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## **Pirates, prostitutes and what's after the MDG's**

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**Abstract:**

*What can the applying the narratives of pirates and prostitutes do to enhance the understanding of development?*

Tales of pirates and prostitutes have long been part of the human story. As oft treated as fanciful tales, these narratives have yet to be applied as more than anecdotes. This work begins an examination of both piracy and prostitution as being more than story or the taboo. It attempts to contextualize the roles of both pirates and prostitutes in order to extract meta-frames that may be used in wider economic analysis. Following in a line with works like The moral economy of trade, or the more popular and contemporary Freakonomics, the goal is to understand the role these groups fulfilled in development, and by extension continue to fill. Albeit in contemporary society, they may be labelled differently. The modern world is full of both pirates and prostitutes, from the individual to the state level. The applicability and value of the area of academic enquiry is demonstrated in the second half of the paper by applying the roles to explore the topics of sustainable poverty, the emerging international order and what might be after the MDGs.

Keywords: pirates, prostitutes, sustainable poverty, development, growth traps, MDGS.

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## Introduction

When looking for development models, one normally does not consider Pirates or Prostitutes. Rather, investigations begin with the developed or the developing. Generally, the line of inquiry and discourse follows what it means to be developed or what needs to be done to develop. In reviewing how different countries have developed some patterns emerge at the macro level. Correlations have been established between indicators like health and education and the level of development. While one can establish that many countries do well when the people are educated, causality may be lacking. The problem appears in the case where an indicator of success in one country, appears along with failures in another. Rather, than looking at the developed and trying to figure out what they have done, it may also be valuable to look at those who are typically considered outside of the society.

The idea for the investigation stemmed from combining ideas found in The Moral Economy of Trade and Freakonomics. In the first Evers and Schrader (1990) introduce the paradigm of the trader's dilemma. Typically, the wealthy in the traditional society have had the ability of transubstantiation: to change the material into the symbolic, which then allows them to store the rewards and benefits in an honourable way. However, trader's encounter a problem: while they could exploit time and space for profit, most traditional societies have a moral code preventing accumulation through commercial exchange.

The dilemma is further compounded by the fact that their profits usually result from scarcity. Thus, if they charge the highest price possible, which really reflects the scarcity of the good, they may be seen as being greedy. Likewise, friends and family may demand that they be generous both with supplies and credit. Extending credit also can cause problems for operations, as capital may not be able to be recovered wholly either in the short or long term. Equally, while knowing this, due to the familial relations, they also cannot really refuse credit.

One of the solutions found to the trader's dilemma is the interaction of two moral communities. They cooperate, but not across moral boundaries (ibid, p. 8). Thus, one may be traditional society, and the other can be a migrant group that is passing through, or that has settled while maintaining their customs. In both situations, they can interact and participate in transactions, however, there does not need to be the exact same exchange. The traditional may maintain its ways and culture because the other is foreign or different. Likewise, members of the

other group may extract profits from transactions as they are no longer bound by the moral code of the traditional society.

In Freakonomics, Levitt and Dubner (2005) present an array of answers to interesting questions using the tools of economics in contrast to the oft output of economics where the tools of the trade are used to craft more of the same. Freakonomics clearly demonstrates how the tools of economic analysis can be applied successfully to a much wider array of questions. From Teachers and Sumo Wrestlers to disappearing crime, Levitt investigates. In a similar fashion, Levitt and Venkatesh (2007) produced another paper entitled "An Empirical Analysis of Street-Level Prostitution."

Merging the two threads of thought, might lead to an investigation interested in looking the groups that are outside of the norm, and trying to understand them by applying traditional tools of economic analysis. However, that would simply continue the reproduction of knowledge in the way that it has been produced, and might also yield answers to interesting questions. Rather, than applying the tools to interrogate the interesting questions and subjects, herein the interesting subjects are used to interrogate the tools. For this reason, the work begins by contextualizing stories of the pirates and prostitutes to develop meta-models.

#### Meta Pirates and Prostitutes

Contextualizing the stories provides powerful models with which to explore development. The idea of a meta-model comes from the field of psychology and more specifically neural linguistic programming. Two researchers Bandler and Grinder developed a "meta-model" from the works of Milton Erickson and Virginia Satir. The idea of their meta-model was that people had representations in their minds based upon the language they used to describe their world. By examining the model one could find generalizations and deletions in the thinking to map the patterns that blocked or released change.

The concept of a meta-model is applied herein a means of describing general patterns present in the stories. Ontologically, the concept presupposes that actions and processes can have meaning even when extracted from the specific case, actor or event. By understanding the embedded processes, the possibility emerges to transfer the outcomes or learn lessons for making meaningful changes in other places. Moreover the meaning changes based on the perspective of the viewer, thus starting at a different point may yield new insights. Likewise parties to a transaction, participate because of their interest in the outcome. However, parties need not have equal or even the same type of interest for the transaction to occur. As long as the parties participate, even while seeking entirely different outcomes, a transaction can occur.

When one speaks of pirates and prostitutes, the conversation is often treated as story or taboo. The pirate tales with which people are most familiar in the US and UK are the likes of Blackbeard and Long John Silver. More recently, the films brought into view Captain Hook and Captain Jack Sparrow. Now, while it is easy to find stories about pirate captains, little is available in terms of the lives of the pirates. What did their daily routine look like? Were they a happy lot? The crew is merely the supporting cast for the captain. The former is typically spoken of in the collective. In the 20 tales reviewed for this piece, not one was the diary of a typical pirate, moreover, most ended with the death of the captain and buried treasure. The stories of the prostitutes are more diverse. They range from the personal narrative, to the collective tale, and the blamed. Their tales are most often told in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, while less frequently 1<sup>st</sup> person accounts also appear. The tales of the prostitutes also end in death, or in more contemporary ones with their escape.

The ultimate risk associated with being either a pirate or prostitute was an continues to be death. The pirate stories typically end with the pirates dead and the treasure buried. Death for the pirate could have been at the end of a sword, hanging from the gallows, or dying at sea. For the prostitute, disease tops the list, and then in earlier works a number were tried as witches and collaborators with the devil. In these cases, they were also burned or put to death in a similar way. Many other associated risks can be found for both such as the chance of losing a limb or mutilation. Thus, neither represents an occupation free from risk or danger.

In some places, and some times both piracy and prostitution have been cast as legitimate professions. The legality depended directly on the state and was external to the work or interests of either the pirate or the prostitute. Moreover, the law could change, as happened in the case of Henry Morgan. The interesting part, in his case, was that although he was arrested and returned to England, he was also eventually knighted and returned to be the deputy governor of Jamaica. Here it becomes clear that activities may be licensed, and this is beyond the control of the individual.

In the case of many pirates, it appears that they had little or no choice of becoming a pirate. There were a number that viewed it as a better alternative than what awaited them elsewhere. For example, Henry Morgan may have been “Barabadosed” meaning that he awoke as on a boat heading to be an indentured servant. He may have then escaped to join Cromwells army. The minority seem to be those like Ann Bonny who sought out the pirate’s life, eventually joining up with the infamous Rackham.

While prostitution may be one of the oldest professions, there were no stories where it seemed that woman from an early age wanted to become a prostitute.

However, in many of the narratives, women turned to prostitution as they felt, it was the only alternative available to them. Thus from both sides, the idea of confined or limited choice is an important one to explore.

### ... and Development

How should one invest their time and energy? Even without knowing the Solow production function; most people have an innate sense that labor times capital increases the value of output. One problem for the common person, which becomes compounded exponentially as one descends into the depths of poverty is the absence of capital. Here one need not limit the definition to a strict monetary sense. Rather, there is a general lack of assets and working capital. What does a 13 year old on the streets of Bangkok have? Likewise, what would someone have that wakes aboard a pirate ship?

A web of family and friends could be considered a significant asset when they can be turned to when times turn tough. Its important to underscore the "when." In examining, the stories, usually an event occurs which leads to slipping into a downward spiral. In the case of Yon it is the death of her father that breaks the surface tension and her buoyancy. Imagine, a pot of boiling water with spaghetti noodles. As the water boils, the heat and steam cause bubbles to form. They grow and eventually boil over the edge of the pot. However, adding a few drops of oil, and the surface tension dissipates. The bubbles nearly disappear, and have trouble forming. Likewise, if a piece of paper were placed on top of a the water in the bathtub, it would float. Then, if something happened causing an edge to slip below the surface, it would begin to sink and would not stop until it reached the bottom. Moreover, it would remain there until someone fished it out.

For pirates, prostitutes and the poor, the choices are very limited, and it appears as time goes on more so.

The author's micro in a macro framework is built from these insights and the supposition that one can only realize the value of developments when viewed in terms of cashflow. One must evaluate whether the development created an asset or liability. However, the framework may be extended, in such a way, that the actual cash need not be real money. A development can be for example generate cultural capital. Equally, the cash may be depleted.

### ... after the MDGs

Applying the meta-models and discussion to the 8 MDGs reveals two very important insights. None of the MDGs reduce risk. Moreover, none of them are explicitly creative.

There is nothing in the MDGs to prevent someone from being in a group that achieves the MDGs from finding the limits of choice that lead to either piracy or prostitution. The situation becomes further exacerbated when a person feels they need more income than the efforts in the traditional can yield. It is also important to address the issue that some may be forced physically, but others, are actually forced by the lack of other options.

### Conclusion

This work has shown that development theory needs additional discussion that focuses on the forces and processes shaping poverty. Much research has been spent defining poverty, and even now the topic appears to be moving toward well-being. The narratives of pirates and prostitutes do generate some interesting meta-models. Themes like limited choice and rewards from following the rules emerge. When one begins to question the models, it becomes clear that

## References

Sir Henry Morgan URL: <http://www.cavazzi.com/morgan/>