important part of economic life in Russia. For discussions of the economic implications of blat, see Hewett (1988), Boettke (2001) and Ledeneva (1998). Indeed, this 'economy of favors' emerged as a means of overcoming the persistent shortages and inherent weaknesses of the Soviet system continues to play a considerable role in the distribution of resources in post-Soviet Russia. As Gaddy and Ickes (2001) demonstrated relationships in Russia have been transformed into relational capital. Because this relational-capital cannot be easily cashed out or transferred, however, the personalised nature of the Soviet economy lingered in the post-Soviet Russian economy. Personal ties are not only valuable, they are self-protective and quite robust as well, since those who would lose relational-capital if the ties were broken are the only ones in a position to break them.

The flip side of this reliance on relations is that Russians have tended to maintain a narrow radius of trust. Arguably, this tendency (distrustfulness) predates the Soviet Union and has a long history in Russia. Nevertheless, the Soviet experience contributed to the prevalence and depth of this feeling. Batjargal (2006: 317) has suggested that Russian entrepreneurs typically 'search for partners within limited spatial and temporal boundaries' and describes them as being 'relationally inert' (ibid.). Batjargal writes, 'past investments in contacts tie them up tightly with old contacts and prevent them from going actively [after] new contacts who are potential clients, suppliers, investors' (ibid.). Russian entrepreneurs' networks have not expanded since the Soviet-system collapsed, he found, because of 'widespread distrust, suspicion and attitudinal ambivalence among the Russians' (ibid.).

Not surprisingly, it is possible to find tales in Russian literature that speak to this tendency of Russian entrepreneurs to rely on relational capital and maintain a narrow radius of trust. More than speaking to the existence or prevalence of these cultural traits and how they impact entrepreneurs, these tales add another dimension. They offer insight into how and why these attitudes toward strangers developed and how these characteristics enter into and affect enterprise in this context. Indeed, the Russian entrepreneur's 'distrust, suspicion and attitudinal ambivalence' is understandable given who emerges as the heroes in these tales and the way that strangers and entrepreneurship are portrayed.

Consider, for instance, Gogol's *Dead Souls* (Gogol 1996) a tale of economic life in Russia under serfdom, where both the Russian conception of entrepreneurship as an act of deception and their suspicion of strangers receive eloquent treatment. *Dead Souls* tells the tale of Chichikov, a dismissed civil servant and would be feudal lord, who prospers not by producing something of value but through trickery and guile. In his Russia, feudal lords were forced to pay taxes on their slave holdings. Strangely, landowners remained liable for their serfs who died after the last census, that is, until a new census was taken. Sensing an opportunity to outwit the system, Chichikov plans to buy the souls of these dead serfs and to use them as collateral in order to borrow the funds he needs to finance his own estate. Though he is challenged in the courts, his scheme succeeds. Gogol portrays Chichikov as an economic hero and his narrative suggests that the quickest way to succeed is to manipulate the system, to direct your entrepreneurial attention toward 'get rich quick schemes' and extra- and quasi-legal opportunities to attain wealth. Additionally, Gogol's tale highlights the Russian tendency towards wariness when dealing with strangers that Batjargal (2006) emphasizes. Another lesson relates to getting ahead by using connections (and the names of dead serfs), although, as Gogol shows, this advancement comes at a high cost. Gogol understands but does not like this aspect of his hero. As Gogol (1996, 392-393) charges his readers, 'the dishonest practice of accepting bribes has become a necessity... [but a good Russian] must rise up against falsity.' Gogol's book formed the basis of another novel *The Heart of a Dog* (Bulgakov, 1925) in which the same story is transplanted from the era of serfdom to 1920s Soviet Russia when the New Economic Policy was in force.

Another possible explanation for the 'distrust' that Batjargal (2006) claims has a long history in Russia and is simply a part of the Russian culture is that communism was a system that corrupted almost everyone and that it is the lessons learned during communism that continues to color entrepreneurship in post-Soviet Russia and the rest of the former Soviet-bloc (Kuran 1995). Several tales that describe life under communism illustrate this point. In *The Beggar's Opera* (1975), Havel's 'translation' of John Gay's 18th novel of the same name, for instance, every man is either a thief or a pimp and every woman is either a prostitute or a madam. Czech writer, Milan Kundera, explores a similar theme, noting that communism corrupted everyone and pleased few. His novel, *The Joke* (Kundera, 1992), explains how one simple joke mailed to a girl as a flirtatious enticement by the hero Ludvig destroyed his political career. The lesson is a stark one that any form of honesty might wind up destroying one's future. In learning to conform, Ludvig felt forced into false friendships, he lost his ability to have any real relationships, since he, 'lost...any chance of resurrecting (his) trust in men' (ibid., 115). The moral is clear - honesty is

dangerous in a society based upon lies.

Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* (Bulgakov, 1996) also highlights the theme of corruption under communism and the resulting 'distrust' of others it engenders. This novel was banned in the Soviet Union with only a heavily censored version appearing in state-authorized outlets. The full novel, however, was available through *samizdat* (clandestine distribution channels). The novel deals with the lives of ordinary Muscovites as a people who, because of the structure of Soviet society and its failings, are weary of strangers, are haunted by the secret police, and are forced into petty corruptions in order to survive. Bulgakov presents them as a people who love money but have become corrupted by it.

Similarly, in the story of *Milan*, in Simecka's *The Year of the Frog* (Simecka, 1981), the nameless hero has to pretend to be someone else to overcome his father's legacy as a dissident who wound up in the prison camps. The hero is pitied by some for his plight, shunned by others, but is in no way a content and willing participant in the life he is forced to live whilst feeling like 'vomiting.' (Simecka 1981: 7). The hero goes from one job to another, all of which he is over-qualified for and none of which are able to make up for all of the opportunities that he lost because of his father's position. In addition to being a novel about having to 'live a lie,' this is also a novel of frustration of living under a system that blames you for your place in society, whether or not it was one you chose, and that gives one little in the place of all that it takes away. In the novel, there was no way that an individual could find out what his natural abilities were, since he lived under another's plan, never his own. Stated another way, in addition to speaking to the distrust that communism engenders, Simecka describes this society as one which breeds a perception of an external locus of control.

As Rupke (1978) showed, levels of perceived internal locus of control are positively correlated with entrepreneurship across cultures. Kaufman *et al* (1995) discovered, however, that even Russian entrepreneurs had significantly lower levels of perceived internal control than U.S. entrepreneurs. Zamyatin's *We* (Zamyatin, 2006), which was banned in the USSR because it is a critique of the dystopian aspirations of Sovietism, speaks to why people who have lived under communism possess low levels of perceived internal locus of control than others. The novel set in the fictional 'One State', parodies Soviet Russia with its lack of individuality. The hero D-503 is perfectly content until he falls in love with I-330 and develops an imagination which is prohibited because it breeds discontent and breaks the rules. To find happiness D-503 submits to an operation to remove imagination and soul. The Soviet system,

Zamyatin's novel suggests, stripped men of their individuality, imagination, humanity and essence. The Soviet system, as portrayed in *We*, is a deeply alienating social system where the locus of control rests with the state .

Rehn and Taalas (2004: 237) have argued that '*the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics might be seen as the most entrepreneurial society ever*. In fact, one can, with a specific notion of entrepreneurship in mind,' they contend, 'claim that the system forced all citizens to become micro-entrepreneurs, to enact entrepreneurship in even the most mundane facets of everyday life.' According to Ledeneva (1998), for the subaltern under Soviet-rule, securing the basic goods needed for survival meant relying on connections, calling in favors, and operating in the black market. As he argues, the subaltern correctly perceived that in order to enjoy greater material comforts you had to be a member the *nomenklatura* (the political elite) or be willing to use trickery to get ahead. Under communism, Ledeneva (ibid.) found, the successful entrepreneurs (as economic heroes) were individuals who used deception, were corrupt, and enjoyed political patronage. The novels discussed above confirm the findings by Batjargal (2006), Kaufman *et al* (1995) and others about entrepreneurship in the former Soviet-bloc and suggests that the effects of communism still colors entrepreneurship in that region. Entrepreneurship was pervasive under communism but it was entrepreneurship of a type directed at achieving what was possible in a system where shortages and inefficiencies abound. An entrepreneurship distorted by the 'widespread distrust, suspicion and attitudinal ambivalence among the Russians' (Batjargal 2006, 317). Not the absence of entrepreneurs, but the existence of a worldview that celebrated confidence men as economic heroes (as in Gogol's novel), that viewed everyone with some suspicion (as in Kundera's work) and is characterized by an external locus of control (as in Zamyatin's *We*).

Culture and entrepreneurship in Britain's black colonies

The relationship between colonialism, neo-colonialism and entrepreneurship has received little attention in the entrepreneurship literature. No articles that deal substantively with this nexus have been published between 2000 and 2006 in ten key entrepreneurship journals the authors consulted. Elsewhere, however, we have argued that colonialism leads to lower levels of entrepreneurship and higher levels of corruption (Storr 2002). Colonialism was a system where only those who had innate privilege (i.e. the colonizers), those who received political patronage, or those who employed deception in their business practices could succeed. As a result, the colonized either convinced themselves that success is impossible and so do

not try or they begin to equate success in business with connections, bribery, kickbacks, etc.

Although they do not deal specifically with colonialism, the profile of black entrepreneurship, as being hampered and distorted in post-Independence Africa and the West Indies because of their colonial and neo-colonial experiences, is confirmed by the few studies that do exist on entrepreneurship in these regions. Corruption and perceptions of external locus of control, these studies conclude, have dulled entrepreneurial success among the subaltern in Africa and the Anglophone Caribbean. Ryan (1995), for instance, has concluded that levels of entrepreneurship amongst blacks in the Caribbean are relatively low for a number of factors including cultural ones. Ramachandran and Shah (1999), similarly, found that European and Indian owned firms outperformed black-owned firms in Sub-Saharan Africa and that black entrepreneurs had less education and lacked the critical networks that their white counterparts enjoyed. Additionally, as Kiggundu (2002: 250) summarizes, *Kalabule* (Ghana) and *Magendo* (Uganda) are two societal practices, which illustrate the challenges of African entrepreneurship. These practices both refer to illicit, improper, or illegal business conduct used to criminalize entrepreneurial activities in order to allow those in positions of control and influence to make quick and illegal money. These practices, which Kiggundu asserts are unfortunately quite commonplace across the African continent, affect entrepreneurs in a variety of sectors (from taxi drivers to store owners) and undermined 'trust and confidence among entrepreneurs' (ibid.).

Anglophone African and Caribbean novelists have explored these very themes. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease* (Achebe, 1960), draws our attention to a common attitude in Nigeria (and elsewhere) regarding *blat*. Reasoning on the difficulty of keeping ones hands clean in a context where corruption is rampant, Obi, Achebe's (1960, 100) leading character laments, refusing a bribe can create more problems than accepting them. Although Obi, a mid-level bureaucrat in the Nigerian government, finds his society's permissive attitude toward corruption abhorrent and so struggles to stay clean, his tale is, in the end, a tragic one. He is simply unable to resist the temptation. Achebe's Nigeria in *No Longer At Ease* is a corrupt society that corrupts everyone where entrepreneurs deal in bribes and public officials expect kick-backs.

Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah tells a similar tale in his novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Armah, 1968), albeit with a more hopeful ending. This is the story of a man who tries to resist the

insidious system of bribes and corruption that exists in his country, only to face ridicule from his compatriots and the disappointing looks of his family members. Set in post-Independence Ghana, where the 'national game' of theft and bribery is so common 'that the point of holding out against it escapes the unsettled mind' (Armah 1968: 109), Armah's novel is not only an extraordinary exegesis of the deleterious effects of corruption but it demonstrates vividly how difficult it is to overcome the cultural and institutional pressures to exist in that system. Indeed, to his compatriots he is either a fool or a coward for taking 'refuge in honesty' (ibid., 51). Even his wife ridicules him, likening him to the conflicted chichidodo bird, who 'hates excrement with all its soul. But the chichidodo only feeds on maggots, and you know the maggots grow best inside the lavatory' (ibid., 45). He wants to eat but does not like how and where the food grows. After all, in Ghana 'everybody prospers from the job he does' (ibid., 32). And, 'the foolish ones are those who cannot live life the way it is lived by all around them, those who will stand by the flowing river and disapprove of the current. There is no other way, and the refusal to take the leap will help absolutely no one at any time' (ibid., 108).

Ngugi wa Thiongo's mythical novel *Devil on the Cross* (Ngugi, 1982) explores the perceptions of entrepreneurs that can develop in a context where corruption is prevalent. In his tale, entrepreneurs are not seen as producers but as parasites. As Gitutu, a character in the novel queries, 'How do think you think Grogan and Delamere became rich? I would sleep with my mother before I believed that it was their own sweat that made them so wealthy. . . . Who has ever become rich by his own sweat? Who has ever become rich through his salary alone?' (Ngugi, 1982, 102). In Ngugi's original tale, the devil ('Satan, the King of Hell') hosts a competition between Kenyan entrepreneurs to see which one is the biggest thief and robber. Entrepreneur after entrepreneur mounts the stage to brag about their wealth (their cars, their homes, their women), to tell of their conquests and to share their philosophies on business; 'he will tell us how he first came to steal and rob and where he has stolen and robbed,' the master of ceremonies announced, 'and then he will tell us briefly his thoughts on how to perfect our skills in theft and robbery' (ibid., 87). Ngugi's characters consistently link entrepreneurship and theft.

Several Anglo-Caribbean cultural texts, similarly, link entrepreneurship to theft, corruption, and shady dealings. In Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (Lamming 1970), for instance, the local businessman is named Mr. Slime. Antiguan novelist Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (Kincaid 1988), similarly, recounts how commonplace it is for politicians and bureaucrats in Antigua to become successful entrepreneurs by using and misusing their public offices. She describes how even the wives, girlfriends and associates of

politicians are able to become successful entrepreneurs because they benefit from government contracts and are granted exclusive distribution rights over certain imports. Colonialism, Kincaid asserts, is to blame for all of this corruption. As she (ibid.: 34) asks of her former colonizers, 'Have you ever wondered to yourself why it is that all people like me seem to have learned from you is ... how to take the wealth of our country and place it in Swiss bank accounts? ... how to corrupt our societies ...? You will have to accept that this is mostly your fault.'

The studies that deal with entrepreneurship in Britain's black colonies have described black entrepreneurship in these regions as lagging behind entrepreneurship amongst other ethnic groups in these countries. As Boxill (2003) explains, these differences between entrepreneurs in the same political and economic environments have led entrepreneurship scholars to look to cultural factors to explain relatively low levels of black entrepreneurship. The novels discussed above confirm the findings of Kiggundu (2002) and Ryan (1995) that entrepreneurship in Britain's black colonies are colored by perceptions of entrepreneurship as corruption (as in *Devil on the Cross*) and links those perceptions with colonialism (as in *A Small Place*). The novels also offer thick expositions of the cultural milieu that can constrain black entrepreneurship in these regions.

Discussion

Why should we listen to subaltern voices? What can they teach us about how culture affects entrepreneurship, about how corruption affects entrepreneurship, about how totalitarian, oppressive social systems affect entrepreneurship even after those systems have begun to wither away? What can we learn about the challenges that those oppressed peoples who have lived through and survived communism and colonialism face by paying attention to their stories? Can novels written by members of these oppressed groups and set in these oppressive contexts help us to understand subalternity and entrepreneurship?

Previous studies on the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship have primarily relied on survey data to get at cultural traits. This approach has proven to be quite fruitful. There are, however, some gaps in that literature. Extant studies have tended to ignore marginalized voices and typically reduce culture to a collection of indices. Using subaltern literature, however, fills in both gaps. In particular, the approach allows us to readily focus on (a) the psychic toll that communism and

colonialism exacted on their victims and (b) the challenges that the subaltern must contend with and overcome as they engage in entrepreneurship.

The novels discussed are meant to be illustrative and were chosen because they contained subaltern voices and described in vivid detail subaltern attitudes toward business dealings and their perceptions of their prospects from economic success. As is clear from the discussion above, however, colonialism and communism were corrupting systems that forced people to live a lie; that encouraged them to be suspicious of strangers; that led several of them to equate business success with bribes, kickbacks and *blat*. Kundera's Ludvig learns the hard way to be distrustful of others. Gogol's Chichikov who trades in the dead souls of serfs and Ngugi's Kihaahu who leaves no crumbs when he eats are representative models of successful entrepreneurs, if not economic heroes.

How next to proceed? Further research is needed along several paths. Firstly, there is a dearth of studies on the relationship between entrepreneurship and corruption. The various ways that corruption can distort, redirect and dampen entrepreneurial energies is an important and understudied line of research. Secondly, many marginalized people are engaged in the informal economy. Reports have suggested that more than half of the economic activity in poor countries occurs with the informal economy (see, Abedian and Desmidt 1990). The above study suggests that using subaltern literature can give us insight into subaltern attitudes and beliefs and that much of the subaltern's economic activity occurs within the informal sector (unlicensed, untaxed, underground enterprises). We do not, however, spend much time in this study applying this method to the informal economy, *per se*. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this discussion of subalternity and entrepreneurship stressed the cultural barriers to subaltern entrepreneurship and not the cultural tools that might spur their success. There must, however, be more optimistic tales or more opportunistic readings of the above tales that can be utilised. There are no such things as progress-prone and progress-resistant cultures - all cultures are diverse and can draw on (perhaps muted) tales that encourage entrepreneurship.

We can learn much from the legacies of entrepreneurship within these contexts (Boxill 2003). We can tell new tales and underline old ones. Writers from subaltern cultures can write a) Novels where the conceptual link between piracy and business, a link that makes sense given their experiences with colonialism and communism, is challenged and broken; b) Plays where the permissive attitude toward political patronage and corruption are called into question; c) Songs where the heroes are successful businessmen who prospered by knowing the right things and not by knowing the right people. The work

of development, this study suggests, needs to be done by local poets, singers, novelists, playwrights and artisans. To repeat a previous quote, 'if you want to get a sense of whether a community is apt to grow wealthier, we are suggesting you find out what stories they tell, what myths they believe, what heroes they admire, what metaphors they use' (Lavoie and Chamlee-Wright 2001: 53). Poets can stir our progress, but as students of subalternity and entrepreneurship our job is to pay attention to their verses.

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